EDITORS' COLUMN

Pandemic Realities in the Midst of Developmental Education Reform: Documenting the Labors of Basic Writing Faculty

The past four years, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, have required swift and abrupt responses to what may seem for many of us a never-ending series of crises. In our personal lives, we have grappled with changes in our families and communities—involving illness, mental health, caregiving, financial stability, political divisiveness, and racial reckoning. As we took on the heavy load of emotional labor necessitated in these changes, as educators, we simultaneously grappled with the pandemic challenges of online teaching modalities, austerity campus budgets, as well as the expanding emotional and social needs of our students. A 2021 National Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) Survey of English faculty members at two-year colleges indicated that, during the pandemic, 78.57% percent of almost 400 respondents stated that the pandemic increased the amount of time they spent on their job, and about 80% of respondents claimed that the nature of their work changed during the pandemic (TYCA Workload Task Force). In the TYCA Workload Task Force's analysis of open-ended questions included in the survey, 194 out of 246 respondents indicated that the pandemic necessitated a change in teaching approaches. Questions related to emotional labor revealed that "instructors were largely sympathetic but overwhelmed by the needs of their students" (11), with responses describing the instructors' experiences of stress, exhaustion, and loneliness during this period. The analysis of the survey ends with an important question for further consideration: "What are the consequences and the ongoing impact of the emotional labor, trauma, and drain of the pandemic years? Is resilience an appropriate way to frame possible gains, or is there permanent damage to the collective psyche of a generation of students, or both?" (14).

These questions linger as English faculty members reflect on –and begin to analyze– the past few years of our labor. Sharing our teaching experiences during and following the pandemic enables us to consider the ways in which our labor has evolved, perhaps permanently, as we better understand the challenges our students face as well as view the changes to the landscape of our colleges and our field. At this point in time, numerous documents of the experiences of composition faculty members, administrators, and scholars have been published, articulating collective and individual experiences of this period and creating space for reflection and resilience. Collections

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such as *Recollections from an Uncommon Time: 4C 20 Documentarian Tales* and *Literacy and Learning in Times of Crisis: Emergent Teaching Through Emergencies*, as well as the April 2023 special issue of *Pedagogy*, have helped writing teacher-scholars make sense of our work within, and hopefully beyond, times of crisis. Such scholarship has created space for thinking and rethinking the labor(s) of writing instruction and teaching more broadly. The two special issues we are co-editing for the *Journal of Basic Writing* contribute to this scholarship by providing perspectives of basic writing teachers and scholars during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. We focus here, in our first issue, on documenting the labor of writing faculty during the pandemic, with contributions that offer both moments of critical analysis as well as personal reflection on our work. Our second issue, to be published in late 2024, focuses on programmatic responses to changes wrought by the pandemic as well as resulting pedagogical shifts in basic writing and composition.

In the specific context of basic writing/developmental education, the labor of teaching these past four years often has necessitated incorporating more types of student support into the curriculum without being provided additional resources, integrating more types of literacy instruction into our courses without being provided more time with students, and delivering instruction in online modalities without the certainty that our students (and at times our selves) are fully prepared and equipped for online learning. What is more, the increase in types and loads of labor has been accompanied for many of us by the continuation of substantial developmental education reform including changes to placement and assessment, the integration of reading and writing, as well as the implementation and/or scaling of corequisite programming. Many developmental English programs have implemented or expanded reforms to *integrate*, *condense*, and *accelerate* literacy instruction amidst the profound personal, professional, and social upheaval wrought by the pandemic.

In the years leading up to 2020, national trends in developmental English education reform focused primarily on reducing or eliminating standalone basic writing and/or reading courses, which often involved students taking a semester or multi-semester-sequence of non-credit courses based on an initial placement before being eligible to take a credit-bearing introductory composition course. Such developmental English courses were being replaced by corequisite courses which offered an introductory composition course with additional support and instruction for students identified through the placement process as in need of developmental English instruction. The exemplary model of this approach to developmental English

instruction has been the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), conceived by Peter Adams and his colleagues at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) in 2007. The ALP model enrolls students deemed in need of developmental English instruction into an introductory composition course, alongside non-developmental or "mainstream" English students, as well as an additional support course taught by their composition instructor. This condenses what was once a two-semester sequence into one semester, thus *accelerating* students' completion of their credit-bearing introductory composition course. ALP and other corequisite models have been implemented in hundreds of colleges across the United States over the past fifteen-plus years, sometimes through faculty-led initiatives and other times via legislative or university-wide mandates. Furthermore, the effectiveness of corequisite instruction for students in terms of pass rates and retention has been documented in scholarship and lauded by educational institutions such as the Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation as well as the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University.

Recently, in the March 2023 issue of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, Patrick Sullivan and Peter Adams conclude their analysis of the current state of developmental education in the title of their feature article, "National Report of Developmental Education: Corequisite Reform Is Working." This report draws upon Adams' extensive experience of corequisite course development over the past twenty-plus years as one of the founding developers of the ALP at CCBC as well as the two scholars' extensive analysis of existing corequisite program data. They state the aim of their report as providing " a degree of clarity about the present moment in developmental education" (225), which includes an overview of the legislative mandates to reform developmental education in states across the United States, beginning in Connecticut in 2012, as well as a review of pre-pandemic research on student performance in corequisite instruction.The takeaway from their analysis is that corequisite instruction is more effective than traditional developmental English education across a wide variety of institutional contexts when examining pass rates, and the benefits of corequisite instruction are more pronounced when data is disaggregated by ethnicity and race. Their conclusion recommends that community colleges work to enroll as many students as possible into credit-bearing English courses and that changes necessary for this move be implemented as soon as possible.

As co-editors of this special issue and colleagues who have worked together at the City University of New York (CUNY) for over ten years, we have experienced many of the changes Sullivan and Adams outline in the

journey to our current moment in developmental education reform. Each of us has been inspired by the ALP model at CCBC, and we have been advocates for implementing this model on our college campuses. Beginning in 2013, we worked together to design a local ALP curriculum around CUNY placement and remediation policies as well as departmental structures; we facilitated faculty development to onboard our colleagues; we carefully assessed our program; and we worked to scale, slowly and carefully, our ALP to include more students. As CUNY began to implement university-wide developmental education reform in 2016, we worked to align our corequisite course offerings with new policies, including an overhaul of CUNY's placement process and, ultimately, the elimination of all standalone "remedial" or developmental education courses beginning in Fall 2022. Our scaling up of corequisites on our campuses, Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) and Queensborough Community College (QCC), respectively, included opportunities for our faculty to reaffirm CUNY's commitment to access, incorporate non-cognitive student support into our curriculum, adopt universal design for learning in our courses, and work collaboratively on culturally relevant assignments. Such efforts align with work at other CUNY community colleges, as Elizabeth Porter documents in her article on Hostos Community College, CUNY, "Corequisite English and Community College: Modeling Supportive Course Design and Process-Driven Learning in Times of Crisis," published in *Pedagogy*. However, as Porter also acknowledges in her article, we were doing this within a university system at the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the largest number of COVID-related deaths of any university in the United States, and while facing significant budget cuts and austerity measures (Valbrun).

For each of us, as for many of the faculty represented in these two special issues of *JBW*, this meant we as individual faculty and program administrators were participating in substantial developmental education reform as we also were transitioning back and forth across teaching modalities, trying to support our students in times of personal and collective crisis, striving to maintain a sense of connection with our colleagues and community at our colleges, and, equally importantly, trying to hold together our lives at home. During the pandemic at QCC, Jennifer, as Chairperson of the English department, and Leah, as Composition Director, worked to support faculty members as we taught remotely and adopted online pedagogies. At BMCC, Cheryl, as ESL Deputy Chair, worked with faculty to craft instructional continuity plans in order to maintain rigor in the delivery of varied distance-learning models and adjust those models to the needs and

capabilities of students during the enormous disruption to normal academic operations. At QCC and BMCC alike, we were heartened by our colleagues working overtime to ensure that our students remained connected to us through various rounds of upheaval. At both campuses, faculty worked together to ensure our students had reliable internet access; transition to online teaching; slowly transition back to in-person instruction; and all-the-while keep up with CUNY's developmental reforms which changed placement into developmental English and Math courses, identification of English-as-Second-Language (ESL) students, and ESL placement testing protocol while also integrating developmental reading and writing courses, eliminating standalone developmental courses, and requiring the adoption and/or expansion of the corequisite model.

However, by Fall 2022, when this reform had been completed, and when we all were back on campus teaching primarily in-person, we witnessed a prevailing feeling of exhaustion. It seemed as if on our campus, and confirmed by the TYCA Workload Survey, writing faculty were trying to wrap their minds around the profound changes that we– and our students– had experienced personally, socially, and institutionally. We spoke about this often with our colleagues and with one another: not only were there few spaces for faculty to come together to reflect on our own pandemic experiences and express appreciation of our collective labors during this period; there also were few ways in which we could understand and contextualize our students' experiences in their classes, particularly in the midst of significant developmental reform. As the Center for Analysis of Postsecondary Research (CAPR) similarly suggested in its presentation on preliminary research related to the effectiveness of developmental reform at CUNY, it seemed impossible to assess for any one variable when developmental education reform is enmeshed in adjustments in teaching modalities as well as a global health crisis and its effects on mental health. Thus from our own experiences, and lingering sense of confoundment, came our desire to co-edit a special issue on developmental education reform and the COVID pandemic.

We hope this will provide space for basic writing teachers and scholars to reflect on the unprecedented challenges we all have faced over the past few years, the possibilities for critical analysis of this period, as well as an acknowledgement of the human connections we maintained in times of crisis. It is our hope that this first special issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing*, as well as the issue that will follow, will contribute to a further analysis of the present moment in developmental education that Sullivan and Adams recently outlined in their article. While Sullivan and Adams's report focuses

on corequisite studies conducted up to 2019, the articles and reflections in these special issues add other layers of analysis. Our contributors detail some of the realities of implementing and scaling corequisite courses over the past few years, as faculty, administrators, and students have grappled with unprecedented challenges related to the pandemic in tandem with the challenges of developmental educational reform. The contributions across the two special issues highlight student and faculty experiences in corequisite courses, the challenges of online instruction in developmental English curriculum, possibilities for community-building within professional development related to reform, and opportunities and challenges in community-building in times of crisis. The analyses and reflections of the authors demonstrate careful consideration of how realities of the pandemic have shaped faculty and student experiences of accelerated learning–and may inform it in the present moment in developmental education.

The contributions in this first issue of *JBW* focus on faculty experiences teaching corequisite courses during COVID-19, providing some glimpses and some deep dives into what this period has been like for those of us involved in developmental English education reform. In the first article, Jacqueline Brady studies the "alienated labor" of CUNY ALP instructors who have persevered through the immediate challenges of the pandemic, but continue to face increased pressure from historical and neoliberal forces beyond their control. She finds that the "culture of speed" at both the national and community college level holds instructors accountable yet may not necessarily meet the needs of students enrolled in those basic writing courses. In the second article, Trish Serviss, Jennifer Burke Reifman, and Meghan A. Sweeney also investigate faculty responses to the accelerated writing education as mandated by California legislation that "pushed and pulled actors, objects, and outcomes." The authors argue that more inclusivity is warranted to ensure open admissions and educational equity within the state's community college system; ultimately, they compellingly frame the problem as it relates to acceleration models, which change the speed and intensity of basic writing courses. The authors couple this with the need for more dynamic paradigms of time and more robust definitions of both student success and student preparedness if we are to leverage acceleration legislation as opportunities for building more writing education equity capacity in and across our college systems.

In addition to the full-length articles included in this issue, we share some shorter, more personal reflections as documentation of corequisite

instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our intention here as co-editors is to allow more perspectives to be included in these issues as well as to acknowledge the personal and fundamentally human interaction inherent in teaching. Within this format, we provide authors the space to document and reflect without the obligation of academic contextualization and to open space for empathy, a practice that has been essential for many of us to teach in times of crisis. In the first reflection, John Paul Tassoni shares his challenging experience as an instructor of a hybrid ALP writing course marked by student confusion during the height of the pandemic era; still, his experience leads to the valuable discovery of how such confusion can foster "sites of engagement" for teachers and students alike. In the second reflection, Sara Heaser reflects on teaching a corequisite course in the same period through the lenses of liminality and how the course would function differently for students who could not meet for in-person instruction. It is an experience that leads to discoveries about how to engage with students while navigating through a time of shifting expectations and unpredictable crises.

We believe these works as a whole meaningfully explore the emotional labor inherent in the experiences of teaching basic writing in our current moment, a challenging moment of unprecedented change–and, we hope, possibility. The articles in this issue interrogate the term *acceleration* and conceptions of time and labor during crisis by documenting the experiences of faculty taking on new (additional) work required of our current moment in developmental education. The reflections further humanize this moment by contemplating flashes of learning and connection between teacher and student, illuminating what Heaser and Tassoni help us understand as liminal possibilities in confusion.

—**Jennifer Maloy, Cheryl Comeau-Kirschner, and Leah Anderst**, guest editors, JBW Special Issue on Acceleration, Basic Writing, and Pandemic-Era Pedagogy (Vol. 1 of 2)

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