

Two-Year Colleges

Two-year colleges, sometimes referred to as community colleges and historically called “junior colleges,” are rich sites for teaching, learning, and research. Most two-year colleges have open admission policies, and many are intentionally designed to assist the communities around them. Two-year colleges serve nearly half of undergraduates in the United States. They usually have lower tuition costs compared to four-year universities, and many serve place-based students (e.g., students with families and full-time jobs that are geographically bound to a specific area). For some folks, two-year colleges offer the only path to higher education. As Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt (2011) writes, “For many returning—and often place-bound—students, for students who struggled academically in high school, and for low-income students, two-year colleges may be the only means they have for accessing higher education” (p. 119). Two-year colleges have historically been an inclusive space for diverse learners: veterans, low-income students, multilinguals, returning adults, and dual-enrolled high schoolers.

These institutions have distinct missions connected to their students. Two-year colleges are not homogenous. Some are urban, some rural. Some are predominantly White institutions (PWIs), some are Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Some focus on dual-enrollment and transfer, while others develop programs and curriculum around vocations. Writing instruction and writing classes are comprehensive within these contexts given their student populations and unique institutional operations. George B. Vaughan (1982) describes two-year colleges as a “coat of many colors” (p. 7). English faculty often teach a range of classes, including basic or developmental writing and first-year composition courses, and sometimes creative writing and literature courses. This interdisciplinarity

requires a great depth of knowledge and skills. Howard Tinberg (1997) writes that it is easier to “say what we don’t teach than what we do” (p. 11). Two-year colleges are sites that truly represent diversity and inclusivity and are essential to postsecondary and professional preparation and success.

Two-year colleges were formed from the Morrill Act of 1862 which was signed to grant land to states to establish and support agricultural and technical education. The goal was to develop colleges with curriculum that focused on science and engineering (as opposed to classical liberal arts education) given the demands and manufacturing processes brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Two-year colleges played a significant role through the devastation of World War II and the need of industry workers (Vaughan, 1982). Most two-year college histories center on the importance of the Higher Education for American Democracy in 1947, also known as the Truman Commission Report (Sullivan & Toth, 2016). Even though these institutions have a rich history and tradition in higher education, two-year colleges are usually positioned in the margins of composition studies at large. Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano (2013) challenge the academic hierarchies and misconceptions about teaching in two-year colleges:

We press college composition instructors to embrace an open-access mission of higher education . . . we call for a scholarly reimagination that repositions two-year college teaching at the center of our disciplinary discourse. (p. 118)

Like Hassel and Giordano, I agree two-year colleges need to be represented more in professional discourse, including academic journals and national conferences, and should be amplified in conversations on teaching writing. Two-year college instructors offer greater insight on what it means to teach writing to a range of students and these institutions often work closely with K–12 systems and universities (Calhoon-Dillahunt, 2011). Two-year colleges should be positioned at the front of conversations about teaching writing, in my opinion.

I chose to place this chapter at the beginning of this book for that reason and to address one gap in traditional composition

anthologies. Most don't include two year-college perspectives and experiences. This affects grad programs in rhetoric and composition and composition studies at large. Since two-year colleges are often situated in the margins of writing theory and research, these contexts are frequently invisible to grad students in traditional rhet/comp programs. English graduate programs "need to reckon with" the lack of attention given to two-year colleges and "change those structures" (see *TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College*). Graduate programs ought to prepare and develop writing teachers to teach in two-year colleges. The 2020–2021 academic job market is one consideration for the needed increased attention on two-year colleges, but it isn't the *only* reason to reconfigure grad school curriculum. Familiarizing grad students with two-year college opportunities and challenges, as well as reading research from teacher-scholars in these contexts is important and ethical work. It increases equity in our field. There's a real need for programs to explicitly professionalize students for teaching in two-year colleges because, in short, they play an extraordinary role in higher ed and serve diverse students in innovative ways.

Teaching writing in two-year colleges is time consuming and labor intensive in part due to their institutional and administrative missions (see *TYCA Working Paper #2: Two-Year College English Faculty Teaching Adjustments Related to Workload*). Most two-year colleges are teaching intensive, and many depend on non-tenure or part-time and adjunct labor. Instructors teach upward of five to six classes a semester along with other college and departmental service commitments. Professional identities in two-year colleges are unique and complex (Andelora, 2005; Toth et al., 2013), and so are other aspects connected to two-year institutions, such as transfer and placement (see *The Journal of Writing Assessment Special Issue on Two-Year College Writing Placement*, 2019). Having talked with teachers across all kinds of two-year contexts, I noticed a trend: two-year college teachers are passionate about teaching writing and committed to their students. They teach writing in ways that are designed to help students pursue whatever life or career path they want to take.

INTERVIEWS

That trend will resonate through these interviews. In this chapter, I talk with Sharon Mitchler, Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt, Jessica Nastal, and Howard Tinberg about teaching in two-year colleges. Mitchler teaches at Centralia College and Calhoun-Dillahunt teaches at Yakima Valley College in the Pacific Northwest; Nastal teaches at Prairie State College outside Chicago; and Tinberg teaches at Bristol Community College in Massachusetts. In these interviews, I ask them to reflect on their institutional contexts as well as their pedagogical practices. Mitchler talks about what it is like to teach at a small rural college between Seattle and Portland. She shares how community is central to her pedagogical approach and describes classroom practices that help her construct this sense of community, such as “safe writing,” modeling, and peer response. Calhoun-Dillahunt talks about teaching a wide range of classes, including developmental writing and first-year composition, and offers advice for future two-year college instructors. Nastal reflects on how she teaches first-year composition “as an introduction to writing studies” course, and how she encourages students to think critically about their role in education. Tinberg concludes by talking about the importance of reading, he shares challenges two-year colleges face, and offers future direction for teaching and research in two-year colleges.

Shane to Sharon Mitchler: Do you mind talking about Centralia College in Centralia, Washington, and your approach to teaching writing? [Episode 14: 02:28–06:12]

Centralia College is halfway between Seattle and Portland. It's a very small rural college, we have about 1,900 full-time enrolled students that's divided between a variety of programs and locations. So, we have academic transfers, those are students who are doing two years with us and then going to another institution . . . they may do a class with us, or they may do a year with us, or they may do a full two years and not complete a degree, or they may do three years and change their mind and then transfer. There's different paths. Then, we have technical programs and certificates and degrees, those range from one-quarter

certificates all the way up to a year certificate or a two-year degree. We also do continuing education classes for adults, pre-college classes, starting with learning the language for second-language students, because again, as a rural entity, if we don't offer it, it doesn't exist . . . we also do GED and high school equivalent, and then we have a number of campuses, and we have two prison sites, students who are at Cedar Creek Correctional Facility . . .

We have a limited number of faculty. We have five full-time faculty in what's called the English department. We don't have a separate WPA because we're so small. We all teach composition and rhetoric, and some of us teach other things as well. I have a master's degree in humanities and a master's degree in English and a PhD in English. So I teach literature and composition and a whole series of humanities courses.

Our comp classes are kept somewhere between 24 and 28 students, depending on how many sections you're teaching . . . we have English 99, then English 101, which is expository writing, and English 102, which is a research class . . . we do technical writing, we do creative writing. The short version is, throw me into a room full of students, I need to know who they are and what their goals are, and then I adjust. If you want to teach in a place where every single section is going to be a little different, the community college is the place for you, because the mix of students and the demographics can be really fascinating even from section to section in the same term. We have a wide range in economic backgrounds, so we have folks who never dreamed they'd be coming to college ever, ever. It wasn't on their list, it wasn't something that they have family connection to . . . we have lots and lots of first-generation students, and then we have lots of people whose life has taken a turn, they've lost a job, a relationship has changed, a whole variety of reasons and they all ended up in a class together. So, facilitating those conversations in that space is eternally exciting.

Shane to Sharon Mitchler: How do you facilitate class conversations? How do you bring that community together? [Episode 14: 06:13–09:44]

I'll use English 101 as an example because that's the class that most of our students are going to take. It's the place where they're going to see people who are in other areas as well. I've got diesel students, nursing students, someone who's trying to finish high school. They're all together in the same room. So building a community becomes really important. I also know that there are a lot of people who are anxious. They're not excited about this space, they're not sure who else is in the room with them. They may have tremendous amounts of confidence in some aspects of their academic life and not at all in others, and nobody wants to reveal that on the first day of class. We do a lot of safe writing, five minutes at the very beginning of every class.

I have a stack of cards with questions on them and those questions are generated by students at the end of each class . . . at the very beginning of class, one person draws a card, I write the question up on the board and we spend five minutes writing either on that question or something else that they want to write about themselves. They can do whatever they want. It's quiet writing time. I never see it, and I never ask for it. I use that as a stepping stone . . . here's a way that you can start thinking about what you might want to write about . . . they keep a journal or they keep it someplace in their notebook, they do it on a computer. That's how you start writing. You start with the things that you've already got. It starts to help leverage a sense of . . . writing isn't a thing you just sit down and do. It's a prolonged activity, and you handle that in lots of different ways.

Another thing I do an awful lot of is modeling. When we get ready to do something like peer response, we use one of my papers first. I often write right along with students so they can see my reaction to that . . . if I'm getting frustrated, if I'm getting lost, if I'm like, I do not know

what to do with this paragraph . . . they get to see all of that. So, when we do peer response, we'll start with one of my papers and I'll put it up on the screen, and we'll talk our way through, well, what could you say to me about this, and what's helpful, and what's not helpful? It gives them a chance to practice the skills without having it be their work because the sense of identity that's connected to what they're writing is often right below the surface for a lot of these students. And it's really scary to have your work in the hands of other people. This gives them a safe space to see how it works and to try things out and they learn really quickly that you can't hurt my feelings, and that I really do want to know what's not working . . . we do an awful lot of that kind of work, and then when we shift into students doing that work. I'm roaming around the room as they're working in small groups or they're working in pairs, so that they can ask me questions and I can ask them questions as we go. It drops the stakes quite a bit. Again, these are students who have huge time commitments outside of the classroom, and the idea that they are going to go home and spend two hours agonizing over a draft is probably not a useful context when you're thinking about how you're going to develop class time. So, things that you can do in class that give them a chance to practice, that help to encourage them to see that it's a process that it takes longer, those are really helpful.

Shane to Sharon Mitchler: It's important for us to consider how we are ethically assigning and assessing writing. Do you mind sharing how you meet the needs of students who are working 40+ hours a week, who have a family, and who don't necessarily have the same affordance or relationship with time compared to more "traditional" students? [Episode 14: 09:45–11:19]

I use shorter reading assignments. If we use longer reading assignments, we come back to them multiple times. It's not, "Read 20 pages, come back and let's have a conversation." When we've read something, the first thing that happens in class the next day is everybody gets a highlighter and

I ask them to put the phrase or the word or the section of what they read that meant something to them, or that made sense to them, or that seemed important to them. Then, we develop our conversation based on that. We can come back to that same piece two or three times and delve into the finer points, but that highlights that their knowledge is important. It gets them actively involved in class and helps them see that the class is focused on what they need to accomplish, the goals of the class . . .

With a lot of adult learners, it's important to make that direct connection. They're spending money. They're spending time. There are other things that they're not doing because they're in that classroom. So, you better make sure that the connections between what you're doing and the end goal, and how that attaches to the world that they inhabit when they're not in your room are crystal clear. You don't waste time, and you don't ask people to do things that you don't scaffold well for them to be able to do.

Shane to Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt: Do you mind talking about Yakima Valley College and share a bit about what you teach? [Episode 49: 01:02–05:19]

Yakima Valley is a unique context. It's a two-year college and that's a unique context, but we're in a very agricultural area, yet Yakima itself is a city. There's a lot of drug abuse, there's all kinds of health issues that accompany poverty, there's mental health issues. That's our community, so that's who is in the classroom. I'm from this area so I know this community well. Yakima is also heavily Latinx. The city is pretty much bi-cultural and the campus is about 60% Latinx students . . . for the past few years that has been the majority. I've been here for 20 years. Given this context, and given that we're not a college-educated community on the whole, our students are often coming with pretty modest goals in mind, or maybe no goals in mind.

They're coming because it seems like the right thing to do and they're coming to transform their lives. Whatever that

means for them. You teach writing with that in mind. It's not really about your content first. It's about your people that you're working with and what they're going to need to be able to move wherever they choose to move. You want to prepare them to move because many times they start with very modest goals and then they realize they have brains and it's like, "Oh, you mean, I could go to a four-year college?" They get really interested . . . because many of them had impoverished K-12 educations. Once they get some really good, challenging education, many of them like it and want to continue. They feel really inspired. You also want to set them up for the career goals they have. If they want to get right out there, you want them to be able to do that and do that effectively, but you also want to kind of keep pathways open for them so that they're able to do things that they hadn't imagined they'd be able to do before.

My college has two developmental writing courses prior to English 101 or first-year writing, and because we're on the quarter system, our writing course is a two-quarter sequence. So the first one is just basically academic writing, introduction to academic writing and using source-based writing. The second one is . . . called argumentation. It's a little bit more research and taking a clear position. So that's kind of the span of composition courses. All of us teach composition primarily. There are very few literature offerings or creative writing offerings or things like that. At most, I probably teach one a year. So really, it's composition and that's the whole department. Even though an increasing number are trained in composition, that's not the majority. Most folks are not coming from writing instruction or writing theory backgrounds.

. . . I generally teach . . . I was going to say about half developmental writing and half college-level writing. I think it's leaning a little bit more towards college level writing at this point because we've changed our placement tool in the past few years . . . more students are placing into 101

as a result, so that's a happy outcome. Though, I am sad because developmental writing are my favorite classes to teach. There's fewer of them, but that's what I teach when I can. I also do some advanced comp courses. I teach research writing pretty regularly. A colleague and I do a collaborative developmental reading and developmental writing course.

Shane to Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt: So you teach a wide range of classes from developmental writing to a more argument-centered writing class. What's your approach to teaching these different writing classes? [Episode 49: 05:20–09:38]

It's not that different from developmental to college level. Our entire department has adopted a process-oriented approach, so we see writing as a recursive process and graded writing is always stuff that has gone through revision and feedback processes along the way. In developmental writing courses, I tend to use portfolios to allow more time for the process before grading is involved . . . our developmental writing courses also don't have letter grades, they have "satisfactory" if they're ready to move on to the next level; "credit" if they've completed most of the coursework, but haven't met the course outcomes; and "no credits" would be like if they haven't achieved that. I teach in a quarter system so we don't have a lot of time. Most classes I'm usually doing probably two to three major writing projects and a lot of other writing. I integrate reading in everything I do, though, much more fully when I have that linked reading class where I can actually concentrate on that.

I'm interested in teaching for transfer. I can't say that we've adopted that as a department, but I try to integrate aspects of that where I'm doing a lot of metacognitive work with writing and trying to really make explicit core concepts and the core abilities that they're learning in these areas and the ways that they're applying to other things. I'd say one of the things outside of composition that has really informed my practice in the past three or four years now

is our college has adopted an equity agenda, which means different things to different people. I am on that bandwagon and even though administration may not see equity in quite the same way or they're learners on this, I am happy to be there to shape this conversation and to be a part of this conversation.

Part of that is we've received many Title V grants as an Hispanic-Serving Institution. With one of the more recent grants we received, it was devoted to faculty professional development across the disciplines. We adopted a program at the time called ESCALA and it's a consulting organization that does engaged learning for Hispanic-Serving Institutions . . . this program involves going through workshops to kind of learn some key concepts about equity and about teaching minoritized populations. It kind of has a ladder with three prongs and it has the idea of . . . relationships is one of the key aspects of engaging students in learning, building competence is another one, and building trust. That's part of the assessment system, too . . . having a system that's trustworthy. These are things that I felt like I was already practicing, but it's really helped me to be more conscious, more intentional with my planning, more explicit and transparent with students about what I'm meaning. I think it's been a really healthy, positive change for me and for the faculty involved at this point across the discipline.

Shane to Carolyn Calhoon-Dillahunt: How would you prepare someone to teach at a two-year college, or what resources or pedagogical strategies would you recommend? [Pedagogue Bonus: 01:44–07:38]

It's helpful to understand the two-year college space that you're interested in when you go to apply for jobs and make sure you understand the culture, because they're not all the same as is true of any institution. I think they get homogenized more than they really are, and so they vary quite a bit. But in general, the things that are common is most two-year colleges have open admissions. So you

do need to understand appropriate practices and effective practices for working with adult learners. I would hope anyone in our field would, but I mean in two-year colleges, particularly, you're working with minoritized populations. You need to not only understand what are effective practices for minoritized populations, but you also need to be invested in that. You need to want to work towards equity and social justice, or we're not really doing anyone a service. You need to understand that your role is not necessarily preparing folks for the university or college. That's certainly an option, and that should be an option available to all students, but you are part of a community that's working with students of all different ilk . . . you might have to be a little bit more pragmatic. I think it's really focusing on learning, and less concerned about your particular content or whatever, and more about what are the learning things that you're trying to get them to do and how can we do that?

I think not only understanding how adults learn but also understanding who your students are. I think 83% . . . at our college, are first-generation. They don't have any language of college, and they don't have any of the support systems. They never did. You can't go in expecting that they know things that they don't . . . you have to teach it. No one else is teaching it. They're not going to get it anywhere else . . . college professors tend to be people who came from privileged, I mean, it might be modestly so, but I mean, you came from literate backgrounds, more often than not; you came because you were a good student, more often than not; you came because the K-12 system served you well, whether you liked it or not. And out there is not you. They're different than you.

So the things that worked for you or the things that you internalized and never knew, are not who your students are. Really understanding how to work with novices. I think for folks at a graduate school, I think you really need to understand that scholarship is going to be on your own time,

more often than not. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do it, but it's going to be not rewarded in the same way, and certainly not supported in the same way, but there are ways to make it work. So collaborations, thinking about various ways you might publish or put your information out there, thinking about how to focus in on your classroom as a space and use that. Because it's very rich, and there's a lot to do. But you do have to think about scholarship differently if you're at a two-year college.

What other advice would I give? . . . I think a lot of folks in graduate school get pretty honed in on the discipline. There are reasons for that. It was very hard for composition-writing studies to establish itself as a discipline. So we cling to that, and the disciplinary knowledge is important, but at the two-year college, you're going to need to take things from education, you're going to need to take things from developmental studies, you're going to need to take things from disability studies, you're going to need to take things from a lot of spaces. You're also going to be doing kind of this gen ed. You're also going to be working with your colleagues across disciplines more directly . . . I think coming in with that kind of mindset—this is very collaborative. You're not going to get to just sit in your office and work on your stuff. You are always going to be working for the good of the whole. You're always going to need a lot of resources beyond the discipline in order to do that well.

Shane to Jessica Nastal: Can you talk about your approach to teaching writing at Prairie State College, a community college in the south suburbs of Chicago? [Episode 8: 03:25–07:39]

This semester I'm teaching three classes. I have reassigned time . . . I'm department chair this year and I have an overload for a special project I'm doing on student success. Our contract for full-time faculty is five courses a semester. Then, if you teach two composition classes that load gets reduced to four. The online classes are capped at 24 and then English Composition One and Two are capped at 22.

Developmental English classes are capped at 18. So, how all of this affects how I teach writing or my approach is . . . basically, I just want to have fun with my students. I am trying to implement a little bit of a writing about writing approach but I'm not totally there. I like the idea of using this class as an introduction to writing studies. The reason is because it's the best way for me to be able to structure for students a space where I can help them understand how we can use our individual experiences and beliefs to inform whatever kind of work we do and whatever connections we're making with other people.

One of my approaches also is that connection with my students. I grew up on the South Side of Chicago and moved to the suburbs. I grew up in a working-class family. Most of my family before my generation did not go to college. I can relate to some of the concerns that my students have, and I think the thing that they find most fun is that I hated composition as an undergraduate. So, using the experiences that I had growing up and struggles I've had with writing, and then the realization I had—that writing can be something that does something. It can be a force for positive action. Helping my students understand that is a real privilege.

The past couple of years I had a lot of reassigned time for work in assessment and accreditation and I was still doing the work that I loved, but over the summer I had more space to think about how I want to redesign classes. So, in the past I had focused a lot on response to student writing. Students in both Comp One and Comp Two would . . . we'd have some shared readings on controversies in the field of writing assessment, in particular, which is my background. So things like automated writing evaluation, whether to use rubrics and language policies. That was really fun . . . but I always want to challenge myself to do something new and to learn more and apply what I'm learning from colleagues into the classroom. So this year I am teaching a contextualized English 101 class where

I'm trying to bring in some principles of professional and technical writing into English 101, which uses the WPA Outcome Statement and the *Framework for Success in Post-secondary Writing* as the foundation.

In English 102, which is our Comp Two research class, the research parameters I'm using are the submission guidelines for *Queen City Writers*. And so the goal is that some students would continue working on their projects for publication. I was challenged to bring in some of the most recent and exciting scholarship in our field. Some of the things that we're reading this semester are Aja Martinez's work, some scholarship from the *Journal of Young Scholars in Writing* and *Queen City Writers*. It's a challenge for me because I don't really know what I think about some of the stuff . . . I haven't had a lot of time to think about them. But I'm excited to hear what other people are thinking. This makes the class dynamic for me. I think it helps my students because they see my passion for the field and my respect for them and treating them like scholars.

Shane to Jessica Nastal: So it sounds like your composition class takes a different shape than perhaps other first-year writing classes. It sounds like an introduction to writing and rhetoric course or a seminar on composition theory? [Episode 8: 07:40–10:15]

One thing that students do comment on is that they appreciate this scaffolding . . . it's really like a seminar. So in my syllabus for the Composition Two classes this semester, I told them that it will function as a research seminar in rhetoric and composition/writing studies. Even with English 101, there's different modules or different units and everything is related . . . and so, students were able to see how the ideas built on each other within the units and then across the semester or across the session. And in the middle of it, they hated it because it felt redundant, especially for people who are not interested in pursuing this field I just discovered as a graduate student. But by the end it, overwhelmingly, unprompted, too, students will say how they

started to see how things fit together and they appreciated that structure. The reason I do it like that is because I think that it provides students with a lot of structure and foundation. I've seen their writing grow tremendously.

I guess the other reason that I said that I chose response to student writing because this is where my research is, and that's true, but it's because of the experiences that I've had as a student and that my students have had. We can all think of some of the best feedback we've ever had and how it made us feel and some of the worst feedback we've had and how that made us feel. I'm trying to encourage students to think critically about that and about their role in their education and how they can change things. That doesn't have to be within the field of education or writing studies. They can be more of an active participant in their own education. If they don't like the way someone makes them feel, they can have a productive conversation about that or they can think about why they felt badly. This is why I think it's such a privilege to teach because it's like, in what other space could I try to suggest a way that I think maybe could help them have a better life? That's presumptuous almost of me to think that way, but I don't know, it's something I really am struggling with.

Shane to Howard Tinberg: You've been at Bristol Community College for 30+ years teaching first-year writing. You wrote a chapter in *Deep Reading: Teaching Reading in the Writing Classroom*, which won the 2019 CCCC Outstanding Book Award, about how students experience reading in a community college first-year composition class. Can you talk about the importance of teaching reading and how teachers can frame reading in their first-year writing classes? [Episode 33: 10:08–14:32]

Sure, I don't want to generalize, but for many community college students, reading is not seen as much as an opportunity as a barrier to their success, their academic success. Of course, many . . . read from the screen and read in a multitasking way. So there's little opportunity, I think, for

them to dive deep, or invitation to dive deep into the reading. I think, in some ways, we faculty at community colleges are, I was going to say another word . . . we'll say "facilitate" that assumption or promote that assumption that it's okay for students to come linger on the surfaces. Cynics among us even say, "I will assign my reading, but I'm not assuming the students will do the reading. So here's my PowerPoint demonstration." Students, of course, so often come away from that experience saying, "Well, why did I buy this textbook? What exactly was this textbook doing in this class? I don't have to read. My teacher's going to give me all the bullet points. Why would I bother to read?"

They have very good points . . . I think in some ways, we faculty haven't fully integrated the reading within our own course. It's something we do because when we were students, texts were assigned and the assumption is we went out and read them, not with any help, necessarily. We were on our own. But my students require some assistance, it requires some invitations and requires some skills and strategies to be able to read well, what is in front of them.

I mentioned in the article that historically, reading has been seen as developmental skill. So those folks in the developmental part of the college would be entrusted with the mission of teaching and reading, and that those of us in the English Department, well, what were we doing exactly? We were creating a taste for literature, if that's the way to put it. Or in a writing class, we were inviting self-reflection to the written word, having students get a sense of who they are as individuals.

But it dawned on me for a variety of reasons that reading should be a crucial part of every single course at the college. But I think many of us faculty are assuming that it be done somewhere else, but not in the classroom. I think it was Robert Scholes who said reading is invisible. We have to make it visible to our students. We have to spend time talking about how we read and actually have them read in

class. That's something to learn. That's a data point. That's something we have to understand. How well do our students read the work that we're assigning?

Of course, as faculty, we have to ask those questions as we assemble our syllabus: why these readings? Why these and not the others? What's our rationale here, what's our pedagogical explanation? I don't think we do that often enough. I'll say this about the OER movement, the Open Education Resource movement, too, that it's forced many of us to justify the readings that we require, that come at 100, 150, 200 bucks, maybe more. Do we really, from a moral perspective, want to ask students to dish out that money when we don't really understand the role of that textbook in our class, or we're not really spending time walking students through and showing them how to become deep readers of this work? It's a good, good check on our choices because of the situation that our students are facing.

Shane to Howard Tinberg: What are some of the biggest challenges facing two-year colleges? What would you say, maybe even more specifically, are some challenges writing teachers face in two-year colleges? [Episode 33: 19:46–22:43]

Well, I can state the obvious which is the lack of funding, proper funding, for that element of higher ed. Over the years that I've been at Bristol and Mass, Bristol is part of the Massachusetts Community College system, the state has withdrawn support in staggering amounts over the years. We used to be almost like a 60% public institution funded by the public. Now, gosh, it must be closer to 30%. Over the years, I've thought about this question of what holds us back. When I say, "hold us," I mean our students, as well as those of us who work at the community colleges. I've come to believe that it's in some ways psychological. We do not—meaning those of us who've committed ourselves to two-year college or community college—see the possibilities. I've written about this a lot, that while our

students sometimes have difficulty seeing the horizon and seeing how they may succeed down the road, I think we faculty also tend to limit our vision as to what we can do in the classroom, how we personally can succeed as professionals. So we don't learn as much. We don't review our curriculum as often. We're not as open to change.

Yeah, I know I'm generalizing here, but I've considered it an important part of my work to reach out to faculty, both in my college and elsewhere to two-year colleges to mentor them, to maybe even be a kind of example of someone, of a teacher scholar who can . . . so we could teach five sections, but also write for publication. It's still a kind of rare thing. It's a rare bird, because we do teach so much at the community college. But as I said, we have no choice but to reflect on our teaching if we want to improve it. If we want to continue to learn our craft and to be able to make our courses interesting to our students and stimulating, we need to innovate as best we can.

But it's a scary thing to do that. It means essentially subjecting your teaching on an ongoing basis to research, to reflection. I'm really into classroom research, still am. Trying to figure out how my students are responding to the tasks that I give them. I've always used student voices within my writing because I feel that they have something to teach me about the work. When we shut down, we don't draw upon students' work in our publications, I think that that's a real void.

Shane to Howard Tinberg: What future direction for research and teaching might you suggest others think about and study moving forward in two-year colleges? [Episode 33: 22:44–27:45]

I've been amazed at the crop of teacher-scholars and activists, Patrick Sullivan is one of them. When I first started writing about the two-year college experience, most people were not writing for publication. They may have been scholars, but they weren't necessarily exchanging their ideas with others. Right now, it's huge. Such significant

numbers and you've named them early before our conversation here, people who can do all that, who can teach and share what they've learned in teaching and write eloquently passionately about their work. So I hope that that continues. There are pressures. Most definitely pressures on all of us who teach community college, to be productive and to be accountable for the teaching that we do.

There are a lot of demands on our work, but I hope . . . I dearly hope that each community college system will support and nurture teacher-scholars to see the teaching at the community college, teaching anywhere, requires constant reflection, and that we allow some space for colleagues to do that. Sabbaticals, obviously being one of them. But even space within a semester, a typical semester. Obviously it's crass to say, but compensate folks in order to do so. I worry about younger faculty not necessarily making a great deal of money because of the economics of teaching at a community college. So they have to load on the courses and load on the online courses, especially. They may burn out sooner than later. Burnout was often cited for me, as one of the seemingly inevitable byproducts of teaching in community college.

At some point you stop, you begin to lack energy. You're not curious anymore. As far as I can see that's public enemy number one for faculty who teach at community colleges. I think we have to hopefully create the conditions for people to continue to want to learn, to be curious, to tackle difficult questions, teaching questions. By the way, the scholarship doesn't necessarily have to be classroom research. It could be more traditional conventional scholarship, maybe even a lab-based research. I still think that's a possibility. I do worry about two-year colleges morphing into cheaper four-year baccalaureate program. Obviously, many colleges have done that. There's a unique community mission at open access public two-year colleges, community colleges, that needs to be maintained. But there will be lots of pressures. There are already lots of pressures to,

in some way, become that affordable four-year school and make it less accountable to the community. That would be a shame if that were to happen.

Within our own professional organizations, I think those of us who teach at open access institutions need to keep our voices loud and insistent. I know that colleagues mean well, definitely in composition and rhetoric, we are thoroughly committed to teaching, but we're not immune and they're not immune to the privileges of academe, shall we put it. So sometimes the voices of folks who teach at teaching-intensive institutions are not always heard at our professional meetings. I think we have to speak up for ourselves. We have to be good scholars. We have to demand that we be let into our flagship journals to share what we know about teaching, at same time, keeping our feet firmly on the ground.

DENOUEMENT

These interviews bring attention to some practices and strategies two-year college teachers use in writing classes, and show how different teachers approach writing given their pedagogical values and institutional missions. My hope is that this conversation illuminates the range of two-year college contexts and the diverse students they serve, and that this chapter is just a springboard for graduate programs and the field to resist placing two-year colleges in the margins. I think this conversation speaks to the labor, teaching, and research activity happening in two-year colleges, and that this work demands increased visibility to create a more equitable and sustainable future in composition studies. These interviews provide a glimpse into the nuanced nature of two-year colleges and the range of knowledge needed to teach effectively within these contexts. Teaching in two-year colleges takes a reimagination of best approaches to teaching writing.

I would encourage others to read *Teaching Composition at the Two-Year College* (Sullivan & Toth, 2016), a collection of essays and the first critical sourcebook of its kind dedicated to teaching writing at two-year colleges. I would also recommend *Sixteen*

Teachers Teaching: Two-Year College Perspectives (Sullivan, 2020) and the flagship journal for the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA), *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. These texts provide even greater inquiry into two-year college contexts and are terrific resources that amplify the work of two-year college writing instructors. Mitchler, Calhoun-Dillahunt, Nastal, and Tinberg reminded me of the importance of knowing our students and institutional contexts, and building curriculum in meaningful ways as a response to these needs. I offer the following questions based on our conversation:

- What historical and current conversations about teaching writing are happening in two-year college contexts? How are two-year college perspectives being centered in your English program (undergraduate and graduate)?
- How are you considering your student populations through your approach to teaching? How are you designing and developing writing curriculum to be more accessible, inclusive, and diverse?
- How are you supporting first-year students in ways that move beyond transferring knowledge to other academic contexts? How are first-year writing classes sites for community engagement and activism?
- How are you teaching reading in first-year writing? How are you considering the costs and ethics of asking students to purchase textbooks? What are the affordances of using open access materials in first-year writing?
- What kinds of relationships and collaborations do four-year universities and two-year colleges have, and how can these bonds be strengthened in your local/regional context?