

CHAPTER 11.

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC
SPRINGBOARD TO MORE
EXTENSIVE LIFESPAN
WRITING RESEARCH

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Research is messy! It begins with a question or a curiosity about something; attempts to find answers can lead down various paths that typically clarify what the project is *really* about and suggest ways to get information that might provide answers. This project began with discomfort about our retirement. With our identities so tightly linked to our writing center work, what would we do and who would we be when we left our positions as directors? Did others in our place have the same questions and apprehension? Would sharing our stories help us to find answers that might be useful to us and others? This narrative focuses on our experience as researchers and how the messiness and evolution of our research experiences led us to continued improvisations in our methodology as our topic kept expanding and developing. We began with methodologies familiar to us and to those in the field, but as our work progressed, we developed a lifespan perspective and were drawn to autoethnography, a methodology relatively new to our field of writing center studies.

We offer here an autoethnographic case study of how one research project actually grew and evolved over time. We describe our own project—a research journey of three academic colleagues and friends, evolving from casual conversations through formulating tentative research questions to factoring in expanded questions as we explored, framed, and finally conducted our project collaboratively. We begin this chapter with the questions and conversations that led us to use autoethnography, moving from there to our decision to survey others, and

then on to the implications for lifespan writing research. We conclude with the acknowledgment that our project continues to evolve.

BEGINNING WITH CONVERSATIONS AND QUESTIONS

Our research began, as many projects do, with conversations and questions among colleagues that took place over years with increasing intensity. As long-time and active writing center directors, each for more than thirty years, we were well acquainted with one another through attending and presenting at regional, national, and international conferences. We usually got together to socialize and “talk shop,” most often at the many international conferences in which we participated. Each of us took on unique individual or collaborative work that sometimes intersected and often supported the work of the other two. Throughout those years, Pam Childers and Leigh Ryan occasionally presented jointly, and Kathy Shine Cain and Leigh were active in the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW). All three participated in other professional organizations for writing and writing center researchers and teachers, serving as officers and mentors, hosting conferences, and, of course, presenting and publishing. And then, ten plus years into the twenty-first century, we each found ourselves planning retirement and thinking about our transitions into that new “life” after leaving a profession we loved.

Chronologically, Pam retired in 2010 as Caldwell Chair of Composition and Caldwell Writing Center Director from the McCallie School, a college preparatory independent boys’ school in Tennessee, after previously directing the writing center at a public secondary school in New Jersey. In 2016, Leigh retired as Director of the Writing Center at the University of Maryland, a large public research and flagship university. Finally, Kathy retired in 2018 from Merrimack College, a private college in Massachusetts, after directing the writing center and holding other Writing Program Administrator (WPA) positions. We considered the diversity of our positions to be an advantage, since we represented a range of institutions and possible writing center director positions. Unlike many other authors in this collection, we conducted our research study independent of any academic institution, although we brought to our work the collaborative input from our previous positions.

As we individually stepped away from our full-time jobs, our paths continued to cross at conferences. Pam presented on a panel with other retired writing center directors at the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) conference in 2014, where she roomed with Leigh, and they presented with Steve Sherwood at the 2016 IWCA conference on a retrospective of writing center research promise and progress. Then Pam spoke on life after retirement at the 2017 Conference on College Composition Communication (CCCC), which Kathy attended.

When we met at conferences to share a meal or two, increasingly retirement became a significant topic of conversation. Though published long after we began sharing articles on retirement, Arthur C. Brooks's (2020) article "How to Build a Life: Why So Many People are Unhappy in Retirement" sums up much of what we have since discovered about retirement:

Unless you keel over in the prime of life, your victories will fade, your skills will decline, and life's problems will intrude. If you try to hang on to glory, or lash out when it fades, it will squander your victories and mark an unhappy end to your journey. If you're still in the middle of your hero's journey, it would behoove you to make tangible plans now to show true strength and character in the final phase. Plan to spend the last part of your life serving others, loving your family and friends, and being a good example to those still in the first three stages of their own hero's journey. Happiness in retirement depends on your choice of narrative.

What would our narratives be and how would we find them? Having retired from different kinds of institutions and writing center director positions, we wondered if we were each facing similar issues as we considered how to retain and balance professional and personal activities in this new phase of our lives.

TURNING TOWARDS AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

When Leigh suggested that we reread the late Wendy Bishop's essay, "You Can Take the Girl Out of the Writing Center, But You Can't Take the Writing Center Out of the Girl" (1997), we began to consider more seriously how our experiences as writing center directors informed and influenced our post-writing center lives. We had each spent many years in the field, and so it made sense to contemplate relationships between our professional lives and our subsequent or anticipated civic, professional, and personal retirement activities—both ongoing and new—that seemed natural continuations of our writing center work. We were considering possible ideas to address our own concerns, while also improvising ways to help others in similar positions. And, at this point we were not familiar with lifespan writing research.

The 2018 IWCA conference in Atlanta provided an opportunity to explore this idea further, so we proposed a session grounded in autoethnography. As mentioned in some of the earlier chapters, this research method allowed us to tell our own stories, mining our pasts for details, linking them to the present, and tentatively forecasting their presence in the future. According to Margot

Duncan (2004), autoethnography presents “reports that are scholarly and justifiable interpretations based on multiple sources of evidence. This means autoethnographic accounts do not consist solely of the researcher’s opinions but are also supported by other data that can confirm or triangulate those opinions” (p. 3). We were able to draw on copious documented evidence from our various professional positions; regional, national, and international leadership roles; awards; workshops; presentations; and publications from a wide range of organizations to support our personal reflections. Carolyn Ellis and colleagues (2011) describe our choice of methodology in their description of autoethnography:

When researchers write autoethnographies, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience. They accomplish this by first discerning patterns of cultural experience evidenced by field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling (e.g., character and plot development), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice. Thus, the autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people. (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 5)

Likewise, Tony Adams and others describe autoethnography as

radically inductive. The categories and the themes of the study emerge from the writing explorations. Written reflection emerges in a dialectic that alternates between the collection of data (written fieldnotes, documents, journals, other written ephemera) and the theorizing of that data on its own terms. (Jones et al., 2015)

Calling this theorizing of data “thematicizing,” they suggest that it involves “a continual rereading of this mass of writing and then reflecting in writing that looks for themes, which may be signaled by repeated words, ‘images, phrases, and/or experiences” (Jones et al., 2015).

It should be noted, as Jodi Skipper (2022) points out, that “some other academics tend to segregate [autoethnography] as an activist and, not [as an] academic, which is not how I was trained to think. I also just believe that academic work is innately political and that such a separation isn’t optional” (quoted in

Henery, 2022). Given that our own reflections continue to emphasize the values inherent in writing center work, and that many respondents shared our association of this work with social justice, we would share Skipper's assessment of this methodology.

Elliot Eisner (1991) describes the ways in which qualitative studies like autoethnographies find usefulness: if they help readers understand a situation that is otherwise confusing, if such studies in some way help readers to anticipate future possibilities, and if they act as guides to highlight specific aspects of a situation that may go unnoticed (paraphrased in Duncan, 2004, p. 9). And that is precisely what happened with our autoethnographic study. As Kathy wrote in hers,

So what to do [in retirement]? I'm beginning to formulate an answer to that question, focusing on two essential elements of my writing center experience: 1) I want to maintain my professional identity, and 2) I want to continue to engage in the kind of social justice-oriented work that I believe is inherent in writing center work.

Pam considered,

Just as in our writing center positions, we have dealt with family joys, losses, major health issues, and our own aging processes. I have flown cross country monthly for 3 ½ years caring for my parents, traveled throughout the world, taken on many new adventures, and re-examined how I am approaching this project [called retirement].

Finally, Leigh noted the significance of bringing interests together, both on and off the job:

For me it was social justice. I began volunteering at an historic house museum in 1994 because I loved the mansion, but quickly became primarily interested in an enslaved family, the Plummers, and their stories. My activities at the mansion aligned with my interests and activities at work, where my tutors and I actively sought to promote inclusivity, diversity, and social justice in our tutoring and other projects.

All three of us have continued our involvement in social justice issues, both old and new, in our retirement activities, but was that true of other retired writing center directors? And as messy as they might be, what avenues could we explore to discover that information?

FROM AUTOETHNOGRAPHY TO RESEARCHING OTHERS

These self-reflective autoethnographies were just the beginning of what would evolve into a far different research project than we had originally envisioned. A lively discussion among participants in our Atlanta presentation made it clear that some of our former writing center colleagues had left their directorships not to retire, but to move into other positions inside and outside academia. Some had advanced to key administrative positions, while others focused on different but related academic interests, took full-time teaching positions, or started their own businesses. Fortunately, we had kept in touch with many colleagues over the decades through conferences and collaborative projects connected to IWCA, CCCC, NCPTW, and WAC. How had their writing center directorships influenced their choices and work after leaving that position? As we examined our individual qualitative studies and listened to others who shared their own stories, we asked ourselves, “Why not broaden our study to include ‘former’ rather than ‘retired’ writing center directors?” This simple change in language shifted our perspective and greatly expanded the implications of the project.

At this point, we began to reconsider and refine our research questions. We now had information gleaned from our 2018 IWCA autoethnographies, along with feedback from that audience and other former, current, and future writing center directors with whom we had shared our ideas. In addition, we had determined that our research needed to include a larger, more diverse, and international group of subjects. We also considered the relevance of prior writing center research. The work of Kenneth Bruffee (1984), particularly his definitions of collaborative learning and of knowledge as a social construct, along with Pam and Leigh’s reflections on Steve Sherwood’s presentation on writing center careers (2011), helped inform our thinking. Also relevant were Brad Hughes, Paula Gillespie, and Harvey Kail’s (2010) analysis of the lasting impact of the writing center experience on undergraduate tutors’ professional lives and Andrew Jeter’s (2016) conclusion from his research on high school peer tutors: “peer tutoring taught [student tutors] how to find the joy in collaboration with others” (p. 110). Our research questions reflected these studies: What, if any, similar conclusions could be reached about the impact of writing center work on former directors? And to what extent might our experiences help current directors consider what facets of their writing center work might carry over into retirement or future positions and how? Also, could this research impact the way others approached their lifespan writing projects involving retirees?

As we deliberated, we looked more closely at the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project’s (PWTARP) interest in learning “which abilities, values, and skills tutors developed from [students’] education and experience as peer writing

tutors and how, if at all, they had used those abilities, values, and skills in their lives beyond graduation” (Hughes et al., 2010). That study’s framework led us to ask about the talents, skills, and abilities former writing center directors put into practice or learned in their positions, and how those might have served them in the professional, civic, and personal aspects of their lives after leaving to assume other positions or retire.

The PWTARP results also reinforced our notion of writing centers as communities of practice (Lave, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1990; Wenger, 1998), featuring collaboration and interaction on an ongoing basis, with a focus on exploring and sharing best practices and creating new knowledge. We wondered what being part of a community of practice meant to former directors, and if and how they saw it influencing or being a part of their subsequent activities. We also began regular online discussions to determine our next steps. To gather information from others who had left their writing positions, we decided to compose a survey of former directors modeled on Hughes and his colleagues’ (2010) survey of peer writing tutors.

We initially coded our own autoethnographies, and then turned to crafting questions for our survey. This shift moved us from our original qualitative study (autoethnography) to a quantitative one (survey) that would also include data we could analyze as correlative and code as descriptive. Guidelines for developing surveys and questionnaires (Anthony et al., 2014) served as a kind of brief refresher course, reminding us to focus on our objectives, design ways to best obtain information (e.g., demographic questions, closed or open questions, use of scales such as Likert), and determine the structure and order of the survey itself. And, of course, we continued reading what we termed “background material.”

Development of the survey, which went through many iterations before being finalized, involved weekly online meetings, email discussions of drafts, and feedback from participants at several conferences, and finally, some discussions at our weekly online meetings. Though sometimes messy, drafts we presented at conferences received spontaneous suggestions and comments from attendees that we quickly recorded. Finally, we discussed, critiqued, revised, and reordered our questions, then tested the final version (Appendix A) with our own responses. We were participants in our own survey! That final survey included basic demographic information (i.e., age, education, years of experience as writing center directors, institutional affiliations), involvement in professional organizations, publications, and presentations. The last six open-ended questions allowed participants to expand on specifics related to their work as writing center directors and future career/personal choices they had made during and after leaving the writing center. The survey ended with a question requesting contact information for respondents willing to complete

more detailed follow-up interview questions. Meanwhile, we secured a mutually accessible Survey Monkey account.

We began our survey distribution process in the spring of 2020, sending invitations (Appendix B) through more than a dozen regional, national, and international listservs that might include former secondary and postsecondary writing center directors. Since more people were working online during the pandemic, we may have been able to contact a greater number of respondents through listservs than we might have otherwise. Because some who had left writing center positions were no longer on any of these listservs, we contacted those we knew directly and solicited names and contact information from other colleagues. What began as three individual autoethnographic research studies had grown into a full-fledged, internationally diverse and inclusive research survey that could impact the personal and professional work of former, current, and future writing center directors.

CONNECTING EARLY FINDINGS TO LIFESPAN WRITING RESEARCH

As of this writing, we have received 260 responses, with over half volunteering to respond to follow-up interview questions. The former writing center director respondents included high school, community college, and four-year college and university directors from such countries as Iceland, Canada, Turkey, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Philippines, Taiwan, Oman, Chile, Namibia, Denmark, Germany, and the United States. Only 18 percent were under 45 years of age, with 25 percent between ages 45 and 55, 21 percent from 55-64, and 36 percent over 65. It was interesting to discover that many had left their writing center positions early in their careers but still felt a strong connection to those experiences that influenced them in other positions in academia or elsewhere. In fact, 60 percent had been directors for less than ten years. Although 18 percent of respondents had retired, most have continued volunteer work that reflects what they learned as directors, and at least 46 percent moved into full-time faculty or administrative positions where they have applied what they learned as writing center directors. We would never have received these kinds of responses or amassed such detailed information if we had not changed our original research question from its focus on “retired” to “former” writing center directors.

As responses slowly came into the new Survey Monkey email we created, we began to focus on the data we were receiving. This was messy work, as we alternated checking periodically to identify trends and reaching out to additional potential participants. Between and during our weekly online meetings, we analyzed and shared our coding of the survey data to determine what follow-up

information to gather. Then, we created six questions (Appendix C) to distribute in early 2021 to those (130) who had volunteered to participate further. By summer 2021, we had received 64 follow-up interview responses, offering more qualitative research with an abundance of useful specific personal data to investigate. Throughout this time, we continued sharing drafts of data, gathering new research, and collaborating on writing conference proposals, presentations (Appendix D), and applications for grants.

As our work progressed, we noticed that more and more attention was being paid to intellectual and scholarly connections between the academic and post-academic life, all of which suggested we were on a good path. One valuable resource was our involvement in the Writing Through the Lifespan Collaboration starting early in 2018. This group began in 2016 in response to Charles Bazerman's call for research on writing across the lifespan, from cradle to grave. We were fortunate to attend virtual presentations and discussions, and presented our own *Work in Progress*, "Identity, Activity, and Community Practice in the Writing Center and Beyond: What Departing Directors Carry with Them," in October 2020. Participants offered valuable suggestions for further research, shared their own experiences, and asked beneficial questions. It is at this point that we began to more fully understand and articulate the inextricable connection between our identities as writing center directors and as lifelong writers. Pam and Leigh also became subjects in an ongoing study involving retired members of rhetoric, composition, and writing studies that looks at retirement as an active part of the disciplinary lifecycle (Bowen & Pinkert, 2020). In addition, we noted an increase of formal organizations for intellectual exchange, cultural enrichment, and social interaction forming on campuses and within organizations. The University of Maryland Emeritus/Emerita Association, for example, allows retired faculty to continue engaging with the university, while the CCC "Standing Group for Senior, Late-Career, and Retired Professionals in Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies" likewise provides an arena for continued professional activity and interaction. All three of us benefited from these further sources of information we had not considered or that were not available when we started our own research.

A PROJECT THAT CONTINUES TO EVOLVE

Our project remains one "in progress." Not only is there much more to do, but that work takes us down several paths simultaneously. As Maureen Daly Goggin and Paul N. Goggin describe in their introduction to *Serendipity in Rhetoric, Writing, and Literacy Research* (2018), "What one can rely on is an open mind, one that is ready for the messiness and one that learns to stay comfortable within

the mire of unknowing as well as a process of preparing that mind” (p. 6). Sometimes it is chaotic; always it is a bit muddled because there’s never just one thing going on at a time while we examine and code the surfeit of information we have gathered. We also continue to read and listen, learning and adding to what we know, and to investigate links to similar research, past and present. In this collection alone are multiple resources from existing research, and the chapters that follow offer innovations we had not previously considered.

Repeatedly, we have discovered that sometimes the “messiness” that Goggin and Goggin (2018) refer to appears simply because life intrudes. Economic or political realities, natural disasters, a pandemic, or an unexpected international war may interrupt the progress of a project like ours. Personal and family health issues, as well as unexpected situations encountered in other areas where we had commitments, affected our work and required us to be flexible. With three of us, it was not unusual for one or two of us to cover for a third, to make small or large changes for the common good, or to fill in gaps for one another; and we simply accepted it as a part of the research process. That is one of the advantages of lifespan writing research that is collaborative, as noted in so many of the chapters in this collection.

Our lifespan writing research is not complete. We continue to find ways to share portions of what we have gleaned so far through conference presentations and other activities. These opportunities allow us to focus ever more closely on not only what we are discovering, but also how we are discovering it and how it might be used. That means writing proposals to present at conferences, and then creating appealing and informative presentations. Also, we have taken parts of our research to use in more specific studies regarding lifespan writing. For instance, why did such a large percentage of our respondents leave writing center positions after less than ten years? How might we conduct case studies on the impact of writing center work on directors’ moves to other positions in academia? How does or does not the role of mentoring change over the lifespan of former writing center directors? Individual responses to our survey and follow-up questions take on different meaning as we reread them and reflect on new improvisational directions for our research.

We have already connected diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) responses to our interview questions in a presentation at CCCC in March of 2022 and participated in the CCCC Standing Group for Senior, Late-Career, and Retired Professionals in Rhetoric & Composition/Writing Studies. We have several other research avenues currently in progress on this endless journey of lifespan writing research. The dissemination of information has also involved writing this chapter and proposing a book explaining and exploring our findings, possibly as part of a series of publications on lifespan writing research, and writing

a chapter for a forthcoming book on the role of collaboration in our ongoing research. Most recently, we organized an international session at IWCA 2021 to discuss forming a Special Interest Group (SIG) of “Past, Present, and Future Writing Center Directors.” The fifteen attendees at that online session were early career, mid-career, late-career, and retired writing center directors. They decided that the SIG would be important to “support, exchange, advise, and collaborate (SEAC)” with one another. We proposed another SIG for the fall of 2022, and IWCA has made our SIG permanent. Through that group, we have also met new writing center directors who have moved our work in a new direction of multigenerational writing center research and mentorship. Finally, we continue to consider ways to establish new initiatives—activities that will serve others in the future, such as a blog, a listserv, a regular journal column, or a formal mentoring project. Who knows what a Call for Proposals, suggestion from a former writing center director, rereading of an article, or critical thinking among the three of us might lead to in the future? We may come up with some new “messiness” based on the innovative research in the chapters that follow this one!

IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHERS DOING LIFESPAN WRITING RESEARCH

For novice researchers and those new to lifespan writing research, we hope readers will see the trajectory of our work as an example of the organic, experimental, experiential, and sometimes chaotic quality of each research experience and the often improvisational journey from one research project to a related, more specific, or different one. Our lifespan writing research involves questioning ourselves and others, taking risks that may change our methods and lead us into new directions, listening to the voices and ideas of others, and adapting old or creating new methods of research. Managing this ever-evolving research project and juggling all its pieces is often messy and not always easy, but the process of conducting and sharing it continues to keep each of us engaged in a very fulfilling and rewarding example of lifelong learning and sharing what we learn in the form of lifespan writing research.

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APPENDIX A. THE WRITING CENTER DIRECTOR ALUMNI RESEARCH PROJECT SURVEY

Participants: Former writing center directors who have either retired or moved on/back to other careers, in or out of academe.

Purpose: To examine how the experience of directing a center has informed/ influenced participants' civic/professional/volunteer life after leaving the center.

Methodology: Survey followed by interviews and/or focus groups.

SURVEY

Purpose of Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study that will gather information on the extent to which your identity as a writing center director has influenced you in re-shaping your professional identity and the ways in which you have adapted your scholarly and professional expertise to address issues and audiences beyond the discipline. Specifically, you will be asked to answer questions about your experiences beyond those as writing center director in other careers or retirement.

Benefits to the Individual

There are no direct benefits to you other than the opportunity to reflect on your own experiences; however, there may be benefits to others in the profession or in society, such as mentoring and material for further research.

Confidentiality

Survey results will be delivered and reported anonymously. Even if participants reveal themselves by naming specifics in their responses that might identify them, the research team will not reveal the specific participant. We may ask participants to volunteer participation in follow-up interviews, but those interviews will also be anonymous unless the participant chooses to become known.

Survey Questions

1. What is your current age?
__under 30 __30-39 __40-49 __50-59 __60-69 __70/ over
2. What is your gender/sexual identity [*if determined to be relevant to this study*]?
3. What is your race/ethnicity [*if determined to be relevant to this study*]?
4. How long did you work in a writing center? How long as director?
5. What other positions, if any, did you hold in the writing center?
6. How long ago did you leave your last writing center work as director?

7. What academic training prepared you for a writing center position (check all that apply):
 Postdoctoral study PhD/EdD MA/MFA/MS
 Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in Rhet/Comp
 English other (name)
8. What avenues of ongoing professional development did you pursue (check all that apply):
 coursework additional degree(s) IWCA Summer Institute
 conferences reading/research collaborative work with other writing center directors self-directed research other (name)
9. In what ways did you contribute to writing center scholarship (check all that apply):
a) publication of scholarly books articles chapters tutor guides regular columns;
b) conference presentations international national regional keynote addresses
c) invited presentations/workshops
d) held leadership positions in regional/national/ international writing center organizations
10. How were you appointed to the directorship?
 result of national search promoted from within
 directed by administration other (name)
11. What was the nature of your position?
 TT Faculty Non-TT Faculty Administration Staff
 Part-time Faculty/Part-time Director other (name)
12. If your position was faculty, how was it counted?
 release time (how much?) part of teaching load other (name)
13. Where was your writing center housed?
 stand alone department/program (name)
 college/school within institution learning center (or similar entity)
14. What was the reporting line for your position?
 Department Chair(name) WAC Director Learning Center Director/Dean (or similar entity) Academic Dean (name) Provost/Academic Vice President other (name)
15. Why did you leave writing center work?
 choice position eliminated terminated position/operation of writing center altered other (name)
16. What did you do upon leaving writing center work?
 retired returned to faculty moved to administrative position moved to another academic institution left academe
17. If retired, what have you done since retiring (check all that apply):
 volunteer work consulting writing/publishing in the field

writing/publishing outside the field presenting at conferences
 attending conferences adjunct teaching activist work other (name)

Respondents will be able to answer questions 10-15 for each center they've directed.

Narrative responses:

In what ways has your experience as a writing center director informed your subsequent work/activity?

Are there any ways in which your experience as a writing center director may have impeded your subsequent work/activity? If so, how?

How might you have better prepared yourself for life after the writing center?

What is the most valuable thing that you've taken from your experience as a writing center director?

What do you wish you had known before becoming a writing center director?

Would you like to add anything to your responses?

If you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview, please leave your email address here so that we may contact you.

APPENDIX B. EMAIL INVITATIONS

EMAIL INVITATION TO LISTSERVS

Are you no longer a writing center director? Have you moved out, moved up, moved on, or retired? If so, we would appreciate your going to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RCKPVGG> and completing our anonymous survey. We will be sharing the results of our survey at future regional, national, and international conferences as well as in a future publication. We appreciate your taking the time to reflect on your own experiences as a writing center director to help current and future writing center directors. If you are willing to offer suggestions or answer follow up interview questions, please respond at the end of the survey. We hope you enjoy this experience as much as we did completing the survey ourselves!

EMAIL INVITATION TO INDIVIDUALS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN WRITING CENTER DIRECTORS

Because you have worked as a writing center director, we would appreciate your going to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RCKPVGG> and completing our anonymous survey. We will be sharing the results of our survey at future regional, national, and international conferences as well as in a future publication. We

appreciate your taking the time to reflect on your own experiences as a writing center director to help current and future writing center directors. If you are willing to offer suggestions or answer follow up interview questions, please respond at the end of the survey. We hope you enjoy this experience as much as we did completing the survey ourselves!

EMAIL INVITATION TO INDIVIDUALS WHO MAY HAVE BEEN WRITING CENTER DIRECTORS

If at any time in your career you have worked as a writing center director, we would appreciate your going to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8VFZJM9> and completing our anonymous survey. As we receive responses, we will be sharing the results of our survey at future regional, national, and international conferences as well as in a future publication. We appreciate your taking the time to reflect on your own experiences as a writing center director to help current and future writing center directors. If you are willing to offer suggestions or answer follow up interview questions, please respond at the end of the survey. We hope you enjoy this experience as much as we did completing the survey ourselves!

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

Thank you so much for agreeing to respond to some follow-up questions for our project, “Identity, Activity, and Community Practice in the Writing Center and Beyond: What Departing Directors Carry with Them” (or essentially, The Former Writing Center Director Project).

This research project began as we each dealt with retirement and discussed among ourselves what it meant. After years directing a writing center, what were we taking with us as we left? For this study, we expanded our questions and concerns to include all people who had directed a writing center at any point in their careers. When we asked you that question, your answers were similar to ours—broad things like “management skills” and “an appreciation for collaborative learning.” Now we would like you to dig a little deeper and tell us even more.

We have returned to Wendy Bishop’s comment, made when she left directing a writing center to assume another administrative position: “you can take the [person] out of the writing center, but you can’t take the writing center out of the [person].” We wondered, what does it mean that the writing center is in us? We decided it meant that we infused the writing center with aspects of our identity and vice versa. To get at how that happens, we’d appreciate your exploring more fully the ways in which your identity has been shaped by your

writing center experience, and how you shaped the identity of your writing center(s). To do that, please respond to the following questions, elaborating as you see fit.

APPENDIX C. FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what ways, if any, did your writing center(s) reflect you? How would you characterize the ethos of your writing center(s)? And how have you carried that ethos into your work after leaving the director's position?
2. What challenges did you have to overcome as director of a writing center (e.g., physical space, funds, needed items to function, clear mission, administration, taking over from a previous director)? Any specific examples would be helpful.
3. What other interests were you engaged in outside the writing center while you worked as director? Have you continued to pursue those interests, or what new interests/activities/hobbies have you pursued since leaving the center? Have any been connected to your experience as a writing center director? If so, how?
4. What are you most proud of accomplishing in your center(s)? What did that accomplishment reveal about you, personally and professionally? How have those qualities served you in your work after leaving your writing center position?
5. What skills, values, and abilities served you best during your writing center career? In what ways has the knowledge you gained as writing center director served you in any of your work since stepping away from the writing center? Give any specific examples from your own experience.
6. A writing center is often described as a community of practice, one that is defined by collaboration. What does this description mean to you? In what ways might this description fit with your experience(s) as a writing center director and your experiences since leaving the director's position?

APPENDIX D. FURTHER PRESENTATIONS AND WORKSHOPS

- "The (HE)ART of It All: What Departing Writing Center Directors Carry with Them" (IWCA, 2019)
- "Identity in the Writing Center and Beyond" (Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, 2019)
- "The Writing Center Director Alumni Research Project: Re-shaping Professional Identities" (European Association of Teachers of Academic Writing, 2019)

- “Beyond the Writing Center: What’s in Your Backpack?” (Writing Through the Lifespan Collaboration, 2021)
- “Re-shaping Professional Identities: The Writing Center Directors Alumni Project” (CCCC, 2021)
- “Past, Present and Future Writing Center Directors’ SIG (IWCA, 2021)
- “Welcome to the Writing Center’: Encouraging Inclusivity in the Writing Center” (CCCC, 2022)
- “Taking the Commonplace Out of the Common Place: How Do Former Directors Adapt Writing Center Culture in New Venues?” (CCCC, 2022)
- “Empowering Writing Centers: What We Can Learn from Former Directors” (European Writing Centers Association, 2022)