

Introduction to the Special Issue on WAC/WID at Rural, Regional, and Satellite Campuses

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While literacy skills are still rooted in interpretation, comprehension, and production, the modern mediums within which they occur extend far beyond print text and the use/refuse of digital literacies is often complicated by race, age, gender, affluence, and access (Selfe & Hawisher, 2004; Banks, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008). Consequently and increasingly, new literacies instruction falls within the pedagogical realm of the composition classroom, and today's Writing Program Administrator (WPA) work often involves curricular redesign/modernization, multimodal professional and program development, increased instructional technology, and redefined assessment strategies in addition to identifying best practices with technology implementation and assessment of computer-mediated, blended, and online courses. With scholars such as the New London Group, James Gee, Cynthia Selfe, Gail Hawisher, Jeff Rice, Adam Banks, Colin Lankshear, Kelly Ritter, Jody Shipka, and many others researching and writing on the relationships between computers and composition, the field of composition studies has stretched its borders to include new literacies studies and digital media.

However, as writing programs and literacy centers broaden their scope to include digital literacies, we have yet to see a comprehensive resource for WPAs who oversee the digital overhauling of our composition programs and initiatives, especially those carrying WAC/WID objectives. Additionally, we have yet to see deep scholarly inquiry into what is most central to this special issue of *Across the Disciplines*: the necessary synthesis between the scholarship surrounding the teaching of digital literacies in WAC/WID curricula and the scholarship surrounding writing program development at remote, rural, or satellite institutions where technology access, budget constraints, first-generation learners, and contingent faculty development are sometimes constrained by institutional settings entrenched in administrations of "tradition" and nostalgic legacies. In an effort to fill this scholarly gap as well as support rural WPAs charged with updating their programs and responding to pressures for reform from within and outside their institutions, this collection of essays offers narratives of success and struggle while articulating the administrative processes of directing and sustaining twenty-first century writing programs in rural, remote and sometimes isolated areas of the country. In particular, this special issue is especially relevant in light of the Obama administration's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program aimed at expanding high-speed Internet networks in underprivileged rural communities in Appalachia, New England, Alaska, Arizona, and other remote areas of the country that are often considered at risk as a result of the "digital divide" or "participation gap" ("Broadband USA").

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When viewed against the existing literature, this special issue fills a clear gap in the current scholarship on integrating digital literacies into writing programs (sans attention to institutional geography or place). Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher's *Literate Lives in the Information Age: Narratives of Literacy From the United States* (2004), for example, provides important contributions to the field's understanding of modern literacy practices, and this text approaches these literacies by documenting literacy narratives over several decades and pointing to the disparities in digital literacy acquisition vis-à-vis gender and affluence. While Selfe and Hawisher's text offers real-life testimonies, it does not situate those testimonies alongside the practical moves being made by WPAs supporting the most "at risk" students (i.e., the digital 'immigrants') often found on today's rural, remote, regional, and/or satellite campuses. Moreover, while Adam Banks' *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for Higher Ground* (2006) speaks directly to the disparities in technology usage based upon race and affluence and while this text points to the field's ethical obligation to teach digital literacies, this text does not offer evidentiary value or faculty/WPA testimony to the proposed pedagogy or its outcomes in rural institutions plagued by diversity and retention crises. *Toward a Composition Made Whole* (Shipka, 2011), *Computers in the Composition Classroom: A Critical Sourcebook* (Sidler, Morris, & Overman-Smith, 2008) and *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition* (Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, & Sirc, 2004), Jeff Rice's *The Rhetoric of Cool: Composition Studies and New Media* (2007), and Cynthia Selfe's *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention* (1999) bring to bear a number of key, updated pedagogical perspectives on the teaching of digital media in the composition classroom, but they do not focus these pedagogies around the specific constraints of enrollment, retention, and (often) remediation that drive WAC/WID curricula and administrative initiatives at rural and/or regional institutions. Moreover, these texts do not include qualitative, quantitative, critical, and strategic guidelines for writing program administrators. Finally, perhaps most closely related to this project is *RAW: (Reading and Writing) New Media* (Ball & Kalmbach, 2010). Serving as inspiration for this project, *RAW* chronicles digital literacies' journey into the academically sanctioned practices surrounding reading and writing, and it addresses the institutional, pedagogical, and administrative moves that occurred along the way. However, absent from this indispensable text are narratives of WPAs and faculty ushering in new literacies to rural regional or branch institutions and classrooms. While there is robust scholarship examining the learning, teaching and practicing of today's "new literacies" in modern writing programs, those texts have yet to place digital literacies squarely in the spotlight of remote WPA work. In short, the field is overdue critical examinations of the socio-political implications that accompany the necessary digitization of rural and often isolated regional institutions and their writing programs, specifically in this era of the "digital divide."

In response to this gap in scholarship, this special issue seeks to add to and reorient the fields of new literacies studies and composition studies by focusing on the work of the twenty-first century writing program administrator in rural and remote post-secondary settings, where faculty are often greatly in need of curricular redesign/modernization, multimodal professional and program development, increased instructional technology, and redefined assessment strategies. This special issue brings together these landmark conversations, while introducing into the mix the affordances and constraints of doing the multimodal WPA work of the twenty-first century in rural, remote, and regional settings: environments which often do not enjoy the robust socio-economic advantages of flagship and non-regional campuses. Furthermore, this special issue provides substantial, original, qualitative evidence as to the WAC/WID implications that occur when we integrate digital media into our writing-intensive curricula.

The essays in this special issue of *Across the Disciplines* center around three questions: (1) What unique material and/or philosophical constraints do rural WAC/WID programs face in the twenty-first century? (2) What are the processes through which rural WAC/WID program administrators secure adequate program resources and provide professional development for faculty across the disciplines? (3) How can writing program administrators and college and university faculty leverage multimodal composition to help provide rural institutions, students, faculty, and the communities around them new and unique opportunities for literacy development *across and beyond* the curriculum? In particular, this special issue focuses on the role of the WPA or other faculty members charged with professional development in modernizing/digitizing the composition faculty and instructors in writing-intensive and writing across the curriculum programs at rural institutions, and this issue explores the timely opportunity to address the gap in research and scholarship on the rural WPA in the twenty-first century. While this collection of essays presents evidence that points to some of the constraints that may be specific to digital WPA work in rural areas, this special issue simultaneously presents examples of the unique opportunities for digital literacies to support and enhance the community development and literacy initiatives that stem from the mission statements of regional institutions that strive to serve their surrounding communities, counties, and constituents. This collection incorporates practical, qualitative experience from seasoned WPAs; innovative ideas from a variety of faculty; and case studies of successful (and perhaps *not* so successful) WPAs and faculty who have attempted to increase techno-literacy in their WAC/WID curricula and across their campuses. This special issue also seeks to offer compositionists and digital media scholars new angles on how the changing natures of literacy, technology, identity, and pedagogy are often situated by the demographics of institutional setting.

One area in which our authors find themselves facing increasing pressure in WPA, WAC, and WID administration is in online programming. Online learning has long been touted as a means of reaching rural populations who might otherwise not have access to traditional college courses. The most recent Babson Survey indicates that 69.1% of chief academic leaders see online education as "critical to their long-term strategy" (Allen & Seaman, 2013). As online programming continues to grow, so does the pressure on WPAs or WAC/WID administrators to assist faculty with moving writing and writing intensive courses online. A recent special edition of *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks* demonstrates that one means of reaching rural populations is through the use of open educational resources (OERs), projects which are "changing the scope and reach of education" (Vignare & Geith, 2013). With mounting pressure from colleges and universities to attract students through online programs and to recruit and retain more students, rural, remote, and satellite campuses are facing pressure to increase online offerings and provide professional development to ensure their faculty are ready to face this digital future.

In March 2013, the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Committee on Best Practices for Online Writing Instruction (OWI) released the report *A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction*. This document, the result of seven years of research into online writing instruction, includes several principles that relate in particular to this issue:

- OWI Principle 1: Online writing instruction should be universally inclusive and accessible.
- OWI Principle 7: Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) for OWI programs and their online writing teachers should receive appropriate OWI-focused training, professional development, and assessment for evaluation and promotion purposes.

These principles in particular demonstrate some of the challenges that online programming brings to rural, remote, and satellite campuses. First, due to limited resources at these campuses, faculty professional development to help instructors become proficient in online writing instruction across the disciplines might be limited. Second, the underserved and sometimes under-prepared populations that are the primary populations of rural, remote, and satellite campuses make the provision of "universally inclusive and accessible" a special challenge.

Articles in this Special Issue

This project came about as the co-editors, Jessie Blackburn and Heidi Skurat Harris, found themselves separately doing the institutional community organizing work that is often at the root of administrative duties focused on WAC, WID, or innovative teaching initiatives. In both of our careers, we do this work (or *have done* in the case of Heidi, who recently moved from Eastern Oregon University to the University of Arkansas Little Rock) within the institutional contexts of rural, regional, and/or branch campuses. These campuses face shrinking budgets along with increasing demands to educate and prepare students from mostly rural communities for twenty-first century literacies, technologies, and workplaces. As we moved deeper into our tenure at our regional institutions, we found ourselves looking for scholarship in journals, the WPA-L, and conferences to understand "best practices" for taking the standards and positions of the NCTE into such "remote" or "satellite" institutional contexts. When Jessie posted a call for research on these contexts to the WPA-L, she was met with multiple responses from other rural and regional WPAs stating that they, too, were seeking current scholarship on rural, regional, and branch writing program administration. Of particular interest was scholarship featuring successful processes for transitioning into multimodal composition curricula, digital humanities, WAC/WID initiatives, and online instruction at these institutions where technology access, budget limitations, first-generation learners, and contingent faculty development are often constrained by institutional settings or community/regional pressures. The four articles in this special edition provide just the types of institutional studies that we were looking for when Jessie first queried the WPA-L. Each piece captures a snapshot of a particular rural, regional, or satellite campus from across the U.S. as they attempt to meet requirements to increase writing in the disciplines, across the curriculum, and for online student populations. It is worth noting that while this special issue features just four essays, we believe this reflects the vulnerability felt by junior WPAs who are, in many cases, pre-tenure as they cautiously undertake the process of modernizing their curricula on rural, regional, or satellite campuses. Furthermore, we see the modest number of essays in this special issue as evidence to the need for additional research to serve as both reference and inspiration for these especially vulnerable and innovative faculty/WPAs. Specifically, we hope this issue inspires deeper scholarly inquiry into the challenges and constraints that multimodal WPAs may be experiencing across campuses lacking progressive administrations or full support for pioneering teaching strategies *even when those strategies are in play at the flagship institution of the branch/satellite campus* and even when those strategies are established, best practices in the field of composition studies (e.g., see Paul Cook's article in this special issue for one description of the barriers and pressures experienced by a WPA looking to do innovative WAC/WID curriculum development at a small, nostalgic college). In other words, we hope this special issue exposes the need for additional research into matters of context and "place" for modern WAC/WID work, as this work so often requires an exceptional capacity for nimble maneuvering across campus landscapes laden in identity politics within intimate departments, divisions, budgets, and administrations.

The first article, "Economies of Place and Power: Lessons from One Regional University's Writing-Intensive Initiative" by Polina Chemishanova and Cynthia Miecznikowski details the efforts of one

regional institution to use an ecological frame during a Quality Enhancement Plan initiative on campus to "focus specifically on the dynamics of establishing a viable and institutionally-embedded programmatic structure and illustrating how this sustainable design translates to student success and the emergence of a campus writing culture." Chemishanova and Miecznikowski write that "we have been able to embrace unique affordances and negotiate constraints our particular ecology represents while attending to both our local institutional needs and the 'larger patterns and flows' that we trust are moving us in the direction of our goal." This article speaks to the challenges and constraints of sustaining writing-intensive initiatives at the regional university serving an ethnically and socio-economically diverse student population.

The ethnically diverse populations that regional and satellite campuses serve are at the forefront of the next article in this special edition. In "WAC/WID Campus Concerns: 'Growing Pains' or Perspectives From a Small Branch Campus," Andrea Davis and Vanessa Cozza outline that satellite campuses that are connected to nationally-recognized writing programs (such as their program at Washington State University-Tri-Cities or Jessie's program at the University of Pittsburgh Bradford) face particular challenges when applying programmatic initiatives from the main campus to populations that are distinctly different than those at the main campus. Davis and Cozza outline the challenges that came with developing and directing a writing program (for Davis) and serving as a new multilingual composition specialist (for Cozza) at the only institution in their state designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution. Both authors conclude that in developing and sustaining new writing initiatives, a key component for success is "the importance of attendance to institutional histories and politics" and "the unique constraints of coping with the specialized discourses of educational and institutional labeling that can both empower and constrain our programs." Their narrative sheds light on concerns facing new faculty who are both seeking to implement institutional change while simultaneously navigating the path toward tenure and promotion, a serious concern for new and untenured WPAs at small, rural, and/or regional campuses where tenure is often attached more to student evaluations than it is to innovative program administration.

Another institution facing increasing need to provide online education to a rural population is highlighted in the third article in this special issue, "Confronting the Challenges of Blended Graduate Education with an Adapted WEC Project." Heather Bastian and Sally Fauchald provide a study of a successful collaboration between Bastian (a composition and rhetoric specialist) and Fauchald (chair of the Department of Graduate Nursing) on a Writing-Enriched Curriculum (WEC) campus at the College of St. Scholastica. The challenge that Bastian and Fauchald faced was to revise the Graduate Nursing program, in particular the coursework in the Doctor of Nursing Practice program, while "engag[ing] regional and rural adult learners in an online educational environment so that they meet graduate-level and discipline-specific writing expectations." Bastian and Fauchald outline a process that began with addressing the components of the Quality Matters (QM) rubric to identify how those components best served (and did not serve) graduate nursing students and followed a seventeen-month process in which faculty from the Department of Graduate Nursing met with and worked with Bastian on revising the graduate curriculum to best meet the needs of their primarily rural students. Bastian and Fauchald conclude that "Interdisciplinary collaborations like ours that work to address these challenges with limited resources can result in the development and delivery of high quality blended and online programs that meet the rigor required for the professionals in today's changing workforce."

Finally, Paul Cook addresses the concerns of one particular type of rural college, the "small, non-sectarian woman's college" in his article "Notes from the Margins: WAC/WID and the Institutional Politics of Place(ment)." Cook uses institutional autoethnography to "explore the political and pedagogical dynamics of WPA and WAC/WID work within an exceedingly small, resolutely single-

sex, and assuredly rural liberal arts campus ecology." While funded by a philanthropic organization and providing primarily two-year degrees, Cottey College in rural Missouri faces the same constraints as many rural institutions with small student populations. Cook writes that "the very things that make Cottey unique—its historical commitment to women's education, its diverse student population, and the inherent flexibility that comes with having an unusually small student body—are challenged by the dynamics of institutional identity and the intensifying scramble for resources and students." Cook's concluding paragraph perhaps best sums up the role of faculty—WPA, WAC/WID, or otherwise—when he writes:

Be it rural, regional, satellite, or otherwise, we have a duty to ensure that our students receive the best we can offer. Against the conventional wisdom of our own era, in which jeremiads and calls of crisis abound everywhere in our publications, institutions of higher education in the United States are serving more students—and more diverse students—than ever before in history, even as the price of admission continues to skyrocket to unethical and frankly dangerous levels (Frank, 2013, October). Rather than shrinking from this sizeable responsibility or allowing ourselves to be ushered out of our own decision-making processes, as faculty we have a duty to our students to seize upon *this* time, our own era, as a time that is ripe for setting ourselves to the enormous, and enormously important, task of reshaping our institutions to meet the needs of changing students in mercurial times.

Cook brings the special issue back around to the theme that ties together the collection and was at the heart of Jessie and Heidi's initial inquiries: How do we best meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student bodies when under the constraints brought by the changing higher educational climate?

We hope that this special issue is of use to the individuals who responded, both on- and off-list, to Jessie's original call for research into the work of WPAs at rural, regional, or branch campuses. The stories contained in this special issue are a tribute to the hard work of individuals across the country who face daunting challenges in writing classes across disciplines and are hopeful that their work meets the needs of their students.

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