

## Theme 6. Care Work and Sustainability

This final section displays a rich network of stories that show the ways in which communal everyday acts of care can make our work more sustainable and enjoyable, even while striving for work-life balance (Morris, “Care and Work/spaces”; Skinner and Wells, “Labor of Love”; Junaid, “What the COVID-19 Pandemic Taught Us About Writing Center Work”). At the same time, however, specific traumas often precipitate this kind of care work, whether it is the death of a family member, the loss of support structures, or even the birth of a child. Life often gets in the way of work, but, in this section, we see how our lives and our bodies can be brought into our work in novel and humane ways. These narratives show the relationality of writing center work. Of course, many of the narratives prior to this section demonstrate this phenomenon, but we felt the stories here focused on relationships more than other dimensions of practice and labor. For example, several stories in this section discuss the effects of the pandemic on writing center labor. Morris’ piece explores how our labor is tied to our relationships—not just in our professional spaces but beyond. Skinner & Wells’ story shares how they supported each other through motherhood, demonstrating the sort of metalabor that can make this work sustainable, enjoyable, and worth advocating for. Miley (2016) asserted “that by infusing the principles of feminist mothering into our own theorization of writing center administration, writing center directors empower writing center work and resist the neoliberal, patriarchal production of the institution” (p. 19). We see Skinner & Wells’s piece as providing an example of what such theorization might look like in practice. We also see relationality and care work as deeply anti-capitalist.

There are also seemingly quotidian events that happen in our work that we don’t always mark or examine but that are the mainstay of tutoring work. These experiences can also perhaps provide us with some of the most joy. Green’s piece, “Mike” (this collection) details how a tutor supports and mentors a student as they consider taking a predatory multi-level marketing job. Garner’s story “Keep Writing Centers Weird” (this collection) shares the serendipitous work of the “weird” writing center. While perhaps not considered “work” in the traditional sense, he tells the story of a student who shared fantasy poetry and ballads in a tutoring session. The student-produced writing beyond the university that is both moving and unique; we ought to pay more attention to these surprising, pleasurable, and moving experiences in our work.

Elliott’s “Disruptive Labor” (this collection) and Bond’s “Growing Like Moss” (this collection) consider how change can occur in writing centers and institutions through collaborative and sustainable actions. In particular, Bond’s metaphor of moss growing into places where it is needed or where it is most successful is an apt one. It helps us to understand that while pushing boundaries (Elliott)

is critical in writing center administrative work, so, too, is creating networks of allies and developing a shared purpose. As Wright (2019) has argued, coalition-building and cooperation are key strategies for resisting capitalism, and we see stories here that speak to this particular anti-capitalist approach.

## Discussion Questions

- What does remote work enable that in-person work disallows? How are caretaking and family prioritized in remote work or taking breaks or leaves from work?
- How can we create supportive environments where we mutually care for one another, as Skinner & Wells share in their story?
- What types of positive and communal feelings do writing centers provide to workers and writers, alike, particularly in times of crisis?
- Why do we do writing center work? What do we take from this work that is joyful, satisfying, or pleasurable? What do we hope to take from this work?
- Have you ever been offered guidance or given guidance—as Green details in his story about advising a student against a multi-level marketing scheme—in the writing center that is above and beyond “the call of duty”? Think back to this moment and describe what was offered and how it impacted you.
- Part of the joy of writing center work is the unpredictability of it as Garner discusses in his story about keeping writing centers weird. Think back to a “weird” but enjoyable experience you have had in the writing center and share it with others. Is there a way to bottle the lightning that some sessions create for tutors and writers, alike?
- When do we need to push boundaries in our work, as Elliott does in her story? When might we need to set our own boundaries around our work?
- How do we create sustainable and collaborative writing center workplaces? Bond details some strategies but develop your own based on institutional context and need.