

## EDITORS' COLUMN

In summer 2021, we emerge into the next phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccinations have begun to have an impact on our lives, allowing us to see friends and family and return to some activities that have been either virtual or impossible for long months. One such activity is work. In higher education, many of us—with trepidation and hope—are transitioning back to a campus environment that looks more like 2019 than 2020.

While these changes restore some sense of normalcy and joy as we reconnect with communities that matter to us, we cannot erase what we have experienced and learned in the last year and half. We face shifting expectations that require increased flexibility and fresh perspective; we may have a whole new set of worries that we could not even have imagined before. Our “new normal” demands action, calling upon us to rebuild our communities within radically transformed structures. Change is not a new phenomenon, of course. The structures that shape our lives and interactions—from government and other institutions to family, friends, and jobs—are always evolving, and our practices and attitudes have to evolve along with them. They just don't usually change as quickly as they have since March, 2020.

This issue of *JBW* grapples with change—not the rapid change of a global pandemic, but the more gradual change that has always shaped Basic Writing and all the communities it touches: students, faculty, classrooms, programs, departments, and institutions. While slower, our field's changes also demand action. The authors in this issue examine a range of responses to change, including rethinking our pedagogical approaches and teacher preparation, developing flexible pathways for students, and redefining professional communities of practice. In their examples of out-of-the-box thinking, we are reminded that the only constant is change, requiring adaptability and creativity. This creativity can be a force for good. When the bottom falls out of our plans, we innovate, marshalling new communities and assembling new structures as we imagine a better, more equitable future.

In our first article, “Learning on the Job: Instructor Policy Literacy in the Basic Writing Course,” Gregory Bruno makes the case for developing instructors' policy literacy as a step toward creating more caring classroom communities to promote student success. The policy knowledge that Bruno promotes—for instance, knowledge about credit-bearing work and cost to students—is especially important for instructors of basic writing students, who may not have generational knowledge about how to navigate the complex information streams in college. As Bruno argues, “Instructors with high

levels of policy literacy are often able to teach with a more effective grasp of the material context of their students' lives." This connection to students' lived experience, while outside an instructor's typical professional purview, not only informs students' choices, potentially increasing their persistence; it also demonstrates empathy, which further benefits their academic success. "Many instructors who teach Basic Writing have their hearts in the right place," Bruno says, "but without the requisite policy literacy, they may do more harm than good, as they are more prone to see the classroom as an isolated arena, reinforce the misalignment between rigor and policy, or worse, evince a lack of care."

Emily Suh and Darin Jensen shift the focus from students to instructors, who also can feel isolated or unsupported and benefit from caring communities. In "Examining Communities of Practice: Transdisciplinarity, Resilience, and Professional Identity," Suh and Jensen first establish that "Basic Writing is part of the transdisciplinary profession of developmental education, whose professional development is both under-theorized and under-supported." Thus, they apply a transdisciplinary lens to develop a fuller understanding of "developmental educators' sense of professional identity, engagement in the field and discipline, and how teacher-scholars in these contexts become resilient and sustain their practice." By situating their study alongside the recent special issues of *JBW* on graduate education, they further connect the value of ongoing professional support to other forms of teacher training and mentorship. According to Suh and Jensen, "fostering a strong professional identity has implications for student success, teaching excellence, and professional engagement," as well as for professional resilience. Inclusive professional networks, like caring and inclusive classrooms, promote well-being for all.

The opportunity to make informed choices also promotes well-being. Too often, institutions fall back on old practice and broad generalizations to make assumptions about what its community members, especially students, "need." Kailyn Shartel Hall argues against this "one-size-fits-all mentality." In "My ACT Score Did Not Let Me Take AP English as Dual Credit': A Survey on High School Experiences of Basic Writers," Hall shares a study of students who would not typically have qualified for the corequisite course (based on students' previous AP/honors courses or high placement scores) but chose or tested into the corequisite option anyway. Hall states, "These discoveries changed the tenor of conversations we had as a Basic Writing program. Our program's goals shifted immediately from understanding how to structure the corequisite best for administration purposes to getting a better under-

standing of the students enrolled in both versions of the course so we could make necessary changes to placement procedures.” By moving away from administrative assumptions and priorities and taking students’ previous experiences and choices seriously, Hall and her colleagues could reflect on how to “better support the students we have in the classroom rather than the theoretical underperforming students we presumed we had.” Hall’s study underscores the powerful value of student experience and voice in programmatic revision.

Rachel Ihara also promotes this value in her article, “Basic Writing Reform as an Opportunity to Rethink First-Year Composition: New Evidence from an Accelerated Learning Program.” Ihara traces her institution’s move from separate basic writing and first-year composition programs and courses to combined courses with enhanced assessment processes and other supports for basic writers. Her study demonstrates that, “By unsettling the boundary between ‘remedial’ and ‘regular’ college writers, mainstreaming programs ultimately challenge us to rethink the goals of college writing writ large.” For example, at Ihara’s institution, some basic writing students exceeded expectations in the combined sections while other students, who did not have the benefit of the more rigorous support or assessment models, struggled. Based on these findings, Ihara argues that rigid categories for college writers narrow our vision when it comes to student ability and need; in turn, such categories also limit innovation and opportunities for faculty collaboration that would benefit our programs and students. The case of her college shows that the “creation of . . . two categories of students—underprepared and prepared—undermined the notion that there could be benefits to a similar programmatic approach to assessing writing in composition.”

The authors in this issue demonstrate the importance of creative thinking as we reimagine our work-based communities and structures, and continue to create new ones. Sometimes, we have to open ourselves up to new ways of seeing in order to build better futures for ourselves and our students. Through intentional collaboration and a little out-of-the-box thinking, we can more effectively advance communities of care, educational justice, and equity—those principles at the core of Basic Writing as a discipline and so critical in this precarious “new normal” moment.

**--Cheryl C. Smith and Hope Parisi**