



Journal of Basic Writing

Special Issue on Democracy and Basic Writing

Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Open Admissions

Lynn Reid and Jack Morales

Guest Editors

“Admission to One. . . Admission to All”: The (End of the) Radical Dream of Open Admissions in the Post-Desegregation South

Annie S. Mendenhall

Open Admissions, Resilience, and Basic Writing Ecologies: A New Cultural Narrative

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Access and Exclusion: Chinese Undergraduates and Basic Writing in the Global University

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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to the complexities of providing writing support across contexts. All manuscripts must focus on Basic Writing and/or must situate settings of instruction or institutional agency in explicit relation to Basic Writing concerns. A familiarity with the journal and its readership should be evident through an introduction that engages with recent and ongoing debates, open questions, and controversies in and around Basic Writing.

We particularly encourage submissions that draw heavily on faculty voices, student voices, or student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research written in non-technical language; and co-authored writing that provocatively debates more than one side of a central controversy. Recent *JBW* authors have also engaged more deeply with archival research. Work that reiterates what is known or that is mainly summative or overly practical will not be considered. Articles must work to substantively add to the existing literature by making explicit their central claims early on and by devising a clear and thorough methodology. Before submitting, potential authors should review published articles in the journal that model approaches to methodology and organization.

JBW scholarship reflects the full range of frameworks applied to composition and rhetoric, two-year college, and literacy studies. We invite authors to engage with any of the following methods or approaches: antiracist approaches; second-language theory; the implications of literacy; first-generation studies; discourse theory; just-writing and access studies; two-year college literature and student support; writing center theory and practice; ethnographic methods and program studies; program histories and critical university studies; and/or cross-disciplinary work. In addition, the journal is in active dialogue with the scholarship of translanguaging and multilingualism, multimodality, digital rhetorics, and justice studies. Authors should be explicit about their choice of framework and its appropriateness to the article's subject matter, including reference to how such choice models or revises a particular theoretical approach.

In view of Basic Writing history, we value submissions that help Basic Writing reassess its original assumptions, question its beneficence, and posit new and informed futures for writing support. We invite prospective authors to view the latest issues in our web archive at wac.colostate.edu/jbw.

Manuscript Submission Information

Submissions should run between 25 and 30 pages (7,500-9,000 words), including a Works Cited, and follow current MLA guidelines. To assure impartial review, include name(s), affiliation(s), mailing and email addresses, and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page only. The second page of the manuscript should include the title but no author identification, an abstract of 250-300 words, and a list of five to seven keywords.

Endnotes should be kept to a minimum. It is the author's responsibility to obtain written permission for excerpts from student writing, especially as this entails IRB review, which should be made transparent in an endnote for readers.

Contributions should be submitted as Word document attachments or Google links to jbwcuny@gmail.com. Authors will receive a confirmation of receipt. The next communication will be on whether the manuscript, if geared toward a *JBW* audience, will be going out for peer review. If so, review reports generally follow in six to eight weeks. The editors also welcome proposals for guest-edited issues.

EDITORS' COLUMN

Open Admissions at 50: The *JBW* Special Issue on Democracy and Basic Writing

A policy of admissions that reaches out beyond traditional sources for its students, bringing in to a college campus young men and women from diverse classes, races, and cultural backgrounds who have attended good, poor, and mediocre schools, is certain to shake the assumptions and even the confidence of teachers who have been trained to serve a more uniform and prepared student population. For the English teacher, the shock and challenge of this diversity is experienced first through the written words and sentences of the new students, for here, spelled out in words, woven into syntax, is, the fact of inequity—in our schools and in the society that is served by these schools.

—Mina P. Shaughnessy, Editor's Introduction, *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 1, no. 1

Over the last fifty years, no public policy has garnered as much historical attention in the annals of rhetoric and composition as Open Admissions (OA). Associated chiefly with the student-led activism of the late 1960s at City College of New York (CCNY), this counterpoint to a selective admissions standard for college enrollment embodied the activist spirit of the Civil Rights Era. In the midst of a campus strike/occupation in the spring of 1969, student organizers at CCNY presented a list of five demands, among them “that the racial composition of the entering freshman class be racially reflective of the high school population” (“Five Demands”). Because Harlem’s predominantly Black and Puerto Rican residents were underrepresented at CCNY—comprising a mere 9% of the student body – the university acted sooner than expected on a plan to implement a policy that would quickly ameliorate the results of a systemic problem with racial discrimination. Basic Writing, as we know it, began formulating its intellectual and political foundations within this social reality.

Because BW’s disciplinary history is accented by Open Admissions, the scholarship that emerged from the teaching of writing in this specific place and time is part of a larger social history of the university where the contours

of activism would be shaped by a burgeoning scholarly discourse. But we would be remiss to relegate our reflections to a context that obscures the popular discourses that are now being cataloged by an ever-increasing cadre of interdisciplinary historians of education. For example, with its emphasis on the educational lives and experiences of students historically underserved, projects such as the American Social History Project at City University of New York (CUNY) have worked to develop collections such as *CUNY Digital History Archive* (CDHA). With a growing collection of primary source materials from the Open Admissions era of the late twentieth century, the CDHA can be a resource for expanding not only our individual and collective inquiry about the nature, purpose, and consequences of Open Admissions, but also the very historical literacy that informs our understanding of what BW might have looked like half a century ago.

In his introduction to the eleven essays that make up *Microhistories of Composition*, Bruce McComiskey distills a rhetorical theory of social history that presents an ever-increasing context for the work of BW. In this formulation, historical perspective is formulated not by rejecting the universal grand narratives of conventional social history nor the “isolated cultural zeitgeist” of cultural history, but instead the dialogic relation between the two that is mediated by an analysis of the people, places, texts, and ideas heretofore considered too ephemeral for the construction of narrative (21). For instance, the political activism that surrounded Open Admissions, we learn from CDHA, was not exclusive to the CCNY campus. In a monograph written by professors Florence Tager and Zala Highsmith-Taylor, *Medgar Evers College: In Pursuit of a Community’s Dream* (2008), we learn of the origins of Medgar Evers College in the midst of social and political unrest in the aftermath of the NYC United Federation of Teachers Strike of 1968 (6). In their book we learn about the experiment of having a community controlled public college in the predominantly African American Bedford-Stuyvesant section of central Brooklyn. Histories like this one detail the community and city-wide politics that led to the Board of Higher Education deciding to move central Brooklyn’s Kingsborough Community College to the wealthy neighborhood of Manhattan Beach (12-13). Because of works such as this, local citizens like PTA activist Ella Sease speak from the archives in, for example, a letter to the Governor where she exclaims that “Central Brooklyn must have a college” (qtd. in Tager and Highsmith-Taylor 12). Moreover, our expansion of the scope and scale of a phrase like Open Admissions creates an avenue to understand how to read and reconstruct our disciplinary and political histories around methods that provide a “multidimensional” and “multiscopic”

analysis through the centering of sources, including yearbook photographs, narratives, political pamphlets and posters, community newspapers and leaflets (McComiskey 23).

Across New York's East River, students at Manhattan Community College (MCC) distributed *The People's Handbook*, a collection of editorials, cartoons, listings of free services around the city, as well as histories of the student movement at MCC. This populist account details the organization of MCC's Third World Coalition, a multiracial coalition of students who seized the MCC campus demanding reforms that included the institution of a "Third World Department" (*People's Handbook*). What might be considered ephemera in the social history of rhetorical education is center stage in a rhetorical history of the CUNY student movement. With no authors, the content speaks in one voice as an unsanctioned and yet institutionally-sponsored community publication. In contrast, the November 13th, 1970 issue of *Prometheus*, MCC's official student newspaper, featured a first-hand account of student activists, Gus Koutsoftas and Gail Mercer, who write about their arrest during a protest over free education. In striking detail, Koutsoftas and Mercer recount their own apprehension by the police along with fifty-six other student protesters and two faculty members, Professors Freidheim and Pearlstein (13). Known as the "BMCC 58," the defendants and the college administration appeared before a judge only after a series of postponements forced all the students and faculty involved to remain in the city throughout the summer of 1970 (13). Though the charges were eventually dropped, Koutsoftas and Mercer's account is a reminder that such ephemera in the form of "extra-curricular" student writing can reveal a political literacy that otherwise might not be visible in accounts of student writing. Accounts like these detail examples of students writing local history and understanding the politics of a local legal system that unfairly favored the prosecution.

Some fifty years later, stories like these can show us the previous limitations of a two-dimensional plane where public policies like Open Admissions and areas of scholarly inquiry such as BW are defined by a familiar story that takes place in a specific time and place. Instead, this special issue looks to round out that history by acknowledging the constellation of places and spaces that articulate(d) a historically literate accounting of BW theory, history, and pedagogy. What follows, in other words, is not a presentation of archival research related to Open Admissions as we know it in the story of BW in New York's municipal colleges. Instead, we offer a frame of reference from which we can read exemplary work in BW through the lens of an historical foundation that is constantly changing, a frame in

which our studies and pedagogies might account for the particularities of Open Admissions as intellectually and politically generative rather than as inconsequential and idiosyncratic.

Whether we view its legacy as a meaningful step forward or as a concession meant to calm the spirit of protest or quench the fire of advocacy, Open Admissions has provided the context upon which the theory, history, and pedagogy of BW has flourished into a bona fide research program within Writing Studies. This places BW in contested territory. As BW education faces growing political pressures in an age of austerity and a growing professional landscape hospitable to the study of writing in the U.S. community college, its ethos will now have to begin addressing the internal economic contradictions that have shaped BW's identity. The role of language and assimilation is but one of these concerns. Although BW's long road toward professionalization might seem to suggest some kind of post-political landscape, the anniversary of the Open Admissions strike at CCNY and the period of unprecedented enrollment that followed offers a reminder about the tenuousness of the social and political world in which our scholarship has always circulated. BW has weathered the changing political winds before: both veiled and explicit attacks on Open Admissions at the end of the last century, the consistent outsourcing of BW instruction to the U.S. community college, and the ongoing precariousness of those who teach the most vulnerable in our institutions.

Like every generation, perhaps, we're called to ask *what's so different now?* While it seems as though there have always been forces threatening the public's access to higher education, the rhetorical ground beneath our scholarly feet has shifted. The arguments about access to higher education are no longer about the reallocation of resources but about whether diversity has "an endpoint," as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court recently put it. That inequality could be cast teleologically – that is, as an empirical problem to be resolved – is not a controversial position in and of itself. What *has* changed is the looming threat that the end to the problem may be upon us sooner, not because we have been able to demonstrate a solution, but because its origin—institutionalized racial prejudice—is not recognized by the branch of government entrusted to protect the rights of citizens. In a climate fueled by the so-called culture wars, the righteous claims to bipartisanship work against the protection of civil/human rights, a threat that renders BW's history as potentially divisive because its origins are coterminous with the Black and Latinx campus movements of the period.

These social and political conditions help to create a space in which

fear is “an environment, rather than something localizable” (Virilio 11). In *The Administration of Fear* (2012), philosopher Paul Virilio outlines fear as a consequence of globalization. However, Virilio means neither fear as an emotion nor globalization as a doxa of political economy. For Virilio, we live in a society where terror, fear, and panic are environmental conditions that are endemic to globalization’s ideological commitment to progress. In other words, as Virilio says, it is the “the cult of speed” that has necessitated an administration of the fear created in the wake of progress. In this configuration it is states and their agents that administer (through policy) the consequences of progress in which all political subjects must then feel their civil and human rights as alienable. At the risk of oversimplification, for instance, the professionalization of Writing Studies – and by extension Basic Writing – leaves in its wake a situation where the accumulation of knowledge (progress) conflicts with the economic interests (progress) of colleges and universities who have not invested in their workers. The fear, then, of chronic underemployment persists for Basic Writing teachers and is part of the condition for the production and consumption of new research.

We share Virilio’s observations, here, not because we necessarily share his conclusions about progress, but because understanding terror, fear, and panic as environmental can suggest ways of reflecting on our disciplinary past that moves beyond a 50th anniversary retrospective on Open Admissions as either ceremonial speech or the kind of critical discourse Hannah Arendt might have called an “impotent truth.” However simplistic it might be, we think that the administration of fear in Basic Writing – which includes the manufacturing, legislating, and commodification of crisis – can be confronted with a classic remedy: courage. For example, a vulgar reading of Aristotle’s mediation on courage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* reveals a sense in which courage is equated to knowledge by virtue of the particularities that inform someone’s actions. In his analysis of the courage of a professional soldier, for example, this courage is one that comes from experience. Because their “experience makes them especially able in attack and defense, because they are proficient in their weapons” and because they are familiar with “the many false alarms that seem to arise in war,” professional soldiers appear courageous. In reality, Aristotle claims, these professional soldiers were cowards when compared to the ill-trained citizen soldiers of the period who would presumably prefer to die by standing fast rather than running away from the fear of death as professional soldiers would do. What is helpful, here, is the distinction that is made by how we use our knowledge in relation to particularities. Situating the many stories of BW within an always changing

social and political context can provide us with something of a blueprint for how writing—once again—might change the nature of the university.

The legacy of the Open Admissions era in New York City is often provided as a basis for considering the social and political origins of an intellectual movement that coincided with the campus movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Much of our knowledge from this period is indebted to the excellent historical work by BW scholars and has paved the way for scholarship that recognizes the relationship between public discontent and political activism. What we are starting to see is the potential for archival work to show us instances in which local citizens used writing to speak truth to power in a way that we have not yet fully appreciated in our theories, histories, and pedagogies. Our fellow citizens—BW students, their teachers, and conspiring staff members—speak to us from these spaces with advice about the character that can sustain a social movement, one that can make us courageous in the administered society. They provide the ethos, as it were, from which we might read one another's work and consider the implications by assuming the necessary and appropriate danger.

As we noted in the Call For Proposals for this special issue:

These histories rightly position a critical inquiry of remediation within the context of the social movements driving educational reform in New York. They chronicle the transition of literacy from a set of discrete, abstract, and apolitical skills to what Deborah Brant has characterized as skills that function as “an engine of profit and competitive advantage in the twentieth century. . . raw material[s] in the mass production of information” (Brandt). They, in effect, render literacy a public good—and therefore a resource—subject to state intervention and regulation. That this transition was codified in the shift from selective admissions to *Open Admissions* offers a chance to evaluate the historical, empirical, and theoretical trajectory of Basic Writing in the 21st century.

Complicating this transition, of course, is the maturity of BW from an exercise in gatekeeping to one of formal academic study. Mina Shaughnessy's well known developmental stages for teachers of basic writing characterize this transition aptly—“guarding the tower”; “converting the natives”; “sounding the depths”; and “diving in” (Shaughnessy). To understand the legacy of Open Admissions, then, is to unpack the competing versions

of what Open Admissions means to the public and what it means to an ever-increasing cadre of specialists in BW. Bruce Horner began this conversation in 1996 by considering the ways in which the institutionalization of BW courses has played into the public discourses of Open Admissions and higher education. For Horner, these seemingly competitive discourses worked together to naturalize the omission of the “concrete material, political, institutional, and social historical inequalities” that frame the lived experiences of students and teachers of Basic Writing. Because its social history narrates a hard fought battle for the legitimization of BW’s “institutional place,” these inequalities remain obscured.

Similarly, Steve Lamos shows how the field’s origins at CUNY can be understood as a poetics of entrenched racial difference, or “racialization,” where Basic Writing bears an almost metonymic relationship to race. For Lamos, this process renders remediation an exclusively minority enterprise in the popular and scholarly imagination (Lamos 26). In addition, George Otte and Rebecca Mylnarczyk’s historical overview of the field in their *Basic Writing* (2010) reminds scholars that Open Admissions as a “movement” is affirmed in the stories of the social and political “volatility” of the 1960s. These social histories of Basic Writing reveal an emerging tension at the end of the twentieth century, one that ushers in the transition of literacy as a good to be subsidized and regulated by the state to a practice and/or competency duly regulated by a profession.

As Mina Shaughnessy’s introduction to the first issue of *The Journal of Basic Writing* indicates, the exigence for this journal’s founding was rooted in the changes that Open Admissions brought to CUNY campuses specifically, and as such, the Open Admissions movement at CUNY has received substantial scholarly attention in BW. While recognizing that CUNY’s role in the professionalization of BW is critical to understanding our disciplinary history, the authors in this special issue encourage us to reorient our perspective and see the legacy of Open Admissions from a new historical perspective and from an analysis of the contemporary issues that the BW community faces in local settings. Annie S. Mendenhall’s contribution to this special issue, “Admission to One. . . Admission to All’: The (End of the) Radical Dream of Open Admissions in the Post-Desegregation South,” highlights the impact of Open Admissions policies alongside desegregation efforts in the South beginning in the 1960s. Mendenhall analyzes the rhetorical function

of OA policies during the merger of Tennessee State University (an HBCU) and the University of Tennessee (an HWCU) in 1979 to highlight the extent to which the rhetoric of desegregation that accompanied OA was utilized to racialize standards for writing. This led to an increase in remedial courses and a significant loss in innovative programming intended to foster equitable access. Mendenhall's discussion of external forces that impact basic writing programs is echoed in Joyce Olewski Inman's essay, "Open Admissions, Resilience, and Basic Writing Ecologies: A New Cultural Narrative," which takes an ecological systems view of change. Inman analyzes a corpus of articles from *JBW* through the lens of resilience theory and identifies four dominant themes: growth, adaptation, release, and reorganization. For Inman, a successful approach to BW acknowledges the influence of external stakeholders and recognizes the need to adapt to the inevitably changing landscape for our work. In "Valuing Embodied Epistemology to Counter Neoliberal Programmatic Reform at the Two-Year College," Alison Cardinal, Kirsten Higgins, and Anthony Warknke argue that the changes implemented through broad-scale developmental education reforms can unwittingly move BW programs farther away from the equity-minded values of the OA movement that those same reforms may seek to support. The authors advocate for an approach to placement that emphasizes students' embodied experiences and the unique needs of local contexts and caution us to adopt a critical gaze toward developmental reforms that fail to acknowledge the specific needs of individual students, instructors, and institutions. With a similar focus on embodied experiences, Tom McNamara's contribution, "Access and Exclusion: Chinese Undergraduates and Basic Writing in the Global University," utilizes a case-study method to highlight the lived experience of multilingual international students from China whose placement in BW contributed to a self-identity that reinforced a status as "outsider" in comparison to their monolingual classmates. McNamara concludes with recommendations for assessment, assignment design, and program advocacy that resist deficit models of instruction. Taken together, these essays highlight the deep influence that the OA movement had on inspiring access-oriented work in composition studies but also take a critical eye to policies and practices that, while often intended to support access, can inhibit inclusivity.

In closing, when the idea for this special issue came to us, the world was different. While our intention had been to mark an important anniversary in the history of Basic Writing, we had no idea that we would be embarking on several years that would change our frame of reference for what follows in these pages. We would be remiss to forget that our personal and collective

acts of reflection are marked by our weariness from: all a global pandemic brings, a relentless culture war that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, and the menacing statements against Affirmative Action made by sitting members of the U.S. Supreme Court at the time of this writing. Indeed, one of the enduring legacies of the Open Admissions movement is the realization that public policies governing literacy instruction cannot easily be untangled from the social, economic, and political constraints that have contributed to higher education's inaccessibility. In their own way, the articles in this special issue ask how we might recenter the sociopolitical and economic contexts in our own acts of reflection.

We want to assert that the value of this special issue lies not so much in a ceremonial remembrance or solemnity of Open Admissions but in engaging its memory with a historical literacy that resists ascribing to and forecasting an automatically benign future for BW. Each one of these articles presents us with an opportunity to see how the political and intellectual contexts of Open Admissions and BW inform one another such that we are challenged to imagine a future that honors the moral imperative to increase access to higher education. In that spirit, we hope that you enjoy reading these excellent contributions.

—**Jack Morales and Lynn Reid**, Guest Editors,
JBW Special Issue on Democracy and Basic Writing

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“Admission to One. . . Admission to All”: The (End of the) Radical Dream of Open Admissions in the Post-Desegregation South

Annie S. Mendenhall

ABSTRACT: This essay describes Open Admissions in the South during postsecondary desegregation, providing a comparative analysis of policies and debates in Tennessee, Louisiana, and Georgia. Statewide Open Admissions policies emerged in the 1960s as part of superficial efforts to comply with desegregation but were ineffective; consequently, they were overturned in court in favor of increased remediation and selective admissions in four-year colleges and universities. Desegregation litigation consistently presented literacy remediation as key to desegregation, undermining civil rights activists' arguments for transformative Open Admissions programs that proposed nonselective admissions coupled with the transformation of historically white universities' programs and policies. Desegregation enforcement may have delegitimized radical Open Admissions by presenting remediation, particularly Basic Writing, as key to accessing higher education for students of color—a persistent rhetoric in Basic Writing scholarship that must be reexamined in light of this history.

KEYWORDS: corequisite Basic Writing; desegregation; directed self-placement; Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); Open Admissions

“Admission to one of the institutions within the state system means admission to all of them. Admissions standards shall be uniform and uniformly applied with no elitist criteria at any level.”
—*An Alternative Plan for the Desegregation of the University System of Georgia*

“The current practice of open admissions to all four-year institutions is counter-productive, both in terms of educational

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objectives and racial integration. The objective is not simply to admit students into college, but to educate and graduate them.”
—*United States v. Louisiana* (1989)

In 1973, a report on Open Admissions programs in New York, Nebraska, and California was submitted to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) by a curriculum institute at the University of Nebraska.¹ Authors David Rosen, Seth Brunner, and Steve Fowler concluded, “No American institution of higher education currently operates under a real open admissions policy.” They argued that Open Admissions required several policy conditions to be in place: free public higher education, the elimination of mandatory remedial coursework, the hiring of racially diverse counselors, the elimination of grades, and childcare services on campus, among other things. These recommendations reflected a radical vision of access to higher education—one that sought to disrupt the “racial and economic discrimination that regulates entry to this system” (Rosen, Brunner, and Fowler 7). At the heart of this vision was a belief that Open Admissions should support the desegregation of historically white colleges and universities (HWCUs).²

In reading Rosen, Brunner, and Fowler’s report on eastern, west coast, and midwestern programs, I can’t help but notice the absence of the geographic region I call home, the South. This absence is especially marked given the underlying theme of desegregation in the report, which, like most histories on the subject, does not imagine Open Admissions as a southern phenomenon. Perhaps they assumed that southern universities resistant to desegregation would be unlikely to adopt Open Admissions, but if that is the case, they overlooked numerous Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that have operated in the South since the 19th century with Open Admissions. Despite this omission, their report is interesting because it accurately predicted that Open Admissions, as it had been adopted by HWCUs, would not accomplish desegregation. They highlighted unrealized demands for social justice in higher education that persist today. However, by overlooking southern programs, they could not predict that policy failures in Open Admissions institutions would be scrutinized in desegregation litigation, fueling the political turn against Open Admissions after the 1970s.

This history of a fractured and ultimately failed southern Open Admissions takes the influence of the civil rights movement and HBCUs on Open Admissions seriously, as scholars Amaka Okechukwu and Carmen Kynard implore us to do. Drawing from legal rulings, archival records, and institutional histories in Tennessee, Louisiana, and Georgia, I describe the

role of Open Admissions in the South from the 1960s through the 1990s. While Open Admissions at HBCUs predated the 1960s, I focus on this period to show how desegregation litigation undermined Open Admissions, which court rulings viewed as responsible for Black students' attrition. The cases I describe in formerly segregated states were what I call *nominal Open Admissions* policies designed to avoid obvious discrepancies between admissions requirements at state-funded HWCUs and HBCUs. States argued that they did not racially discriminate because admissions were open. Yet remediation requirements in these state systems still made admissions and graduation contingent on literacy performances set by HWCU standards and policies.³ These strategies constituted what Eric Darnell Pritchard describes as the "normative regulation, policing, and surveillance" of literacy in school, which has historically been used against African Americans (59). In contrast, civil rights activists demanded *transformative Open Admissions*, nonselective admissions policies coupled with the elimination of systems of grading, mandatory remediation, and non-degree-credit courses.

In this article, I begin by situating southern Open Admissions within the national context of Open Admissions and desegregation. I then analyze nominal Open Admissions policies in Tennessee and Louisiana, which I argue were an attempt to stall desegregation by appearing cooperative. These policies were eventually struck down by the courts for failing to result in desegregation. Their failure affirmed growing opposition to Open Admissions and strengthened support for tiered admissions and the remedial role of community colleges. Finally, I recover arguments for transformative Open Admissions in Georgia, which warned that increasing state preferences for tiered admissions and conventional remediation would perpetuate segregation and harm HBCUs—a prediction that has proven accurate (Carnevale et al.; Perna et al.). This history explains the backlash against Open Admissions in the context of stalled desegregation and the retrenchment of civil rights progress.

The history I describe here troubles the assumption that Basic Writing programs played a key role in desegregating HWCUs, during or after Open Admissions. Black activists did demand Open Admissions as part of desegregation, according to Okechukwu, but the establishment of such programs met strong political opposition to the idea of altering admissions requirements for the purpose of redressing racism. This backlash pushed most remedial coursework out of four-year colleges (Okechukwu). Similarly, Kynard has demonstrated that Open Admissions was accepted briefly for its political utility in constructing "the image of public higher education as egalitarian,"

but was quickly abandoned when white stakeholders no longer wanted or needed that image (166). As Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu, Mary Soliday, and Steve Lamos have detailed in their histories, Basic Writing programs were racialized as serving students of color, even when they remained majority white. While writing instruction was included in demands for Open Admissions by activists, students of color, and faculty, Tessa Brown has shown that such programs operated in institutional environments that worked against them: marginalizing faculty of color, disproportionately failing students of color, and graduating white students at higher rates. The history of southern Open Admissions parallels this national history, demonstrating the limited and political nature of Open Admissions at HWCUs. Southern states that used Open Admissions programs to try to avoid litigation remained unwilling to adopt the policies that activists demanded.

What, then, does this history suggest we should do about Basic Writing? As a white scholar, a writer using what April Baker-Bell calls “White Mainstream English,” and an only occasional teacher of Basic Writing (mostly outsourced to community colleges in my post-desegregation state), I am cautious about the conclusions I draw from this history. My language proficiency has never been questioned, and my access to education and employment has never been threatened by racist language assessments. I will not resolve a thirty-year-old debate over whether Basic Writing contributes to segregation, which has played out in the pages of *Journal of Basic Writing*. In 1993, William Jones argued that Basic Writing programs were “Jim-Crow way stations for minority students” in HWCUs, but he argued in support of alternative approaches taken at HBCUs (73). In 1997, Ira Shor called Basic Writing placement “our apartheid.” Recent scholarship on the history of Basic Writing pedagogy and labor (Brown) and placement practices (Molloy, Fonville, and Salam) details how Basic Writing at HWCUs stems “root and branch” from segregation and white supremacy. Elsewhere scholars have pointed out that Basic Writing histories are themselves segregated, focusing primarily on HWCUs and leaving out HBCUs and activist movements (Royster and Williams; Kynard; Ruiz). My contribution is to show that there is a southern history of Open Admissions—a tradition both of segregation and of activism—a history that troubles existing representations of Basic Writing as *itself* an access strategy. Access cannot be reduced simply to pedagogy or placement practices; rather, access is always governed by political and institutional policies that determine who enters and exits college, and in the U.S. those policies historically were used to maintain segregation and white supremacy in higher education.

Situating Postsecondary Desegregation in the History of Open Admissions

The Open Admissions movement emerged at the intersection of two historical developments in the mid-20th century: the tiering of postsecondary institutions by admissions requirements, popularized in the 1960s based on Clark Kerr's model for the California system, and demands for the desegregation of HWCUs. These debates over admissions and institutional tiering were precipitated by the enrollment expansion of higher education following World War II and by civil rights activism and protests on college campuses in the 1960s. The California model, which became influential nationally, adopted Open Admissions only within a lower tier—typically, community colleges. However, activists in the late 1960s and 1970s demanded Open Admissions apply to elite universities as one of many changes necessary to desegregate HWCUs.

Most famously, in 1969 at the City College of New York (CCNY), Black and Puerto Rican protestors demanded changes to admissions practices and the founding of ethnic studies programs within the City University of New York (CUNY) (“Five Demands”). These demands included the guaranteed admission of all high school graduates in the city, resulting in demographic enrollment proportionate to the city's high school graduates. Students also stated that every admitted applicant should “receive checks and the proper courses to overcome individual deficiencies” (“Five Demands”). Citing this demand, the Board of Higher Education of the City of New York proposed an Open Admissions policy to encourage “the ethnic integration of the colleges,” but it also stressed the need for remedial programs to ensure that the “open door” would not become “a revolving door” (189). The bargain over admissions was therefore conditioned on retention, which politicians, courts, and institutions began to use to measure the success of desegregation-era programs. What made this condition risky for CUNY is that Open Admissions applied to (and therefore risked the reputation of) CUNY's most prestigious institutions; it was not isolated to a lower tier of access institutions, as in the California model (Soliday).

However, the broader philosophy of Open Admissions—that is, democratic access to higher education with the aim of racially reparatory programs—predated CUNY's program. Kynard credits HBCUs with “inventing both the theory and sustained practice of open admissions” (177). Both state-funded HWCUs and HBCUs employed non-selective (but racially restrictive) admissions prior to the enrollment expansion of the

1940s and 1950s (Okechukwu). But unlike HWCUs, many HBCUs offered non-discriminatory Open Admissions, courses on Black literature and history, and innovative support programs, including novel forms of Basic Writing—all before CUNY.⁴ Although HBCUs had a record of successfully educating Black students, their policies did not become a model for HWCUs during desegregation, particularly in the South where failed resistance to desegregation turned to minimal compliance designed to avoid litigation.

Postsecondary desegregation, as historian Peter Wallenstein argues, was an extended process (19). In 1890, the second Morrill Act required segregated states to establish or fund public HBCUs in order to continue receiving federal land grant funding for higher education. From 1890 through 1935, seventeen states operated legally segregated postsecondary systems, and HBCUs enrolled and graduated nearly all Black students in higher education in the U.S. (Wallenstein; Wooten). As Wallenstein explains, HWCUs might best be characterized not as white, but as anti-Black, reserving their most ardent resistance for Black applicants. Following the 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, southern states resisted desegregation, employing strategies, ranging from violence to stalling tactics, to maintain segregation in higher education (Wallenstein). After *Brown*, eight states operated segregated university systems until the passage of the Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which denied federal funding to any institution that discriminated on the basis of race (Wallenstein 16). However, when racial patterns in enrollment persisted, HEW was forced to issue Title VI citations against states, a process that involved litigation and oversight from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) (Brown; Perna et al.). This enforcement raised questions about whether institutions had any legal obligation beyond removing race-based admissions. In other words, if a state's universities remained racially identifiable, but race was not explicitly used to deny admissions, was a university considered desegregated?

This question became increasingly important as investigations by the OCR in 1969 revealed patterns of segregation in more than half of formerly segregated states (Haynes). These investigations prompted HEW to monitor states' desegregation process. If HWCUs and HBCUs in the same state had different admissions requirements, particularly in terms of required standardized test scores, those differences made the state vulnerable to accusations that it was using admissions to maintain segregation. Mississippi was taken to court for this reason, after the state's flagship HWCUs (the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, and the University of Southern Mississippi) adopted a minimum ACT score of 15 in the 1960s,

more than twice the average score of Black students (Supreme Court of the United States, *United States v. Fordice*). While the state defended tiered admissions as maintaining academic standards, the court called this defense a “midpassage justification for perpetuating a policy enacted originally to discriminate against black students” (Supreme Court of the United States, *United States v. Fordice*). Tiered admissions were clearly segregationist in the South after *Brown*.

In contrast, nominal Open Admissions policies in states like Tennessee and Louisiana were less obviously segregationist. These policies functioned as the postsecondary equivalent of “freedom of choice” plans, which were implemented by non-compliant K-12 school districts under the auspices of giving students a choice to attend either the historically white or the historically Black school in the district, placing the onus for desegregation entirely on students. In 1968, the Supreme Court ruled in *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* that freedom of choice plans did not promote desegregation because the choice was artificial: Black students feared attending the white school, and white students viewed the Black school as inferior. But in 1969 the Supreme Court affirmed that *Green* did not apply to higher education by upholding an Alabama district court ruling that argued K-12 desegregation would “probably resolve” the problem of college segregation, so no action was needed beyond nondiscriminatory admissions (United States District Court, M.D. Alabama). It was not until 1992, in *United States v. Fordice*, that the Supreme Court conceded that admissions policies were suspect in university systems with a history of segregation, and, as Justice Antonin Scalia noted in his partial dissent, this also made Open Admissions policies suspect where they had been used in segregation.

State-wide Open Admissions was adopted not out of sincere interest in desegregation or a recognition of HBCUs’ effective access strategies, but because nominal Open Admissions posed little threat to the segregated order of higher education. As I show below, Tennessee and Louisiana presented nominal Open Admissions policies as evidence of their commitment to desegregation, but by the 1980s, courts dismantled such programs, finding them counterproductive to desegregation. Their solution was tiered admissions, with remediation viewed as critical to desegregation but now further distanced from four-year colleges and universities by its placement primarily within community colleges. These decisions undermined Basic Writing innovations at HBCUs by framing Basic Writing primarily as means of keeping underprepared students out of regular college coursework at four-year HWCUs. Consequently, the philosophy of Open Admissions for racial justice

was delegitimized, and Black students were further coded as underprepared in educational policies.

Nominal Open Admissions and the (Re)Turn to Remediation in Tennessee and Louisiana

Nominal Open Admissions in the South following *Brown* might best be understood as states justifying ongoing segregation by pointing to identical race-neutral, non-selective admissions policies at public HWCUs and HBCUs. But nominal Open Admissions did not radically alter admissions requirements in the 1960s, when the role of standardized testing was still ill defined. Rather, states retroactively crafted the defense that they did *not* create differential admissions requirements in the 1960s (as Mississippi did) to resist desegregation. For example, in *Geier v. University of Tennessee*, the United States Court of Appeals summarized Tennessee's defense of its policies: "While conceding. . . a state-imposed dual system of public higher education prior to 1960, [Tennessee's trustees] contend that the State fulfilled its constitutional obligation to establish a unitary system when it instituted an 'open-door' admissions policy." As a legal defense, nominal Open Admissions represented freedom of choice. In practice, the focus on admissions ignored how literacy remediation policies restricted HBCUs and implemented systems for linguistic racism at HWCUs.

That nominal Open Admissions was symbolic is evident in comparing admissions policies before and after 1960 at Tennessee State University (TSU), the state's public HBCU, to its flagship HWCU, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (UTK). Founded in 1912 in Nashville as the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School, TSU was by 1946 a master's-level land grant HBCU accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools ("Undergraduate Catalog 1946-47"). Both before and after 1960, admission was open to any applicant who was 16 years old, submitted high school transcripts, took appropriate placement tests, and could "furnish satisfactory evidence of good moral character (usually the recommendation of the high school principal)" ("Undergraduate Catalog 1946-47" 25; see also "Undergraduate Catalog 1965-66" 35).⁵ By comparison, UTK had similar policies before and after 1960, although after 1960 students took the ACT for placement, whereas before students took "whatever other tests are set by the Committee on Admissions from year to year" ("General Catalog: 1955-56" 72; "General Catalog: 1962-1964" 22). Although there were changes

after 1960, Open Admissions served primarily as a rhetorical strategy, and it did not preclude the use of testing for placement into remedial coursework.

Admissions may have been non-selective, but state policies provided mechanisms for literacy surveillance, including requirements that students pass an English proficiency test to graduate and that faculty report students for English 'deficiencies' at any time to the Committee on Student English ("Undergraduate Catalog: 1946-57"; "Undergraduate Record 1955-56").⁶ Unlike UTK, TSU resisted and rewrote these requirements in the late 1950s. In 1957, TSU removed the committee and reporting system from its catalogue, although the requirement to pass the Junior English Test (later renamed the English Proficiency Test) in "simple expository English" remained ("Undergraduate Catalogue 1957-58" 39). As late as 1975, UTK still had an official policy allowing faculty to report any student's English usage by

simply check[ing] the column headed 'English' on the quarterly grade sheets. A student checked by any faculty member will be required to remedy the deficiency through work in the Writing Laboratory. Remedial work in the laboratory shall be started as soon as possible after the student has been notified of his deficiency and shall continue until the student's performance in English has been declared satisfactory by the laboratory[,] instructor, or both. ("General Catalog: 1975-76," 19)

These forms of literacy surveillance gave a predominantly white faculty at UTK a means of making proficiency in White Mainstream English a determinant of whether a student could progress through a college degree. Such policies provided a system for linguistic racism that operated independent of admissions and differentiated practices at HBCUs and HWCUs during nominal Open Admissions.

In contrast, TSU's writing program developed innovative approaches to placement and course credit under the direction of Alma Dunn Jones, an alumna of the college with an MA from Columbia, who served as the Chair of Freshman English and Composition from 1932 to 1972 ("Undergraduate Catalog: 1971-73"; TSU, "Sixty-Seventh"). Through the early 1960s, TSU placed Basic Writing students into English 100, "English Fundamentals," "A non-credit course designed for students who give evidence by entrance examination of their inability to meet the standards of English 101" ("Undergraduate Catalogue 1963-64" 129). Upon passing English 100, students took 3 quarters of first-year composition focused on "various areas of the

communication skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening” (“Undergraduate Catalog 1946-47” 143). It is worth noting, however, that students would have taken this course alongside courses on Black history and literature and core courses teaching “the contribution that all races and nations have made to our present civilization” (“Undergraduate Catalog 1946-47” 148). In 1965, TSU replaced English 100 with alternative support offered through the Communications Clinic, an integrated reading, writing, speaking, and listening center founded in the 1950s. This arrangement allowed students to earn credit for first-year composition and receive academic support at the same time. In the early 1970s, this curricular structure was formalized into a paired non-credit laboratory course—an innovation predating modern corequisite or studio Basic Writing courses (“Undergraduate Catalog: 1971-73” 99). The Clinic also expanded to serve all students, who could attend the Communications Clinic voluntarily (“Undergraduate Catalog: 1971-73” 11). Additionally, TSU provided support options for students who failed the English graduation test: students could choose either to attend the Clinic or audit a composition class (“Undergraduate Catalog: 1971-73” 31). These curricular revisions provided flexible approaches that destigmatized writing support and offered options to students.

However, TSU’s approaches to writing remediation changed after *Geier v. University of Tennessee* (1979) ordered its merger with neighboring HWCU, the University of Tennessee at Nashville (UTN), ruling Open Admissions a failure for desegregation. By 1975, UTN’s enrollment remained nearly 90% white, and TSU’s enrollment remained nearly 90% Black. At UTK, Black enrollment was still only 6.4% of the total student enrollment (United States Court of Appeals). The merger of UTN into TSU allowed TSU to remain an HBCU, but it ended Open Admissions and implemented new admissions policies requiring a minimum ACT score and limiting conditional admissions to no more than 5% of admitted freshman (“Undergraduate Catalog: 1981-1983” 12). In other words, the ruling not only dictated placement methods, it limited the number of remedial students TSU could admit. Additionally, the merger expanded the non-credit Basic Writing courses TSU offered. Basic Writing was divided into two non-credit courses, ENG 098 and ENG 099, the former focused on sentences and paragraphs and the latter on paragraphs and essays (“Undergraduate Catalog: 1981-1983” 80). Students who failed the required graduation test also had to enroll in a remedial course (“Undergraduate Catalog: 1981-1983” 28). These changes replaced flexible support with conventional non-credit coursework consistent with state HWCUs. The state’s failure to adopt TSU’s innovations undermined the university’s

Basic Writing program, resulting in more remediation requirements and the erasure of a historic corequisite model from Basic Writing history.

Rather than facilitating desegregation, the merger prompted a massive white flight in enrollment. By 1983, nearly 80% of TSU students were Black, and more than 90% of entering freshman were Black; prior to the merger, the combined enrollment of TSU and UTN was 51.2% white (Warnick). In *Geier v. University of Tennessee*, the judge had warned that “the efforts of TSU to retain its identification as a black university... has had a strongly deterrent effect upon its attractiveness to white applicants” (United States Court of Appeals). Although the comment was intended as a caution against a Black identity for the merged TSU, it predicted the ongoing challenges that TSU would face due to white students’ attitudes about HBCUs. TSU’s desegregation was challenged again in 1984, and the settlement again presented TSU’s “black identification” as a problem (United States District Court, M.D. Tennessee). That settlement set a goal of 50% white enrollment by 1993. To accomplish this, the settlement required TSU to raise its GPA and ACT scores over 5 years, with a cap on the number of students admitted by “alternative admissions standards” and placed into “developmental education programs” (United States District Court, M.D. Tennessee). The settlement stipulated that state community colleges could not change their admissions requirements, since they provided access to higher education. In other words, the settlement made TSU’s admissions more selective, limited its remedial programs, and assigned community colleges the responsibility for remediation. These policies reveal how selective admissions was part of a policy approach designed to mitigate TSU’s historical identity as an access institution for Black students in order to attract more white students. The settlement did not permit Open Admissions or the flexible writing support that had characterized TSU’s past efforts. Rather, it cast Open Admissions as a threat to white students’ perceptions of HBCUs and therefore a threat to desegregation.

While Tennessee’s termination of Open Admissions shows the effect that desegregation litigation had on HBCUs and Basic Writing, Louisiana’s history demonstrates the judicial logic behind similar rulings against Open Admissions. Louisiana adopted nominal Open Admissions after a 1954 case (before *Brown*), *Constantine v. Southwestern Louisiana Institute*, ordered the state’s HWCUs to admit Black students. In her chronicle of this history at one HWCU, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL), Nicole Pepinster Greene describes how desegregation-era Open Admissions racialized remedial writing instruction.⁷ As she details, ULL faculty viewed Basic Writing as critical to desegregation during Open Admissions, but ULL’s Basic Writing

course, English 90: Remedial English, was fraught with pedagogical and retention problems that perpetuated racism. As Greene reports, faculty allowed students to write in “nonstandard English” on informal journaling assignments but not for essays (Greene 74). This approach, according to Baker-Bell, “perpetuates anti-blackness as it adheres to a politics of respectability, surrenders to whiteness, and does not challenge Anti-Black Linguistics Racism” (28). Presenting Black English as inadequate for professional or public writing presumes ongoing white supremacy in the academy and workplace by requiring White Mainstream English for success. Accordingly, Greene found that Black students disproportionately placed into remediation, failed, and dropped out (Greene 75-85). ULL also hid its retention data and misrepresented enrollment and pass rates when reporting to the desegregation enforcement monitoring committee (Greene 85).⁸ Greene’s history suggests that nominal Open Admissions in Louisiana allowed some HWCUs to implement policies that determined admission to regular college coursework on the performance of White Mainstream English.

Greene’s history of ULL may not reflect every Open Admissions program in Louisiana during this time, but it demonstrates that nominal Open Admissions programs had practices and policies that contributed to higher attrition rates for Black students—a problem that the court specifically used to justify overturning Open Admissions in 1987, when a review of Louisiana’s progress found segregation had worsened in the prior decade (Diamond). In 1988, the enrollment of ULL was 79.2% white, Louisiana State University was 88% white, and all state HBCUs had enrollments that were more than 80% Black (United States District Court, E.D. Louisiana). The district court found that Louisiana’s Open Admissions “fail[ed] to organize students by academic ability,” which it argued explained why less than half of students admitted graduated within six years, with the highest attrition rates in the state’s HBCUs (United States District Court, E.D. Louisiana). Critically, the ruling cast racial disparities in attrition rates as a failure to provide *enough* remediation, rather than a failure of the kind of remediation being offered or other system and institutional policies that contribute to attrition. This ruling claimed that Open Admissions had a demotivating effect on high schools and that raising admissions requirements in four-year institutions would “forc[e] high schools to respond to the preparation challenge” (United States District Court, E.D. Louisiana). The court then ordered Louisiana to develop a tiered admissions plan, with remedial programs phased out at selective institutions beginning in 1990. Meanwhile, community colleges were given a larger role in desegregation as they were ordered to provide “remedial

education of those who might be excluded from the less accessible four-year college system, thereby helping to ensure a racially balanced system” (United States District Court, E.D. Louisiana). This ruling cast remediation in a larger role and created new obstacles, such as transfer, that displaced responsibility for desegregation onto high schools and community colleges and allowed the state to control public HBCUs’ admissions policies (Harbour; Wooten). Clifford P. Harbour argues that states assigned community colleges the role of facilitating desegregation to avoid making larger changes to their university systems (148). As the Louisiana ruling demonstrates, that role was defined by remediation policies that avoided larger questions about racial disparities in retention.

In relocating Basic Writing and Open Admissions primarily to community colleges, desegregation in Tennessee and Louisiana reproduced the same assumptions about Black students that undermined their Open Admissions programs: that desegregation did not require substantially changing HWCUs and that Black students should bear the responsibility for desegregation by completing remediation, now relocated to community colleges. As Harbour argues, the side effect was that, for states, community colleges “only had relevancy and importance in the litigation to the extent their operations were a benefit (or detriment)” to state politics (168). This history suggests that presenting Basic Writing as key to access for Black students ignores the larger system in which access is circumscribed through a racialized and racist system of instruction and surveillance that allows four-year HWCUs to define academic standards, against which non-normative literacy practices and retention rates are measured. Nominal Open Admissions served the pretense of desegregation while eliding (or in Tennessee’s case overturning) transformative Open Admissions. This is especially tragic in light of the vision that many civil rights activists articulated for transformative Open Admissions in Georgia, where, as I will show, selective admissions policies served segregationist ends.

“Lily-White” Universities and the Countervision of Transformative Open Admissions

Historian John Hope Franklin described segregationist practices as full of “contradictions and inconsistencies” because they were primarily designed “to maintain racial distinctions at all costs” (142). Nowhere is this point more evident than in the case of postsecondary admissions in the South: even as some states maintained segregation through nominal

Open Admissions, other states did so with tiered admissions, with the most selective tier of institutions comprising the state's prestigious HWCUs. In Georgia, postsecondary desegregation continually emphasized selective admissions for maintaining academic standards, presenting remediation as key to desegregation. In response, civil rights activists argued that a failure to implement transformative Open Admissions would threaten the identities of HBCUs and result in segregationist remedial programs that perpetuated the exclusion of Black students from the prestigious universities.

During the period in which Georgia was monitored by the OCR for postsecondary desegregation enforcement (1969-1987), Georgia continually presented tiered admissions along with remedial instruction (called Special Studies) as key to its desegregation plan.⁹ In 1977, Georgia produced a desegregation plan not unlike what Louisiana and Tennessee later adopted, in which desegregation depended on geographically accessible lower-tier colleges with remedial coursework, arguing that access institutions promote desegregation by providing a path for transferring to the state's top-tier universities, all of which were HWCUs (Oxford et al. I.15). Remedial Special Studies courses in English, reading, and math were described as "the heart of the problem of increasing minority student enrollment" (Oxford et al. I.161). The plan justified this focus by describing the "cultural and educational backgrounds" of Black students as "not conducive to strong academic development" (Oxford et al. II.48). To identify students for remediation, the state required applicants to earn a combined SAT score of 650 for regular admissions, below which students would be required to take additional placement tests (Oxford et al. II.52). However, individual institutions could set that score higher if they wished, effectively allowing institutions to discourage applicants by setting a higher bar for bypassing remediation requirements.

This strategy was criticized by an anonymous group of activists in a counterproposal, *An Alternative Plan for the Desegregation of the University System of Georgia*. Published in 1977, the *Alternative Plan* originated during a workshop on "Problems of Poor People and Minorities in Higher Education in Georgia," attended by citizens, students, and educators (1). The *Alternative Plan* described Special Studies as "a new category of segregated students" (60). Furthermore, the authors pointed out that applying this statewide requirement at all University System of Georgia institutions would turn HBCUs into "primarily remedial institutions—thereby reinforcing the dual system of education" (*Alternative Plan* 60). Indeed, data from SAT score distributions from 1975-1976 showed that this requirement would place 1.2% of incoming freshman into Special Studies at the University of Georgia, the state's

flagship HWCU; in contrast, 75.4% of first-year students at Savannah State, one of the state's 3 public HBCUs, would be placed into remediation using this requirement, nearly eliminating the entire freshman class from regular college coursework (*Alternative Plan* 61). The institutional disparities between HBCUs and HWCUs would be insurmountable based on these numbers.

The *Alternative Plan* argued that the state's remediation requirements missed the point. The authors stated:

It is illogical and unreasonable to think that the retention of Black students within higher educational institutions which have historically denied them entry can be achieved without the alteration of those institutions themselves taking place. To simply include a large Black population of students within racist institutions and expect them to do well in an academically and otherwise hostile environment is, at best, foolish.... The [desegregation plan] did not and could not even allude to this problem since the Regents see the problem of the desegregation of the University System of Georgia as merely a problem of the artificial introduction of Black students—in a token manner—into previously white institutions. (*Alternative Plan* 67-69)

Activists criticized the white-centric view of desegregation as remediation. This is not to dismiss racial inequities in K-12 education, although sources suggest that Black students' academic preparation and performance were better than the media portrayed (Boyd). However, by reducing desegregation to a problem of remediation, the University System of Georgia not only reinforced racist stereotypes of Black students as unfit for college, it also crafted structural responses that disproportionately disadvantaged Black students and HBCUs.

The *Alternative Plan* proposed transformative Open Admissions with innovative Basic Writing coursework, similar to the approach taken by TSU prior to its merger. The *Alternative Plan* stated, “*open admissions* to all of the public institutions of higher education is essential to their desegregation. By open admissions we mean that anyone who possesses a high-school diploma or G.E.D. certificate should be admitted to any and all of the institutions within the University System of Georgia. Without open admissions the lily-white institutions can at best engage in the shallow charade of tokenism” (10, emphasis in original). The *Alternative Plan* proposed all required courses count toward degree-credit, eliminating pre-collegiate and remedial

coursework (74). Instead of remediation, universities should develop writing support centers and new core courses in reading, courses “relevant to the Black experience and perspective,” and redesigned core courses including “the perspective of Black and other poor peoples... within the presentation of other relevant subject areas” (75). Furthermore, all academic support would be *voluntary*, with students participating in “an extensive program of individualized evaluative counseling for the purpose of ascertaining academic weaknesses that a student might have prior to registration,” and then advised on appropriate, optional support (75). Although reminiscent of today’s directed self-placement and co-requisite approaches to Basic Writing, this model proposed more radical actions, including eliminating grades and allowing students to retake courses “repeatedly until [the student] has developed sufficient skill to exit the course with full credit, based upon the judgment of the instructor concerned” (75). For these activists, a redesigned Basic Writing and core curriculum was as important as the removal of admissions requirements. Unfortunately, the *Alternative Plan* did not change the state’s desegregation plan, and like other segregated states, Georgia continues to have patterns of segregation, particularly in four-year institutions (Litolff).

Georgia’s tiered admissions and Tennessee and Louisiana’s nominal Open Admissions similarly attributed ongoing segregation to Black students’ academic preparation. Rather than enacting transformative Open Admissions, state plans forced HBCUs to alter their policies and programs and to offer extensive, state-mandated remedial coursework. Such resolutions increasingly made the process of negotiating desegregation risky for plaintiffs suing states or universities, especially as policy enforcement under President Ronald Reagan shifted to emphasize HBCUs recruiting white students and faculty. In Mississippi, for example, Black plaintiffs fought for Open Admissions at HBCUs in exchange for higher admissions requirements at HWCUs; however, the courts denied this request and instead mandated admissions and remediation requirements across the state’s institutions (Inman). Nowhere did desegregation emphasize the transformative Open Admissions practices that activists demanded.

The story of Open Admissions in postsecondary desegregation is critical to understanding the history of Open Admissions—its aims and ultimately its end. Desegregation offered an opportunity to rethink the segregated structure of higher education. Instead, states used it to normalize the practices of HWCUs and to justify institutional tiering and state-controlled remediation policies. As Melissa E. Wooten explains, “Surely if there had been will, imagination, and political pressure the region might have developed a

solution that did away with traditionally white colleges in favor of opening schools that had never erected exclusionary admission policies... Instead, traditionally white colleges were understood as mainstream organizations while black colleges were seen as deviations from the norm” (18). The story of Open Admissions and Basic Writing is case in point, as innovative Basic Writing programs and proposals were erased from history by failing to forefront HBCUs’ work creating access to higher education.

Post-Desegregation Basic Writing

While political favor for selective admissions may have played the greatest role in eliminating Open Admissions outside of community colleges, it would be a mistake to discount the role of litigation that ultimately deemed Open Admissions counterproductive to desegregation. These policies did not consider alternative models of writing coursework or a redesigned core curriculum, which activists argued were essential to enacting racial justice in higher education. Rather, the courts and states treated remediation as key to Black student enrollment in HWCUs, rationalizing stalled desegregation as a product of Black students’ academic preparation.

For higher education, this history has had documented negative effects. The movement of Open Admissions to lower tier colleges appears to exacerbate racial segregation. In a 2018 report on enrollment and graduation rates at public institutions, Carnevale and colleagues found that white students are overrepresented in public selective colleges. Black and Latinx students make up 36% of the college population, but only 19% of enrollment at selective public institutions, despite a sufficient number of Black and Latinx students scoring above average on standardized tests (4). The overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in non-selective colleges, which spend less on students and instruction than selective colleges, results in higher attrition rates and lower degree completion rates for these student groups (Carnevale et al. 8-10). Even more concerning, Black enrollment at selective public institutions has declined in about half of states with substantial African American populations since 2005 (Carnevale et al. 25). Studies also show that ongoing segregation remains worse in formerly segregated states (Perna et al.; Litolff). The reasons for these patterns are likely more complex, but as selective institutions value higher average test scores for entering classes of students, they magnify disparities in standardized testing. The preference for selectivity in admissions perpetuates racial injustice and further normalizes

conventional remediation policies that define who is prepared for college and where students who are “underprepared” should go.

For Basic Writing, the way that HBCUs’ histories were effaced and overwritten by political intervention has limited the visions for programs—an oversight long noted in our field (Royster and Williams; Green; Jackson, Jackson, and Tafari). HBCUs and civil rights activists were strong opponents of standardized testing, and the lack of attention given to their arguments may have solidified the role of testing and mandatory placement in Basic Writing, making it harder to argue for degree-credit for remediation, the mainstreaming of Basic Writing, or alternative placement measures. Post-desegregation remediation policies routinely ignored research suggesting that the predictive value of SAT and ACT scores varied by student and institutional types.¹⁰ The different forms Basic Writing took at UTK, TSU, ULL, and Georgia’s university system suggest that Basic Writing is not a straightforward site of access; rather, policies surrounding admissions, literacy assessment, degree credit, and student agency play as much a role as the course itself in determining its outcomes for students. What might it mean, then, for Basic Writing scholarship to consider policy work as central to the field’s reckoning with its legacy of racism and injustice? As we grapple with the need for pedagogical change, we must also recognize that policies still define access and identities for Basic Writing students. Perhaps this is why HBCUs like TSU innovated in institutional policy work that allowed flexibility, credit, and value for Basic Writing despite the limitations of state requirements.

Could Open Admissions ever restructure U.S. higher education? The recent questioning of SAT and ACT scores in admissions at selective universities suggests that perhaps it could, with sufficient public pressure (Hubler). Yet, if the history of Open Admissions in the South tells us anything, it is that we should interrogate changes to admissions that fail to address other policies. As Horner and Lu argue, Open Admissions was ingrained in the ideology of “equal opportunity” that “tended to equate the work of basic writing. . . with the provision of skills (to ensure equal opportunity). The seeming innocuousness of that equation stems from its denial of social and political oppression, substituting the provision of politically innocent ‘skills’ for political means of fighting such oppression and thus renaming oppression as cognitive lack” (20). The ideology of equal opportunity not only informed Basic Writing pedagogy. It informed admissions, retention, and remediation policies that defined the parameters of college-level literacy. We must change more than just pedagogy or placement practices to unseat this ideology. That is where knowing the history of Open Admissions, and its connection

to desegregation, is necessary. Should the moment return, our field must be ready to understand the full implications of what Open Admissions has meant, where it has been practiced, and what it might mean for the future.

Notes

1. The Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, which published the report, was one of the curriculum study institutes founded by the National Defense Education Act of 1958, tasked with developing innovative English instruction. HEW was the precursor to the modern U.S. Department of Education.
2. I use the term HWCU, following the recommendation of Lockett and RudeWalker, to describe colleges and universities that excluded Black students, either by law or practice, prior to the 1964 Civil Rights Act.
3. I use both “remediation” and “Basic Writing” throughout this essay. I use remediation because most legal and policy documents preferred that term and did not use “Basic Writing.” Where appropriate, I use Basic Writing to describe remedial English courses.
4. Segregation was enforced at state-funded HBCUs by the state. Wooten explains that many HBCUs would have admitted white students freely if allowed by the states (25). Efforts at racially integrated colleges and universities were often undercut by outside forces, such as accrediting agencies (Smith).
5. Letters of recommendation were ubiquitous in state-funded HWCUs and HBCUs at the time. In Georgia, a law was briefly implemented in the early 1960s requiring alumni letters of recommendation for segregationist purposes. In Mississippi, recommendation requirements were used to deny James Meredith admission to the University of Mississippi. It is unclear to what extent such requirements at HBCUs may have been mandated by the state or by accrediting organizations.
6. The English proficiency tests may have been a state requirement. The wording at different institutions, even in the early bulletins, is almost identical. The wording does not diverge until the 1970s when TSU changed its policies. TSU and UTK, however, were governed by two different state university systems at that time.
7. ULL changed names three times during the period I discuss in this essay. It began as Southwestern Louisiana Institute, then University of Southwestern Louisiana, and finally the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. For the sake of clarity, I use ULL throughout.

8. The OCR first cited Louisiana for ongoing segregation in its universities in 1969, but Louisiana refused to produce a desegregation plan. After the Department of Justice sued the state in 1974, a desegregation plan was negotiated and implemented in 1981. The state's progress was set to be reviewed in 1987.
9. Unlike Tennessee and Louisiana, Georgia did not have separate litigation. Instead, Georgia was monitored by the OCR, part of HEW, for Title VI compliance, a process that began with investigations of 19 states in 1969 and resulted in citations in half of those states over several decades. Plaintiffs filed suit against HEW for failure to enforce these citations in a case that began as *Adams v. Richardson* (1973). A 1977 ruling in the case, *Adams v. Richardson* (1977), outlined requirements for desegregation plans, which resulted in the 1977 plan. The University System of Georgia's plan was not initially accepted, but after revisions in 1978, it was finally approved and implemented in the 1979-1980 academic year. See also Haynes; Litolff.
10. Two studies from the time are illustrative. Sharon found in 1970 that mathematics placement was more accurate than English placement procedures. In 1983, Baird found evidence that institutional characteristics, including programs, institutional type, location, etc., affected the extent to which typical predictive measures were accurate.

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Open Admissions, Resilience, and Basic Writing Ecologies: A New Cultural Narrative

Joyce Olewski Inman

ABSTRACT: This article considers the complex ecosystems of Basic Writing programs through the lens of resilience science, particularly William E. Rees' work in the field. The author uses critical discourse analysis to analyze articles published in The Journal of Basic Writing from 1995 to the present and identifies institutional narratives that illustrate patterns of development and disassembly in Basic Writing programming that align with Rees' adaptive cycle: narratives of growth, conservation, release, and reorganization. The author then shares her own institutional narrative and grapples with the conflicted legacy of Basic Writing and what it means to move forward and attempt to create resilient programming in our current climate of political and cultural division.

KEYWORDS: Basic Writing; conservation phase; growth phase; institutional narratives; Open Admissions; program narratives; release phase; reorganization phase; resilience science

The provost explains that the university is about higher education, not remediation, especially given the times (one of many budget crises in my career; they come often; financial crises are a normal part of capitalism; according to Marx and Keynes, though each providing different ways of dealing with crisis). The university cannot afford the luxury of remediation...

About ten years after that first meeting with a provost, the other state university in the same state: Same conversation, same threat, same result, given the promise of assimilation, a kind of enculturation.

—Victor Villanueva

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The Journal of Basic Writing (JBW) is, in many ways, a historical record of how Basic Writing practitioners responded to the changing needs of basic writers and teachers of writing during and after the era of Open Admissions. The journal allows us to map the ways Basic Writing programs across the country are both created and dissolved in response to external pressures—to contemplate the ways Basic Writing may or may not be resilient and to consider the various elements of the ecological systems within which these programs exist. George Otte and Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk provide a history of the discipline and of the journal in *Basic Writing*, and their account includes an interesting reflection on the late 1990s and the ways *JBW* articles often provided “accounts of the dismantling of Basic Writing programs” (34). The authors note that while scholars in the field have always had differing opinions on the ethics of Basic Writing programming, the majority of the programs that were dismantled were shuttered due to lack of resources and the vulnerability of the students and programs themselves, not due to pedagogical considerations (34). Victor Villanueva’s cautionary tale of his experiences with building and dismantling of Basic Writing programs at different institutions and his sobering articulation, “same conversation, same threat, same result,” establishes the consistency of this problematic narrative throughout scholarship on Basic Writing programming—a narrative that resonates with any Basic Writing practitioner or administrator, as the history of Basic Writing programming clearly illustrates the cycles of crisis and response that began with Open Admissions initiatives.

A careful review of *JBW*’s contents suggest that Otte and Mlynarczyk are correct, and the narratives published in *JBW* (including Villanueva’s) illustrate the internal and external pressures that threatened the resilience of Basic Writing programming across the nation. In their overview, Otte and Mlynarczyk claim that the 1990s ushered in the field’s recognition of the ways Basic Writing might indeed be a “project of acculturation” and that narratives of Basic Writing programs illustrate how external forces were “once again threatening to eradicate support structures and to limit access for weaker students” (26-27). Similarly, in her 2018 article “Disciplinary Writing in Basic Writing Education,” Lynn Reid provides a combination of distant and close reading of programmatic narratives from 1995 to 2015 in *JBW* in an attempt “to focus on feature-length articles that included narrative accounts of the politics of remediation playing out in a specific local context” (15). Like Otte and Mlynarczyk, Reid recognizes the ways these programmatic narratives are bound by external pressures, implicitly acknowledging the complicated ecosystems these programs inhabit.

Of course, the concept of writing and writing classrooms as ecologies is not new. Sustainability theories have been applied to writing practices (Cooper; Dobrin and Weisser; Patrick), writing classrooms (Owens; Shepley; Inoue), and writing programs (Gilliam; Devet; Kahn; Ratliff), as teacher-researchers note the relationships between environments, the individuals and materials inhabiting them, and the actions and reactions present in those environments. These studies all focus on ecologies as localized and on the concept of sustainability, “the degree to which a process or enterprise is able to be maintained or continued” (OED 2b). We are, however, beginning to see a shift from sustainability to resilience, an implicit acknowledgement that sustainability is an ideal while resilience acknowledges the need for adaptability and recovery from problematic influences and actions. This move towards resilience is one that resonates given the explicit environmental and political pressures on Basic Writing programming. Practitioners and researchers need to acknowledge the vulnerabilities of Basic Writing programs and focus on programmatic missions that acknowledge the need for resilience and on how to create programs and classrooms that can recover quickly and serve their students effectively even in the face of difficulties.

In this article, I consider the complex ecosystems of Basic Writing programs, the cycles these systems have experienced since Open Admissions movements of the 1970s, and the ways scholarly narratives portray these cycles. I begin with discussions of resilience and Basic Writing programs in an effort to consider what might be described as a volatile history and how we might use resilience science, particularly William E. Rees’ work in the field, in an effort to make more lasting institutional change when it comes to serving students many deem underprepared. Then, to illustrate the patterns of design and failure that emerge in narratives of Basic Writing programs, I examine the *JBW* archives and the local histories of programs developed and disassembled in response to political, economic, and ethical pressures that are part of the conflicted legacy of Basic Writing. I then share my own institutional narrative, adding to the *JBW* archive of narratives about Basic Writing. The final section of the article grapples with the tensions inherent in Basic Writing programming and makes recommendations for moving forward in our current climate of political and cultural division that early scholars of Open Admissions and Basic Writing would, unfortunately, immediately recognize.

Resilience Science and the Ecologies of Basic Writing

Best known as the originator of the “ecological footprint” concept, William Rees’ work in sustainability, ecology, and ecological economics engages diverse aspects of our relationship to our local and global economies, from the housing crisis (2018), to the climate crisis (2019), to Covid-19 (2020). Experts in resilience science define resilience thinking as “understanding and engaging with a changing world. By understanding how and why the system as a whole is changing, we are better placed to build a capacity to work with change, as opposed to being a victim of it” (Walker and Salt 14). And according to Rees, “understanding and coping with change is at the heart of resilience thinking” (Rees, “Thinking” 33). This concept of adapting to change should be familiar to scholars of Basic Writing, as the majority of our work and the scholarly accounting of that work responds to external and internal pressures related to who our students are (Horner and Lu; Gray-Rosendale, “Back to the Future”; Ritter), access for students others might deem underprepared (Rose; Fox; Stanley), and programmatic measures that might best address institutional, communal, and student needs (Bartholomae; Shor; Soliday; Lamos).

In “The Adaptive Cycle: Resilience in the History of First-Year Composition,” Clancy Ratliff employs Rees’ explanations of resilience science to document the ecological life cycle of first-year composition and to discuss ways the field of composition and rhetoric might “reorganize” first-year writing classes at local levels to improve resiliency. Ratliff explores the ways first-year composition—as an ecological system—may be viewed through Rees’ systematic lens; however, Ratliff only gestures toward Open Admissions and the Basic Writing programming that the movement generated. Open Admissions, the GI Bill, and Basic Writing classes, in the ecology she puts forward, are merely contributing factors to the growth of first-year writing sequences as a whole (286). For the purposes of this article, we must consider Open Admissions and the localized implementations of the initiative as more than elements leading to the institutionalization of composition coursework, and Ratliff’s reliance on Rees’ theories of community planning, economics, and ecologies is a helpful starting point in zeroing in on Open Admissions and Basic Writing using resilience science.

Rees’ work in resilience science suggests the adaptive cycle includes four phases: the exploitation and rapid growth phase, the conservation phase, the release phase (Rees also refers to this as the “collapse” phase and in later works as “plague”), and the reorganization phase. In her article,

Ratliff encourages the field of composition and rhetoric to acknowledge the ways first-year writing sequences have adhered to this model with booms in undergraduate enrollment and cries of literacy crises contributing to the growth phase; continued public rhetoric related to literacy and a reliance on contingent labor during the conservation phase; moves toward expediency in graduate rates that led to students receiving credit for composition classes during the release phase; and the suggestion that composition may now be in the reorganization phase. Ratliff concludes her analogous exploration with a call for compositionists to consider how they might effectively preserve and encourage the role of writing in institutions of higher education. And while this is certainly an overly-simplified summary of Rees' work and Ratliff's efforts to employ the resilience science model in composition, it provides an interesting lens through which we can observe the cyclical growth and demise of Basic Writing programming via the narratives offered by Basic Writing professionals.

Finding Narratives of Resilience

I began this study with the intent of exploring how Basic Writing scholarship framed the dismantling of Basic Writing programs. As I will discuss later in this article, I was dealing with the failure of the Basic Writing program at my institution, and full of frustration at these circumstances, I felt the need to return to others' stories, thinking this might lead to answers of how the program at my institution might be reinvigorated and reassembled. In doing so, I couldn't help but consider Linda Adler-Kassner and Susanmarie Harrington's exploration of competing narratives in Basic Writing and their suggestion that "Basic Writing, however defined and however situated, is always a political act, and the stories that shape it have significant implications for students, the institutions they attend, and the culture(s) in which those students participate" (14). Like Adler-Kassner and Harrington, I was interested in the tensions and "break points" of Basic Writing, but I also wanted to delve into institutional accounts of how programs were created or dissolved. I suppose I hoped this might help me create some sort of master plan related to resilience in Basic Writing at my institution. In Otte and Mlynarczyk's overview of Basic Writing, they suggest that the late 1990s is when scholarship in the field began to publish accounts of Basic Writing programs being dismantled (26), so I began combing through issues of *JBW* beginning with the 1995 issues. I read *JBW* articles with the goal of finding patterns of assembling and disassembling programs that might have been

missed in previous studies of the journal's content (Gray-Rosendale; Center; Otte and Mlynarczyk; Reid).

I did not begin this process intending to focus on institutional narratives, however; but then I read Reid's "Disciplinary Reading in Basic Writing Graduate Education: The Politics of Remediation in *JBW*, 1995-2015." Her suggestion that these types of narratives provide a somewhat problematic depiction of our field, that "the reproduction of such stories, true or not, reinforces an image of Basic Writing professionals as increasingly without agency beyond our classrooms," struck me as significant (29). Of course, Reid's overarching argument focuses on ways we train graduate instructors and their interpretations of scholarly literature and, thus, the discipline, but her interpretation of the programmatic narratives offered in *JBW* (and the lack of agency they suggest) seemed like a strong starting point for a discussion of resilience.

In order to provide an example of how we might encourage nuanced readings of disciplinary literature, Reid examines local narratives that describe and confront the politics of literacy and address the roles of multiple stakeholders within an individual institution. I, too, am interested in these programmatic narratives, but my approach differs slightly in that I am hoping to better understand how to develop more resilient programming—particularly given the volatility of the ecological life of Basic Writing over the past five decades and what looks to be an even more insecure future moving forward. In addition, while cognizant of the fact that *JBW* is a product of the CUNY system, I think it is important to consider how scholars in programs outside of the CUNY system have discussed the measures that led to their adoption of new programming and the measures that may have led to their demise.

Thus, I chose to code *JBW* articles from 1995 to the present, and this meant reading and coding 242 articles. My coding process is informed by Thomas Huckin's critical discourse analysis methodology with his emphasis on identifying patterns of interest, questioning and verifying these patterns, and using "functional-rhetorical analysis" to interpret the results (90-93). My first reading of the articles involved summarizing the focus of each piece in order to determine patterns. Ultimately, four primary patterns of scholarship emerged: 1) curriculum-based, 2) placement, 3) theory-based, and 4) programmatic. My second reading allowed me to further refine these categories and to verify my initial coding, and in both the first and the second readings, articles could be coded using more than one of these codes. My parameters for coding narratives used these specific codes:

- *Curriculum-Based Scholarship*: Articles authored by teacher-scholars reflecting on specific elements of their own classroom curricula were coded as curriculum-based. These pieces covered a wide variety of curricular discussions related to Basic Writing courses—teaching specific genres, implementing service-learning, harnessing reflective writing, teaching grammar, and the role of reading in the Basic Writing classroom are just a few examples.
- *Placement Scholarship*: Articles coded as placement tended to center on high-stakes testing, institutional placement measures, and assessment practices specific to student placement.
- *Theory-Based Scholarship*: Articles coded as theoretical were typically overarching discussions of the politics of Basic Writing, how we define basic writers, and scholarship forwarding specific theories of language use. These articles were often representative of the tensions and stakes of Basic Writing in higher education.
- *Programmatic Scholarship*: The final category involved articles focused on programmatic initiatives—either the development or failure of a program implemented across multiple course sections to meet the needs of Basic Writing students at a specific institution.

A Focus on the Programmatic

In my initial coding pass, any article that discussed the creation or dissolution of Basic Writing programs with state systems or specific institutions was coded as programmatic. In the second reading, I chose to distinguish between articles making arguments about the justness (or not) and the necessity (or not) of Basic Writing programming and those that were local programmatic narratives, leaving twenty-nine articles coded specifically as programmatic narratives. In some ways, each of these twenty-nine narratives is about both success and failure, as even articles focused on designing a new program are often predicated on the failure of a previous program. Narratives focused on the design of new Basic Writing initiatives fall into what many readers will see as expected categories in terms of the types of programs described (e.g., stretch programs, supplemental programs, mainstreaming programs). Each narrative outlines the practitioners' attempts to create a Basic Writing program more suited to a specific institution and the needs of their students, and most contemplate the growth of the program

and nascent results of the program on student success and retention. Narratives that chronicle failures of initiatives tend to focus on the external forces that led to failure. Authors describe failed initiatives not just as failures, but instead use words such as “death” (Severino) “unraveling” (Stygall), “resistance” (Tassoni, “(Re)Membering”), and “inability” (Melzer).

These narratives provide significant insight into “the politics of remediation”¹ and the external pressures that often influence programmatic decisions, but they also allow us to begin to sketch the ecologies of Basic Writing programs. In a typical institutional setting, the Basic Writing ecology involves a state board of trustees, the local community and feeder schools, the local institution and its mission, the academic unit responsible for providing instruction to students deemed basic writers, the faculty who teach these classes, and the students who take them. These, however, are simply the major stakeholders; other elements of the ecology include the neoliberal economy of state budgets, legislative actions, institutional budgets and priorities, the economics of high stakes testing, and rising tuition costs. In her thoughtful look at first-year composition ecologies, Ratliff outlines the adaptive cycle of first-year composition as one that began in the 1970s and is, perhaps, just now entering the reorganization phase. However, reading and coding local narratives of Basic Writing in *JBW* suggests that Basic Writing programming may provide a more obvious means of applying resilience thinking to academe. Each of these institutional narratives, regional ecosystems if you will, illustrates a local institution at a different phase of the adaptive cycle, while they also suggest that resilience in Basic Writing programming may depend on an institution’s (and the field of composition’s) willingness to embrace diversity and social equity instead of specialization and efficiency.

In addition, close readings of these narratives illustrate that scholars understand the systematic and ecological nature of Basic Writing programming—tracing the growth, conservation, and disruption of these programs, as well as attempts to rebuild them to better meet the needs of “inhabitants” of the programs. In her reflections on the twenty-five year history of the University of Illinois-Chicago’s Educational Assistance Program, Carol Severino notes that “growing xenophobia and ‘metrophobia’ climate threaten the survival not only of support programs but of urban institutions themselves” (40). Phrases such as “threaten,” “climate” and “survival” acknowledge the ecological nature of the local Basic Writing program Severino historicizes, but, more significantly, there is a tacit admission that the program functions within an entire system that goes beyond just the institution itself. Similarly,

in her often-cited article, “Unraveling at Both Ends: Anti-Undergraduate Education, Anti-Affirmative Action, and Basic Writing at Research Schools,” Gail Stygall points out that there is a “dismantling of diversity in U.S. public universities [that is] contributing to a system that permanently locates Basic Writing students and students of color in lower tiers of the hierarchy” (4-5). Providing examples from the University of Washington, Stygall calls on writing scholars to consider the public discourse surrounding Basic Writing and to pay attention to the internal documents at their institutions and the need to investigate “the sociopolitical linguistic milieus in which our programs exist” (19). Stygall’s work is a veritable snapshot of a plagued ecology—a program in which efficiency is prized over diversity and resilience.

These ecological narratives are not outliers. 100% of the twenty-nine examined narratives described Basic Writing programs as existing within an institutional, political, and economical environment, and each used language and phrasing suggestive of ecological frameworks. Four primary patterns of ecological language emerged in my readings of these narratives. Authors carefully described the histories and ecologies of their programs, and the literal and metaphorical language they used to talk about the programs focused on one or more of these themes: 1) the interconnectedness of various elements of the Basic Writing ecology; 2) power relationships; 3) prioritizing efficiency or diversity; or 4) crisis. Scholar practitioners’ tendency to incorporate these types of language suggests a recognition of the ecological nature of our programs, as well as a desire for resilience, “the capacity of a system to withstand disturbance while still retaining its fundamental structure, function, and internal feedbacks” (Walker and Salt, qtd. in Rees, “Thinking” 27). These language patterns align with Rees’ theories of the adaptive cycle in important ways, as each of the *JBW* programmatic narratives I studied includes a detailed description of the system within which the Basic Writing program operates, while authors also use language that characterizes the interconnectedness of various elements of the program and the adaptive cycles taking place.

Articulating Narratives of Growth

Not surprisingly, many of the coded narratives include language and descriptions suggestive of Rees’ growth phase. Scholars often reference Open Admissions as either a moment in time that led to the growth of Basic Writing programming or as a descriptor of the institution. This common feature of the narratives provides insight into the accepted belief that Open Admissions

initiatives led to the primary growth phase of Basic Writing programming and Basic Writing scholarship. Consider Rees' definition of the "exploitation and growth phase":

The early phase in a new adaptive cycle is characterized by the establishment and rapid growth of the stronger opportunistic species (or new businesses) that have flooded in to take advantage of open ecological niches (or unexploited markets) and temporarily plentiful resources. . . Initially, diversity and resilience are high but internal connectivity is low. As it develops, the system gradually creates a stable regime. (34-35)

This description of the growth phase may remind readers of the longstanding discussion in Basic Writing scholarship of whether or not the system has created "basic writers" and the programs serving these students to serve its own needs—taking advantage of "open ecological niches" within the system of higher education when a need presented itself. But my goal here is not to rehash such arguments. Rather, it is important to recognize that Open Admissions initiatives and other measures meant to provide access to a larger and more diverse student population are part of a cycle that led to what we know as Basic Writing programming today.

Narratives of Basic Writing illustrate an understanding of the adaptive cycle of Basic Writing programming both in their historical references to Open Admissions and in their language patterns. In describing their programs, scholars acknowledge the "complex ways that remediation interacts with vested institutional, economic and political interests" (Goen and Gillette-Tropp 110). Jessica Yood describes her program as a "reflexive system of constant change" (19). John Paul Tassoni and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson detail their attempts to implement a Studio approach to Basic Writing as a "struggle within a 'configurative complex' of cultural, social, and institutional places" (69). These authors recognize the competing forces within the systems and the problematic and productive interactions between various elements of the ecological system. Basic Writing narratives also tend to recognize the complicated lives of many of their students and the competing forces and demands on their time—adding another layer to our understandings of how inhabitants (in this case, students) of the system operate. For example, Mlynarczyk and Marcia Babbit argue that Basic Writing and the "structural features of the university" must adapt as "more and more college students have to juggle work and family responsibilities as well as school work" (74).

In other words, each individual student functions within their own system, only parts of which overlap with the system of the university and the Basic Writing program. And some narratives recognize the cyclical nature of Basic Writing programming outright. Mary Kay Crouch and Gerri McNenny note that in the complex history of the California State University system's attempts to serve basic writers, "the solutions proposed during each cycle of concern rarely varied" (64). These narratives make clear that the growth phases of Basic Writing also lead to what seems like a certain amount of stability—a recognition of Basic Writing's place in the university ecosystem.

Articulating Narratives of Conservation

Growth and the recognition of systematic roles lead to Rees' conservation phase, described as a period of relative consistency and stability, but also one of consolidation and accumulation. It is during this period that the "competitive advantage. . . shifts to efficient specialists" and "diversity and resilience gradually decline" ("Thinking" 35). A history of Basic Writing programming and Basic Writing scholarship might identify this period as the decade following Open Admissions to the new millennium, but such an overarching characterization ignores the nuances of individual programs and the ways "dominant species compete for ever-scarcer resources" ("Thinking" 35). In other words, if specific initiatives lead to growth and resources for Basic Writing programming within an institution, this period of growth is typically followed by a period of competition—the longest phase of the adaptive cycle, one in which the system is most vulnerable to attempts at homogenization.

In nature, these power disputes take the form of competition for resources and less aggressive competitors can find themselves "repressed or eliminated" ("Thinking" 35). In economic ecosystems, established aspects of the ecosystem can become complacent and unresponsive. Narratives of Basic Writing programming provide insight into both of these concepts, as competition for financial resources, political power moves, and resistance to diversity take place during this phase of the adaptive cycle. Lori Ostergaard and Elizabeth Allen acknowledge that the two primary pressures on their Basic Writing program involved "legislative efforts to influence university curricula through new and increased accountability measures and from university administrations hoping to improve retention and completion rates in the face of shrinking enrollments and dwindling state budgets" (53). In their accounting of the Basic Writing program at the University

of Alabama-Birmingham (one of the few narratives of a southern school documented in *JBW*), Tracey Baker and Peggy Jolly note their institution's desire "to assess the value of individual programs (such as Basic Writing) in order to determine whether to retain or abolish them" (28). Tassoni and Lewiecki-Wilson's language provides even more clear insight into the ways the university and the Basic Writing program are part of an ecosystem in which individuals and programs are competing for power and resources. They explain that "since institutional spaces are never transparent, unclaimed, or uncontested, remaking the landscape of the university involves problems of power and colonization" (69). Greg Glau even discusses his naive hope that his program's status as an award-winning program might provide "political protection" in an age of austerity (45).

In the adaptive cycle, this competition for dwindling resources after a period of growth and abundance also often means a renewed emphasis on efficiency. This move toward conservation is part of what depletes an ecosystem, and we see these parallels in Basic Writing narratives and their emphasis on the system's privileging of efficiency and the gain of resources or prestige over diversity and commitments to students. Matthew McCurrie recounts the ways Columbia College Chicago's administrative efforts "to make the program more accountable for the students it serves and the resources it consumes may also have sacrificed the college's commitment to open access for all" (34). Rachel Rigolino and Penny Freel point out that when Basic Writing courses are discontinued due to resource allocation it can "diminish the diversity of [the] student body by excluding students from a wide range of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds" (56). Similarly, Crouch and McNenny note that while CSU "applauds diversity," it also "wants to homogenize the population the CSU serves" (55). Stygall's descriptions of the Basic Writing programming at the University of Washington are even more aligned with Rees' suggestions that all systems can be tied back to nature (and are perhaps even more damning) when she describes she and her colleagues as "educational canaries. . . whose lost voices may preface the dismantling of diversity in U.S. public universities" (4) due to institutional priorities "when pressed financially" (6). Stygall laments the ways all "lower division writing is remedial, superfluous, unnecessary in an 'efficient' system" (emphasis original, 9). But it is her repeated reference to canaries, birds that can be overpowered at any moment but who are still responsible for alerting us to injustice, that I find fascinating when reading these narratives through a lens of resilience science. There is an implicit suggestion that the role of writing program administrators is to sound the

alarm when the signs of threat merge—but also that these cries may ultimately be unheeded.

Articulating Narratives of Release

The release phase of the adaptive cycle, or what Rees in later works begins to refer to as the “plague phase,” is when resilience is at a minimum and any number of disruptions might cause collapse. Partly in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Rees explains that our tendency to value “interdependence, efficiency and growth” over “community self-reliance, resilience and stability” can lead to this collapse (“The Earth”). These types of disruptions that prioritize economic growth over diverse learning experiences are familiar to most Basic Writing practitioners. Budget cuts. Loss of faculty. Shifts in administrative priorities. Legislative decisions. Changes in grading or admissions policies. These almost always lead to cultural loss. Severino describes the demise of the University of Chicago-Illinois program as having “witnessed a drama of political conflict, social change, and ultimate loss” (40). In his narrative of Basic Writing programming in Connecticut, Patrick Sullivan notes, “there are powerful forces actively at work in America seeking to erode or turn back advances we have made in civil rights, access, and social justice” (74). Scott Stevens’ analysis of the CSU system considers the way public rhetoric can plague the system and produce “the very crisis conditions it purports to reflect” (6). The release phase—the phase in which the system is most vulnerable to crisis—is where we see the disassembling of the university ecology take place. If, however, the adaptive cycle means that this disassembling is inevitable, simply part of the cycle of existence, how do we begin to create resilient Basic Writing programs?

Imagining Narratives of Reorganization

According to Rees, our responses to the chaos created in the release phase is what determines resilience. The reorganization phase, according to Rees, “creates numerous opportunities for novelty and experimentation.” It is during this phase that we have the opportunity to rebuild in ways that may be more lasting, that determine the priorities of the “subsequent growth phase.” However, Rees also warns that “conditions in this phase tend to produce a faithful repetition of the previous cycle” (“Thinking” 35). He points out that in order to achieve resilience during this phase of the adaptive cycle, “development strategies must abandon efficiency and maximization as primary goals in favor of social equity and ecological stability” (“Think-

ing” 37). What might such strategies look like in the neoliberal educational institution? If we consider each of the program designs forwarded in the programmatic narratives of *JBW*, will we recognize the initiatives as built for sustainability and resilience? More importantly, if we look at our own local ecologies, can we begin to forward more resilient programming that values cooperation and diversity in the face of the dwindling resources and cultural struggles we continue to face?

Another Institutional Narrative: Growth, Adaptation, Release, and Reorganization

As I contemplate these questions, I can't help but reflect on the Basic Writing program at my institution. In 2008, I received a call from the then chair of English asking me if I was interested in returning to academe and serving as the Basic Writing coordinator for their program. This position was available because the University's Quality Enhancement Plan was focused on writing and speaking, and one of the programmatic commitments to the plan was a Basic Writing coordinator position. The University was seeing increased enrollment of students who might be deemed underprepared for college-level writing based on standardized test scores, as well as decreased retention and graduation rates. This position, I realized rather quickly, was a check-the-box position. It was temporary, and it was meant to communicate support for the then institutional priority of supporting struggling writers. There was little value added to the program as far as most of my soon-to-be colleagues were concerned. I was there to work with students they preferred not to teach, someone to deal with underprepared students so they did not have to do so.

That first year, I sat down with the faculty member who was leaving this position to teach at another institution, and I explained some of the ideas I had for rethinking our Basic Writing program. She explained her work with Basic Writing at the institution and politely informed me that none of the plans I wanted to consider were feasible due to state mandates that stemmed from *Ayers v. Fordice*, a prominent desegregation case in higher education that changed the landscape of access and remediation in Mississippi. I dedicated myself to understanding *Ayers* and its influence on higher education in Mississippi, and it quickly became obvious that the *Ayers* case functioned similarly to CUNY's Open Admissions movement but with greater resistance from the community (the case was resolved in 2001 after twenty-six years in the court systems) and an even more explicit focus on race and the racial

makeup of Mississippi's institutions of higher education. The *Ayers* settlement led to changes in admissions requirements, summer developmental programs for students, and incentives for diversity that were false promises of repair and restitution to historically black colleges and universities. This background and history of what I now realize constituted the growth phase of Basic Writing programming at my institution encouraged me to begin creating what I hoped would be effective and resilient Basic Writing programming within and in response to these state mandates.

We piloted and fully implemented a stretch program based on Arizona State University's award-winning program. We prioritized writing and access through community, integrity, and instructor and student relationships. We also integrated a studio model of composition in order to abide by state requirements for students who score a 16 or below on the English index of the ACT. We were granted five hires based on our pilot data to ensure the success of the program moving forward. In 2012, we had six faculty lines devoted to the program; we lost half of those hires within three years to other programs. We were granted visiting positions in interim years—sometimes one, sometimes two. Currently, we have three permanent positions dedicated to the Basic Writing program. We dissolved the studio program in 2017 after the institution revised grading requirements for classes that were not listed as 100-level courses or above. We dissolved our stretch program in 2018 when we could no longer staff or schedule it effectively due to loss of faculty lines. We worked to retain the core values of the program, implementing common reads, extra-curricular activities, and writing celebrations for our students. None of this changed the fact that we were back where we started—a preparatory class most often taught by graduate instructors who were not adequately prepared to meet the needs of students. The class now included institutional credit, but despite ten years of successful movements forward, that was one of the only tangible institutional changes the program maintained.

In Fall 2019, we started again. We planned for intersessions. We designed and planned to pilot a version of supplemental coursework that would increase students' first-year writing course to four credit hours in hopes of designing a curriculum that would meet students' needs and provide them more time with their instructors but also be less dependent on institutional resources that could be removed at any time. As we were preparing for these new programmatic measures—and like every institution across the nation—we found ourselves attempting to do this work during a pandemic. Covid-19 brought additional layers of bureaucracy, safety concerns, and necessary

curricular changes that we could never have anticipated. Roadblocks and crises, everywhere we turned.

I share this narrative both because I am confident it will be familiar to readers and because, in retrospect, I recognize how each of the major shifts at our institution align with Rees' adaptive cycle. I have the advantage of looking back at the past twenty years of this program and providing a condensed narrative that fits the confines of a journal article, while most *JBW* narratives are focused on one specific phase of the adaptive cycle by necessity. At this point, however, I do not know if my ability to survey what seems to be an entire cycle of growth, adaptation, release, and reorganization is a blessing or a curse.

Conclusions; or Planning for Reorganization

In "The Human Nature of Unsustainability," Rees argues that human nature itself is what leads to our inability to sustain our global ecosystem. He posits that our tendency to "exploit all available resources" and our belief in perpetual growth "centered on unlimited economic expansion" means that as a species we are living unsustainably (198). The same can be said of institutions of higher education in America, including mine. Most regional educational ecosystems and their Basic Writing programs have seen complete adaptive cycles (and for many institutions more than one such cycle) that originated with diverse growth phases spurred by Open Admissions initiatives and witnessed varied release phases due to institutional and legislative priorities that privilege efficiency and monetary growth. We are at yet another intersection where financial exigency, crisis management, and attention to intersectional factors—particularly in terms of race—exist. Covid-19 has made that intersection more obvious, and it will require those invested in the success of at-risk students to contemplate the resilience of our programmatic structures. The pandemic may be a disruptive force that Basic Writing practitioners cannot ignore as we begin to think about our opportunities to reimagine and rebuild. Rees argues that we are at a "crucial juncture in human evolutionary history" and that survival and sustainability will require a shift from competition to cooperation—a new cultural narrative that directly contradicts the current modes of thinking about our educational system ("The Human" 202).

Indeed, there is a danger that in our efforts to think about our individual courses in the years to come—our efforts to provide engaging educational experiences through difficult combinations of online learn-

ing and face-to-face courses—that we will forfeit the opportunity to think creatively about how we might face this challenge and to design resilient Basic Writing programming that values the diverse student voices we have always claimed to embrace. In a recent article for *The Atlantic*, Michael D. Smith argues that the seeming stability of academic institutions over the past decades “has again bred overconfidence, overpricing, and an overreliance on business models tailored to a physical world” and he suggests that this long period of stability means we have “conflated our *model* with our *mission*” (emphasis original). Is it possible that many of us in Basic Writing studies have conflated our model—the way we deliver writing instruction to at-risk students—with our mission?

Resilience thinking tells us that the model is never stable. For example, agricultural pesticides eliminated crop-damaging insects, and then those insects developed immunity; fire control methods that were seen as the savior of national parks have led to even more wildfires; fisheries science methods that promised to create even more fish for consumption have caused collapse (Rees 26). These model technologies were successful in their early efforts, but the systems around them evolved leading to their failures. Perhaps the lack of resilience we see in our efforts to reach underserved student populations is due to our focus and allegiance to models—stretch models, ALP models, studio models—rather than to our missions.

I would venture to guess that most Basic Writing practitioners align in our missions. We hope to provide access to the college experience and the successes that can stem from our culture’s privileging of higher education to as many students as possible, and we hope to do so in ethical ways that value students and their language practices. We hope to advocate for these students and for their places within our systems of education. We hope to become a “presence that creates visibility for our work and for the work of our students” (Bernstein 8). In order to meet these goals and help our students thrive in a pandemic-informed educational environment, we are going to have to rethink our allegiance to models, particularly when those models are more often than not devoted to efficiency of time and resources and not to diversity. Rather than focusing on models, we need to focus on our missions and on creating spaces for education that align with those missions.

We need to recognize that Open Admissions initiatives embraced recruiting diverse students and that at many institutions, Basic Writing programs still serve large percentages of minority students. And while I acknowledge the danger in assuming that our Basic Writing students are “of one-person type” (Ritter 13), I am also aware that over two-thirds of the

writers who place into the Basic Writing program at my institution identify as Black. And while this in and of itself is problematic and we have been grappling with the complex issues of race and socioeconomic status since we started our program, the Covid-19 crisis makes this data particularly damning. Many of the students we are trying to reach and to retain are students who are more likely to be affected by Covid-19 because of failed systems. And Basic Writing programs based in our pre-Covid models may become yet another system to fail these students. As Amy M. Patrick notes in “Sustaining Writing Theory,” “maintaining diversity is key to sustaining healthy communities, and recognizing diversity is key to moving toward sustainable solutions.” Patrick claims that “helping our students to understand the ways we and they perceive relationships to individuals, communities, the ecological, social, economic, and technological world around them—consciously or unconsciously—is thus crucial to our engagement with them as writers.” And as Asao Inoue argues in *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies*, we must help students problematize their educational environments and “[change] or [(re)create] the ecology so that it is fairer, more livable, and sustainable for everyone” (emphasis original, 82). Our programs, then, must embrace diversity and create programming that more fully acknowledges the systemic racism underlying Basic Writing initiatives as a whole.

Rees suggests that planning for resilience and sustainability requires us to develop completely new ways of thinking and learning about our individual and global systems and doing so in ways that see change as inevitable. He notes that this is necessary for our survival. Our programmatic narratives illustrate the university’s willingness to use crisis situations as an excuse to prioritize efficiency over diversity. Those of us who are dedicated to serving marginalized students will need to be strategic about the programs we build from this chaos. Survival and programmatic resilience in this new phase of higher education will require attention to our missions and an understanding that our students’ lives are at stake. It will require that we acknowledge “how linguistic hierarchies and racial hierarchies are interconnected” (Baker-Bell 2). And although an examination of anti-racist pedagogies and programming is beyond the scope of this project, this is where, I would argue, we must begin our efforts to rethink our programs.

Redesigning our writing programs in this age of cultural divisiveness and pandemic-induced resource scarcity demands that we acknowledge how our programs may have contributed to the homogenization valued by our institutions. Rewriting that narrative means asking difficult questions. Who administers and teaches Basic Writing courses in our programs? Who are

our students and what does this tell us about biases of our programs? What roles do students have in determining their placement and their curriculum? What are our missions and what does our programmatic and institutional data tell us in terms of meeting the goals outlined by these missions? The current cultural and systemic crisis provides an opportunity for a new cultural narrative in writing instruction. It is time to disassemble and to build resilient programs that value the lives of our students.

Notes

1. See Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* and Mary Soliday's *The Politics of Remediation: Institutional and Student Needs in Higher Education* for the origins of this phrase.

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Valuing an Embodied Epistemology to Counter Neoliberal Programmatic Reform at the Two-Year College

Alison Cardinal, Kirsten Higgins, and Anthony Warnke

ABSTRACT: This article heeds Susan Naomi Bernstein’s call for an “embodied epistemology” for Basic Writing. In the wake of recent economic and health crises as well as the ongoing effects of neoliberal reform efforts at the two-year college, a materialist, embodied orientation for critical practitioners within two-year colleges is more necessary than ever. This epistemology foregrounds the local conditions of people, programs, and practices involving Basic Writing and challenges the limitations of the neoliberal reform movement, which has taken hold at many two-year colleges. The reform movement flattens differences among two-year colleges while primarily conceiving of and representing their value in economic, specifically neoliberal, terms. As a result, the initiatives that this movement offers, many of which involve Basic Writing and basic writers, deemphasize local conditions, fail to foreground racial equity, and ignore material concerns that do not fall within a neoliberal framework. An embodied epistemology, therefore, helps critical practitioners locate areas for transformative action within their programs and in the larger scope of their institutions. Drawing on examples from one specific two-year college ecology, this article details how an embodied epistemology can negotiate reforms as well as take actions on issues that are marginal in the reform movement. Among other concerns, the article addresses reforming course placement; adapting a corequisite approach to Basic Writing through an equity lens; attending to the affective in corequisite support courses and deemphasizing the individualistic notion of “non-cognitive” support; and detailing larger institutional actions that materially impacts basic writers. Through these examples, the article offers an embodied epistemology as a proactive alternative to neoliberal hegemony.

KEYWORDS: Accelerated Learning Program; ALP; Basic Writing; embodiment; epistemology; two-year college; neoliberalism; writing program reform

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This article arises at an unsettling and uncertain moment for two-year colleges. With declining enrollment (National Student Clearinghouse) and the disinvestment in higher education, it's more challenging than ever to maintain the egalitarian dream of the two-year college (TYC). Though these trends pre-date the pandemic, the pandemic has further exacerbated existing fissures. Adjunct faculty bear the brunt of losses from reduced course offerings as job cuts fall on the most precarious workers. BIPOC communities, disrupted in their educational plans, face widening equity gaps (Belfield and Brock). State-mandated initiatives threaten faculty autonomy and reduce higher education to its economic value. Though seemingly intractable, these fissures also open up space for locally situated action within the unsettled and unsettling landscape. If there is anything that Basic Writing (BW) scholarship has shown us, it's that we can maintain hope that change is possible in the face of difficult circumstances. How, then, can teacher-scholar-activists assert their agency despite destabilizing forces that relentlessly threaten and devalue open-access education? (Sullivan).

This article situates these forces within the neoliberal circumscription of higher education—where market logic and economic values guide many state legislatures, administrators, and research centers. The so-called reform movement at two-year colleges has arisen in this neoliberal context. Institutions, chasing after grant funding and the need to stay in the black, are increasingly making curricular and programmatic decisions to reform without consulting faculty experts. State-mandated reforms such as streamlining developmental education and implementing Guided Pathways continue to offer corporately underwritten and broadly replicated remedies for transforming two-year colleges into stronger economic performers in the face of crises. It has become commonplace for an institution to accept funding from a philanthropic entrepreneurial organization—like the Gates Foundation—that requires TYC faculty to reform programs and practices. Consequently, a faculty member might open their inbox to discover that their college and/or the state are specifically targeting their programs. While

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programmatic changes are at times needed, these top-down mandates often do not offer a nuanced understanding of a particular locale's student needs. And rarely, if ever, do these mandates hold any regard for the well-being of part-time faculty who teach many of those courses. Couched in the vague language of "innovation" and "student success," these mandates reshape the purpose of open-access institutions—who they are for, what they should look like, and who ultimately should have control. It can feel like these neoliberal forces sweep the TYC forward and faculty are left with little choice but to be reactive. Teacher-scholar-activists need new analytical tools that can be used to understand one's context and find openings for responsive work within the reform context in the neoliberal moment.

In this article, we offer a combination of theory and practice, or praxis, for identifying opportunities for responsive work. We take this approach partly due to the emergence of the term *teacher-scholar-activist* in TYC writing scholarship, which defines the nature of the work as an inseparable combination of theory, practice, and social justice-oriented action (Sullivan). As such, this article is neither a purely theoretical piece nor solely a description of programmatic reform. Instead, we seek to strongly link theory and practice as essential partners in on-the-ground activism. For our purposes, we believe a strong theoretical understanding of the current neoliberal moment and how it constructs knowledge and shapes realities is essential. While no two institutions are the same, we hope that our local application will resonate and can better highlight the way neoliberalism emerges materially and locally.

To equip teacher-scholar-activists, this article has two specific goals: 1) To define an *embodied epistemology* as it relates to two-year colleges today (Bernstein). Those doing critical reform work need this approach, first conceived of by Susan Naomi Bernstein, which situates the discipline of BW and its tradition of attending to those on the margins within the lived realities of the current moment. This method attends to the complexity and specificity of a college's local context and refuses to eschew material and political concerns. 2) To detail what it looks like to put this theory in practice by describing how a group of TYC faculty used this praxis to reform their BW program. Our account highlights how, despite the ways philanthropic entrepreneurial organizations frame reform, we were able to resist the neoliberal frame in small but effective ways.

By using an embodied epistemology, we were able to find places for activism within the messy complexity. This article, therefore, highlights specific examples of programmatic change while showing how theory has guided those changes. Our goal is to demonstrate the effectiveness of this

approach and show how an embodied epistemology can be used at other institutions looking to maintain the integrity of the TYC's original mission and redirect the direction of austerity measures. By reforming BW programs via this approach, writing faculty can actively resist the pull to define students and their experiences only by their economic value to the TYC and can redirect mandated reform of writing programs by using the opportunity to progressively reshape the structure, curriculum, placement mechanisms, and labor configurations. This emphasis on praxis acknowledges the opportunities in the current moment for reforms that can, broadly, support student success and, more specifically, trouble longstanding practices and ideologies about basic writers. However, the complexity of these reforms and, in particular, the top-down implementation and neoliberal funding sources require engaging with them in light of the local populations they affect. This requires faculty to be nimble, responsive, and unabashedly anti-neoliberal in the application of this theoretical framework. Our goal is to equip faculty—theoretically and practically—for this challenging work.

THE NEED FOR NEW EPISTEMOLOGIES

One of the most important terms in our argument is *epistemology*, which we think is necessary to carefully define. This term most simply refers to a “way of knowing” (Powell and Takayoshi), but it has many associated terms. These include paradigm, worldview, theoretical framework and philosophy (Creswell, Merriam). Explicitly or implicitly, an epistemology informs every scholar's work as well as their own positionalities. Feminist approaches in Writing Studies urge researchers to critically examine our epistemologies and make them visible in the work that we do (Powell and Takayoshi; Royster and Kirsch; Rawson and Schell). For this article, we will use the term *epistemology* to refer to:

- The framework that researchers and policymakers use to understand a phenomenon
- What and who this framework values
- The way this framework drives the questions and concerns of instructors, researchers, and policymakers
- How this philosophical framework motivates action (Creswell)

We want to acknowledge that this term is slippery and has overlap with methodology (philosophy of research). While we acknowledge this slippage, we use epistemology because it encompasses broader concerns

than just research, such as an institution's overall philosophical paradigm that guides all of its operations.

While there is already a large body of work that outlines the types of worldviews used in composition studies writ large (Harris; Barnard; Berlin; Faigley), our descriptions of epistemologies will focus on those developed and used in the study and teaching of Basic Writing. BW, from the beginning as a discipline and a practice in the 1970s, was politically motivated, and two-year college scholars were involved in vital documents such as the original Student's Right to Their Own Language (Toth). At the birth of the open-access movement, BW scholars were motivated to help those who had been excluded from higher education. While this radical framework has always motivated the discipline, the objects of study and major concerns have shifted over time. A large initial focus put "basic writers" as the subjects of study to define these students and try to understand their language and writing practices (Ritter; Sternglass). Scholars became critical of these discourses of students as "basic writers" as infantilizing, romanticizing and deficit-based (Horner and Lu; Stanley; Stygall). A large body of scholarship has focused attention on Basic Writing programs themselves, and how these structures help or hinder student success (McNenny and Fitzgerald; Grego and Thompson; Adams et al.), with some calling for the abolition of Basic Writing programs altogether (Shor).

While these approaches have been immensely helpful for critically examining the "basic writer" and what a Basic Writing program should look like, as well as the consequences of both, there has been less focus on frameworks that zoom out to a broader picture of writing's entanglement in the specific contexts of two-year colleges, their communities, and their places among institutional and labor ecologies (LaFrance; Soliday; Toth *Transfer*). And while much of the scholarship on Basic Writing has been used to develop and reform writing programs and develop critical pedagogies, the discipline could benefit from epistemologies that mobilize not just disciplinary knowledge but also local ways of knowing and local needs. BW at the two-year college would also benefit from a more expansive field of analysis beyond writers and writing programs to provide the basis for more transformative political action at a college and within the community. We argue that when teacher-scholar-activists research their context and look for places to intervene, they should take account of the materialist, ecological and embodied nature of the two-year college landscape to provide the foundation for activism.

In the past 15 years, ecological and materialist epistemologies in composition studies have challenged static conceptions of writing that ignore the embodied and material relations in which writing and rhetoric lives (Cooper; Dobrin; Horner; Schell; Ratcliffe). These frameworks understand writing as emplaced in complex networks and dynamic relationships where everyday people and writing practices mutually shape one another. However, as Reiff et al. argue, “We talk about the complexity of writing in our scholarly journals, we postulate theories of writing as ecological, complex, dynamic, and interrelational, and yet when it comes to the programs we help to create and maintain in our universities and other sites of practice, we have difficulty seeing them in the same ecological light” (4). In the context of the two-year college and Basic Writing, this is equally true. Despite the fact that broader activist movements provided the foundation in many ways for Basic Writing’s existence at CUNY and beyond (Biondi), ecological understandings of BW’s place amid larger political forces in the two-year college are less prominent than they should be.

In BW scholarship, books that examine the institutional role of BW largely base their analysis on the discourses surrounding these programs. These works often base their archival research on institutional documents (Ritter; Lamos; Stanley) and written accounts (Soliday). While this research is immensely helpful for historicizing Basic Writing and uncovering its origins within open-access institutions, as well as for detailing how discourses around Basic Writing and basic writers shape programs and student trajectories, there is a need for more methods that examine the immediate contexts and current material practices happening in the complex political and economic moment. Landscapes are constantly in a state of flux, and TYC faculty would benefit from methods and epistemologies that privilege their knowledge and experiences on the ground as well as their allegiances and values that exist outside of a neoliberal understanding. These include qualitative methods that emphasize the lived and embodied nature of teaching and learning. For instance, we suggest that conducting institutional ethnographic studies can be effective to understand the neoliberal landscape of a particular TYC and to find places for action. Another key strategy is gathering the stories of those most affected by neoliberalism, including adjunct faculty and underrepresented students. We suggest engaging underrepresented students in creating counterstories that highlight their experiences (Martinez) and engaging adjunct faculty and students in autoethnographic research (Warnke, Higgins, and Sims; Cardinal, Atienza,

and Jones). We will highlight how some of these methods look in action in the programmatic reform section.

The field is already beginning to make an empirical shift towards paying attention to the immediate, embodied entanglements that make up the work of composition. As Michelle LaFrance argues in her book advocating for institutional ethnographic methods in composition studies, “*much of our field’s discourse elides concern for what people are actually doing, how they are doing it, and how they are enabled to do it*” (14, emphasis original). In two-year college scholarship, Christie Toth begins to widen the analytical frame further by arguing that we should be looking at the ecologies that exist between two-year colleges and universities. Critiquing composition studies’ normative definitions of disciplinarity and how it centers composition at elite institutions, Toth argues that “[t]wo-year college composition must be understood on its own terms rather than through university-centric lenses” (*Transfer*, 77). This lens points to the need for using methodologies and methods especially developed for use at open-access institutions where immediate action is necessary for responding to myriad, shifting forces. It’s important that these epistemologies help to see and untangle the macro, mezzo, and the micro—e.g., the national, state, and local—levels. As two-year colleges continue to be centered as economic engines, many government policies and non-profit organizations are competing to shape the future of TYCs, and by extension, to shape the evolution of BW at these institutions. Neoliberalism and austerity are inextricably entangled in the everyday teaching of Basic Writing. Without an embodied epistemology that can analyze, challenge, and attempt to hold all these forces in balance, teacher-scholar-activists are left with the unproductive polarity of resistance or compliance that makes a critical reform position untenable (Warnke and Higgins).

THE HEGEMONY OF NEOLIBERAL EPISTEMOLOGY

An embodied epistemology must resist the hegemony of neoliberal epistemology where “neoliberalism governs as sophisticated common sense, a reality principle remaking institutions and human beings everywhere it settles, nestles, and gains affirmation” (Brown 35). Neoliberalism itself is a broad term that describes the augmentation and near deification of the “free market” through government policy since the mid-1970s. In neoliberalism, the non-economic value of public goods and spaces is diminished, and “there is no society,” as Margaret Thatcher famously said. Instead, what’s “public” has value insofar as it generates capital, promotes economic gain,

and operates within the logic of the free market. Furthermore, neoliberalism has a more pervasive and pernicious effect than merely privileging a set of economic imperatives. As Wendy Brown argues, neoliberalism transforms every individual into *homo oeconomicus*. In other words, neoliberalism has become a hegemonic rationality and epistemology—not just a dominant economic system—“through which capitalism finally swallows humanity” and marketizes all aspects of private and public life (44). In the two-year college context, state governments, research centers, philanthropic organizations, and institutional leadership increasingly operate from this reality principle, or hegemony, of neoliberal epistemology. Often in the name of liberal ideals, such as upward socioeconomic mobility, neoliberal epistemology circumscribes knowledge, values, and possibilities within two-year colleges. (For example, as we write this, the banner article on the Community College Research Center website reads: “Data Viz: How Much are Community College Graduates Making Two Years Later?”). We would assert that the problem with the hegemony of neoliberal epistemology isn’t that it attends to the economic among other values. Rather, for organizations like CCRC, all roads seem to lead back to economic rationale and students maximizing their value. Issues such as labor inequality and resource availability are of little to no concern. As many scholars have detailed. Such valuing is not a new phenomenon; two-year colleges have long been reduced to their economic utility (Sullivan; Beach). In his critical discourse analysis of community college mission statements in 2005, for example, David Ayers discusses the hegemony of neoliberalism within two-year colleges by analyzing college mission statements.

We, therefore, are extending the work of these scholars to the current moment. The lines of inquiry that follow from neoliberal epistemology include but are not limited to:

- To what extent can two-year colleges be engines of socio-economic mobility? How do two-year colleges serve macroeconomic goals?
- How can two-year colleges serve the economic motivations of students, which is positioned as their primary educational purpose?
- How do metrics such as degree completion represent a college’s success and reflect accountability narratives? (See Toth, Sullivan, and Calhoun-Dillahunt)
- What is the return on investment for investing resources into two-year colleges? How can these investments be made as efficiently as possible—i.e., how can narrow economic framing justify austerity?

In particular, we join scholars who see the way neoliberalism undermines democratic and non-economic roles of higher education as especially relevant to Basic Writing (Stone and Austin; Welch and Scott) and scholarship on the two-year college (Sullivan; Toth). (For more on the relationship between neoliberalism and Basic Writing, see issue 16.1 of the *Basic Writing eJournal*). Part of doing so means interrogating the binaries that cast neoliberalism as the stark opposite of the true purpose of higher education, particularly as it relates to the “people’s college” (Kabat). These dichotomies risk missing the complexities of how neoliberal epistemologies operate and dominate. Part of what makes neoliberal hegemony so durable is the way that it *appropriates* liberal values. This, again, suggests the dominance yet invisibility of the neoliberal reality principle, even for those with the best of intentions. Neoliberal epistemologies, particularly in the context of higher education, often justify themselves through discourses of access, equity, and social justice.

The issue of antiracism provides one example. Critical work by BIPOC scholars questions the performance of antiracism in institutions of higher education. This work offers lessons in the ways that neoliberal epistemologies co-opt and rhetorically enact principles of social justice while ignoring questions of systemic and material change. As Jennifer Hamer and Clarence Lang argue, “the university has become a site where nominally antiracist discourses recognizing diversity, celebrating difference, and even acknowledging the presence of social inequality can thrive—even as unequal distributions of power, resources, and opportunity remain relatively undisturbed” (898). To illustrate the disconnect between rhetoric and resource distribution, Hamer and Lang describe the disproportionate harm of loan debt on African American students, the scarcity of investment in campus resources that support the mental-health needs of African American students, and the lack of full-time faculty of color. We see a similar scarcity of investment within the reform movement at two-year colleges. This is not to say that reformers do not recognize inequity and inequality. However, as Hamer and Lang suggest, a neoliberal epistemology often fails to account for deeper and locally specific questions of power, resource allocation, and opportunity distribution. At worst, it ventriloquizes equity and justice without investing in those who are most vulnerable while tying any investment to economic accountability.

At best, however, we believe at least partial, and perhaps provisional, materially consequential change is possible at this moment. When the reform movement does afford possibilities, we have argued elsewhere that interest convergence can lead to pragmatic negotiations of reform initia-

tives such as changing placement mechanisms or rethinking labyrinthine developmental course sequences (Cardinal and Keown; Warnke and Higgins). Outlining an embodied epistemology for Basic Writing at the two-year college offers an alternative framework that goes beyond critique and looks to effecting pragmatic material change.

EMBODIED EPISTEMOLOGY AS ALTERNATE FRAMEWORK

An embodied epistemology contrasts to the hegemonic neoliberal epistemology that takes advantage of crises to cut and reshape the two-year college within a capitalist framework. It reflects a “located agency” that aligns Basic Writing with those on the margins (Jensen and Suh). In the wake of the Great Recession and in the zeitgeist of Occupy Wall Street, Bernstein argues that “a better world is possible for Basic Writing,” one that “needs a revised epistemology, ways of and means of knowing based on material realities and embodied events of everyday life in the wake of austerity” (104). As institutions, philanthropic organizations, and federal funds compete to define what defines this “better world,” we can demand that we critically examine whose world is actually made better. When working to sustain the ecology of the two-year college within the current political moment, an embodied epistemology challenges or, at least, complicates the lines of inquiry articulated above with questions like:

- How do we recognize the specificity of local conditions and take into account the diversity of local two-year college ecologies, especially when considering reforms?
- In what ways do reforms account for, ignore and/or reify a stratified labor system?
- In what ways can reforms recognize racial disparities unique to local ecologies and be adapted and assessed through their antiracist consequences?
- How does assessment move beyond the narrow metrics of “accountability,” resisting what Toth, Sullivan, and Calhoun-Dillahunt call “notions of educational accountability [that] theorize students as wholly independent ‘consumers,’ unattached to and unaffected by historical backgrounds, families, communities, cultures, and structures of social inequality”? (401)
- To what extent does the two-year college preserve roles for democratic and liberal arts values in higher education, especially for those most underserved and often reduced to the benefits of vo-

cational education? Relatedly, how can we conceive of the *whole* student and the dynamic intersections of their identities and dreams as well as their physical and emotional needs?

- How can we acknowledge the insufficiency of any neoliberal reform to address the larger political struggles that manifest in our ecologies such as poverty and white supremacy? And how do we hold onto critical reflection on reforms once they have been implemented?

When orienting BW to everyday material realities, Bernstein argues that “we must write and must speak—we must bear witness to austerity and we must recognize human suffering...” (103). An embodied epistemology in the two-year college must, therefore, work to alleviate material suffering that neoliberal hegemony marginalizes or pays lip service to. As Bernstein describes her experience with Occupy Wall Street, she insists that BW scholars take up and reclaim space. The students who occupied the library at CUNY knew the power of reclaiming space and embodying it in a way that demanded attention. It was their radical act that led to the open-access institution. Neoliberal epistemologies, with their positivist bent, ignore the qualitative and privilege “big data” that can lead to reforming the TYC. Embodied epistemologies claim the opposite. They elevate storytelling, witnessing, and autoethnographic work as a way to speak back to the narrowness of “objectivity” (Baker-Bell; Chang; Martinez). By centralizing the qualitative, we also centralize the experience of the most marginalized and keep those at the center accountable and reflexive about their positionality and privilege (hooks). As Shari Stenberg argues, “the margins offer a keener view of dominant structures and that articulating located, embodied knowledge is both a channel to illuminate epistemological possibilities and to take responsibility for the partiality of one’s perspective” (193). Neoliberal power structures remain invisible at the center, and those working at the margins provide a powerful potential to critique and take action against them.

An embodied epistemology’s lines of inquiry resist the reduction of the two-year college to market utility. Yet they also acknowledge that two-year colleges have always existed within complicated entanglements. To enact an embodied epistemology means recognizing the political messiness that has long shaped the two-year college while moving forward with materially consequential actions. Scholars have extensively documented the contradictory nature of the two-year college, and they have robustly critiqued it for cooling aspirations and purporting to offer access when, in

fact, they reproduce stratification (Clark; Beach; Dougherty). An embodied epistemology towards Basic Writing means occupying this messy, relational, even contradictory web within the two-year college.

The following examples illustrate how, when an embodied epistemology is combined with activism, this praxis can lead to change within the two-year college. Our examples begin on the programmatic level as we discuss placement and redesigning our Basic Writing program. Then, we explain how an embodied epistemology can result in change in institutional spaces beyond Basic Writing programs themselves.

EMBODIED EPISTEMOLOGIES IN A LOCAL CONTEXT

Rethinking Standardized Placement

As an example, we will describe how, through the use of a combination of institutional ethnography (LaFrance) and storytelling work, we were able to use the gathered data to reform placement into Basic Writing courses to materially improve the lives of students. At our two-year college—a large, suburban, and diverse two-year college between Seattle and Tacoma—Warnke and Higgins saw an opportunity for better serving the material interests of our students through questioning their placement within our multiple-level Basic Writing and developmental reading program. Rethinking course placement meant analyzing the reductive and dehumanizing effects of standardized placement mechanisms such as the Compass exam. Part of this work involved critically examining the racist and classist language ideologies present in the Compass exam questions and timed format. We saw overlap between Community College Research Center scholarship calling for placement reforms with disciplinary-specific scholarship calling for the replacement of high-stakes, standardized placement assessments (Toth, “Directed”; Inoue).

Our process for reforming placement began by including a variety of stakeholders within our division to gather data and make decisions based on what emerged. We created an inclusive divisional subcommittee rather than a top-down, administratively driven process. This subcommittee included both composition and reading faculty since placement had impacts on various elements of our ecology. Finally, gathering quantitative institutional data helped to highlight the disparate impact (Poe et al.) on our student population, particularly on our increasing number of international students. We centralized race in our data gathering to emphasize the disproportionate

harms of standardized placement on non-white students, those who were most vulnerable within our ecology but subjugated through normative placement practices.

Throughout our work, we attempted to develop an approach attuned to the complexities within our ecology. We synthesized scholarship, our faculty members' different disciplinary perspectives, and the stories of students' experiences. Conversations around reforming placement could certainly be difficult, especially because changing placement could affect enrollment in Basic Writing courses. However, we attempted (not always successfully) to move through these conversations sensitively and democratically, aware of the vulnerability that changing placement represented. Over the course of two years, the division managed to implement a matrix of placement options. Many members of the division worked together to consider various populations within the ecology and began implementing multiple placement methods such as high school transcript placement and Directed Self-Placement that honored this heterogeneity of experiences and backgrounds (Klausman et al.). Multiple placement measures enact an embodied epistemology in the way they privilege student agency, affirm students' previous experiences, and deemphasize language correctness as predictive of success in the college writing classroom. Taken together, our work on placement began to rethink our Basic Writing program through the ways that students were initially constructed within it. A neoliberal epistemology may have emphasized changes to placement, and certainly we undertook changes to placement, in part, because of the convergence with neoliberal organizations' interest and scholarship on placement. However, a purely neoliberal framework regarding placement would not have valued a democratic, instructor-driven approach for implementing those changes, analyzed those changes through the lens of disparate impact, nor carefully designed a DSP tool where students' experiences and linguistic backgrounds were the basis for their self-assessment.

Designing a Locally Responsive Accelerated Learning Program

The embodied praxis we used in our placement redesign led to seeing more opportunities for antiracist and labor activism amid reform. In particular, we asked to what extent our multiple-course "developmental" writing and reading structure resulted in cooling out the aspirations of our students (Clark). To us, the Accelerated Learning Program reflected progressive calls in Basic Writing for mainstreaming writers (Adams et al.; Shor). We also

found convincing evidence of its effectiveness as two-year colleges across the country adopted it. However, we also felt uneasy with the assimilationist paradigm that we saw reflected in the language ideology of ALP. That untroubled ideology suggested that students should aspire to the Standard Written English ideal of a first-year writing course, and that the corequisite structure of ALP would help them do so more easily. We saw this ideology, for example, in materials for ALP's support course that focused on supplemental grammar instruction. More tellingly, perhaps, was how we couldn't find any discussion of multi/translingual student populations on the ALP website or in ALP scholarship. Since then, we have seen how instructors have innovated culturally responsive curriculum. However, as we attempted to adopt this reform, we didn't notice any ways that the corequisite was a vehicle for embodying progressive pedagogy through its mainstreaming of basic writers. Instead, ALP left monolingual and racialized linguistic norms untroubled.

In fact, many developmental reforms, such as ALP, seemed disconnected from the demographics of local contexts. The portability and adaptability of these reforms appeared to be among their principal selling points. Structurally, we believed that combining English 101 with a 3-credit support course made sense for our students. Pedagogically, however, we felt that the discourse around ALP assumed a white, middle-class target. Embodying ALP within our ecology meant recognizing that many of our students, particularly students who would place into ALP, were not white or middle class. Furthermore, as white, middle-class faculty working on this reform, we wanted to use ALP to reflect on our own limited knowledge of students' identities, competencies, and linguistic repertoires. We sought to adapt ALP in light of our student population and their assets. With the ALP model's and our own personal limitations in mind, we used ALP as a vehicle for implementing translingual and antiracist pedagogy that was responsive to our student body. Therefore, we adapted an equity-focused ALP that placed issues of identity at the center of our course. And in our assignments, we attempted to deemphasize "correct" Standard English as the hallmark of a successful college writer (Condon and Young; Perryman-Clark, Kirkland, and Jackson). We took the reform of ALP, with its demonstrated successes, and modified it through an embodied epistemology regarding our student population. We sought to recenter the ways of knowing and writing usually centered in a course that often relies on an unquestioned centering of White Mainstream English. Embodying ALP within the ecology of our ecology involved several areas:

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1. *Course texts:* By focusing the course on social and personal identity, we sought to present students with authors from various disciplinary and identity backgrounds. This diversity, we felt, was a first step for repositioning authority and knowledge-making in the classroom. We chose texts that dealt with material concerns on topics such as social power and inequality and poverty. These included texts such as Beverly Tatum's "Who Am I? The Complexity of Identity" and Paul Gorski's "The Myth of the Culture of Poverty." For us, it was important that what students read about, and who they read it from, embodied their own experiences and identities.
2. *Autoethnography:* As we have documented elsewhere, one of the major assignments in the 101 component of our ALP course was an autoethnography assignment (Higgins, Warnke, Sims). In this assignment, we encouraged students to examine their identity construction in an analytic autoethnography. While being aware of our limitations as white instructors soliciting identity disclosures from a diverse student body, we believed autoethnography could center student experiences and literacies in the college writing classroom. This assignment allows students to take a first-person perspective on issues such as race, gender, migration, and mental health. Additionally, this assignment allows students to "codemesh" and bring their own linguistic repertoires into the first-year writing classroom (Canagarajah; Young et al.).
3. *Professional development:* We created a summer institute for teaching ALP that many adjunct faculty members attended. We insisted to our administration that in order to run the institute, and to run more sections of ALP, adjunct faculty members had to be compensated. The insistence on well-compensated professional development attempted to place ALP pedagogy within progressive writing studies scholarship. Such scholarship guided the institute and included work on mainstreaming Basic Writing and translanguaging. Additionally, we attempted to make scaling up ALP, an institutional prerogative, contingent on institutional investment in adjunct instructors. Since we developed this institute, adjunct instructors have become the majority of ALP instructors, and we continue dialoguing among all ALP instructors about our experiences.

4. *Assessment:* Although our college's institutional research office has provided challenges for assessing ALP, we have attempted to assess it through an equity lens. To do this, Higgins and Warnke centered student voices, used student work to promote equity-focused professional development of faculty, and sought quantitative data that examines pass rates for marginalized students. In faculty development workshops, faculty read student essays together not to judge writing but instead to promote conversations about developing practices that integrated antiracist pedagogies within ALP. While we found a significant increase in pass rates, we also wanted to understand whether ALP is resulting in equitable outcomes across marginalized groups. While detailed data that disaggregate by demographic have not been made available to us, the college has embraced ALP as a mechanism for ensuring that fewer students, including students of color, languish in lengthy pre-college pipelines. In fact, our accreditation self-study report singled out ALP and our college's IRW structures as equity-centered reforms. Furthermore, we ran several focus groups to account for student experiences in our piloted sections of ALP. This qualitative data attempted to meaningfully inquire into what students learned and how the course model was (and was not) serving their needs. Our goal was to understand the nuances of student struggles through academic, material, and demographic lenses.
5. *Rethinking Support in the Context of the "Non-Cognitive" Support Course:* The support class in ALP uses the frame of "non-cognitive" for describing how to support students (Adams et al.), which our version of ALP seeks to problematize. This term often stands in for study skills such as time management and goal setting. First, the term "non-cognitive" suggests a problematic binary between academic intelligence and students' daily lives (which don't involve cognition. . .?). Although assisting students with individual skills can help them succeed, this kind of support often neglects material and systemic barriers to student success. "Non-cognitive" support often relies on a "bootstraps" or "grit" narrative that individualizes success or failure. This terminology suggests that the support class should help students develop their inner resources to contend with barriers without recognizing the racist, sexist, ableist, and classist nature of many of those barriers.

ers. For example, a “non-cognitive” support class might include a unit on procrastination without recognizing the gendered nature of a student’s personal responsibilities that might impede them, racist experiences that have damaged their educational self-regard, and/or the role of neurodivergence in procrastination.

To an extent, we understand the value of helping students recognize and develop strategies for success. However, a narrowly conceived “non-cognitive” support class complements neoliberal epistemology. Attention to the individual’s success and productivity aligns with the neoliberal imperative to maximize and “responsibilize” the individual’s success regardless of material constraints and inequities. As Brown argues, “[R]esponsibilized individuals are required to provide for themselves in the context of power and contingencies radically limiting their ability to do so” (134). “Non-cognitive” supports neglect material reasons that students might not succeed such as family obligations, housing or food insecurity, mental health difficulties, and employment issues. In designing more embodied supports for the ALP support course, we attempted to focus on providing resources that would promote student success. In our support sections, we have integrated counseling, campus resource guides, campus tutoring centers, as well as finding and completing scholarships. Furthermore, following the democratic values of studio models, we have used the support class as a “third space” for students to ask questions, drive the content of the class, and share knowledge and resources with one another and their instructor (Grego and Thompson). Most recently, we have experimented with bringing in mindfulness strategies into the support class. These strategies attend to the affective components of learning and include journaling, guided meditation, and bringing awareness to feelings such as anxiety around academic performance. We also use contract grading in the support class to value students’ labor and efforts rather than performance (Inoue). Recognizing that we need students to think about how grades can perpetuate inequality institutionally, we use conversations around grades to help students develop a critical lens towards the structures of the institution to advocate for themselves and others throughout their academic careers.

Based on what we learned from students in ALP, we pushed these conversations beyond the classroom to advocate for students' material needs. Whenever ALP is used as a model of success by colleagues and administrators, we use this as an opportunity to advocate for the resources students need beyond academic support in one course sequence. We look to initiatives such as CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for the ways in which it provides material supports for students such as tuition help and free public transportation passes. However, we have faced resistance at our college for implementing these material supports, but we continue to find every opportunity to advocate for students in these ways.

6. *Adapting ALP for Online Learning:* Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has given our local troupe of ALP instructors the opportunity to quickly adapt our courses to try out asynchronous and synchronous instruction. While the impetus for adapting to all online instruction had a tragic origin, it allowed for rethinking how ALP could be embodied in virtual spaces, which led to innovations in offering support online (online ALP). This included using Zoom conferences to work within students' schedules. Instructors' dedication to making ALP successful in a virtual format for diverse learners speaks to their interest in students' well-being. In many cases, instructors developed curriculum around mindfulness approaches or integrated self-care into assignments. In every class, compassion became the watchword for decisions on the number and types of assignments. In addition, instructors instituted design principles that emphasized limiting the number and types of assignments required because of the barriers related to ongoing, robust, uninterrupted internet access while the majority of adults and children in the area were working or studying online. Instructors also negotiated assignment modalities to ensure that students would have the most robust opportunities for demonstrating their ability to meet outcomes (Elliot).

REFLECTING ON COMPLICATED RESULTS

Lack of Systemic Transformation

Part of an embodied epistemology is being reflexive about the actual impact of reforms, rather than only being attuned to intent. Five years after we first piloted ALP at our institution, what we can say is this: It's complicated. We can demonstrate some basic successes. More students, especially students of color, are enrolling directly into a college-level composition course, and pass rates for the college-level courses remain about the same. Further, we have no evidence that students who complete ALP 101 are less likely to pass the next course in the sequence. While the reform has been effective in these limited ways, it's hardly been a slam dunk for closing equity gaps, especially as they persist in programs beyond our influence. We maintain that evidence-based, small-scale reforms such as ALP were pragmatically preferable to leaving the status quo untouched five years ago. An embodied epistemology allowed us to recognize the potential of these reforms by localizing widely adopted initiatives that have roots in both neoliberal reform organizations but also BW scholarship. As they were designed to do, ALP and its typically concomitant placement reforms allow students who would normally be shunted into lengthy developmental English sequences to enroll in college-level English with support. In most cases, course pass rates (or course completion rates, in some research) remain about the same despite the widening of the gates, so more students try—and succeed in—college-level English. However, ALP, at our college and other colleges, has not resulted in systemic transformations that decisively close equity gaps in course completion, much less graduation. (See especially Barnett et al.'s CAPR report, "Who Should Take College-Level Courses? Impact Findings From an Evaluation of a Multiple Measures Assessment Strategy" on mainstreaming's positive but hardly game-changing impacts.) In fact, most developmental reforms have some success in getting students to hit early success markers, such as accumulation of college level credits or enrollment in the next sequential course (sometimes considered "early indicators"), but no or little demonstrable impact on larger completion rate (Ran and Lin).

As placement reform and developmental reforms have been increasingly implemented across the country, ALP and related structures are becoming the new status quo, and that new status quo is still one of disparate impact and inequitable completion rates. Equity gaps stubbornly refuse to decisively improve despite the implementation of positivist, so-called

“evidence-based” reforms like ALP. We have yet to see any scholarship from reform organizations that explicitly acknowledges the limitations of these efforts, especially as it relates to equity. Such concessions would undermine the neoliberal agenda, which constantly advocates for the next new initiative (such as Guided Pathways) without making room for critical reflection. In contrast, an embodied epistemology works in a feminist mode that acknowledges gaps and limitations, one where “locational agency,” as Stenberg describes it, involves a humble positioning that acknowledges where benefits to marginalized students are unproven.

Impact on Labor

Furthermore, while we attempted to include and compensate adjunct faculty in the redesigned Basic Writing program, the more streamlined program resulted in fewer courses that our division offered. This reduction in classes disproportionately impacted adjunct faculty, whose prioritization for selecting classes comes after full-time faculty members choose their classes. The effect of Basic Writing reform on adjunct faculty underscores the complexity and interdependent nature of the ecology. As we made changes responsive to the material needs of one element of our ecology—our students—the material needs of other members of the ecology became strained. Neoliberal epistemology understands the ecology as consisting of discrete parts, and students occupy an exalted position at the expense of considering other humans who exist in relationship to them. An austerity calculus positions adjunct faculty, especially, as those who need further training to better serve students. An embodied epistemology, on the other hand, refuses this dehumanizing reductionism. Professional development opportunities for all faculty, especially around issues of antiracism and language ideology, are certainly vital. However, when we do not take into account those who dedicate their lives to teaching within unjust labor conditions, we damage the larger ecology and undermine authentic values of equity.

Embodied Epistemology Through Larger Institutional Actions

Embodied epistemologies aligned with the material interests of Basic Writing students should move beyond Basic Writing programs themselves. Higgins, in particular, has dived more deeply into both institutional and statewide equity work within a variety of philosophically related but structurally distinct entities. Collaborative groups made up of faculty and staff who take their role as scholars and activists seriously are meeting to study

the systemic and institutional inequities and acting upon them without recognition or institutional support. For example, her work has included action with a statewide, DEI-focused, independent group of Washington State faculty, staff, administrators, and state board personnel aiming to decolonize our community colleges and decenter whiteness in curriculum, funding, hiring, and so on. Decolonizing the community and technical college systems does not merely align with but strategically implements the more radical tenets of BW scholarship in grassroots action.

On the campus level, the work has included serving as an “equity rep” on hiring committees, a long-running program only recently sanctioned by our college administration. It has also included investing time, creativity, and even money in creating a (re)entry program for formerly incarcerated and system impacted people, nearly all of whom will take transitional studies (formerly Adult Basic Education) or other BW courses. Making space, creating opportunities for students to become more visible on campus, and dedicating resources for BW students, we suggest, is the embodied work of BW scholarship and activism. In these seemingly disparate ways, we study inequities and act on them. In the ecology of our two-year college, these arenas of involvement are vital parts of Basic Writing work and focus the energies of many faculty and staff whose life work is centered on Transitional Studies, Workforce offices, and other entities whose *raison d’être* is centered in advancing the fortunes of BW students—yet we find it challenging to provide enough context and explanation here to ensure these actions’ recognition, publication, and representation within BW scholarship. This is part of what Basic Writing scholarship-activism looks like.

Future Reforms: The Promise and Peril of Guided Pathways

Currently, Guided Pathways is a pervasive set of reforms encompassing those that we’ve mentioned, such as course placement and accelerated education. However, whatever other claims the reformers make regarding student-centered reforms and equitable outcomes, very little research is being produced on the pedagogical and curricular changes that might validate, and harness the strengths of, our students’ lived experiences. In fact, in its scope, Pathways robustly exemplifies neoliberal hegemony. As we continue to track the research on Pathways and related reforms, we find an emphasis on dollars and cents—on making the reforms pencil out in an austerity framework—increasingly evident. Alejandra Marchevsky and Jeanne Theoharis warn in “Restoring the People’s Universities: CUNY, the

CSU, and the Promise of Socially Transformative Education,” their recent article on the New Deal for Higher Education:

Tellingly, graduation initiatives at public comprehensive universities rarely fund faculty-student mentoring, curricular innovation, small seminars, or more opportunities for independent undergraduate research—all of which are proven to increase retention and completion *and* help students excel academically. At base, austerity and the obsession with getting students quickly graduated and employed stems from a racist imagining of low-income students of color as workers rather than thinkers and national leaders.

Most graduation- or completion-centered initiatives for the TYC, too, align with the austerity goals of state legislators and governors. Does the equity-centered rhetoric amount to little, providing cover for a cheapening of education accessible to the majority of students of color, as Marchevsky and Theoharis argue? As critical reformers in two-year colleges, we’ve long suspected that the bottom-line emphasis in much published scholarship on reforms illuminates the austerity-angled ultimate goal. Perhaps a generous reading of this fact is that CCRC and others don’t have funders willing to support other significant outcomes of proposed reforms. We suggest that that generosity ought to cut both ways.

Yet in our conversations with colleagues leading the Pathways reform work on our campus, we find one striking element: a collective shoulder-shrug at Pathways’ theoretical shortcomings and an eagerness to harness the opportunities that these reforms may allow. From their perspective, being assigned to execute Guided Pathways reform work means having state mandates or resource allocations that allows them to begin the on-the-ground-work of scrutinizing the local conditions and responding to them. We believe this illustrates an important point. An embodied epistemology, though not explicitly named, already exists in how so many staff and faculty operate. We imagine this happens at many other institutions as well. Those who work within reforms—from faculty members to advisers—attempt to repurpose them for their own ends—to embody the reforms within the material needs of their departments or areas. Articulating an embodied epistemology, then, gives name to and seeks to embolden the efforts of those already attending to the bodies that matter within our ecologies—those who need care, space, resources, and time in order to thrive. Whether it’s programmatic work on Basic Writing courses, an adviser helping a Basic Writing student navigate a a

new enrollment website, or a staff member pushing back in a meeting against reductive labels on streamlined student pathways, those on the ground already engage in embodied epistemologies, with BW students at the core.

TAKING ACTION, RECOGNIZING LIMITS, AND MAINTAINING HOPE

We believe an embodied epistemology is a framework of hope for more equitable two-year colleges. We believe in materially-minded activism that cautiously works within fraught conditions, and we believe that working locally resists the reductionism of idealized reforms while also negotiating their potential. We seek to keep one eye on systemic causes of suffering in our ecologies, those that neoliberal reformers ignore, while keeping the other on imagining a “better world for Basic Writing” (Bernstein 104) within two-year colleges. For us, this is what the most progressive Basic Writing scholarship has always done and continues the legacy forged at open-access institutions.

Yet we constantly balance the tension between action on the one hand and critical reflection on our limitations on the other. We acknowledge the delusion of overemphasizing our agency and the harms of reifying emancipatory narratives of higher education. These narratives are empirically specious (Beach). We worry about reproducing an academic white-savior position—that by implementing the “right” BW program along with other sensitively adapted reforms, we can not only save our students, but also mint an academic brand (whether that’s “critical reform” or “embodied epistemology”) that maximizes our scholarly worth. As Coleman et al. argue, “If we as teachers of writing normalize (read, accept) the dominant presence of constructed whiteness in the field and discipline among our students and colleagues, how might that consciously or unconsciously affect our teaching in the classroom and the assessment of students?” (367). We worry about giving in to the hegemony of center-left neoliberalism, which in the last 40 years has limited the imagination of what public policy can accomplish and has conceded agency to neoliberal organizations and administrators. An embodied epistemology should not be about individuals from the tenure track handing down changes but rather creating coalitions with students and adjuncts. To understand the complexity of local contexts, we suggest other strategies that we have yet to demonstrate here, such as collective autoethnography (Chang) and writing counter-stories (Martinez) as epistemological approaches that can provide the basis for action, especially for the most marginalized at our institutions. Writing *with*

rather than *about* marginalized students is vital for creating critical reforms that matter. Creating knowledge together, rather than a solo project or one completed, behind closed doors, by so-called “experts,” is one strategy for countering neoliberal approaches to knowledge making. In that regard, this collaborative article is one small gesture.

There are also hopeful signs that the neoliberal orthodoxy is cracking, and this cracking echoes the conditions that led to the open-access university in the 1970s. Could this be another kairotic convergence of interest (Bell)? As the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) are banding together to move forward the New Deal for Higher Education, which promotes a progressive re-envisioning of the role of open-access higher education as well as robust funding, the larger national conversation around poverty and mechanisms of social mobility is evolving, too. As moderates accede to the necessity of sharing some of the costs associated with child-rearing and acknowledge poverty amelioration as a national priority; as President Biden’s agenda acknowledges that funding today’s infrastructure extends beyond byways and bridges; as the data on “social mobility” remain mixed and problematic, especially when intersectional racial and ethnic identities are accounted for in the studies; as researchers revolutionize the available data on predictors of poverty, we see signs that neoliberalism’s narrative framing is shifting. Whether its socio-economic structures follow suit is an interesting possibility, one that the open-access movement has yet to fulfill.

As instructors work with students whose collective poverty and traumas are increasingly evident and attempt to alleviate suffering despite systemic limitations, we need to band together as accomplices with those in our communities who are materially suffering. As a rich body of activist scholarship and community activism demonstrate, this work is already well underway. Now is the opportunity to use an embodied epistemology as a framework for action from the writing classroom outwards.

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Access and Exclusion: Chinese Undergraduates and Basic Writing in the Global University

Tom McNamara

ABSTRACT: This article draws on a qualitative study of Chinese international undergraduates at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Throughout, I argue that these students' FYW experiences compel BW instructors and WPAs to reevaluate pedagogies long thought to empower underrepresented students, ones rooted in our encounters since Open Admissions with working-class students, multilingual writers, and students of color. For my participants, these pedagogies narrowed their educational goals, casting them to the margins of a campus where they had been given unprecedented access (and where access had contracted for domestic students of color). Their stories reveal a university transformed by profit-driven internationalization, one that requires new approaches to writing assessment, assignment design, and programmatic activism in order to secure access for historically underrepresented domestic students and international students.

KEYWORDS: access; activism; Basic Writing; belonging; Chinese international students; critical pedagogy; ELL; English language learning; international students; internationalization; race

In the fifty years since Open Admissions, Basic Writing scholars have routinely called for expanded access to higher education. Just as often, this advocacy has been at odds with institutional priorities. From the start, faculty and campus administrators walked back Open Admissions and other educational opportunity programs (EOPs), citing concerns about institutional prestige and underprepared students (Horner 202-3). More recently, these programs have been casualties of contracting state budgets that have cut student aid and cultivated a wealthier (and whiter) student body at state flagships (Jaquette et. al. 638; Lamos, "Minority-Serving" 5). Yet, even as Basic Writing has consistently opposed these trends, our advocacy for students has often made us unwitting accomplices. In our efforts to secure institutional support for our students, Basic Writing instructors and WPAs have often resorted to the same deficit terms used by those opposed to EOPs,

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with the result being that “we end up arguing with words that sabotage our argument” (Rose, “Language” 342). This is clear in recent efforts by California State University WPAs to replace no-credit remedial courses with a stretch model, when WPAs nonetheless described underrepresented CSU students as remedial and deficient—the very language used by administrators and policymakers in favor of no-credit courses (Melzer 90). Likewise, our placement mechanisms and curricula, especially at institutions with no-credit courses focused on isolated skills, alienate our most vulnerable students from the university’s research and knowledge production (Rose, “Language” 352). The result is that the students we claim to support are marked as institutional outsiders upon their arrival to campus, reinforcing larger patterns of racial and economic exclusion (Shor 92-3).

In this article, I join Basic Writing scholars who have grappled with our field’s uneasy relationship to access, in particular those who have worked to identify how our efforts to expand access can unwittingly reinscribe students of color and multilingual writers as remedial institutional outsiders (e.g. Horner, Melzer). Specifically, I study one group whose experiences reveal a good deal about access as colleges and universities experience ongoing state disinvestment: Chinese international students. These students, who on many campuses pay full-price tuition, have been given unprecedented access to US higher education in a time when institutional support for domestic students of color and state appropriations for higher education have dwindled (Folbre 45-6, Jaquette et. al. 638, Kannon et. al. 84).¹ Drawing on qualitative research at the largest US enroller of Chinese undergraduates, I document how these students quickly come to see their US educations as unstable investments from which they must extract the maximum return possible, often in response to the university’s failure to support their educational goals even after aggressively recruiting them.² Across my interviews, participants shared how they recalibrated their educational goals in response to ethnic isolation that defied their expectations of US campus life, a move that they hoped would recuperate at least some return from their educational investments. Troublingly, these shifts in their educational and social goals most often occurred as they negotiated monolingual ideologies on campus, ideologies that sent persuasive messages about their linguistic and cultural belonging even as they moved through writing classrooms that aimed to empower students of color and multilingual writers.

The case study at this article’s core—focused on a student named Ruby (a pseudonym)—compels us to reevaluate classroom practices long thought to empower underrepresented students, practices rooted in Basic Writing’s

historic encounters with cultural and linguistic difference (Trimbur 220). More broadly, though, experiences like Ruby's also complicate narratives about access that have guided placement, curricula, and activism in Basic Writing. Charting a throughline from Open Admissions, scholars have repeatedly shown that access to higher education remains a benefit largely reserved for the white middle and upper classes, both through institutional policy and deep-seated cultural beliefs about who ought to attend college (Kynard, "Stayin Woke" 520; Lamos, "Basic" 27-8; Martinez, "The American Way" 585; Prendergast, *Literacy* 37). Amidst declining student of color enrollment at many flagships (Baumhardt) and increased racist violence nationally, such insights must continue to inform Basic Writing. Yet, I worry that the political contexts we often imagine for our work can eclipse the full complexity of race on today's campuses. Specifically, the long shadow cast by composition's civil-rights era advocacy (Bruch and Marback 651) obscures a new force defining campus racial politics: the corporate university's revenue-driven entrance into the global higher ed market. As scholar-teachers committed to access, Basic Writing professionals must grapple with how recruitment and enrollment decisions are now tied also to the instabilities of global "fast capitalism" (Lu, "An Essay"). We must identify how our classrooms quietly uphold ideologies of language, culture, and race that frustrate the educational goals of students like Ruby, who experience both transnational educational mobility and longstanding domestic racism. Doing so is essential to enacting equitable models of access and student support in a time where campus race politics are being reshaped by a higher ed marketplace that is increasingly global.

Before turning to Ruby's story, I first introduce my larger study of Chinese undergraduates, noting in particular how this group's experience of the corporate-international university provides unique insight for Basic Writing and composition scholars committed to access. I then turn to Ruby's experiences, noting in particular how she navigated a campus where she felt peers and professors were open to her linguistic and cultural differences—but where she nonetheless came to see those differences as deficits that prevented her academic success and full participation in campus life. Unfortunately, Ruby's growing sense of campus alienation persisted even as she encountered writing pedagogies long thought to create space for difference in universities that still privilege white linguistic and cultural codes. Indeed, as was the case for most of my research participants, these pedagogies actually narrowed Ruby's educational and social goals, a finding that sounds an alarm about our classrooms' ability to dislodge damaging linguistic and

racial ideologies on internationally diverse US campuses. Following Ruby's case study, I consider the wider implications of Ruby's story, focusing in particular on how access and campus race politics have been transformed by profit-driven internationalization. Finally, in the conclusion, I outline approaches to writing assessment, assignment design, and programmatic activism that can equip students and writing instructors alike to publicly demand access for historically underrepresented students, all while securing the educational goals of the international students like Ruby who bear the burden of public disinvestment.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS: CHINESE UNDERGRADUATES IN US WRITING CLASSROOMS

This article draws on a qualitative study of Chinese undergraduates at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign during the 2014-15 academic year. At that time, the campus was a leading enroller of students from China, placing it at the center of a national press conversation about international enrollment (e.g. Belkin and Jordan, *Tea Leaf*). Since then, Chinese undergraduates have remained in the national spotlight due to ongoing tensions with China over trade and intellectual property, suspicions about their political loyalties, and the uncertain status of international students amidst the pandemic (Silver) and an increasingly hostile immigration climate (Wong and Barnes). Likewise, the U of I has continued to attract media attention for its aggressive recruitment of international students and the fiscal motives of its enrollment practices. As on many campuses, the international student population at the U of I grew precipitously following the 2008 financial crisis, when many states slashed public higher education funding. In Illinois, these cuts began an era of austerity that lingers today (McGee), at one point leading to fears that some of the state's public universities could close (Brown) or lose their accreditation (Seltzer). Meanwhile, the university turned to international students as a revenue source, with administrators publicly touting the fiscal benefits of this decision (Cohen) even though the Illinois legislature had been historically opposed to out-of-state enrollment (Abelmann, "The American University"). As a result, the Chinese undergraduate population at the U of I grew 250% between 2009 and 2019 (Final), compared to a national increase of 189% during the same period (Fast Facts).³ By 2014, nearly 10% of the first-year class at the U of I was from China alone (Cohen).

The Chinese undergraduates I interviewed were thus at the center of forces that, while uniquely felt on individual campuses, were remaking US

higher education: deteriorating fiscal conditions, growing demand in China for Western education (Fong 3-4), and the emergence of “internationalization” as an institutional buzzword on par with “diversity.” My 28 literacy life history interviews (Brandt 9-11) probed the impact of these institutional shifts on Chinese undergraduates themselves and college writing instruction more broadly in effort to address the following: What forms of cultural and economic capital do Chinese undergraduates hope to cultivate by pursuing a US undergraduate degree? How do notions of linguistic and cultural difference—as well as US histories of linguistic and racial discrimination—shape how they envision their future careers and economic lives? Finally, what do their stories of segregation reveal about race in FYW classrooms, situated as they are in institutions that increasingly negotiate divergent civic, international, and corporate missions? In pursuing these questions, my study aimed not only to understand the academic motivations of a student population increasingly present in FYW and Basic Writing courses at the U of I and other institutions; I hoped to also understand how this transnationally-mobile student cohort negotiated long-documented forms of racial and linguistic discrimination on US campuses.

In interviews, participants reflected on their general attitudes toward reading and writing, their experiences learning English in China prior to study abroad, and their experiences writing at the University of Illinois (with an emphasis in particular on their first-year writing courses). Participants in these interviews were recruited mainly through the assistance of writing center tutors and first-year writing instructors, who shared information about my project with tutees and former students. I limited my participants to students enrolled in science, technology, engineering, and business fields. 69% of Chinese undergraduates enroll in these disciplines at US universities (Desilver), often because they fear they lack the linguistic fluency to major in the social sciences or humanities (Fong 112). At the U of I, this number was higher, with 75% of Chinese undergraduates enrolled in STEM and business programs (Edwards). Many Chinese students are attracted to such fields by the cultural cachet attached to them in China, and my research participants in particular believed that a degree from the University of Illinois’s highly-ranked Colleges of Business or Engineering would later give them an advantage on the job market (see also Redden, “At U of Illinois”). However, I limited participants to students in these disciplines not only to cultivate a participant pool reflective of the demographic majority of Chinese international students on US campuses; my decision was informed also by my desire to reach “theoretical saturation” through purposive sampling

(Guest et. al. 65). This decision proved critical, enabling me to (1) confirm among my participants the academic motivations Fong documented and (2) understand their shared experiences, as a student population with similar educational and professional aspirations, of linguistic and racial discrimination. Moreover, it seemed particularly apt to study students in STEM and business given that they are at the center of many STEM and business colleges' fiscal strategies, with the U of I Colleges of Engineering and Business even taking out a \$60 million insurance policy in 2018 to insulate themselves against any potential decrease in Chinese student enrollment (Bothwell).

I want to note here that the bulk of my research participants were enrolled in the campus's mainstream composition course, including the student at the center of this article. Yet, my study was motivated by my experiences as a Basic Writing instructor at the University of Illinois. When I began my graduate work at the U of I Center for Writing Studies in fall 2011, I was assigned to teach Basic Writing courses due to my prior experience teaching BW at DePaul University—and because of my extensive work with adult, underrepresented, and multilingual writers at DePaul's writing center. As international enrollment rose steeply, the University of Illinois's Basic Writing program—which had historically served domestic students of color and was initially created to offer race-conscious writing instruction (Lamos, *Interests* 44)—shrank in half (Course Explorer).⁴ At the same time, international students came to comprise 80% of the writing center's clientele and were enrolling in the university's "mainstream" writing course in larger numbers than ever before.⁵

That the percentage of African American students in particular was declining as international enrollment grew (Das Garennes)—and that university administrators were pointing to international enrollment as a measure of diversity (Redden, "At U of Illinois")—raised questions about access that cannot be answered by looking only to the cohorts of basic writers who have historically been featured in our research. Specifically, to fully understand access in a time of contracting support for domestic students of color *and* rapid internationalization, Basic Writing scholars must work to understand more than just how and why institutional enrollment priorities have shifted away from the students our programs have typically served (e.g. Webb-Sunderhaus); we must also examine how and why our institutions have come to privilege other student cohorts in recruitment and enrollment while the presence of domestic students of color has decreased drastically. I thus study a group often not featured in Basic Writing scholarship, similar to Kelly Ritter's examination of students who don't fit the stock image of basic

writers in field-defining texts like *Errors and Expectations*. Doing so can help us better understand the institutional forces that shape our students and programs, ones whose impact we may not fully appreciate when we focus solely on Basic Writing programs and students.

Moreover, because who is designated a basic writer shifts across institutions (Matsuda, “Basic Writing” 67-8; Ritter, *Before* 38), my participants’ experiences are instructive for those whose Basic Writing programs *are* increasingly comprised of international students and multilingual writers (see Matsuda, “Let’s” 142). Even though my participants tended to enroll in the U of I’s mainstream writing course, they may have just as easily been placed in Basic Writing or “ESL” courses at institutions with different placement criteria. These students’ experiences also speak to longstanding concerns in Basic Writing about campus linguistic discrimination, clear in a steady stream of stories from the *Chronicle* and *Inside Higher Ed* about their supposed linguistic deficiencies, underpreparation, and academic dishonesty (e.g. Barker, Bartlett and Fischer). Finally, like more traditional basic writers, my participants experienced linguistic discrimination through placement mechanisms aiming for the “linguistic containment” (Matsuda, “The Myth” 638) of multilingual writers and students of color⁶—even as their family financial resources gave them access to test preparation and tutoring programs that enabled them to bypass Basic Writing and ESL courses (Bartlett and Fisher). Despite that my participants tended to enroll in mainstream composition, then, their experiences provide insight for Basic Writing professionals who do serve international students—and who are concerned with placement, the stigma associated with our courses, and access to higher ed more broadly.

The case study that follows represents recurring themes in my interviews and observations. From my 28 interviewees, I focus on Ruby’s for the ways her story is both an “apt illustration” of experiences reported across interviews (Ellen 237) *and* a “telling case” (239) that brought more clearly into view the themes and experiences reported by other participants. Like others who have studied basic and multilingual writers, I employ a case study methodology for its careful attention to the contexts and histories that shape individuals’ writing and language-learning experiences (e.g. Balester; Rose, *Lives*; Spack; Stanley; Sternglass; Tardy). Moreover, given that my interviews took place in English—the second or third language for my research participants—a case study approach mitigates the difficulty of coding interview data that includes rich negotiations between languages. I worried in particular that reporting only on coding categories across interviews would flatten my participants’ sometimes-lengthy descriptions of

concepts for which they did not have an accessible English vocabulary. My case study approach is likewise an attempt to resist the tendency in composition scholarship to speak *for* researched populations (Royster 30) and the dangers in ethnographic research of isolating significant moments of students' experiences from their social worlds (Trainor 30-1). By narrating my participants' stories through case studies, I try to offer textured portraits of how Chinese undergraduates navigate US writing classrooms, in the process drawing attention to the institutional forces most shaping access in our changing institutions.

LANGUAGE, THE WRITING CLASSROOM, AND RUBY'S FALTERING EDUCATIONAL INVESTMENTS

When I met Ruby, she was a junior studying accounting, but she stressed throughout her interview that she didn't have much interest in her major. Instead, Ruby chose accounting when, during her first year at the University of Illinois, she became convinced that she lacked the linguistic and cultural knowledge to be successful in marketing courses. As Ruby reassessed her professional aspirations, she also began to reconsider her place in the campus community. Ruby had come to the US expecting "to be more like active and involved in the campus," but she quickly discovered that she would have few interactions outside her Chinese peer group. In this section, I document how Ruby came to see such academic and cultural growth as out of reach, ultimately altering her career path so that she could recuperate at least some returns from what she described as her faltering educational investment. Importantly, Ruby's writing classroom was at the center of her story of how she came to see her cultural and linguistic differences as liabilities, even as she described curricula and teaching practices that strove to create space for such differences. Stories like Ruby's, I argue, reveal how pedagogies rooted in Basic Writing's commitments to access and inclusion—which at the U of I included course projects centered on undergraduate research of race and student identity—can falter amidst campus monolingualism and monoculturalism, in the process offering critical insights about access in a time of university privatization and internationalization.

"What I can do is maintain my academic performance": Tempered Academic Expectations

Compared with many of her Chinese peers, Ruby decided to pursue US higher education late in high school. Where many Chinese students be-

gin preparing for education abroad in primary school, enrolling in private English schools and vying for seats at prestigious secondary schools, Ruby began to study for the TOEFL and SAT only in the summer prior to her final year of school. At that time, one of her friends, who would later attend UCLA, urged Ruby to apply to US universities. Ruby had already been aware that US degrees were seen as more prestigious in China, and so, with her friend's encouragement, she began preparing to go abroad. "Almost everyone in China knows how much better the education here is than China," she said, explaining her decision. "You know more people—and expand your social circle." In contrast, Ruby claimed that Chinese universities offered little to the vast majority of the country's students: Only a privileged few, she said, were accepted to China's best universities, and, like the majority of her Chinese conationals, she believed that the nation's other universities were academically subpar.⁷ Moreover, she believed that the quality of students remaining in China was poorer because many of her Chinese peers were exhausted by the time they enrolled in college. Many students, she said, attended "cram schools" in preparation for the infamous gaokao, the country's standardized and hypercompetitive university entrance exam. "The last year of high school is like hell," she said. "They get up at five and start studying to like ten o'clock at night." She also claimed that China's regimented high schools left her peers unequipped to manage the relaxed atmosphere of the country's universities. This coupling of academic fatigue and newfound independence, she said, produced an unsuitable campus environment at China's universities. "It's the atmosphere in college. Most students, they don't work, they don't study. They just skipping classes and just show up on exams. Actually, lots of college students cheat during their exams."

Where Ruby described Chinese higher education in mostly negative terms, she saw attending the U of I as an opportunity to gain professional and cultural capital. In her estimation, the strengths of US universities were unparalleled, commenting, "Everyone knows the education in the US is best in the world," and she planned to take full advantage of the opportunities she believed available at the U of I. In addition to majoring in advertising or marketing, she imagined that she would be involved in campus organizations and would form friendships with domestic students. She had also been open to the possibility of moving to the US permanently after graduation. However, Ruby's first two years at the university frustrated these expectations. For instance, Ruby decided to major in accounting after coming to believe that she would not be able to compete with domestic peers for advertising and marketing jobs, saying that she lacked the language skills and cultural

background necessary for success in those fields. Ruby had settled on accounting only because she felt that, with her original goals untenable, she should instead enroll in either the engineering or business colleges, which she felt were well regarded in industry. “I don’t have any particular interest in any major,” she explained. “I’m not the engineering kind,” she laughed, adding, “I met some friends after I came here and they all said I don’t look like accounting person. They think I should go into advertising. I don’t know why but they all said that.”

Ruby likewise began to temper her expectation that she’d cultivate cross-cultural friendships, and her reflections on her segregated social circle began to reveal the complicated role of language and linguistic difference in her frustrated educational goals. Like nearly all the Chinese students I interviewed, Ruby described a mix of cultural and language differences that prevented her from connecting with students of different backgrounds.⁸ “I think language is actually not the biggest problem in some ways,” she explained. “Like the cultural differences, if you have a particular topic you can talk for awhile with them, but it’s hard for you to go further and talk with. Because you share different maybe values and backgrounds, it just sometimes hard to make our conversation interesting.” Ruby worried that this lack of connection with domestic students (and, by extension, her lack of involvement in campus organizations) would reflect poorly when she began looking for jobs. “I’ve been disappointed because you have to write something on your resume, but I don’t really have many experiences to write about. That was the biggest stress of my college life.” Yet, Ruby hoped that her major in accountancy would offer at least some career stability—and allow her to secure a return on her expensive education. “Now I plan to finish the master’s degree here so I can like take the CPA exam,” she said. “But I think if I get the CPA certificate, I think I have to at least work here for one or two years so that it doesn’t waste my certificate.” Ruby’s concerns about failing to properly capitalize on her US degree were also evident as she discussed her plans to eventually return to China. There, she planned to first work in a public firm, since she believed that most people returning to China began their careers in one of the nation’s government-operated industries. Eventually, though, she hoped to join a multinational corporation, where she could use her English skills. “If I’m going back to China, I think I expect my work to involve lots of English in my job, because otherwise my experience here would be kind of wasted.”

That Ruby came to see her education as an unstable investment was clearest as she described her revised educational goals as part of a familial

responsibility. Although her family was economically comfortable—her father worked in China’s booming construction industry⁹ and her mother owned a spa—she was cognizant of their economic sacrifices. Ruby was particularly concerned by the emotional toll her US education had taken on her mother. “She relies on me a lot. She keeps saying she misses me and she want me to be with her and things like that.” For Ruby, doing well in her courses was a way to, as she put it, “pay back them” for their economic and emotional investments in her education. “What I can do,” she said, “is maintain my academic performance. I work hard for getting A in the class.” To make good on her family’s investments, Ruby would change her major and reenvision her campus life early on during her time at the U of I, and, as I next chronicle, her writing classroom played a critical role in this decision. For those working to make writing classrooms empowering spaces where students defy and disrupt constraining ideologies of language and race, Ruby’s story shows how our classrooms can counterintuitively make students trade in their “liberal ideals” of higher education—their pursuit of personal development through cultural and intellectual diversity (Abelmann 2)—for narrow professional goals.

“They have the language”: The Role of Ruby’s Writing Classroom

During her interview, Ruby laughed at the irony that, in her junior year, she was majoring in accounting and had relatively few social contacts outside her Chinese peer group. In her first-year writing course, she and another Chinese student had cowritten a research paper urging their Chinese peers to be socially and academically proactive. “We suggest how to be academically successful, like you might sit in the first row and talk to your professor, go to the office hours or something like that. And for socially, like, you attend activities, pick an organization you like.” Despite having cowritten an essay that offered strategies for Chinese students to get the most from their time in the US, Ruby said she had largely ignored this advice. “I don’t speak too much in my classes. Unless there are some participation requirement that you have to speak to reach the points. Unless they have that requirement, I won’t speak.” Moreover, Ruby interacted with domestic students only in class and therefore had few opportunities to practice her conversational English. As Ruby described it, her first-year writing course was in many ways a turning point in this retreat toward ethnic and linguistic isolation, since it was there that she began to see her linguistic and cultural differences as

insurmountable barriers to her educational goals—all this despite that her course research project had suggested that those same barriers could be overcome. This occurred as Ruby encountered challenges in the course that her domestic counterparts did not and, at a less visible level, through the way her course made her devalue her cultural and linguistic background.

Significantly, these shifts in Ruby's educational goals largely occurred as she moved through a writing program with a long history of race-conscious writing instruction (Lamos 44), one reflecting broader pedagogical traditions in Basic Writing and whose curricula in its most recent iteration sought to confront campus racism head on. The research project required across the program—which typically enrolls 4,000 students yearly (Prendergast, “Re-inventing” 81)—required archival and ethnographic research into campus issues and was instituted in response to ongoing racial tensions at the university (83). That race was at the center of many course projects was clear at the yearly Undergraduate Rhetoric Conference, where student presentations often focused on issues like the university's recently retired Native American mascot, the campus's dwindling African American population, and the fraught first-year transitions of Korean and Chinese international students. This emphasis on undergraduate research, which in 2012 earned a CCCC Writing Program Certificate of Excellence, was not only intended to foster critical conversations about race across FYW sections but also aligned the program with emerging calls in the field for undergraduate research as a means for students to exert agency in their disciplines and on their campuses (CCCC Position Statement, Grobman). Further, the program's required collaborative writing projects both mirrored the types of team writing students would later encounter across the disciplines *and* put students in situations where they would need to negotiate across linguistic and cultural boundaries, as Ruby's experiences in the course demonstrate. Engaging students in original and collaborative research projects—and continuing a programmatic tradition of race-conscious pedagogy—the curricula Ruby encountered was indebted to decades of Basic Writing and composition research that has sought to empower students and decenter white normativity on campus (e.g. Lu, “Conflict” 888-89; Trimbur).

Yet, for all it owed to traditions of critical pedagogy led by Basic Writing researchers, Ruby's writing class counterintuitively narrowed her educational goals, raising questions about the emancipatory possibilities of what have become pedagogical commonplaces (Durst 3). The role of Ruby's writing classroom in this process was most visible as she discussed the course's difficulty—and her belief that the challenges she experienced

were not ones shared by her domestic counterparts. Ruby's first-year writing course was harder than any other she enrolled in her first semester, requiring her to write longer and more complex texts in English than she had in high school or as she prepared for the SAT and TOEFL. She was also struck by the unequal time that she invested in the course compared to her domestic peers. "A native student may take like thirty minutes in writing this, and I may take two hours or even more in writing the same thing. I don't know, writing is not my thing," she shared. Although Ruby had expected that her writing course would be a challenge, she was surprised to find the course so difficult that it played a formative role in her decision to change her major. "Before I came to college, I was deciding if I should go to study advertising or marketing. The first year, I took Rhetoric 105 and I find myself, Oh my god! I don't like writing. So I give up the advertising or marketing because they must involve lots of writing."

Beyond persuading her that she was unprepared to write in her preferred major, Ruby's FYW course also sent subtle but powerful messages about her linguistic and cultural differences, ones that made her doubt her ability to successfully communicate with US audiences. Ruby's first-year writing course encouraged students to engage in semester-long research of campus issues (see Prendergast, "Reinventing" 84), culminating in a final essay that imagined as its audience some campus stakeholder. This curricula, as Ruby described it, had fostered a theoretical understanding of rhetoric and persuasion, but, in the process, she came to believe that she did not possess the cultural background that would be required for her to apply her rhetorical knowledge in the advertising and marketing fields. Specifically, in FYW, Ruby began to feel that she could not undertake the writing and creative work characteristic of those fields because she lacked audience awareness, and she pointed to the writing she now did in accounting as a point of comparison. Where the memos she wrote in accounting were formulaic presentations of financial data, she said that marketing and advertising would have required her to "know what people here [in the US] are thinking about, and know more about their culture and their preferences." As a result, she continued, "I don't think I can do well in advertising." In this way, a classroom that emphasized student-centered research and rhetorical knowledge had made Ruby reconsider her educational and career aspirations, even as rhetorical pedagogies (Covino 37) and undergraduate research (CCCC Position Statement) have been seen as means to activate student agency.

In addition to limiting her sense of rhetorical agency, Ruby's FYW experience also made her see her multilingualism as a deficit, despite describing

classmates and an instructor who rarely commented on the linguistic features of her writing. Ruby's instructor in particular actively worked to minimize her anxiety about language, focusing feedback and their conversations on Ruby's ideas and arguments. For Ruby, this was a relief: "Back in China we, our education on English, they focus a lot on grammar things. Here, they pay more attention to the concepts. That's exactly what I want, because it help me in the most beneficial way." Yet, language was still a source of anxiety for Ruby, and, during FYW, she became convinced that she lacked not only the cultural knowledge but also the linguistic resources she believed necessary for a successful career in marketing. As Ruby explained it, during FYW, she came to believe that "I don't think I can do well with advertising because you have to compete with the native student. They have the language. I don't think I can catch up things in like, under five or ten years." On the other hand, Ruby believed that her own language and that of her Chinese peers carried less currency. For instance, she believed that peer review in her first-year writing and communication courses was less useful when she worked with other Chinese students. She likewise preferred to collaborate with domestic students in accounting courses, which routinely required her to write with classmates. At the time of our interview, Ruby had recently worked in a group comprised of Chinese students, and although she appreciated that they could speak Mandarin together, she believed that the work they produced was of a poorer quality than when she worked with domestic peers.

Ruby's descriptions of her university writing experiences betrayed her belief that she did not have access to valuable linguistic resources that many of her peers easily marshalled, even as instructors and peers focused their attention away from language when reviewing her work. In her reflections, Ruby reveals the continued power of monolingualism's presumption that only certain speakers own or have access to valued dialects, a presumption that orders languages and their speakers along familiar racial lines (Lee and Alvarez 6). The linguistic and cultural boundaries Ruby imagined—and her sense that English fluency was something owned by others—were particularly clear as she described her collaborations with a peer from Singapore who understood but could not speak Chinese. The two negotiated across languages often, and their conversations resembled the cross-language work composition scholars have promoted as a counter to monolingualism (e.g. Wetzl 205). As she discussed their conversations, she laughed, commenting, "When I was making a phone call with my Singapore group member yesterday because we have to work on that case study, I was speaking in Chinese because he can understand that, but he was, he replied to me in English."

Yet, for their writing projects, he often took the lead while Ruby prepared their calculations. “We work on the project and we wrote the memo together, and he took the most part of the memo because he said he can’t understand me. Because, if they make him write in Chinese, he will struggle.” Although the two negotiated across languages in their everyday communication, their academic writing operated under the assumption of strict boundaries between languages, with Ruby’s linguistic background having less currency in their university context. Underlying Ruby’s description of their collaboration—and of her writing at the university writ large—was her sense that the linguistic and cultural knowledge valued in the academy was inaccessible to her, a belief that led her to describe her ethnic isolation and narrowed educational path as inevitable. More troubling was that these beliefs about language ownership and linguistic boundaries were solidified early in her college experience through FYW—and that these beliefs were reinforced even as instructors and peers, at least on the surface, did not narrowly focus on the technical features of her writing.

IMPLICATIONS: CAMPUS LIMITS TO LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND BELONGING

Ruby repeated throughout her interview that she was relieved that her instructor deemphasized grammar in the writing classroom, a welcome change from her English education in China. She also appreciated that her instructors and peers seemed unconcerned about her language differences in their daily interactions, commenting, “Before I come to the US, I was really concerned a lot on the accents. But after I come here, I find like there are people having different accents everywhere, so I think that’s fine. As long as you can communicate with others, I don’t think accent matters.” Where Ruby in such moments described a campus open to her linguistic difference, one where monolingual ideologies seemingly have less currency, she also recognized the limits to such openness and believed that she still had to conform to the campus’s linguistic mainstream, commenting, “I don’t think we should use other language to express ourselves here.” Ruby’s writing classroom in many ways reinforced these attitudes about language, persuading her that certain linguistic and cultural knowledge was required to participate in the university’s academic and social worlds, even as she described peers generally unbothered by her accented writing and speech. Indeed, her writing course—with its focus on campus issues—in many ways provided her the space to reach these conclusions about her educational

aspirations, inviting her to identify the cultural and linguistic barriers that existed on campus without providing her the tools to dismantle them.

Experiences like Ruby's, which were shared by many of my research participants and have been documented in other studies of multilingual international students (Fraiberg et al.; Kang, "Tensions"; Zhang-Wu), expose the limits in our changing institutions of writing pedagogies that aim to confront racism and linguistic discrimination. For many composition researchers, identifying and grappling with cultural, linguistic, and racial differences has long been seen as a means for students and instructors alike to begin dismantling racism and other forms of discrimination (e.g. Alexander and Rhodes, Barlow, Brodkey). Indeed, a stated goal of the ethnographic and archival research project at the center of FYW courses at Ruby's institution was to investigate narratives of community and belonging on campus in yet another moment when the university was embroiled in racial controversy (Prendergast, "Reinventing" 82-3). In many ways, such pedagogies are indebted to Basic Writing scholars and instructors, whose classroom experiences working with students of color and multilingual writers—and, for many, whose experiences as multilingual writers and/or scholars of color themselves—impressed on them the necessity of challenging how university writing conventions often subsume and eradicate other discourses (e.g. Lu, "Conflict"; Rose, *Lives*). Yet, the stories like Ruby's documented in my research suggest that our pedagogies, while perhaps effective in naming cultural and linguistic differences, may do little to disrupt the marginalization of those differences (see also Kerschbaum). This finding puts our classrooms in the undesirable position of reinforcing campus racial realities that withhold access to students' educational goals.

Importantly, even as Ruby's writing classroom was where her monolingual attitudes were strengthened, her story has campus implications that stretch far beyond Basic Writing and FYW. Basic Writing programs (and composition programs more broadly) have historically been the first institutional spaces to feel the impact of demographic change, a harbinger of campus realities to come. They are, as Catherine Prendergast puts it, a "canary in the mines—the university site where demographic, cultural, economic and political shifts in the United States have hit first and hardest" ("Reinventing" 81). That Ruby's experiences in the writing classroom speak to wider campus transformations is evident through how her FYW course colored her broader sense of campus belonging. Specifically, that Ruby's writing course disrupted her educational pursuits—pursuits that included her desire to participate in the academic and social worlds of the university—reveals how writing

instruction can allow our campuses to remain spaces of whiteness, even as many administrators tout internationalization as a measure of diversity. For Ruby and my other research participants, the writing classroom withheld their access to the university's historically white intellectual and social worlds (see Prendergast, *Literacy* 97), becoming a mechanism by which the cultural capital typically bestowed by higher education remained out of reach for this new and non-white student cohort—and by extension a mechanism by which this cultural capital remained tethered to whiteness.

Troublingly, this all occurred even as these students' tuition dollars have enabled many colleges and universities to continue functioning while states have slashed higher education funding (see Fraiberg et al. 29). Indeed, my research participants' stories show a university whose hot pursuit of revenue-generating international students amounts to the conditions of *exception* that anthropologist Aihwa Ong identifies as a key feature of racial politics in global fast capitalism, where typically-marginalized groups are given partial access to socioeconomic benefits when their capital in some way benefits the racial majority (4). In US universities, this occurs as international students who can contribute short-term fiscal capital to their institutions are momentarily excepted from longstanding policies of racial exclusion, only to be later marginalized when a more lucrative market of student consumers becomes available. While such conditions of exception allowed Ruby and her Chinese conationals to enroll at the university, they were simultaneously denied the full access they desired to the university's academic and social worlds. And, as Ruby's narrative shows, her writing classroom in particular blocked this access, raising concerns for Basic Writing scholars about how our work might bolster global racial inequities as they play out on and shape access to our local campuses. In particular, the stories shared by Ruby and my other research participants force Basic Writing scholars and instructors to grapple with the following: How do we create opportunities for students on our internationally diverse campuses to position themselves as members of the university's intellectual and professional communities? Moreover, how can our classrooms help students dismantle barriers to and fundamentally transform those communities, in the process confronting the racial contradictions of the global university? In the conclusion, I outline how we might position our classrooms and writing programs to address these challenges and, in doing so, disrupt the monolingual ideologies that Ruby and my other participants developed in their writing classrooms.

CONCLUSION: LESSONS FOR ASSESSMENT, ASSIGNMENT DESIGN, AND PROGRAMMATIC ADVOCACY

For Ruby, the writing classroom played a formative role in her academic and ideological development: It was there that she began to recognize the faltering promise of the US university, in particular as she began to develop a monolingual orientation that made her see her educational goals as unattainable. Stories like Ruby's, which emerged across my interviews, are unsurprising. As Jennifer Trainor notes, literacy education plays a central role for our students' in their "construction of consciousness," a reality that compels us to "engage in disciplinary investigation and critique to understand where our technologies of self-formation are working and where they go awry" (141). For Ruby and her Chinese peers, our classrooms were formative as they developed identities as cultural and linguistic outsiders at institutions where they have gained unprecedented access. The lessons of their stories are crucial for Basic Writing professionals as we seek to create classrooms that better serve new cohorts of international students *and* renew our commitment to the domestic student populations our programs have historically served. As I conclude, I want to outline classroom assessment mechanisms, assignment design, and programmatic advocacy that can empower students and instructors alike to publicly expose the institutional forces of exception (Ong) that, for a student like Ruby, were interpreted as individual cultural and linguistic deficit. It is my hope that, through these strategies, we can draw attention to institutional forces that, for many on our campuses and beyond, are too often invisible.

Classroom Assessment

For starters, grading contracts that value student labor—and not a written product's quality (see Inoue, Consilio and Kennedy)—could decrease the likelihood that multilingual writers like Ruby leave our courses convinced that they are weak writers by virtue of the greater amount of time they spend on assignments. In particular, a contract could have valued the time and effort Ruby and my other participants put into their writing, effort that was not acknowledged in the more traditional modes of assessment common in their writing program at the time. Contracts also have the added benefit of creating a classroom infrastructure in which students and instructors can directly confront the monolingual ideologies that, for Ruby, were solidified in FYW. For instance, instructors can design contracts so that students are encouraged to strategically deploy different languages and dialects in their

writing—and then discuss such deployments in class. This would require a shift from what Susan Peck MacDonald describes as our field’s “erasure of language,” our turning away from “attention to the sentence level in order to focus on the text level” (586). In practice, this might involve classroom workshops and peer review sessions that supplement our attention to “global” concerns (like argument and rhetorical situations) with focused attention to language. Students might reflect on how they and their classmates negotiate the demand in academic contexts to write in “standard English,” perhaps by identifying instances where students’ linguistic moves might strategically defy the expectations of academic audiences. Doing so could help multilingual writers see their linguistic backgrounds not as evidence of deficiency but as resources for rhetorical agency (Lu, “Professing”; Shapiro et. al.), all while creating opportunities for others to reflect on their own implicit linguistic biases (Liu and Tannacito 371; Stanley 9-10). Importantly, these critical engagements with language could help students begin to confront the institutional and systemic roots of damaging language ideologies (see Schreiber and Watson 96)—rather than, as Ruby did, seeing language difference as a barrier to be overcome at an individual level.

Assignment Design

Assessments that value students’ labor and languages depend in many ways, though, on assignments and classrooms that cultivate students’ labor and direct it toward purposeful rhetorical activity (and, significantly, counter the felt sense of students like Ruby that they’re incapable of activating rhetorical agency in US contexts). While Ruby’s class in some ways laid a foundation for students to wield such agency, in particular through assignments that invited students to examine exigent campus issues related to race and identity, those assignments fell short of inviting students to indict the institutional forces and ideologies that excluded them. Ruby, remember, concluded from her research that the burden was on Chinese international students themselves to become more active members in the campus community, missing an opportunity to document the broader forces that relegated Chinese undergraduates to the margins of campus life. This occurred despite that the writing program at the U of I was, at the time, using a common syllabus whose ethnographic and archival research projects aimed to confront head on issues of race, discrimination, and identity at the university (Prendergast, “Reinventing” 83). In fact, the program’s common assignment set—which included exploratory writing about primary

sources ranging from archival documents to interviews, synthesis of published scholarly writing, and a final research paper—had been developed in response to the campus’s fraught racial history: The curricula’s focus on issues of race and identity first emerged when the FYW program began to offer themed “Race and the University” sections, designed “as a response to the unfavourable climate and ossified positions that had developed in the wake of a multi-decade debate over the legitimacy of the university’s Native American mascot” (Prendergast, “Reinventing” 82).

Despite this programmatic focus on race, Ruby and my other participants too often attributed the racism and segregation they experienced on campus to their own individual cultural and linguistic differences. In the classrooms I observed, the Chinese undergraduates, many of whom had spent entire semesters interviewing classmates about their struggles as international students, would ultimately write final research papers arguing that their Chinese peers needed to work harder at the individual level to break free of their ethnic comfort zones. FYW papers written by Chinese undergraduates in the university’s repository of research writing (IDEALS)—which I also collected and analyzed in the course of my project—often came to similar conclusions. In my classroom observations, this appeared to be the result of instructors’ and students’ discomfort addressing racial tension: Rather than interrogating student experiences of segregation, it was easier to attribute the experiences of students like Ruby to their own personal failures to take advantage of the social and academic opportunities afforded by a US university. Additionally, that the entire semester was oriented toward creating a final argumentative essay, for which students synthesized all of their course research, seemed to force them into offering somewhat simplistic proposals to the complex problems they’d spent the semester documenting. In Ruby’s case, the solution to the segregation she’d uncovered was simply participating more in class and becoming involved in student organizations.

While the common assignment set in Ruby’s FYW program offered a starting point for serious investigation of racism, then, students were not always provided the space to fully grapple with the complexity of the issues they researched. Our classrooms might better address such issues, I contend, if we were to deemphasize the argumentative nature of academic writing and instead create opportunities for our students to engage in longer and more open-ended processes of inquiry. This would mean leaving the door open for a student like Ruby to *not* offer specific (and perhaps premature) proposals for how she and her Chinese peers might overcome their campus isolation. Instead, we should urge students to engage in sustained inquiry

about the sources of their social positions, how their experiences are similar to or different from those of their peers, and who benefits and loses from campus segregation. Importantly, such inquiry might also incite a process of “turning toward activism” (Conner 59) that could do more in the long run to expose and disrupt campus segregation and racism. In her qualitative study of today’s student activists, Jerusha Conner found that there is rarely a singular transformational experience that compels politically-engaged students to activism. Instead, college students’ activist sensibilities are formed after multiple encounters with and ongoing critical engagement with their causes. Her findings suggest that the critical goals of our classrooms might be better met by creating space for long-term encounter and engagement, perhaps by deemphasizing argument and instead urging students to document in their full complexity the issues they research and write about. Rather than offering proposals to address racial issues in a final project, for instance, students could instead identify questions that remain unanswered and possible directions for further research and action, something more akin to a research report than an argumentative essay.

Perhaps as important, the process of “turning toward activism” led Conner’s participants to forge alliances across racial, class, ethnic, and linguistic lines that resulted in more effective advocacy. For Basic Writing instructors and scholars, the lessons of Conner’s study are thus twofold: First, we need to recognize that our classrooms are but one site in what is hopefully an ongoing journey toward activist engagement. Secondly, we must realize that we may not see the results of this work—in terms of actual student engagement—in the one or two semesters that students are in our classrooms.

Yet, I see much promise in this ongoing and coalitional activist identity development, and I’d like to point to a January 2019 incident at Duke University as an example of the potential outcomes of such work. Dr. Megan Neely, a faculty member and graduate director of Duke’s biostatistics program, wrote an email encouraging Chinese students in that program to “commit to using English 100% of the time,” saying that department faculty had complained about students “speaking Chinese (in their words, VERY LOUDLY)” in department breakrooms (Wang). Neely also warned that students may have internship opportunities and letters of recommendation withheld if they not speak in English. After the email circulated on social media, diverse constituencies on campus—including the Graduate and Professional Student Council, Asian Students Association, and Duke International Association—mobilized to demand an institutional response and draw media attention to the incident. Together, these groups secured Neely’s

resignation as graduate studies director, forced an apology from Neely and the biostatistics chair, and compelled university administrators to affirm their “promise to value the identities, heritage, cultures, and languages of every individual at Duke” (Price).

Where Ruby and my other participants routinely saw segregation and discrimination as the result of their own individual failings, this student coalition called on the university to take responsibility. Where Ruby felt rhetorically powerless as a result of her FYW class, these students engaged the campus community through position statements, open letters, and engagement with local and national press outlets. Of note for Basic Writing scholars and instructors is that this diverse student coalition garnered an official university recognition of the issue of linguistic discrimination. By emphasizing sustained inquiry in our classrooms—and by resisting the temptation to require students to synthesize a semester’s research and writing into a tidy, final argumentative project—we might start students down a path that results in the engagement that attracted so much attention at Duke. Importantly, teaching students the importance of ongoing inquiry would also give them the time and space to learn more about their campus rhetorical contexts, perhaps removing the anxiety that accompanies writing to a campus audience as first-year students (which left Ruby feeling rhetorically powerless). Again, this would require that we deliberately shift away from the language of argument in our assignments and classrooms, instead privileging inquiry processes that not only look more like our actual research processes but also incite processes of activist identity development.

Instructor and Programmatic Advocacy

Beyond cultivating pedagogy that prepares students to confront and dismantle campus racism, public activism like that in which the Duke students engaged can likewise guide the advocacy of Basic Writing instructors and administrators, especially in our moment of contracting access and internationalization. In particular, we might confront how fast capitalism has remade university recruitment and admissions initiatives—and, in the process, campus race politics—by finding again Basic Writing’s *public* voice. We should widen the audience of our persuasive work to include those outside the university, making publicly visible admissions policies that privilege wealthier students while also foregrounding our responsibilities to the international students who have kept universities fiscally afloat. Doing so can tap into growing national concern about college affordability for a

broad spectrum of the US populace, an area of concern that can create the same kinds of coalitions that led Duke's administrators to for the first time recognize and condemn linguistic racism. On Ruby's campus, for instance, such public engagement could tap into a growing sense that Illinois students are being squeezed out of the state's flagship campus, a reality that has disproportionately impacted African American students but has nonetheless been broadly felt (see Cohen and Richards, *Des Garennes*). Such activism can take the form of organizing a coalition of student groups and student support services committed to increasing access and dismantling racial barriers. This coalitional work could confront head on public hostility to remediation and support by highlighting issues often invisible to the public, such as enrollment practices shaped less by a concern for the public good than by the bottom line. At their best, these advocacy efforts can create a public demand for admissions policies and student services that better serve diverse student groups—including those like Ruby whose tuition dollars have kept US universities fiscally viable. Perhaps most significantly, doing so can again make Basic Writing a driving force in the public conversation fifty years after Open Admissions put our classrooms at the center of the fight for access.

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Notes

1. In *Saving State U*, Nancy Folbre reviews declining state appropriations for public higher education since the 1862 Morrill Act. By 2005, "state and local funding per student at public colleges and universities, adjusted for inflation, was at its lowest level in twenty-five years" (45), with state funds covering less than 10% of the operating costs at some institutions (47). Financial aid—whether from institutions themselves or federal/state grants—has failed to keep up with the tuition increases that accompanied this decrease in public support. The result has been a widening gap between the number of underrepresented students who

graduate from state high schools and those who attend a state's public universities (Baumhardt).

2. In response to growing Chinese demand for Western education, many universities have implemented recruitment practices targeting students from China (Abelmann and Kang 386); at U of I, such efforts have included orientation sessions held in three major Chinese cities (Romano).
3. In 2009, 1661 Chinese international students enrolled at the University of Illinois, compared to 5825 in 2019. Nationally, 127,926 Chinese international students enrolled at colleges and universities in 2009, rising to 369,548 in 2019.
4. In 2011, 16 sections of Basic Writing were offered at the University of Illinois. In 2014, only 8 were offered.
5. Yuki Kang and Kelly Ritter have written about the impact of these demographic shifts on the University of Illinois writing center (Kang, "Translingual Approaches") and first-year writing program (Ritter, "Undergraduate Rhetoric").
6. At the time of my study, test scores were the sole placement mechanism at the University of Illinois. International students scoring over 103 on their TOEFL could enroll in Rhetoric 105 (the campus's "mainstream" writing course) or a parallel class offered in the communications department. International students scoring under 103 on TOEFL were required to take the English Placement Test (overseen by the university's Linguistics department) and were placed into an ESL course depending on their score ("Division"). A score of 103 is higher on average than what most institutions utilize for placement, meaning that international students at the U of I were placed into ESL and developmental courses at higher rates than other institutions (see Ross).
7. Relatively few of China's universities are considered worth attending by Chinese undergraduates in the US, and the intensity of the college admissions processes makes prestigious institutions like Peking University or Tsing Hua out of reach for the majority of Chinese students (see Wong).
8. In addition to emerging in nearly all of the 28 interviews I conducted, concerns about cultural and linguistic barriers also appeared in much of the student writing I collected.
9. China's rapid urban expansion—coupled with the relaxation of the country's land leasing regulations—has led to an expanded and profitable construction industry (see Hsing).

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