

High-Impact Practices and Third Spaces: Connecting across Disciplines

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Abstract: In this article, we explore how members of the Association for Authentic, Experiential, and Evidence-Based Learning's (AAEEBL) Digital Ethics Task Force used their third space discursive expertise to conceptualize Principles for Digital Ethics in ePortfolios and argue that the diversity of their roles is directly responsible for the successful development of the principles. We address how their liminality enabled them to think transdisciplinarily to develop principles aimed at broad application across learning institutions, where a focus on digital ethics in ePortfolio initiatives can often be discipline-specific. Furthermore, we consider how the Task Force's work reflects the high-impact framework, providing a model of an academic discourse community whose success stems from an ethos of collaboration while suggesting that it is impossible to do high-impact work in a silo. Ultimately, we demonstrate the necessity of third space practitioners and communities for effective implementation of high-impact practices in local contexts.

WAC/WID scholars and practitioners are no strangers to the margins; indeed, they've built homes and careers there, developing effective pedagogies and programs whose longevity and impact on both students and faculty is, at least partially, the result of their non-siloed, sometimes liminal nature (Cox, Galin, & Melzer, 2018; Luskey & Emery, 2021; McLeod & Maimon, 2000; McLeod et al., 2001/2011; McLeod & Soven, 1992/2000). The interdisciplinary expertise of WAC/WID scholars with strong foundations in rhetorical traditions makes them particularly effective at persuading their colleagues in other disciplines to adopt valuable, evidence-based practices to support student writing in disciplinary contexts. The professionals who populate other high-impact practice spaces are indebted to the example set by the WAC/WID community in ways that are worth identifying and addressing, as they expand how we understand the valuable intersections, roles, and reach of third spaces¹ in higher education, particularly of the professionals who inhabit those spaces (Smith et al., 2021; Whitchurch, 2013 & 2015; Whithaus, 2013).

Celia Whitchurch (2015) identifies third space professionals as those whose work and professional identity does not neatly fit into the "conventional binary descriptors such as those enshrined 'academic' or 'nonacademic' employment categories" (p. 79). In describing the contours of third space professional identities, Whitchurch notes that they exhibit the following characteristics:

- are likely to work in a multi-disciplinary or multi-professional environment or team

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- build up new forms of expertise...that represent new space and require a blend of academic and professional inputs
- handle shifting bundles of activity
- work to both long and short deadlines, with multiple partners and collaborators, in a mutable environment
- cope with ambiguity and accommodate, and even use productively, the tensions that they encounter
- make connections (for instance, across the curriculum)
- represent Friedson's "elite" group of professionals, who apply their expertise to more complex, individuated tasks, as opposed to "standard" professionals whose activity is geared to "standardised production"
- extend classic accounts of professionalism by developing new knowledge particularly in relation to their institution or their own practice
- use professional bodies for networking purposes rather than as gateways to careers
- acquire qualifications on the basis of need for expertise rather than accreditation
- reflect a blurring of boundaries between different types of knowledge² (pp. 96–97)

Additionally, her findings suggest that many third space professionals recognize the conflict between institutional and academic agendas and find ways to situate their own work productively, taking advantage of shifting politics and priorities. The third space professionals that Whitchurch (2015) studied "demonstrated agency in researching problems, making contacts, finding new ways of pursuing goals, and borrowing practice from elsewhere as appropriate" (p. 93). Finally, a common thread in her findings addressed the level of visibility that such professionals experienced and its impact on their work and sense of belonging. While "[s]ome suggested that having low visibility and or ambiguous organisational positioning could be an advantage" (p. 93) because it enabled them to move more fluidly between contexts, they also identified their use of "organisational structures...as a way of getting things done rather than as conferring a sense of belonging per se" (p. 94).

The experiences of many ePortfolio practitioners mirror those of WAC/WID professionals whether or not they are formally within dedicated centers. The authors of this text represent individuals in such third space roles, sharing the experience of supporting institutional initiatives that are central to academic success, yet operating within programs or units that are often marginalized. Following Grego and Thompson's (2007) recognition that third space researchers and theorists "have one major impulse in common: they each have used a greater attention to space/place to turn their professional eye critically on their own positioning" (p.72), we intend to make a similar move here. We connect established academic third spaces to those in roles dedicated to supporting high-impact practices who must be expert practitioners with knowledge that is fluid in application and without disciplinary-specific constraints. Thus, we hope to better understand the contours of our own work and provide helpful examples to professionals in similar situations.

Living in Third Space: Three Perspectives on the Landscape

As one insightful co-editor of this special issue, Christopher Basgier (personal communication, March 21, 2023), noted in his feedback on our draft of this article, "ePortfolio implementation will always bear the imprint of the labor of third space professionals who operate outside and across disciplinary spaces. In WAC/WID terms, you can't have the 'in' without the 'across,' and potentially without the

'beyond,' too." With that in mind, we use third space theory and experiences to complicate the idea that ePortfolio curriculum and pedagogy can ever be solely a matter of discipline-specific implementation. Indeed, the growing body of research on third space professionals points to the complex individual and institutional contexts that increasingly require these professionals "to function with sufficient vision, capacity, resilience, and open-mindedness" (Smith et al., 2021, p. 516) and "to seek supportive professional and academic networks, ultimately building an identity that reflects their expertise and experience, and creating a work space of 'development, facilitation, and collaboration'" (Whitchurch, 2012, p. 143). The interdisciplinary expertise of WAC/WID scholars with strong foundations in rhetorical traditions makes them particularly effective at persuading their colleagues in other disciplines to adopt valuable, evidence-based practices to support student writing in disciplinary contexts.³

In our own professional roles, the authors of this chapter operate within third spaces, to varying degrees, insofar as we support ePortfolios and other high-impact practices. We are indebted to the professionals within the WAC/WID community whose examples demonstrate ways they broaden our understanding of the significant intersections, roles, and impact of third spaces in higher education, particularly the professionals who inhabit those spaces (Smith et al., 2021; Whitchurch, 2013 & 2015; Whithaus, 2013). Joining with Kensington-Miller et al., "we make public the lived difficulty of our work" (as cited in Smith et al., 2021, p. 507) in the range of roles and responsibilities that comprise third space professional activities in developing and supporting ePortfolios (2014, p. 281). Thus, we provide the following positioning statements as a form of representational advocacy for this work.

Megan Mize: Director, ePortfolio and Digital Initiatives (Academic Success Center)

Megan represents Old Dominion University (ODU), a public, four-year institution located in Norfolk, VA. She serves as Director of ePortfolio and Digital Initiatives within the Academic Success Center with the support of one other full-time employee (an Assistant Director) and a small cadre of peer mentors known as ePortfolio Assistants (typically 6-8 student workers). As ePortfolio Director (as her title is commonly shortened to), her primary responsibility is training faculty and administrators in ePortfolio practice, as well as supporting subsequent design and implementation efforts. She likewise coordinates with the Assistant Director in the design of the student and technical support related to ePortfolio practice. Together, they have built the ePortfolio Studio, which is modeled after writing centers, with a particular focus on multimodal composition and digital literacies.

Sarah Zurhellen: Assistant Director (Writing Across the Curriculum Program) & Professional Consultant (University Writing Center)

Sarah represents Appalachian State University (AppState), a public, four-year state institution located in Boone, NC. Her work involves all things writing studies from developing and providing faculty development in the Writing Across the Curriculum Program to supporting student, faculty, and community writers in the University Writing Center (UWC). She reports to the Director of WAC and the UWC, writes grants to support professional development and assessment, teaches the Teaching in the Writing Center course for graduate student tutors, and mentors graduate students in both programs. As campus-wide units advocating for ePortfolio pedagogy at an institution where the dedicated ePortfolio office was dissolved due to post-Covid austerity budget cuts, the WAC and UWC represent important homes for ePortfolio support, labor, and advocacy. Sarah supports ePortfolio pedagogy through workshops and consultations for faculty; advocates for the use of ePortfolios as

tools for learning, reflection, assessment, and professionalization; and teaches ePortfolio pedagogy as a professional development activity for UWC staff.

Morgan Gresham: Rhetoric and Composition Faculty (English Department)

Morgan is a traditional, tenure-line faculty member in the English department at the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg (USFSP). Trained as a rhetoric and composition scholar, she has served as a writing center and writing program director and Advanced Writing director before arriving at the St. Petersburg campus of USF. Then separately accredited, the USFSP campus had a fledgling writing program that initiated ePortfolios as part of their writing program assessment. During the growth of the writing program, this author joined, and then eventually became chair of, the campus General Education committee, slowly advocating for ePortfolios across General Education. Because USFSP was a small campus of about 5000 students, the chair of General Education served on the University Budget and Planning committee as part of the university accreditation assessment. Continuing to network around assessment and ePortfolios, these activities became closely aligned with the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning on whose founding board the author served. With consolidation of three campuses on the horizon, in 2018, as part of a 3-campus initiative to highlight and support high-impact practices, Morgan attended AAC&U HIPs Institute with the plan of developing an Office of High-Impact Practices which would serve as the linchpin of the new Enhanced General Education for a consolidated ONE USF. Post-consolidation, she now researches capstones and ePortfolios, working with international groups like the AAEEBL Task Force, while continuing to advocate for high-impact practice implementation whenever possible.

Generally, each of us labors to support institutional missions related to academic success, while operating within programs or units that are marginalized. Despite facing unique challenges based on our local contexts and roles, we share a common professional identity as third space practitioners due to our involvement in multidisciplinary and collaborative ePortfolio initiatives. These initiatives span departments and involve coordination with multiple teams, making our work non-standardized and adaptable in terms of activities and expectations. What counts as success in one area may not even be acknowledged in another. To excel in our roles, we continuously engage in self-improvement, staying abreast of emerging technologies and effective practices from various fields. Although the institution may not formally require such ongoing professional development, it is intrinsic to the demands of our work. Finally, as Whitchurch's definition highlights, each of us has chosen to participate within a community of ePortfolio practitioners as a means of connecting with peers and sharing new knowledge rather than as an opportunity to advance our own careers.

As ePortfolio experts, we embody the essence of third space practitioners as identified by Whitchurch. Despite the diversity in our respective positions and daily work lives, our collective experiences showcase a commitment to high-impact practices within our organizational structures. These roles often involve acting as mediators, bridging connections between colleagues and peers to amplify expertise and foster collaboration. As the institutional ePortfolio experts, we must possess a wide-ranging skill set that extends beyond our backgrounds in English Studies to encompass various disciplines and areas like educational development, student support, academic success, instructional design, web design, legal policies, marketing, and assessment. Furthermore, our roles often require balancing between the mandate to support efforts to scale up such activities within programs and departments while maintaining high touch and customized support for individual faculty peers and students. Nor are our experiences as institutional ePortfolio experts unique.

In 2019, the Association for Authentic, Experiential, and Evidence-Based Learning's (AAEEBL), the organization representing ePortfolio practitioners globally, developed a Digital Ethics Task Force. This group is composed of third space professionals and traditional academic types working in

institutional third spaces such as ePortfolio initiatives. In this article, we explore how the Task Force used their third space discursive expertise to conceptualize *Principles for Digital Ethics in ePortfolios* and argue that the diversity of our roles are directly responsible for the successful development of the *Principles*. We address how our liminality enabled us to think transdisciplinarily to develop principles aimed at broad application across learning institutions, where a focus on digital ethics in ePortfolio initiatives can often be discipline-specific. Furthermore, we consider how both our process of developing the *Principles* and our perspective on the final product as a living, evolving text represent the ethical ideals and priorities of WAC/WID pedagogy and reflect the high-impact framework. Finally, we demonstrate the necessity of third space practitioners and communities for effective implementation of high-impact practices in local contexts, and we outline a pragmatic strategy for developing such communities.

It is our contention that an important professional and structural feature of high-impact practices is their third space identity, which includes many of the professionals responsible for implementing, maintaining, and assessing those practices. Furthermore, we intend to show how the third space structural identity informs the effectiveness of these practices, particularly, in the case of ePortfolios, their “capacity to serve as a connector...[and] help students link and make meaning of diverse learning experiences across time and space” (Eynon & Gambino, 2017, p.164). We suggest that because the AAEEBL Digital Ethics Task Force has largely been led by third space professionals, our development of the *Principles*—from the initial generation in year one to the ongoing, iterative, and public process of revision that is now in its fourth year—is inseparable from our own experiences and capacities as connectors. In particular, our work is informed by our awareness of our own professional roles as contingent upon our ability to connect skills, practices, and habits of mind across disciplines, to translate goals and outcomes across curriculum, and to create coalitions of participants across institutions.

(In)Visible Labor and High-Impact Practices

At the heart of high-impact practices is the labor involved in them. In order to be successful (or “done well,” as Eynon and Gambino [2017] repeatedly remind readers about ePortfolios), high-impact practices require considerable investments of time and expertise that many in traditional faculty roles do not have available to invest because these practices are antithetical to the hierarchical academic structures, wherein research output is often rewarded over and above pedagogical labor. Thus, the effective and ethical implementation of high-impact practices, such as writing-intensive courses, first-year experiences, and ePortfolios, often include third space professionals who are accustomed to working within and between established disciplines to provide support for traditional faculty labor. This work requires the ability not only to code switch but also to translate language, practices, and modes of expression across multiple disciplinary contexts (Gonzalez, 2018). In their consideration of third spaces, Grego and Thompson (2007) suggest, “[t]he value placed on such work rests in good part on the invisibility of—or at least an appearance of sameness across—the specific institutional sites that actually house, clothe, feed, and otherwise sustain the academic bodies who populate any given discipline” (p. 37). Using the AAEEBL Task Force as a representative example in this article, we likewise connect the concept of third spaces to high-impact practices to show how it would be impossible to do high-impact practices effectively without third spaces. Furthermore, we use our own third space experiences to outline a productive praxis for others working at the interstices of higher education.

As Halonen and Dunn (2018) rightfully claim, “High-impact practices can be exhausting. They are labor intensive—for students, yes, but especially for faculty members. Designing and managing these efforts can be all-consuming and energy-draining” (para. 3). Nevertheless, in their list of pragmatic strategies for alleviating this labor, the authors neglect to include collaborating with campus partners

whose expertise and resources might offset the difficulties of such high-impact efforts. Moreover, while Kuh, O'Donnell, and Schneider (2017) repeatedly recognize the role that “faculty, staff, and students” (p. 15) play in the success of high-impact practices in their anniversary review that identifies the eight factors most associated with HIPs’ success, scholarship on high-impact practices often overlooks or diminishes the role of staff dedicated or connected to them. This situation is further aggravated by a traditional academic hierarchy in which staff and administrators are rarely encouraged to engage in scholarship regarding their own efforts, perpetuating a narrative in which faculty teach and research while staff and admin manage and support.

To think about academic spaces that have disrupted this traditional narrative in ways that have been successful for faculty, staff, and students and, thus, offer a model for what such disruption might productively look like, we turn to the history of writing across the curriculum. The WAC/WID professionals who we heralded in our opening paragraph have a strong institutional history of working collaboratively across institutional spaces, as identified by the WAC/WID Mapping Project (Thaiss & Porter, 2010) and noted in a long history of research into the role of faculty and curricular development in WAC (Anson & Flash, 2021; Glotfelter et al., 2022; Mullin, 2008; Palmquist, 2000; Strachan, 2008; Townsend, 2008; Walvoord 1999), as well as across the curriculum more generally (Kinzie et al., 2019; McNair & Albertine, 2012; Hughes, 2007; Van Waes, 2015; Wolf 2007). In a recent reflection on WAC at 50, Mike Palmquist et al. (2020) identify the WAC movement’s role in bringing about “significant changes in our understanding of its goals, characteristic practices, and relationship to other educational emphases and practices, such as critical thinking, student success, educational assessment, civic engagement, and career preparation” (p. 5). Furthermore, they highlight its “relationship to other educational movements, such as service-learning, undergraduate research, and problem-based learning, among other high-impact practices” (p. 6). It is noteworthy that in a text reflecting on the first 50 years of WAC, the only mention of professional staff is in Mullin’s reflection on gender and contingency in which she recounts the ill treatment she received when she was hired as “professional staff” in her first WAC position. That Joan Mullin is the only co-author to mention a staff position in an article of WAC leaders reflecting on the movement’s past suggests that the shift toward such roles is relatively recent. However, as Michelle LaFrance notes in a short College Composition and Communication piece from 2015 in which she calls for increased research into labor issues in WAC, “Workload issues...typically take the form of concern for enrollments, release time for directors, and ‘recognition’ for faculty involved in WAC programs,” and they do so to the detriment of “exploring the connections between material conditions and pedagogy” (p. A14). One potential piece of this exploration that goes unnamed in LaFrance’s article is the role that WAC personnel, who qualify as third space professionals according to Whitchurch’s definition, might play in supporting the faculty she identifies as most vulnerable. In our experience and based on the early findings from the survey we discuss at the end of this essay, sustaining ePortfolio initiatives, like WAC (and other HIPs), requires collaboration among professionals who play a variety of roles on campus, from faculty in traditional tenured and non-tenured roles to staff in a variety of spaces, from personnel in career and writing centers to educational developers in centers for teaching and learning. As Mullin’s brief story from her professional experience highlights, finding ways to do this collaborative work equitably and with equal recognition of the expertise of all partners has been (and remains) a challenge.

In recognition of this challenge, the authors of this chapter joined six other colleagues as original members of the AAEEBL’s Digital Ethics Task Force, to collaborate on the initial development of the *Digital Ethics in ePortfolios Principles* with the goal of producing a text that could support the labor of our colleagues across diverse professional roles, curricula, and institutions. Over time, the composition of our Task Force and the focus of our *Principles* has transformed in response to the changing landscape of higher education and the world of digital ethics more broadly. In the next

section, we situate the history of the Task Force and the development of the *Principles* within the high-impact practice/third space professional context outlined above.

Creating a Third Space Discourse Community: AAEEBL's Digital Ethics Task Force and *Digital Ethics in ePortfolios Principles*

Swales' (2016) definition of discourse communities, including mutually agreed upon goals, the use of interpersonal communication strategies, the development and use of multiple genres to further its goals, participatory mechanisms that allow members to contribute, and a level of content expertise mirrors the attributes that Whitchurch uses to describe third space professionals. Given ePortfolios' increased popularity in recent years, the call for more rigorous research to better understand and articulate both the value of ePortfolios and the challenges that practitioners encounter (Rhodes et al., 2014) leads us to consider the ways in which we have established such a discourse community in and through the ePortfolio Task Force. HIP practitioners' often isolated nature within their own institutions, as well as their limited time allocated to research, ePortfolio advocates must often seek out peers from other institutions to conduct such work. In response to this and other calls for increased resources on digital ethics instruction, AAEEBL created a Digital Ethics Task Force and asked them to develop a set of guiding principles for practitioners and other stakeholders (Cicchino et al., 2021).

[The AAEEBL Digital Ethics Task Force](#) was created in September 2019 with a charge to explore and amplify digital ethics in ePortfolio practice and pedagogy. Scholars in the field found the need for greater focus on digital ethics (Kirby et al., 2019; Gierdowski et al., 2020; Gray & McGuire, 2020). The focus of the Task Force was to explore the ethical implications of ePortfolio work that are often not acknowledged and can perpetuate harm, namely for students who are often not trained on data rights and usage and have inequitable technology access and training (Razavi & Iverson, 2006; Fawns & McKenzie, 2010; Gray & McGuire, 2020; Gierdowski et al., 2020). In the four years since the Task Force's launch, 21 members from the ePortfolio community actively contributed to crafting, revising, and sharing the *Digital Ethics in ePortfolios Principles*, putting them into practice. Pulling together a wide range of professionals, members represented 17 institutions, 2 ePortfolio platform providers, and 4 countries, occupying diverse roles within their professional contexts. Among them were higher education institution staff, tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty, independent scholars, and industry experts. As such, this transdisciplinary and multi-professional group, which works to generate new forms of knowledge for the larger ePortfolio community, reflects third space attributes as identified by Whitchurch.

Drawing on the research on third space environments and professionals mentioned earlier, the Task Force's strength lay in the diversity of its members' professional experiences and disciplinary backgrounds. This diversity enabled the Task Force to approach digital ethics from various lenses and perspectives. Additionally, the deeply collaborative structure of the group fostered an environment where individual expertise and interests played a pivotal role in guiding the brainstorming process. The Task Force's composition, featuring individuals from diverse geographical locations and with varying levels of experience and professional roles in ePortfolio practice and support, highlights its embodiment of third space theory. To ensure inclusive participation and contributions, early efforts were dedicated to establishing bridging mechanisms and modes of communication. These initiatives aimed to create an environment where all participants felt welcome and empowered to engage actively.

Over time, the group developed specific strategies to overcome challenges related to time zones and workloads, fostering effective communication. Community-specific genres, like information-rich and action-driven meeting notes, emerged as valuable tools to facilitate collaboration. Eventually, such

community mechanisms allowed a diverse community to generate first the *Digital Ethics in ePortfolios Principles* and then *The ePortfolio Mapping Project*. Such materials were necessarily informed by the multiplicities of the group's experiences, which required negotiation to reach consensus. Such negotiations were in line with the essence of third space theory that embraces diversity and inclusivity in collaborative endeavors.

As the Task Force includes many individuals who occupy third space roles within their respective institutions and are well-versed in the scholarship of high-impact practices generally and ePortfolios in particular, it is unsurprising that the framework for effective high-impact practices saturates their approach to large-scale advocacy. The high-impact criteria as outlined by Kuh (2008) provide a useful framework for third space professionals who must operate through networks and deprioritize discipline-specific knowledge. Kuh, O'Donnel, and Schneider (2017) name eight common features of high-impact practices (HIPs):

- Performance expectations set at appropriately high levels
- Significant investment of concentrated effort by students over an extended period of time
- Interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters
- Experiences with diversity, wherein students are exposed to and must contend with people and circumstances that differ from those with which students are familiar
- Frequent, timely, and constructive feedback
- Opportunities to discover relevance through real-world applications
- Public demonstration of competence
- Periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning (p. 11)

The HIP features identified by Kuh, O'Donnel, and Schneider (2017) provide a useful framework for considering the labor of third space professionals who must operate through networks and deprioritize discipline specific knowledge in favor of a more "across" and "beyond" the disciplines approach. Because the Task Force has been primarily led by individuals who occupy third space roles within their respective institutions and who are well-versed in the scholarship of high-impact practices generally and ePortfolios in particular, it is unsurprising that the framework for effective high-impact practices saturates their approach to community building and large-scale advocacy. By using the characteristics of an effective high-impact practice as a guiding framework, the Task Force created a discourse community for third space professionals that centers their expertise. This community exists outside of institutional contexts and rewards. It is noteworthy that the Task Force's ethos within the organization that formed it remains ambiguous, as most of the members lack the more impactful and internationally recognized authority associated with AAEEBL, once again marking the group's third space status. Nevertheless, this group has produced extraordinary output in the span of four years, writing and revising three iterations of the *Principles*; offering 30+ conference presentations, webinars, and workshops; publishing multiple articles for diverse audiences; and launching a research project that focuses on studying practitioners from the United States and Canada, with a follow-up version closely examining practitioners from New Zealand and Australia.

Members of the Task Force have often remarked upon the consistent activity, with many choosing to remain with the Task Force for multiple years despite such participation often being unacknowledged by their roles in their home institutions. This level of ongoing voluntary engagement and output is likely due to the fact that the Task Force has been designed and run in a

manner that draws on the HIP framework, resulting in professional value and connection for members in much the same way that participating in HIP activities does for students.

Each year, the Task Force leadership works collaboratively with the group to set important but attainable goals for each year. Each of these goals requires extended time and effort from the involved parties, with colleagues being invited to participate as much as they are able without being unduly burdened. Many efforts, such as *The ePortfolio Mapping Project*, are planned with longitudinal goals in mind. Frequent meetings of various subgroups and the full Task Force allow for repeated interactions between individuals representing different experiences, institutional types, and regions; this work is extremely social in nature. Likewise, the ePortfolio community and other groups related to ePortfolio work are frequently invited to learn about and weigh in on the Task Force's efforts, informing the *Principles* and the related research so that these concepts are shaped by a diverse audience. These points of feedback, both internal and external, are frequent and formative. The Task Force also enacts the *Principles* through research projects, such as *The ePortfolio Mapping Project*, demonstrating the ways the *Principles* might have practical applications beyond mere advocacy. Through webinars, publications, and podcasts, the Task Force strives to share this work publicly, marking the importance of grasping these ethical issues. Finally, reflection is intentionally embedded throughout the Task Force's processes. Every meeting is followed by communication that reiterates key points and highlights issues for further consideration. Many times, peers share informal reflections on workshops, presentations, webinars, or podcasts they have engaged in related to this work, marking what worked, what needed more attention, or even trends in audience questions or feedback. Furthermore, we maintain a participant survey to assess the effectiveness of our outreach efforts and revise future workshops and presentations based on participant feedback. Finally, at the end of every year, the Task Force chairs engage in a reflection meeting, considering their efforts and strategies for the previous year and next steps. The Task Force as a whole also has a reflective meeting to share their experiences as peers and thoughts on future directions, which are then shared with new members as they are introduced to our work.

The HIP framework allows individuals from different perspectives and disciplines to work effectively together to design material that benefits their larger community. This approach allows peers to contribute their disciplinary expertise to a shared aim, while striving to communicate concepts in ways that appeal to a broad audience. This group thus shapes their message in such a way that field-specific terminology and jargon is often cast aside, while the values and underlying ideologies remain. In this way, such efforts appear discipline-neutral while advancing the values of multiple fields when they intersect. Thus, practices that might be assumed to only have value within specific disciplinary contexts become more palatable to those in other disciplinary contexts who might benefit from exposure to them. Such transdisciplinary efforts generated materials that strive to be applicable and useful to individuals regardless of discipline, reflecting the third space professional's need to appeal broadly.

Initially, the group considered material collected from the ePortfolio community at AAEEBL's 2018 Annual Meeting regarding ethical issues in ePortfolio practice. From the crowd-sourced material, the group identified twelve digital ethics topics for further study and, following a common third space professional practice, self-identified the topic(s) of greatest relevance to their own interests, contexts, and professional expertise. While the first year's conversations focused largely on things like copyright and data privacy, we entered our second year with attention to the ways that ePortfolio can perpetuate harm, including addressing systemic racism and bias, access and support to technology and training, and inequitable labor practices. Over time, the Task Force has continued to develop new principles—the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Decolonization Principle (DEIBD), the Visibility of Labor Principle, and the Evaluation Principle—to address these gaps. In this process, we have developed a growing body of new knowledge borne out of our own institutional

contexts, but made stronger through working in a multi-professional environment, drawing out our qualifications to do this work on the basis of need (of the profession, of the institutional context, of the growing body of knowledge of ePortfolio labor and its effects on institutional context and sustainability of that work).

Moreover, the Task Force's third space nature influences the decision-making process during ongoing efforts to revise the Principles. This context ensures that the Principles remain relevant and applicable across various disciplines while being inclusive of all users. For instance, the Principles were numbered for ease of reference, but the Task Force quickly realized that order and numbering implied a hierarchy, indicating to the community that we might be placing more value on one Principle than another. However, in practice, we recognized that the Principles often intersect and inform each other or may be of more immediate use to various stakeholders depending on their local context. This awareness was informed by the liminality of many Task Force members' institutional roles, in which they are called upon to help multiple disciplines grapple with such concepts. As such, over the years, the Task Force has attempted to avoid this unintentional hierarchy through several approaches. First, we removed the numbering. Second, we created an interactive visual in which the Principles appeared as icons in blocks with no particular order (Figure 1). This chart is periodically updated to reflect changes in the ever-evolving Principles. Finally, we worked on tagging mechanisms, so that users might search via tags to identify those principles and audience-specific scenarios that might be of most immediate interest given their particular needs. Thus, the Task Force's efforts further reflect third space attributes as identified by Whitchurch as we embrace ambiguity as a productive opportunity to be accommodating of the needs of the community.

Over time, the need for broad appeal and clarity for a variety of audiences has also led the Task Force to re-conceptualize many of the original *Principles*. This revisionary work responded to workshop participant feedback as well as self-reflection by Task Force members, suggesting that (particularly for new members of our community) too many principles was unwieldy for users, the overlap in strategies and use cases for the combined *Principles* often made it hard to differentiate between them, and more could be gained by focusing on the intersections of the concepts they represented than by splitting hairs over their differences.

Indeed, throughout the meeting notes and working documents, the Task Force members repeatedly signal an interest in ensuring the Principles, which are specifically aimed at ePortfolio practice, are not so niche in nature that they cannot be used by non-expert ePortfolio practitioners. For instance, in year three, one member wrote in a working document, "I think it would be a great exercise to ask the Task Force what they think the point of the principles is: solicit individual responses, see if what we've produced still aligns." Another claimed, "Regardless of which principles we combine, chop up, rearrange, and all that, I think we can think more about who will read the principles and how they will engage them (design thinking, sort of)." This emphasis on using empathy, a key feature of the design thinking process outlined by Purdy (2014), and self-reflection continues to guide the Task Force's efforts in hopes of producing material useful to an array of stakeholders. These characteristics combined—drawing from both Kuh and Whitchurch—showcase our group's ability to "cope with ambiguity and accommodate, and even use productively, the tensions that they encounter" (Whitchurch, 2015, p. 17).



Figure 1: Thirteen principles from year two; image created to emphasize non-hierarchical relationship among principles

Over the years of its operation, this Task Force has developed into an ongoing discourse community for international third space professionals invested in ePortfolios as an educational practice and digital ethics as a foundational 21st-century literacy. Working together, we have generated resources, suggested strategies, and defined terminology for successfully implementing and supporting this high-impact practice. Critically, this project has offered each of us a place to share, discuss, and reflect on our own work with other professionals who recognize and empathize with our professional struggles, across state, institutional, and disciplinary boundaries. This motivation exemplifies one of the characteristics Whitchurch ascribes to third space professionals, in which individuals join working bodies to participate in community rather than in self-advancement.

Finally, the Task Force is modeling one strategy for putting a principle into practice with the launch of the ePortfolio Mapping Project at the AAEEBL Annual Meeting. The goal of this project is to begin making visible the labor that is required for ePortfolio pedagogy and practice to work well. The Task Force is currently collecting data regarding ePortfolio practitioner labor in higher education in North America while preparing to launch a second phase of this research focused on Australia and New Zealand to continue developing a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the ePortfolio community. Thus, as a project largely run by third space professionals, utilizing the features that make high-impact practices successful for student learning, we have (inadvertently, at first, and intentionally later on) created a third space professional high-impact practice discourse community.

Third Space ePortfolio Support: Early Findings from the ePortfolio Mapping Project

The Task Force's interest in questions of labor, visibility, and value emerges both from members' experiences as third space professionals within their institutions and increasing calls for higher education to reform the way labor is valued.⁴

The ePortfolio Mapping Project was launched at AAEEBL's 2022 Annual Conference, initiating a year-long data collection phase during which ePortfolio practitioners and advocates are invited to respond to a survey that inquires into their institutional context, educational background, and ePortfolio-related efforts. Respondents also have the opportunity to self-identify and indicate their willingness to participate in follow-up interviews during the second stage of data collection. Importantly, *The ePortfolio Mapping Project* was inspired by the *International WAC/WID Mapping Project* and *National Census of Writing*, highlighting the deeply ingrained influence of WAC/WID principles on ePortfolio practice and theory.

From this work, the AAEEBL Digital Ethics Task Force strives to better define a large community of practice and professionals, highlighting common strategies for ePortfolio support and advocacy. By making visible common practices and trends across North American higher education, the Task Force hopes that this study might support ePortfolio practitioners as they advocate for resources and appropriate compensation within their local context. *The ePortfolio Mapping Project* is also envisioned as a model for ePortfolio practitioners to adapt for their own purposes, perhaps mapping ePortfolio-related efforts within their institutions. Furthermore, information gathered in this study may provide a roadmap for training future practitioners interested in joining this emerging field, pointing to a potential curriculum not unlike those designed for WAC/WID practitioners.

Recognizing this, in June 2022, as members of AAEEBL's Digital Ethics Task Force, we launched *The ePortfolio Mapping Project*, which aims to identify ePortfolio-related labor, including where such labor is occurring and who is responsible for such efforts within North American higher education institutions. In the next section, we share some early data from the survey, particularly noting third space trends in the responses.

Survey Data

We began our research project because we wanted to move beyond the anecdotal to have a more data-informed understanding of who is doing ePortfolio work, how this work is supported at different types of institutions, how the work is acknowledged, and what elements contribute to the sustainability and success of ePortfolio initiatives. We are particularly interested in the professionalization of ePortfolio professionals. For the purposes of this article, we have considered data from early respondents, with a particular focus on those individuals who identified themselves as the primary administrator or individual responsible for supporting ePortfolio efforts at their institution. As of July 2023, 64 individuals had responded. Of those, 17 identified themselves as the primary ePortfolio resource at their institution. Those 17 responses are the focus of the analysis here, as their primary ePortfolio resource role suggests findings from 17 unique institutions. The majority of the group (12) indicated that they served as Academic Affairs staff or administrators. Notably, none of these respondents identify as a full-time, tenure-track, or tenured faculty member. Rather, they occupy roles in upper administration, instructional technology support, instructional design, and assessment (departmental and institutional level). That many of these individuals work outside of academic departments reflects Whitchurch's definition of a third-space professional, as these individuals are called upon to support efforts across the institution and disciplines.

It is unsurprising that these respondents also acknowledged several campus partners, highlighting once again the need for third space professionals to develop and maintain productive networks across disciplines and institutional units. Such work requires that they frequently coordinate with campus partners, including various information technology services, offices of institutional assessment and/or research, teaching and learning centers, career development services, advising, tutoring partners (such as writing centers and student learning centers), library staff, faculty, and administrators. The most consistent campus partnerships appear to be with those tasked with supporting technology, instructional design, and writing, reflecting the intersection of those skills that ePortfolios require and that disciplinary faculty might not have the time to address, whereas third space professionals “build new forms of expertise” that come from “making connections” and “developing new knowledge” that draws on institutional situatedness and context (Whitchurch, 2015, p. 96-97).

This interdisciplinary skillset is further emphasized by the responses regarding the purpose for using ePortfolios. Survey respondents (see Figure 2) indicated that their primary intentions for using ePortfolios include reflection (15), integrative learning (14), preparing students for the workforce (14), conducting assessment (11), composing with multiple forms of media (8), and applying new technologies to learning (7). This emphasis on workforce preparation, assessment, and multimodal composition is especially salient, as the respondents must maintain some degree of expertise in all of these fields, which constitute full-time positions for others in units specifically dedicated to each of these areas, depending on one’s institutional context. Assessment, in particular, sits in a liminal space, as, in our experience, when tasked with “assessing writing” or “assessing programmatic outcomes” faculty frequently self-identify a lack of preparation and proficiency in these skills, often deferring to assessment offices or centers for teaching and learning (aka, third space professionals) to complete this work and help them determine how to put the findings into action.

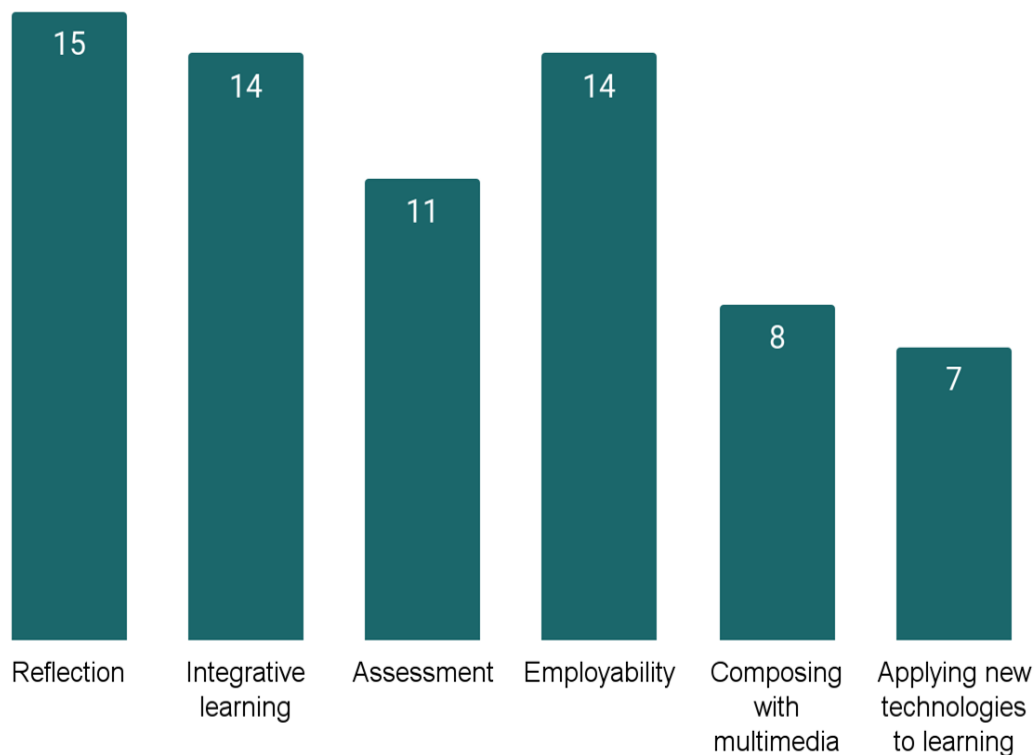


Figure 2: Reasons for using ePortfolios

There were conspicuous trends in respondents' comments regarding obstacles to effectively pursuing their work. Obstacles included time, resources, funding, faculty resistance, failure to see ePortfolios as useful for assessment, competing initiatives, and lack of support from upper administration. In particular, respondents highlighted the difficulty of sustaining successful ePortfolio implementation when the initiatives rest primarily on faculty buy-in or additional labor from faculty. Comments included:

Time and funding are obstacles to doing my ePortfolio work well. As with many positions in higher education, additional duties have been added to my plate and have edged out time and effort available to spend on ePortfolios. Competing goals and limited time available to collaborate across departments can hinder efforts that would allow for intentional, structured ePortfolio use at the institution. The result is individualized use in specific courses and programs that [lack] a cohesive thread to connect those experiences for students.

All curricular decisions come from the faculty; if they are not interested there are no ePortfolios.

Not valued by most faculty, not taken seriously for assessment.

Our institution mandates...an integrative ePortfolio. Faculty advisors are the primary reflection partner for student[s], but many do not take the ePortfolio seriously.

These obstacles are similar to those identified for educational development and WAC/WID professionals. They evidence the third space positionality of high-impact practices work, both as units and professional roles within institutional spaces. As such, high-impact practice initiatives, such as ePortfolio efforts, are likely to struggle due to their ambiguous positioning and authority if institutional structures and administration do not support third space professionals who inhabit them and who are likely to be seen as potential interlopers or even unskilled workers rather than colleagues with relevant expertise.

Given that faculty buy-in is an evergreen issue, such comments also demonstrate what happens when high-impact practice scholarship emphasizes primarily pedagogical approaches, placing the onus of high-impact practice implementation on faculty without recognizing the institution's responsibility in providing the additional support needed for such implementations to be successful (Halonen & Dunn, 2018). Ideally, faculty should not be burdened with the sole responsibility of implementing high-impact practices without the support of professional staff who bring their own expertise to bear on diverse disciplinary contexts. The demanding nature of these practices makes it impractical for individual faculty or groups of faculty to sustain them on their own. Meanwhile, the third space professionals assigned to this role must be acknowledged as experts in their own right, possessing adaptable skill sets and the capacity to collaborate effectively across the curriculum and the institution.

When asked to identify their primary roles and responsibilities as the primary ePortfolio administrator (Figure 3), respondents identified a heavy emphasis on technology support (14), faculty development (14), instructional design (14), student support (14), and assessment support (12) in particular. Marketing (8), supervising student workers (8), and research support (5) were identified by fewer respondents but are worth noting here because they point to some other academic third space activities identified by Whitchurch that often exist in uncomfortable relation to more traditional and lofty views of higher education activities. Notably, one respondent highlighted the ambiguous delineation between educational development and support related to digitally

enriched activities and technical support, stating, “There are other users who have system admin rights, and IT supports deeper level technical functions, but I am the de facto lead in the eP[ortfolio] support and faculty dev[elopment] effort.” This highlights the frequently overlooked (and sometimes underestimated) managerial aspect of such work, encompassing individual tasks, varied deadlines, collaboration with multiple partners, fluctuations in periods of activity, and expertise tailored to specific needs. All of these attributes reflect Whitchurch’s description of a third space professional’s experience.

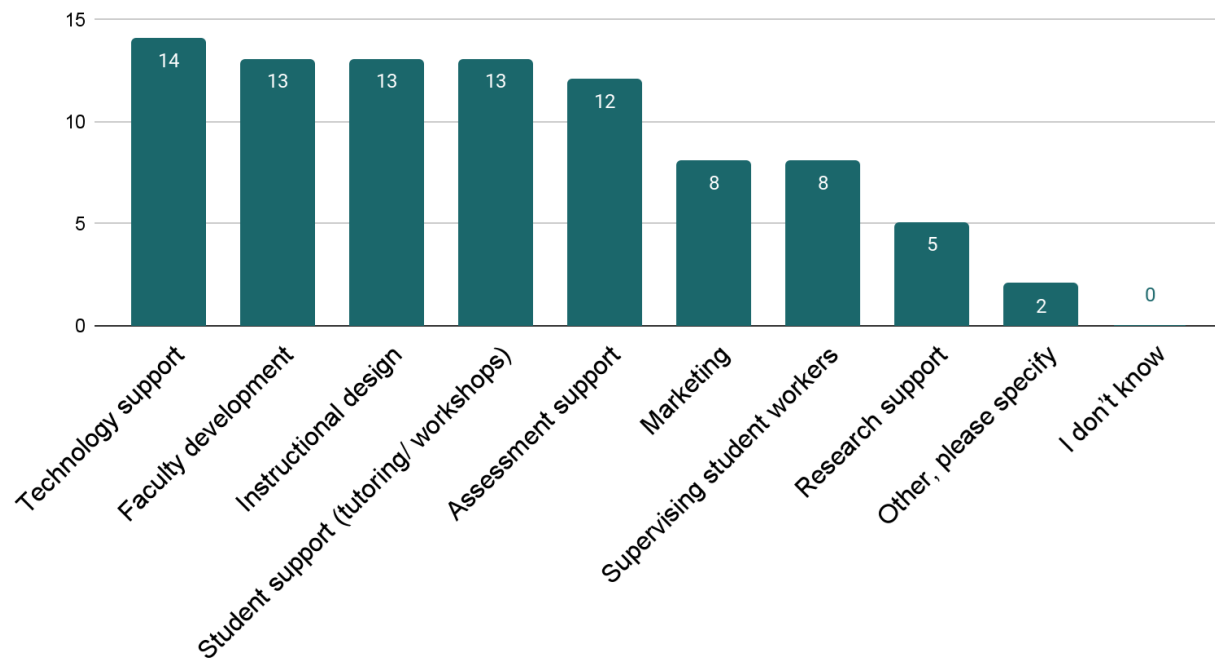


Figure 3: Primary ePortfolio tasks and responsibilities

Many of the respondents demonstrate their ability to “cope with ambiguity and accommodate tension” as they navigate coordinating with multiple partners as well as supporting faculty tasked with implementing these practices within their courses. Importantly, when faculty assume this additional workload, their efforts are also relegated to the third space, as these contributions are seldom explicitly recognized or appreciated. Regarding institutional compensation or acknowledgement for faculty engaged in ePortfolio training and implementation, a majority of respondents (12) answered that such work is not acknowledged, reflecting the assertion by Havnes and Stensaker (2006) that educational development efforts are historically not valued. Of those that suggested there was some form of practical acknowledgement for faculty participants, it took the form of showcase opportunities or awards (3) or a course release (1). Additional comments indicated that unless departments or institutions removed some elements of faculty’s existing workload in acknowledgement of the work such implementation efforts require, then ePortfolio initiatives are unlikely to succeed in the long term. When asked about the compensation for their own ePortfolio work, half of the respondents (7) indicated they were fairly compensated. Others indicated they were not well compensated (3) or somewhat well compensated (4). Two fortunate respondents feel well compensated (2). No one suggested they were very well compensated.

It is impossible to sustain successful high-impact practices without systemic change that supports and compensates collaborative efforts among faculty and professional staff. Both aspects of high-

impact implementation need to be invested in and valued, rather than one at the expense of the other. In an attempt to redress that gap in scholarship and model strategies for acknowledging and alleviating the labor of ePortfolio practice, AAAEBL's Digital Ethics Task Force produced both the *Digital Ethics in ePortfolios Principles* and *The ePortfolio Mapping Project*.

Ambiguous Positionality: Between Spaces, Bridging Sections

ePortfolios may be the most ambiguously situated of the high-impact practices, as they are frequently supported by those who are outside traditional academic roles and work within initiatives, programs, and units whose functions may be loosely defined, if they are defined at all. As a practice, ePortfolios are also viewed through the lens of competing institutional agendas, being fêted as vehicles for improving digital literacies; fostering formative and summative reflection and metacognitive habits; supporting process, assessment, and professionalization; or capturing learning in service to other high-impact practices perceived as more experiential in nature.

One survey respondent captures the liminality of ePortfolio experience, arguing that:

Everyone knows [ePortfolios are] a good idea. But it remains to be seen whether overworked and undercompensated faculty can collectively produce enough framework and support materials, reach enough agreement on matters of structure, and implement enough of that structure—supported solely by one another, other departments, and a tiny cadre of Assessment folks—to actually get it to work.

This perceptive comment exemplifies the third space nature of the ePortfolio practitioner's lived experience. Such individuals must skillfully navigate the diverse requirements of various stakeholders and acquire the expertise necessary to facilitate implementations on both small and large scales, all while facilitating consensus and supporting the additional workload asked of instructors.

In a parenthetical aside to their survey response, the respondent continues, however, to suggest the limits of continuing in unacknowledged and unsupported labor:

I love this work, and I love spearheading it. But even I already have a foot out the door. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to get back to earning my data analytics certificate so I can find a better paying gig.

Job satisfaction can only sustain laborers to a certain extent. When these individuals eventually depart from the position or institution, it can significantly impact the momentum of an ePortfolio initiative. Their departure disrupts the networks they have established and takes away the diverse expertise they have acquired, tailored to address a range of needs. Furthermore, their departure increases the workload for faculty members who are expected to continue operating under established expectations for ongoing ePortfolio efforts. Ultimately, students suffer as a result.

The 2016 Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) study of undergraduate teaching faculty found that many faculty respondents' job satisfaction increased as their hours spent teaching and preparing to teach decreased. At this same time, they found an increase in the number of non-tenure-track instructional lines, an increase in the number of women and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) respondents, and a reorientation of institutional goals away from teaching and toward research. The Mapping Project survey data reflects some of these shifts, with a majority of respondents identifying as female (10) and in non-tenure track lines. Collectively, the results of the last 10 years of HERI surveys showcase the territory that we in higher education now experience as

third space: as teaching missions become farther removed from traditional faculty roles while universities and their administrators push for student success driven by high-impact practices that take an increased amount of intellectual and emotional labor, that labor gets pushed primarily to women and BIPOC professionals outside the realm of tenure.

These statistics could be discouraging, and some of our respondents have reached that breaking point. However, for those of us who choose to inhabit these third spaces—as professionals who choose to invest time and energy (labor) in the interstitial—both the evolution of the *Principles* and the Task Force behind it showcase the generative and sustaining power of the third space instead. Using Whitchurch’s (2015) terms, we have created an “‘elite’ group of professionals who apply their expertise to more complex, individuated tasks” that make the connections required to “build up new forms of expertise” with “both long and short deadlines, with multiple partners and collaborators, in a mutable environment” who do this work primarily because of, rather than despite, these affordances (pp. 96-97).

Rowland (2003) argued, “The challenge for those concerned to develop teaching in higher education, or academic development more widely, is to engage academics in a discourse of learning which is critical in a context which is fragmented” (p. 15). Third space professionals charged with developing and supporting high-impact practices within their institutions are situated in spaces defined by fragmented institutional contexts. While it can pose several obstacles, this ambiguous positionality can also allow them to move between spaces, bridging sections of the institution in new and surprising ways and creating new discourse communities in the process. It is important for scholarship on high-impact practices to take more explicit notice of these third space professionals and their rhetorical strategies, as implementation efforts often rely on them to provide support and expertise when faculty cannot. If, as we asserted earlier in this paper, the heart of high-impact practices is the labor involved in them, then higher education must do more to see and acknowledge all individuals engaged in that work.

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Notes

- ¹ This term is styled differently throughout the scholarship. For consistency, this chapter will use the terms “third space” and “third space professional” while acknowledging it may appear differently in other sources.

² The original source dedicates two pages of paragraph-length material to the items in this list. For the sake of clarity and ease of readability, they have been condensed for this article. Each item represents a direct quote taken from the cited pages.

³ The work of faculty in institutions of higher education is not typically third space. Indeed, it is the “first space” or central space against which third spaces are contrasted. However, our reading of Whitchurch suggests that faculty labor can inhabit third spaces when their work shifts into roles and activities not traditionally assigned to them, which includes many program support and administration activities.

⁴ This study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Old Dominion University, (Approval No. 1900975-3) on 6.3.22.

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