

## Historically Black Colleges and Universities

The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as “any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans” (1965). HBCUs are diverse and dynamic sites for learning and teaching writing. Most are in the south/southeastern parts of the United States. HBCUs are private, public, religiously affiliated, undergraduate-serving, graduate-serving, four-year, and two-year institutions. Some have enrollments of 10,000+ (e.g., North Carolina A&T State University), while others have fewer than 1,000 students (e.g., Rust College). HBCUs have a rich legacy of supporting Black students and are driven by institutional missions designed to celebrate Black lived experiences. HBCUs ultimately are places that honor Black epistemologies, histories, and traditions. As of 2021, there are 107 HBCUs that serve over 220,000 students (US Department of Education).

HBCUs have a unique history within higher education. Schools like Alabama A&M University (in Alabama), North Carolina A&T State University (in North Carolina), Central State University (in Ohio), and Fort Valley State (in Georgia) emerged from the Second Morrill Act in 1890, which was created to support land grant colleges. The Second Morrill Act was also formed to address racial discrimination in college admission policies and standards. States were required to establish colleges and universities for Black students who were being denied admission to other land grant institutions. The Civil Rights movement in the 1950s–1960s, of course, brought about other significant changes to education. For instance, the US Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) established that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. After this decision, the Civil Rights Act of

1964, Title IV (1964) passed, which enforced the desegregation of public schools. Then, the Higher Education Act of 1965 was established to distribute grants to support teaching and learning at HBCUs. Here it should be noted that HBCUs have had to (and continue to) endure through inequitable funding from federal and state governments.

HBCU first-year writing classes are sites that explore culture and language. In her award-winning dissertation, Temptuous Mckoy (2019) writes, “HBCUs allow for Black lived experiences and epistemologies to become a part of the classroom and not a specialized interest” (p. 25). David F. Green Jr. (2016) adds that “HBCUs are places that highlight the complex entanglements of language, culture, and legacy with dominant institutional objectives” (p. 156). Some HBCU writing programs were established by foundational feminist thinkers and scholars (Spencer-Maor & Randolph, 2016). HBCUs are often innovators in writing pedagogies and practices. Critical hip-hop pedagogies (Stone & Stewart, 2016), critical race theory, cultural rhetorics, feminist frameworks, and linguistic justice are natural byproducts of teaching first-year writing at an HBCU. Kedra Laverne James (2013) writes in her dissertation on writing programs and HBCUs, “Writing instruction should mirror the goals and founding principles of the institution so that the university and its curriculum coincide rather than contradict each other” (p. 5).

Since HBCUs serve students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, including other minoritized populations (e.g., Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders), first-year writing programs and curriculum are often unique. Some HBCU writing classes expose students to cultural contexts and empower students to think critically about the ways in which language works within societal and professional contexts, and across disciplines. For example, in her first-year writing class at Howard University, Teresa M. Redd (2014) talks about the importance of developing “students’ rhetorical knowledge and sense of authorship so that they can adapt writing to different purposes, audiences, and contexts” (p. 147). In a multicultural environment like an HBCU, there are a lot of opportunities to investigate how knowledges and languages circulate.

HBCU writing classrooms and programs also face challenges. Faye Spencer-Maor and Robert E. Randolph Jr. (2016) describe how writing teachers and classes “struggle to reconcile traditionally entrenched attitudes and approaches . . . [and] faculty often have little expertise in writing theories or pedagogies” (p. 179). Spencer-Maor and Randolph Jr. explain how some HBCU teachers focus on identifying “error” in student writing, and thus overemphasize grammar and mechanics. These traditional approaches and entrenched attitudes aren’t exclusive to HBCUs. Though, they often contradict HBCU missions—to amplify Black lived experiences and traditions—and make visible a much larger problem across institutions in higher education. Traditional approaches that focus on grammar are problematic because they emphasize Standard Edited American English (SEAE), and associate SEAE with “quality” and/or “good” writing. SEAE is “often a racial marker, a marker of whiteness” (Inoue, 2015a, p. 23). Thus, a grammar and mechanics-based approach to teaching that promotes SEAE ultimately diminishes the value of other linguistic variations and Englishes (e.g., Black English).

As a field, composition studies needs to pay closer attention to the work being done by teacher-scholars at HBCUs, especially those who are cultivating cultural literacies and linguistic differences and critical language awareness in writing classrooms. HBCUs have largely been excluded from conversations about teaching writing in scholarship. Which presents another problem: a white-washing of where teaching writing happens, who teaches writing, how teaching occurs, and who receives writing instruction. Twenty-two years ago Keith Gilyard (1999) wrote that HBCUs “may not have always been in the house of mainstream composition studies, but we were always knocking on the door” (pp. 642–643). Jimisha Relerford wrote in 2012 that “there has yet to be a comprehensive, meaningful treatment of composition instruction at HBCUs” (p. 117). In 2016, Green reiterated this lack of presence: “Scholarship on HBCUs and composition studies remains on the fringes of the field, which is a disservice to the field and to those compositionists working in HBCUs” (p. 162). One step forward would be for composition studies at large to listen, acknowledge, recognize, and amplify HBCU teacher-scholars through publications, citations, and other forms of circulation. HBCUs center conversations on

diversity, inclusivity, culture, community, and language, which are core tenets of our field.

Through the interviews in this chapter, I think you will pick up on the complex nature of HBCUs, including their missions and institutional differences, and how teachers approach teaching writing within these contexts. Moreover, you will hear teacher-scholars talk about the turbulent relationship between HBCUs and writing studies at large, or the absent presence of HBCU perspectives in rhetoric and composition.

#### INTERVIEWS

I was fortunate to sit down and talk with four teacher-scholars at different HBCUs: North Carolina Central University, Howard University, Bowie State University, and Spelman College. Karen Keaton Jackson, David F. Green Jr., Temptaous Mckoy, and Alexandria Lockett share their experiences teaching at HBCUs and talk about how their institutional contexts inform their writing pedagogies and practices. Jackson starts by addressing commonplace assumptions and misconceptions about HBCUs, and explains how HBCUs are complex institutions with nuanced missions. She also talks about the role of mentorship in her writing classes. Green talks about Howard University and his responsibilities as a writing program administrator (WPA). He describes Howard as a place that “emboldens and kind of bolsters students to really cultivate and think about their identities in relationship to their learning and in relationship to the curriculum.” Mckoy reflects on her experiences as a student and teacher at an HBCU, and she shares how she draws on students’ lived experiences to foster engagement. She offers her vision for HBCUs in writing studies scholarship and challenges teachers to “stop acting like we ain’t here.” Lockett adds, “The field owes a huge debt to HBCUs.” She describes her approach to teaching writing and how she draws on Black feminist thinkers to encourage students to examine their own histories and rich literacy practices.

Shane to Karen Keaton Jackson: You teach at North Carolina Central University, a public Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Durham, North Carolina. A lot of your research is

in on HBCUs, too. What are some commonplace assumptions or misconceptions about HBCUs? [Episode 34: 01:47–04:53]

One of the common ones is that we're homogeneous. HBCUs are so complex. Our student populations are so heterogeneous. I think because we're not included in the conversations as much, and you may have one person presenting, then, you know, you get this one perspective of HBCUs. But you know, we're public and we're private; we are big and we're small; some have grown out of religious institutions versus state institutions. I mean, yeah, like you name it, it's there. We just haven't been in as many conversations. So the fact of how complex we are is one of the biggest misconceptions.

Then, the other thing that comes with that is who makes up our student populations. I think overall, for most HBCUs, the general number is about 70% of our students are African American. The other 30% can be international students, White, Hispanic . . . we have a growing Hispanic student population [at North Carolina Central University] and are purposely recruiting students because of the population in North Carolina. So you have the racial demographics. I think the other thing is in terms of the student preparation level. We have a wide range of student competencies, which makes teaching very interesting and exciting and challenging. I think because of the mission of most HBCUs, you may have students in our classrooms who may not get a shot at another institution. You know, and part of that is our mission.

We're serving underrepresented groups. I call them our diamonds in the rough. Students who have all the potential, but often because of the communities in which they grew up, the school systems they were in, the lack of access to college preparatory classes, honors, AP . . . you know, a lot of the school systems didn't have that.

They come to us, you know, "not prepared," right? We have those students who kind of just barely made it in, but they

are here and they are ours and we will love them. Then, we have the students who could have gone to Harvard or MIT or Duke . . . but maybe for financial reasons or family legacy, wanting to be at an HBCU, they've chosen to be in our classrooms as well. So it makes it interesting compared to some institutions where the admissions requirements are a bit more strict, you know, educationally, you might be able to generalize a little bit more about your student population versus at an HBCU. It's very hard to generalize in terms of their level of preparation and kind of what exactly they look like.

Shane to Karen Keaton Jackson: In “We Belong in the Discussion,” you talk about the absence of HBCU perspectives in composition scholarship and how HBCUs have been silenced when they should be leading conversations about race and writing. You ask, “How and why can the field of composition benefit from the perspectives and experiences of HBCU compositionists, and more particularly HBCU African American female compositionists?” Do you mind spending some time talking about the motivations behind this article and also the importance of hearing HBCU perspectives, particularly African American female compositionists in conversations around race and writing? [Episode 34: 05:00–10:15]

My coauthors, Dawn and Hope, they are amazing. We spent a lot of years on this article. We had some rejections on this article. It was not an easy path and there were times I wanted to give up on it. I realized as we went through the writing process how much we had to lay out to justify your very question that “No, this voice is needed.” Because what I felt like some of the comments were as we were going through the process, and rightfully so when I can step out of my own feelings, was just really having to justify, “But what is so different about your context that we need to learn something from you?” I felt like that was, overall, kind of this question: “What are you doing that's so different from what we're doing?”

So part of it was my first answer, laying out our student populations. That's very different than a lot of schools. I

think about just the ways that our institutions are set up. Those at Research I (R1) schools have teaching assistants and a lower teaching load. I mean tenure is based on you having to publish a far higher load than what I would have to do at a teaching institution. Just justifying the difference in the context was a really big piece. I kept looking at a lot of research that talked about teaching African American students. It won't fit for all my students . . . I think about my first-generation college students, and HBCUs have a higher percentage of them generally speaking than predominantly White institutions (PWIs). There's just a difference there in terms of how to approach students. What's going to engage them? . . . Normally you might think, "Oh, a student should know this coming into a college classroom. I can assume that a student has this baseline level of writing experience or writing competencies." I don't ever go into my classroom with that assumption. Some students do, and then some students don't.

A lot of that goes back to access and the school systems. That's a whole different conversation. I think those baseline assumptions that we could often make at other institutions, we can't necessarily make at all HBCUs . . .

I mean, there's a lot of time, like on a regular basis spent really stepping into this kind of mothering role—a mentoring role that's totally outside of academics. It's a normal part of the day. I mean, it's just like teaching class, so it's not like this one off . . . it's pretty consistent that students are searching for that kind of mentoring but with a little love mixed in there as well. So in this other mothering kind of space where we're constantly weaving in the academics with this affective component of learning, that's just naturally woven into HBCUs just like any other part of your syllabus or class.

Shane to David F. Green Jr.: Howard University is a private HBCU in Washington, DC, with over 9,000 students and a notable list of alumni, including Toni Morrison and Thurgood Marshall. Talk to

me about what it's like to teach at Howard University? In what ways do the traditions at Howard impact the writing classroom, and how does this also affect your work as a writing program administrator (WPA)? [Episode 31: 02:16–06:54]

There's this long legacy, this strong Black intellectual traditional at Howard. You can really feel it when you come on campus, and when you're in the classrooms. I teach in Alain Locke Hall, the first African American Rhodes Scholar, and one of the major stalwarts of the Harlem Renaissance. Sterling Brown is one of the main architects for my English department. He's often cited. His work is shared around the classes and what we do, and it's also integrated into a lot of the programs. So the tradition is kind of always there in ways that I find very refreshing, in part, because it gives it a different model of how we might think about some of these disciplines.

When I begin to think about what should a writing class look like in this space at this institution for these students that want that kind of tradition, I often begin with what conversations are relevant to these students who are predominantly Black, but also for these students who come from a variety of walks of life. We have a large international population. Students come from Ethiopia and Egypt. They come from Nigeria. We have a large population of Caribbean students, students from Jamaica and Trinidad. So you have this international mix of students as well as . . . White students, Hispanic students. You have this very, very diverse population in which whiteness is not necessarily centered. When we begin to talk about tradition and we talk about even just certain rhetorical practices in the classroom, students come to expect something extra or something that connects them or connects us to that lineage. So even on our syllabi, when we talk about the program, you'll see those kinds of references and those kinds of scholars. Toni Morrison is always present in many of the works we do, as well as a host of other writers, and thinkers, and intellectuals working in that tradition.



I find it very fun, especially when I first got to Howard, because it allowed me to be flexible in ways that I hadn't thought about before, meaning moving beyond just focusing on the text. Bringing music into class is understood as vital and important—it's a part of many of our ceremonial traditions, it's a part of many of our intellectual talks that occur on campus. Students are geared for it. It allows us to think and work in multimodal ways . . . working as a WPA has been interesting as well because of this tradition. Faculty have been very receptive to some of the changes that I've made or argued for. They've been very receptive to rethinking stances on Black English or other language practices, even terms like *translingualism* or *linguistic difference* have been central to how we've started to think about what our program should be for today's student, or for the modern university. So it's been exciting.

Outside of the WPA work and the writing program itself, we have a host of other kinds of programs, like the Sterling Brown Society, and students have writing cyphers and other kinds of programs in which they come to display their writing in various forms, whether it's poetry, reflective memoir writing, rap, or even just essay or traditional essayist writing. They've come to see it much more dynamically as a part of their lives. I appreciate and enjoy that.

Shane to David F. Green Jr.: In your article, "Expanding the Dialogue on Writing Assessment at HBCUs," you write, "Even at HBCUs where Black English traditions flow through ceremonies, social events, and sports culture (see any HBCU homecoming), classroom discourse focuses on normative standards for writing. In other words, HBCUs push students toward social justice goals within the institutional context while also pulling them toward certain dominant, White language norms within classrooms." I want to hear more about this dynamic relationship, this kind of push and pull that you're talking about here. How do students at Howard respond to this tension between social justice and White discourse? [Episode 31: 06:57–11:31]

That has been one of the more interesting questions, in part, because the students themselves are pretty much free. Howard is a place that emboldens and kind of bolsters students to really cultivate and think about their identities in relationship to their learning and in relationship to the curriculum. So students are always having a kind of push/pull relationship with the curriculum itself, as they should, and as we all do. We pick up certain things that we find valuable, and hopefully we can put down certain things that do damage to our expressive identities, to how we think about ourselves, to any insecurities we may have about our language practices.

I've been very proud of how students have pushed back on some of the invisible . . . I use the word traditional, or normative practices that go along with a writing program. Say maybe an outsized emphasis on certain grammatical learning practices, or as other scholars in the field refer to it, "skill and drill" . . . I think it was the work of the teachers. We needed to begin to rethink some of these invisible assumptions and some of these entrenched beliefs about what is "good" writing or what it takes to produce "good" writing. What are we doing to our students' linguistic identities? For the most part, students have been dynamic, resilient, energized, and they've energized me. I think you'll find them kind of putting pressure on some of this tension in classes. Students will ask questions about certain readings. Students will begin to question certain grammatical formations and certain linguistic performances.

For example, when I first got here, the idea of "shade" and how shade was being used. [Shade] is an African American term that meant throwing critique or providing a subliminal critique or subliminal diss of an idea. But you find it in their work. They're referencing how W. E. B. Du Bois was throwing "shade" at Booker T. Washington, or how in this essay, I see the author throwing shade on this idea or this concept. Well, what do you do with that? It's not like they're linguistically wrong. So we've had to readjust our

thinking to that norm. If students want to express themselves in this way, and in a way that is critical and critically rich, how do we help them do that in a way that supports their identities, but also the rhetorical choices they will have to make out in the real world?

Shane to David F. Green Jr.: This makes me think about how we can reimagine traditional assessment practices (e.g., rubrics) that might emphasize “grammar” and replace those standardized notions of English with concepts that are more elastic, such as rhythm, tempo, or cadence. These concepts might give new meaning to assessing and responding to writing, and valuing linguistic diversity. I know you incorporate hip hop into your writing classes. Can you talk more about what that looks like? [Episode 31: 15:23–19:05]

So for me, hip hop comes out of African American rhetoric. It’s become a global phenomenon. Many people from various rhetorical traditions can lay claim to hip hop because of the forms, because of rap, because of production, because of dance style and dress. But its beginning and its roots really comes out of the African American rhetorical tradition. The idea of signifying, playing with language, the way folks have employed call and response in a variety of ways, how we even begin to think about communities and collectives, and the cyphers that form out of that. What I do different, where my research diverges from maybe traditional hip-hop studies work, is that I’m very invested in what hip hop offers us in how we think about composing. How does it offer new concepts that are fresh that allow us to think about terms that we use? Like multi-modal, and begin to think about multi-medium writing in very dynamic and different ways. Adam Banks mentioned this in his book, *Digital Griots*. What does it mean if we think about our students as DJs of a tradition, or if we think about ourselves, as scholars, as DJs of a tradition?

If we’re always pulling on these various discourses to help people either understand or interpret different types of information, we’re really architects. What does it mean

to move back and forth between the past and the present in dynamic ways? For me, in terms of the classroom, this often takes a variety of different forms. I don't just teach a particular rap artist or particular rap songs, although I find that work valuable—getting a deeper understanding of how certain rappers perform the tradition. But I'm always interested in the conversation in placing maybe older texts or older questions, right up against newer questions or newer texts. How does the work of Black Thought speak to the work of Ernest Gaines? Or how might we rethink a CCCC Chair's Address by Victor Villanueva or Gwen Pough in relation to what Lauryn Hill says, or more recently, Megan Thee Stallion? How do we place these folks in conversations in ways that are productive for students? Not just so they can engage or talk about their favorite artists, but how does this create a substantive conversation that we can build on and that can help students gather a new understanding about how rhetoric functions, and how they might rethink their own compositions in relation to what they've seen, or heard, or discussed in class.

Shane to Temptaous Mckoy: Your teaching centers on students' embodiment and lived experiences. You went to Elizabeth City State University, a public HBCU in North Carolina, as an undergraduate. How does your own experiences as a student at an HBCU inform your embodiment as a teacher at Bowie State University, a public HBCU in Maryland with about 3,000 students? [Episode 38: 14:33–21:30]

Those little miniature communities that you create at the HBCU space is one of the most beautiful things I think that could have worked in my favor at Elizabeth City . . . there are a lot of life lessons, friendship lessons, lessons on being “professional,” right? I spoke about this in the article I did with Brittany Hull and Cecilia Shelton titled “Dressed but Not Tryin’ to Impress.” I discussed how at the HBCU I was “professionalized.” Right? *Professionalized*. You wear your suit, you put your stockings on, you

do all of these things to be professional, and then it wasn't until I got out of it that I realized like, "This is coded for whiteness. Y'all trippin." I didn't have the ethos to push back against that until I got the PhD behind my name. I couldn't do that as just regular old Temp. So now that I am a faculty member at an HBCU, those same lessons show up in my classroom.

For example, when we're teaching the damn resume assignment, because you got to teach the resume assignment in technical writing . . . what I'm running into at Bowie State is I'm working with students who have ethnic names just like me. I can say to a student, "Look, my name is Temptaous, and I go by Temptaous. But there was a time in my life when I only went by 'Shawn' on professional documents." It was the reason I decided to go and get my PhD because I applied to a job with "Temptaous" and "Shawn." Two applications back-to-back . . . and Shawn got a call back. Shawn is a cut-down version of my middle name Ta'Shawn. If you leave the "Ta'," you still know I'm Black.

I was like, "If I do Shawn, you ain't going to know if I'm Black, boy, girl, it ain't going to matter." Shawn got the call back. When I finally called them, they told me I lied on my application. They rejected anything else after that. That was the push I needed to go get my PhD . . . when I'm in my class and I'm teaching my students . . . I realized the power that I had, and not in a dictator way, right? That representation matters moment. Because now my students see in front of them, a Black woman named Temptaous that understands when they're saying, "I don't know what name I want to put on my resume. I'm not sure what I want to do here." I'm also in a sorority. My sorority is a racial identity, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated. That is also a racial identity marker. You look at my address, there's a lot of things that I have and a lot of people know these things that are racial identity markers on our technical documents.

It's always this conversation with my students . . . I never tell a student to not place their government name on the document. But I do have an honest conversation with them about it. "Hey, just letting you know, this is what you up against. Is this what you want to do? Okay, cool. Let me help you do it the right way."

I think going to an HBCU provided me that opportunity to come back and do that. I think of all the things I could not say at East Carolina University that I can say now at Bowie State, mainly because at East Carolina I may have had two or three Black kids in each class. Maybe. There were a lot of things that I had to be careful saying because I knew those kids wouldn't get it. It's not because I think they were bad students, they just didn't get the cultural references. They may not understand why it would matter to not go by a certain name. Those types of things don't show up in the class with White students, nor do they really understand how they themselves reject racial-sounding names. So it becomes a teaching moment at East Carolina, but then at Bowie State, it becomes a moment for my students to be uplifted. Right? I feel if nothing else, I went to Bowie State to be the teacher that I needed.

Shane to Temptuous Mckoy: What is your vision for HBCUs in rhetoric and composition? [Episode 38: 21:31–28:16]

Like keeping it all the way one hundred, it would be honestly for people to stop acting like we ain't here. That's probably my big overarching thing. People don't rock with HBCUs 'til they see themselves wanting to benefit from diversity, or it's some other buzzword thing they feel they want to tap into. I really hate that sometimes HBCUs are overlooked for being great places for learning, and even more so, which is a whole 'nother book I'm going to get out of my head one day, HBCU elitism is a real thing. A lot of people really don't see how that happens. They only know of the Howard's, the Spelman's, the Morehouse's, the Clark Atlanta's. Those are the things

they know about, but they forget about your Bowie's, Elizabeth City State University, Shaw University, Livingstone's. All these smaller HBCUs are just as important. I don't say the HBCU elitism flight to knock my other people, because first of all, they already heard my rant about that in the beginning. I think it's important that we honor those major HBCUs.

My overall vision for the field would be that HBCUs really are being brought into conversations. I'm tired of HBCUs having to be a special topic. That really bothers me. I'm tired of it having to be, "Oh, we got this special panel on HBCUs." Why can't HBCU panels be a part of the party? Don't get it twisted, I'm down for the recognition, but it's always HBCUs are a "but" or a supplemental. That really bothers me to my core . . . I went to the CPTSC (Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication) conference, I realized you can count the number of Black folks in there on two hands. Maybe just one, if we're being completely honest. But in two hands I can count the amount of Black people that were in there . . . so just imagine if HBCUs were looked at and appreciated the same way that we do many of these PWIs, and what would it look like in these conference spaces? If I was able to bring in ten of my Black kids from Bowie State to this next conference, what does that mean overall to the organization? Because you're no longer talking about buzzwords, right? . . .

I appreciate and love my HBCUs. I feel that they're definitely a sacred space for learning Black community. It's the one space in the world that I think back to . . . and I know people always say it sounds dramatic, but it's the honest to God truth—that's the one space that I can forget that I'm Black. Some people really don't understand the power in that . . . I'm not walking around campus thinking about who am I going to walk into? Do I got to deal with this racist instructor? Am I going to have to be . . . sitting in a class, reading a book based on race to only hear a White student telling me it doesn't exist?

I hate how some people get the game twisted . . . if anyone ever does any research or archival research, and I've learned this, North Carolina A&T is literally the Black version of North Carolina State University. If you look at these founding documents, what these schools came out of, they're literally the same damn school. Just one is a HBCU and one isn't. But when you look at it historically and what that meant, North Carolina got all that funding. NC State got the funding as an R1 whoop-de-doo. But A&T got left behind. So what if we really stopped to peel back these layers and histories about what's happening and how our HBCUs are forgotten?

Once we pull back those histories, then we can start to shoot forward about what it means to include HBCUs in the field of rhet/comp and technical communication. That's something that I'm really big on. Telling people like, "No, check yourself. Look at the history." The sense of ideal community is embedded in HBCU. It's there, it's in the threading of an HBCU . . . when I look at PWIs and the conversations that's happening, and I look at how we're trying to bring it together, that same sense of community is not embedded in PWIs. I don't want to say it's a free for all, but it's a way that I think PWIs really could learn from HBCUs. I'm saying, literally, just take the time to see what's happening in that HBCU space and what has happened historically to keep that HBCU going afloat.

Shane to Alexandria Lockett: What is your sense of how HBCUs and scholarship from HBCU teacher-scholars is situated in rhetoric and composition? [Episode 60: 16:57–24:33]

Well, we have been continuously producing scholarship, but it's very marginalized and it's very little if you look at the scope of production. I think there's a lot of reasons for this. Number one, just sheer segregation in terms of, how should I put it? I think we have to come back to the National Education Defense Act and really the growth of sort of English programs. We have to also look at the increase



of your bureaucratic institutions that happened at the turn of the century. We have to look into democratization of higher education. Then, we have to look at the desegregation of higher education. All these major factors, legislatively and socially and culturally and technologically, led to a place where the writing program emerged. And by the writing program, we're talking about whether it was the required mandated writing course because literally Harvard men couldn't write in the nineteenth century.

. . . they're lettered, cultured men, failed miserably on basic standard tests. Even as we will attribute that failure to people of color entering White schools. I would say that the history of the emergence of writing programs and its connection to racial segregation and desegregation mandates, you won't see that in Berlin's history. You won't see that in Harris's history. You won't see that in a lot of people's history of the field, because the scholars who came to write the histories of the field . . . the writing course as a requirement has been a consistent thing since the nineteenth century across all institutions, first of all. But suddenly remedial education and how that was supposed to make up for the deficient students who were coming to college, I'm looking particularly at the '60s.

They were built off the backs of these Black students who were just trying to get ahead and try to get a chance. A lot of these White scholars who participated in that unknowingly, who literally saw an opportunity, they professionalized composition studies off of this context. Writing wasn't something that they learned in a class. Hell, writing wasn't something I learned in a class. I was one of those people who didn't have to do it and look at me teaching it. I have to always confront that, too. I didn't go through what they're going through. I'm building a class that I never had to take. How many of us practitioners are in that situation, Shane? And imagine the ones who started this shit in the '60s and the '70s. You know they were in that position.

... it's interesting to note that the best thing about rhetoric and composition is that we are one of the only disciplines I know of that historicizes itself. That's pretty fucking cool. On the other hand, it is also, when I talk about the scam of rhetoric and composition, there is a kind of competition in this field to be recognized and there's an insecurity about visibility and recognition that leads to the coinage of terms and the barring and appropriation of knowledges from other disciplines without an acknowledgement of interdisciplinarity. That then leads to a kind of reproduction of a discipline that is really empty and shallow because let's be clear, the people who professionalized composition in the '70s, there was no composition studies, so these people were making it as they were going along as an administrative duty to run writing programs. The democratization of education led the institutions to see writing programs as a stop gap for that average student to acclimate and assimilate into the college because college and universities have still failed to define themselves after desegregation.

HBCUs all the while have been doing what HBCUs do: Educating our people the best way that we know how. We definitely can say that the programming in our institutions is diverse, and when we start trying to borrow from the "mainstream institutions," it doesn't quite work as well because our students are very much about that practical education. They want to know what is going to help me in this next class? What is going to help me get into grad school? What is going to help me? Now, I'm not saying the way it's taught is always as progressive as the field would imagine. It's no surprise that we're marginalized within the field. But it's kind of surprising when you see this marginalization alongside this sort of social justice in the classroom, antiracists, let's teach our students to be woke citizens.

That's really hard to do when a lot of your Black scholars, if you have any Black scholars, because as you noticed our conferences are White, White, White-ity, White, White, White. Why would Black people want to be part

of a profession that has little opportunity for growth, very little pay, very little recognition, a reproduction of White supremacy with little financial reward and no power for you anywhere? My sense of HBCUs is that we are marginalized, but with everybody's attention on race, with everything hitting a fever pitch, with racial violence, and it being very apparent that education has to change fundamentally if it's going to serve diverse students, now, people are more interested in, "Well damn, all this history of composition everywhere, where were the HBCUs? What were the HBCUs doing?" Oh, you guys weren't publishing their work is what it was. I think that the field owes a huge debt to HBCUs.

Shane to Alexandria Lockett: Spelman College is a small, private, liberal arts HBCU for women in Atlanta, Georgia. It's the oldest one of only two HBCU women's colleges in the US. Talk to me about Spelman College and what it's like to teach there? [Episode 60: 01:21–06:25]

. . . I want to start off by saying it's quite an honor to be at Spelman because the history of writing at Spelman is really quite fascinating. Jacqueline Jones Royster, who's one of the vets and OGs in the field, she started our program as a writing across the curriculum (WAC) program. What's really fascinating about the history of our program at Spelman and why it is so interesting to teach here is because it started off in . . . Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, she's one of the formidable Black feminist thinkers of our time and historian of Black women's work, and she's done numerous anthologies with Black woman writers of all kinds, whether they were critics or whether they were creative writers or whatever, she's cataloged exhaustively. She also runs our women's research and research center here at Spelman. The program actually started in her office.

The writing program started in a women's research and resource space. It's kind of intriguing to kind of imagine that our writing program could emerge from that situation as

opposed to say a lot of writing programs, which emerged from desegregation mandates for remedial writing programs to get Black people “acculturated” into White institutions. That’s the first thing, I think having that history of writing at Spelman is kind of cool because we are a small college. We do have a comp requirement. It’s one semester, it used to be two, but they eliminated the stretch component because we also have a course here at Spelman called ADW, African Diaspora in the World, which is a two-semester sequence, which is intended to be a kind of decolonial historic . . . it’s kind of like instead of Western Civ, we have ADW, which sort of destroys the idea of having Western Civ.

. . . I think in an HBCU space writing instruction becomes very peculiar and interesting because your students are overwhelmingly . . . Elaine Richardson’s “To Protect and Serve” is a great article that I actually assign to my students as a way to get them to start thinking about their own literacies. If they’re at Spelman College, they’re not there because they were some kind of fist-in-the-air resistant student, they’re there because they are the best of the best. They followed all the rules, they did everything right and now they want you to help them keep doing everything right. Okay, I’m a Black woman. They’re a Black woman. I always ask them the same question I asked my students at PWIs, am I the first, not even am I the first I don’t frame it that way, I say, “Have you ever had a Black teacher at any grade level, regardless of gender?” The overwhelming answer, 95.5% of the time is “No, you are the first. I came to Spelman because I have a legacy of parents who said, ‘This is where I would learn my Black history.’”

The problem with the marginalization of HBCU scholars in the field is there’s a lot of assumptions about who this Black student is that we’re teaching. And a Black student that I’m teaching at Spelman College is not going to be a Black student I’m teaching at Penn State or OU [University of Oklahoma]. The joy of being in an HBCU is the

pedagogical challenge of not being in a situation where I'm trying to model my students to be a particular citizen, but that I'm actually in a position where I can help somebody retrace their literacy and their ownership of literacy and say, "What kind of freedom do you want to have for yourself?" And as a Black woman, the most radical thing I can teach you is how to say "no."

Shane to Alexandria Lockett: What do you teach, and how do students respond to this kind of approach? [Episode 60: 06:26–11:50]

Well, I teach honors composition, and some semesters it's just fantastic and then some semesters it's terrible. Like any institution, I don't care what kind of institution it is, honors students tend to come into that classroom having felt like they've arrived and they're ready to do the work, which is a great frame, except when you're saying, "Hey, the way that you think about writing is not really going to help you." And they panic real quick or they realize they don't have experience with writing they thought they had or their attitude towards communication is they realize how inherently performative and White it is. And it's what they do with that realization that will make or break my class.

Let me tell you about my class and let me tell you a little bit about the structure. I've developed a structure for honors composition after much tinkering and here's what works for me. I spend the first half of the class talking to them about what does being an intellectual mean? What does it mean that we don't associate Black women with the term *intellectual*? We start off with Toni Morrison's *The Site of Memory* where she talks about how her composition process is informed by this kind of absence. She tends to be categorized as a fiction writer, but clearly she's drawing on an autobiographical writing tradition which she traces to the slave narrative. And she says, "Well, the formerly enslaved, when they were writing their narratives, they had to leave out certain things, the sordid details of slavery, we

really don't get a lot from the slave narratives and imagine how much sort of detail we do get."

But Morrison calls that a veil. She says these writers had to write with a veil because they had a very particular rhetorical purpose . . . it was to get these White readers, predominantly White readership to see them in their humanity using Christian appeals overwhelmingly. But for Morrison as a writer, it's that veil that she wants to pull back as a writer to say, "What kinds of creative resources in the world did these people have to make these narratives in that time and to own their literacy and to wield their literacy in such a way that the writing could be as impactful as it is?" When they see Morrison talking about her process in such a clear way, it's a great piece because they start to wonder, what is a Black literary tradition? How do we write? What is the purpose of writing? And what is truth? What are facts?

Because Morrison goes into all the philosophical quarries . . . and then we read Jacqueline Jones Royster's perspectives on the intellectual tradition of Black women. Royster, of course, in her very incisive writing style just sort of schools you. You don't think about Black women when you think about being intellectual. You don't even know who Black women writers are. She of course introduces us to this scope of Black women writers. They also read the introduction to Shirley Wilson Logan's *With Pen and Voice* and the introduction to the 18 volumes of nineteenth-century Black women writers in the Schomburg's Collection of *The Pen is Ours*, written by Gates.

My students start to realize quickly, they don't know nothing about Black women writers and they're at Spelman College and they're Black women. It's kind of like, I don't have to teach, they get to see it for themselves when they're reading about it for themselves. That starts to motivate them to start thinking about their literacy. I give them writing prompts. Some of them are simple and could be

applied to any classroom space. Tell me about the text in your home because I'm trying to introduce them to narrative writing. Not that narrative is . . . because they do associate narrative with fiction and creative writing only, and then there's academic writing only. I need to disrupt that for them just like Morrison disrupts the boundaries of being an autobiographical or fiction writer . . .

Where we go with that is I ask them the question, I say, "Tell me, describe a scene," to get them into showing and not telling. Tell me about the text in your home that you grew up around. Did you have bookcases? Magazines? Whatever that means. Then they start to kind of realize, "Huh, we only had this one little bookcase" or "We had a whole, my parents are professors, so we had tons of books, but I didn't like those books." . . . Second part to that question: when was the first time you ever independently, not in a classroom, not by your parents, when's the first time you independently pursued and read a text written by a Black woman? When they answer those two questions, something kind of happens.

#### DENOUEMENT

As I reflect on these interviews, two words stand out to me: *agency* and *voice*. Who has agency in our classes and in our field, and who doesn't? How are teachers helping support student agency by drawing on diverse cultural knowledges and encouraging students to reflect on their previous experiences with language and literacy? Whose voices are heard through our curriculum and in our scholarship? In what ways are we critically investigating rhetoric and composition history, and how should we retell and rewrite that history? HBCUs are models for what it means to develop programs, initiatives, and classes that celebrate diverse student populations. As the field continues to problematize notions of "standardized" English and works to embrace language diversity and linguistic justice (Baker-Bell, 2020), we would do well to pay more attention to HBCUs and investigate our problematic history as a field (see Royster & Williams, 1999).

I think we see from these interviews that writing classes and programs, and composition studies at large, still has a way to go in listening to HBCU teacher-scholars and amplifying perspectives and experiences from HBCUs. So as we push toward equity and inclusivity in our classes and field, I offer the following questions about agency and voice:

- In what ways are your pedagogies and practices valuing your students' rich language habits and the communities they come from? How are you pursuing linguistic justice?
- What diverse histories and perspectives are being heard and circulated in your writing classes and program? Whose histories and stories are being told?
- How are you supporting your students' lived experiences, and how is that being complemented through your curriculum and assessment?
- How are you judging and assessing writing (e.g., language)? In what ways does writing assessment reproduce White language supremacy and Standard Edited American English or emphasize grammatical errors? How might you reconsider traditional writing assessment practices and incorporate more socially just ones?
- How are you responsibly preparing language users, and in what ways are you emphasizing diverse cultural and linguistic practices, rhetorical knowledges, and ways of making meaning?