JBW

Journal of Basic Writing

Accelerated Learning Programs Special Issue
Acceleration, Basic Writing, and Pandemic-Era Pedagogy

Journal of Basic Writing

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Special Issue on Accelerated Learning Programs, No. 1 of 2
Acceleration, Basic Writing, and Pandemic-Era Pedagogy

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 translingualism 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

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

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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Instructor Alienation and the Accelerated Pipeline of the Post Pandemic's ALP Classroom

Jacqueline Brady

ABSTRACT: *This article examines the alienated labor of ALP writing instructors, who are being held accountable for a community college completion agenda that might not be best serving students. Discussing some of the larger historical forces and local institutional contexts impacting ALP teachers at CUNY, and drawing on recent studies of CUNY faculty, it argues that the neoliberal culture of speed, which emphasizes the numerical data of pass rates, has created increased pressure to accelerate students through composition courses. In particular, the speed-focused construct of the accelerated pipeline used nationally to promote ALP creates alienating conditions for faculty oriented toward the slower work of social justice education. With speed fetishized, learning compressed, and standards lowered—all in the name of social equity reform—instructors of ALP are becoming confused about priorities and unclear about the value and purpose of their teaching. Meanwhile, the work of basic writing instructors has been made substantially harder due partly to the pandemic.*

KEYWORDS: *accelerated learning; alienated labor; ALP instructors; basic writing; composition pipeline; COVID-19; culture of speed*

Accelerated learning approaches and programs have been increasingly embraced in higher education across the U.S. over the last five to ten years. As part of this trend, institutions of higher education that serve basic writers have expanded such programs, adopting a compressed corequisite model in place of non-credit bearing remedial course sequences, which are more time-consuming and expensive for students (Jenkins et al. 1). By now, over 200 two- and four-year colleges offer Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) writing courses (Anderst et al. 12). And as the call for this special issue of *JBW* on ALP noted, support for acceleration in education has not only come

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from educators and education policy experts, but also from politicians and business leaders.

These stakeholders frame accelerated learning initiatives as democracy-building projects that excavate faster and more direct educational passageways for disadvantaged students. Promoting the Gates Foundation's *Accelerate ED: Seamless Pathways to Degrees and Careers Program*, for example, the foundation website states, "As students grapple with the impacts of CO-VID-19 on their education journey, now is the time to accelerate this work and extend these opportunities to all students, especially Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds who have historically had less access to these types of programs." Gates' urgent message that "now is the time to accelerate this work" highlights the capitalist value of speed and the faith in fast learning that is intrinsic to the accelerated learning movement. Although seemingly innocuous, this plea for academic acceleration is part of a problem causing the alienation of many ALP writing instructors.

The alienation of basic writers has been a central theme of basic writing literature for at least three decades (Abt-Perkins; Mutnick, *Writing in an Alien World* and "Still Strangers in Academia"; Gongora). In their article "Basic Writing and Resisting White Innocence," Sean Molloy and former student Alexis Bennett locate a historical root of this alienation in the inherent racism of early basic writing programs, such as that of CUNY's City College, which segregated students linguistically and physically, and which leave behind a dominant legacy of monolingualism that is still painfully disorienting for BIPOC students in writing courses. For an important recent example of the theme of alienation regarding Kingsborough, the Brooklyn-based CUNY community college where I teach, Emily Schnee's study of composition students in "Exploring College Purpose" powerfully demonstrates the alienating effects of "academic momentum policies'' that "are undermining community college students' passions and purpose in pursuing a college education" (1). Although the theme of basic writer alienation persists, thanks in no small part to top-down policies that push acceleration in education, few researchers have explored the alienation of those who teach basic writing.

Because the conditions of our labor closely align with and contribute to student alienation in our basic writing courses, any thorough analysis regarding accelerated learning and its pedagogy should work to understand the current context of ALP instructor alienation and its history and, in so doing, resist the systemic forces that continue to promote it. I offer some of this historical context and macro ideological analysis here, along with some specific problems of CUNY's ALP writing program, to interrogate the

largely unexamined assumption that accelerated learning is categorically better for basic writers and to trouble Peter Adams' assertion that ALP *throws open the gates* for the "the most democratic segment of higher education" ("Giving Hope" 19). But I also provide both the larger structural and local institutional contexts to highlight the need for more attention—more research, more resources, more care—to address the alienated labor of basic writing instructors, who are now required to teach more in less time and who, with no control over the dramatic changes brought by ALP's sweeping implementation and the concurrent decimation of developmental courses, are being held accountable for a community college completion agenda (McPhail) that is not of their own doing or necessarily in their interest. This intention aligns with calls to remedy the problem that faculty voices have largely been missing from the national conversation about the wide-scale adoption of accelerated learning models in place of slower developmental approaches (Schrynemakers et al.; Hassel et al.).

The most available justifications for the promotion of accelerated learning projects have been economic ones. They are sold generally, but to adult learners (read: consumers) and nontraditional students specifically, as products for faster career advancement. As the logic goes, acceleration can help such students develop important skills, build necessary knowledge, and obtain career enhancing degrees in a manner that is more cost effective because it takes less time. Here, for example, is the rhetoric of acceleration Kingsborough uses to promote its "15 to Finish Program": "Graduate on time. Save money. Earn sooner. Complete 15 credits each semester & graduate in 2 years." From this institutional viewpoint, it is not too difficult to pan out to the broader capitalist perspective wherein acceleration in education is enthusiastically endorsed because it presumably readies more effectively trained workers for its needed industries in a shorter period. Along these general lines, accelerated learning is commonly construed as a "win-win" approach, promising students better jobs more quickly, costing students and tax payers less money, and ultimately benefiting the whole U.S. economy by supplying it with a better educated and more suitably trained workforce. ALP writing courses have been billed as particularly beneficial for disadvantaged students, such as those underprepared basic writers in public universities and community colleges, shortening their pipeline to graduation, allowing them to enter the workforce and begin earning a living wage more quickly, and helping them to be more competitive in the job market. In sum, the connection between fast-tracked college degree programs (of which ALP is a vital part) and economic gain is compelling to many educational stakeholders.

For these reasons, it should come as no surprise that the accelerated learning movement still appears to be in its glory days of widespread celebration and, if Gates' call to speedy action is any indication, may even be gaining momentum since the pandemic.

Elevating the Data to Sell ALP as Equity Reform

Within the field of college composition and sub-field of basic writing, arguments for the benefits of ALP draw on substantial research, like that done by the Community College Research Center, demonstrating that students in ALP writing courses are more likely to successfully complete Composition 1 and Composition 2 when compared to students taking non-credit bearing stand-alone developmental courses (Jenkins et al.; Cho et al.). This research is cited far and wide by education reformers and administrators to justify the top-down elimination of developmental education in favor of the allegedly more democratic and equity-oriented ALP model (Suh et al. 3). Take, for instance, this ALP happy tweet from CUNY's Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez: "Replacing the outdated remedial approach with a more effective, equitable, and evidence-based system is an important advance in our ongoing mission to provide all our students with educational opportunity and the support they need to succeed" (12 Jan 2023).

In the name of social equity reform, the argument for ALP writing classes conveniently elevates the data by drawing primarily on the promising news of good pass rates in first-year composition courses. But we need to be careful about the uncritical acceptance of any numerical data that has the power to control public policy (Newfield et al.). The utilization of ALP data relies too heavily on the insular and instrumental view that the complicated work of democratizing higher education through better college completion is measured mainly by the numbers of students passing first year comp courses. And yet, students drop out of college for a myriad of reasons that have nothing to do with what is happening in composition, so meaningful research needs to the take into consideration the underlying causes of college attrition and avoid one size fits all solutions (Boylan, Interview, 20). In their helpful article "Clarifying Terms and Reestablishing Ourselves Within Justice: A Response to Critiques of Developmental Education as Anti-Equity," Emily Suh et al. explain that the better pass rates justification for ALP is based on the mistaken conflation of educational equity with "equal enrollment in gateway courses rather than support throughout the college experience which takes into account students' varied starting points" (3). This confla-

tion happens at the level of the administration with concerns coming down "from above" (e.g., from the provost) together with department chairs regarding low enrollment and the poor retention of BIPOC students in accelerated courses. But it also happens "from within" our departments, with concerns coming from well-meaning course coordinators, writing program directors, and other faculty who search for solutions to disparities in pass rates *only or primarily* in what happens in composition. In both cases, the abundant structural problems that students face, which result in poverty, food and housing insecurity, lack of available childcare and healthcare, and time, work, and family constraints (to list only a few) are minimized or in some cases entirely ignored. Instead of focusing on the wraparound supports needed to address these nonacademic issues (Mangan), attention is turned toward dubious numerical outcomes data with the implication that ALP writing faculty should take responsibility for said data.

The conviction that new data-driven ALP courses will close equity gaps (See Mirabito) produces increasing pressure for ALP faculty to do more work even though there is confusion about priorities, especially in the context of ALP's accelerated format. Are basic writing instructors supposed to be doing meaningful social justice teaching? Or should they be focusing on passing students out of composition courses? And this cloudiness results in an uncomfortable expansion of teaching responsibilities towards a misunderstanding of equity (Armstrong), with some instructors, including this author, insisting that changes to ALP learning outcomes are mostly just "moving furniture around the room" for the purposes of the administration (See Bennett and Brady). Meanwhile, on the writing program level, there is not enough clear discussion about how passing students out of our classes more quickly combats any oppressive systems or tackles any of the underlying causes of social injustice. This leaves ALP faculty to forge ahead with the vague faith that access to higher education alone offers a panacea to inequality. Moreover, there is little honest admission that when institutions with ALP programs place a high emphasis on speed and pass rates, they may be more likely to endorse lower standards and to accept easier and less work—less reading and writing—which might result in students graduating without the knowledge skills they need to succeed in their chosen fields, not to mention to succeed as engaged citizens (Armstrong 64) in a democracy racked by systemic oppression. This knowledge deficiency is suggested by a 2022 survey of employers that found that most did not feel that community colleges are producing work-ready employees (Fuller and Raman 5). The confusing accelerated approach to social justice education also coincides

with and is compounded by exigencies of pandemic teaching that simplified course work requirements, with instructors reducing assignments and lowering expectations around meeting learning outcomes in response to learning loss (West and Lake 10) and fears about low enrollment and high attrition. Indeed, the results of a recent national survey of tenured professors reveal that the lowering of standards is a widespread concern among faculty, with over 30% admitting to inflating grades and "reducing the rigor" of their courses (Horowitz et al.).

By telling only the happy story about the efficacy of ALP, the positive pass rate data dodges sobering evidence that points to ALP's limitations as a social equity reform. For instance, a recent comprehensive review of evidence by the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness reports that "while discrete reforms to developmental education may improve completion of introductory college-level courses, few interventions have been shown to increase long-standing outcomes" (Bickerstaff et al. 3). Hunter Boylan's work also shines light on the propagandizing of data that has led to the drastic decline of developmental education. In his article "No Silver Bullet," he argues that redressing social inequity in community colleges will require them to broaden their focus far beyond the completion of composition courses. He writes:

> It will also require that they address non-academic issues that may prevent students from succeeding, improve the quality of instruction at all levels, revise financial aid policies, provide better advising to students at risk, integrate instruction and support services, teach college success skills, invest in professional development and do all of these things in a systematic manner integrated into the mainstream of the institution.

Of course, the promotion of ALP through only the hard data of the increased numbers of students passing composition also conveniently ignores the lived experiences of faculty, eliding the findings that many instructors teaching ALP are not convinced that it is working very well (Schrynemakers et al.; Lane et al.). In the main, this over-reliance on the data driven metric of student pass rates as the ultimate measure of program success is a signpost of neoliberalism's stranglehold on higher ed. It results from the inaccurate painting of public education as economically inefficient, which has spurred public universities and colleges to adopt managerial models that demand hard numerical data to ensure funding (Newfield). For as Christopher New-

field points out, "Even super wealthy foundations like Gates are looking for direct measurable impacts from their donations and for the confirmation of their value" (Williams 747).

By now, this process of reifying pass rate data as the bottom line in educational equity reform has been almost completely neutralized in the field of composition. ALP founder Peter Adams, for example, promotes ALP programs nationally by asserting that with them "74% of our basic writers are passing first year composition." He further assures us that reluctant faculty at six colleges in Connecticut, who had been mandated to adopt corequisite models, abandoned their skepticism and "became increasingly proud ...when their data showed they had doubled the rate at which developmental students passed first year composition" ("Giving Hope" 20). Even though the over reliance on composition pass rate data typified by Adams' declarations have become standard fare in ALP advocacy, it was not a foregone conclusion in the early stages of developmental education. In fact, it wasn't until the twenty-first century that state legislators and education leaders began to put pressure on accountability to show better pass rates and "success in developmental education began to be measured on student retention and successful completion in gatekeeper classes" (Stahl et al. 10). This development came on the heels of the national No Child Left Behind initiative created by George W. Bush in 2001, which ushered in the regime of high stakes testing and expanded the federal role in ensuring that schools demonstrate learning outcomes. Along with federal and city grant money, increased private sector funding flowing into public colleges and universities in the name of a better prepared workforce has further fueled the learning outcomes assessment movement at the level of higher ed (Bennet and Brady 148). Now both federal grants, such as that of Title V, and private sponsors, such as The Lumina Foundation, require hard evidence of outcomes to justify expenditures. And what better evidence at community colleges—long positioned as "defacto 'suppliers' to local and regional business" of an emerging middle skilled workforce (with more than a high school degree but less than a four-year college) (Fuller and Raman 5)—than the impressive data point showing a larger number of students passing out of the college pipeline more quickly?

Elevated Data's Transport: ALP's Speed-Focused Pipeline

With the national education discourse consistently positioning composition as a major gateway in the college completion agenda, an ac-

celerated ALP pipeline framework has emerged in the reformist imaginary. Here's the view from the ALP pipeline perspective: the only viable entry point to the accelerated pipeline is a credit-bearing comp course and any work (e.g. developmental courses and/or ESL courses) done prior to arriving at this intake point is deemed unvaluable or wasteful; the amount of students flowing into and out of the pipeline must match up, so students who don't make it through in a linear fashion are considered to be problematic "leakages" (Adams' words, "Throwing Open" 53), evoking broken plumbing or dripping faucets, as Elizabeth Garbee notes; and it is largely the ALP instructors' job to keep the pipeline flow going, shunting any holes (better known as non-passing students) that might not make it through. Conveying the consternation that many faculty feel about this accelerated pipeline paradigm, a community college instructor cautions us: "If we cave to the pressure from the administration to push them through, all we are doing is creating failure later on. It is essential to actually bring students up to the college level of reading, writing, and mathematics before allowing them to take credit-bearing courses" (Quoted in Schrynemakers et al. 23).

Several authors have discussed the importance and potential dangers of naming and framing in the fields of developmental education and basic writing. Pejorative names/frames of developmental education programs, such as the "the bridge to nowhere," or in the unpretty parlance used in my institution for the work formerly done in developmental courses, "circling the drain," another unfortunate plumbing metaphor, have the power not only to make students and instructors feel ashamed, but also to influence public opinion, public policy, and program funding (See McGee et al. and Mlynarczyk). In place of such undesirable frameworks suggesting immobility and slowness, the ALP model offers fast flow through the composition pipeline. In the words of the Accelerated Learning Program's website, ALP is successful because "The pipeline through which [students] must travel is shortened from two semesters to one" ("Features"). And yet, both types of frames—be it the sad slow circling of the drain or the upbeat rapid passing through the pipeline—hinge on the capitalist value of speed and are destructive. The ALP pipeline metaphor, after all, is an economically derived model of education imagining a limited and linear prescription for career success. The accelerated pipeline does not adequately honor the lived experiences or various starting points of students, nor does it carefully consider the multiple hindrances encountered or multiple paths taken by them. Barrie McGee et al. explain that even though

> external entities like CCA [Complete College America] seem to
> advocate for college access and success and even invoke the lan-
> guage of social justice, it is difficult to take these presuppositions
> seriously when they fixate on a single segment of the "pipeline"
> and ignore the rest (i.e., socioeconomic, racial, linguistic, cultural)
> of the realities that provided both the catalyst and the mission for
> DE [developmental education] in the first place. (3)

Finally, the ALP paradigm of an accelerated pipeline through which ALP students must pass quickly also goes against what most writing instructors know about learning. Even ALP teachers with no formal training in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of education (which emphasized that learning is a gradual process, only unfolding over time as students integrate new knowledge skills learned through social interactions) intuitively understand that learning is reiterative and relational; that it is not easily measurable or quantifiable; and, most importantly, that it takes time.

Despite its flawed accelerated pipeline paradigm, which narrowly defines success as students passing first-year composition, the ALP writing movement, now over 15 years since its launch at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) in 2007-2008, has gained even more momentum since the pandemic. Fretting about low student enrollments after COVID-19, institutions around the country have scaled up accelerated learning models, such as the FastStart program at the Community College of Denver and ALP at SUNY's Onondaga Community College, to help entice students back to campus with promises of fast-tracked degrees. The pandemic-induced pivot to digital classrooms and "flexible" modes of remote instruction have given accelerated approaches a further boost by making them even more attractive and widely available, especially at community colleges serving nontraditional students and basic writers. At Kingsborough, 26% of ALP writing classes currently have an online component. So ALP students not only can save time taking credit-bearing writing courses; they can also save time by not commuting, a barrier to success at over 40% of the nation's community colleges, which lack transit stops within walking distance (Povich). Kingsborough, for example, is located on a remote beachside campus on the Southern end of Brooklyn with no subway nearby. Clearly the efficiency of internet learning that was bolstered by the pandemic fits well with the academic culture of speed, education momentum policies, and accelerated learning programs, all of which, taken as a composite, throw into sharp contrast the

time-consuming walk to and from many community college campuses and the slow work of social justice pedagogy (Bruenig).

Some Pertinent History of the Capitalist Value of Speed

Because the main point of ALP writing programs is to accelerate students through the credit-bearing composition pipeline, and they draw on a framework that foregrounds pace and fetishizes fast learning, it is worth examining some broader history of the capitalist value of speed in the U.S. Speed has long been a weapon in capitalism's effort to control labor with processes that demand faster production time; and vice versa, attempts by labor to resist capitalism have frequently involved slowing down production or "jamming the works" (See Burowoy on the politics of capitalist production). In the introduction to their book *Slow Cities: Conquering Our Speed Addiction for Health and Sustainability*, Paul Trantor and Rodney Tolly explain that today's prevalent culture of speed has roots back to industrial capitalism and the expansion of railway transportation in the 1800s. The railway system established standard times in agreed-upon time zones and introduced a new orientation toward timetables. According to the authors, "Railways made the notion of 'clock time' the dominant way of understanding time. This meant precise timing of work and leisure activities, and the view of time as a resource that could be saved, consumed, organized and monitored, and used as 'productively' as possible" (11). This development contributed to the view that *time is money* and that time spent in transit is wasted time, much like the ALP framework of the accelerated pipeline sees developmental coursework as something to get done with as quickly as possible. Both perspectives venerate the moment of arrival at a destination and ignore the real possibility that time spent in process—traveling on transportation or learning in developmental course—might have intrinsic value.

In the early days of industrial capitalism, speed was still seen negatively, as a disorienting force that could cause "sick hurry," an uncomfortable condition brought by too much rushing. In fact, it wasn't until the development of the automobile and the rise of Fordism in the early part of the twentieth century that acceleration became a cherished value in American education. Fordism helped to prompt a national obsession with efficiency, acceleration's close corollary, which enabled the vast spread of Taylorism into work, home, and school life. And by extension, Franklin Bobbit, the inventor of curriculum, drew on principles of scientific management to argue that schools should function like efficient businesses with the aim of

preparing students for industry. Business-like models of operation gained solid traction in universities and colleges in the 1980s, when institutions of higher learning began to widely adopt them to increase their own profitability. In her chapter, "Accelerated Time in the Neoliberal University," Kristin Smith explains:

> The adoption of neoliberalism as a re-organizing approach in post-secondary education has amplified corporate, market orientation where demands for "accountability," efficiencies, measurable outcomes, quality control mechanisms, and cost-effectiveness are embedded at every level of academia. Within this context both educators and students have experienced both a work intensification and a quickening of their daily lives whereby there is never enough time to complete the demands of their work. (163)

Certainly, in our current stage of advanced capitalism—also called "go go capitalism" and/or "turbo capitalism" for good reasons—the neoliberal landscape of higher education has fully absorbed the love of speed along with the tenets of instrumentalism, work efficiency, and economic incentive. "Neoliberalism," as one colleague at my institution aptly puts it, "has become the air we breathe." As part of the process of corporatizing higher ed, acceleration, a term once linked to the cost benefits of machine technology and transportation systems, has now been solidly retooled as both a humanistic value, something students desire for themselves, and as a value adding product—a good deal leading to a better life. We should be wary of this retooling.

ALP: An Ineffective Quick Fix for Slow Systemic Problems

By proceeding from the historical fact that acceleration in our ALP writing classrooms is a longstanding and potent force of capitalism that prioritizes efficiency over education, and by understanding that it adheres to neoliberal policies emphasizing numerical outcomes, such as the data of passing composition students over social justice approaches, which require much more extensive wraparound supports and slow systemic interventions, we may find that, contrary to the ways in which it is promoted, ALP's acceleration of basic writers complies with social inequality rather than combats it. Some evidence of this point was found in a longitudinal study of ALP at CCBC done by the Community College Research Center already in 2012. Sung Woo Cho, a researcher who analyzed the data, admitted that while

evidence clearly showed that ALP students had better persistence through comp 1 and 2, "analyses suggested that ALP was more effective for white students and also the higher income students" ("TRPP TALKS").

In his influential book *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*, first published in 1976, Richard Ohmann argued that composition courses in American colleges and universities were reinscribing social injustices and class divisions. According to Ohmann, by teaching students through "skills drills" and other formulaic methods of writing instruction that were common at the time, writing classes were inadvertently preparing students for deskilled, repetitive work in the job force. He posited that instead of such routinized instruction, we should be teaching students of writing "critical thinking." And by this, Ohmann meant anti-capitalist analysis and the complex thinking that *takes the time to* understand how hegemonic power works and how to oppose the oppressive systems that structure our relationships and control our lives. Nearly fifty years later, Ohmann's work is still important for its reminder that composition programs and course sequences, like the colleges and universities in which they are embedded, when capitulating to capitalist forces, can reinscribe social inequity, reproduce oppression, and cultivate the conditions for alienated labor for both students and instructors. An important role of social justice educators, as Suh et al. have argued, is to acknowledge the institutional oppression that Ohmann reminds us of and work to dismantle it while continually reflecting "on our own socialization and assumptions" (6).

To be clear, by invoking Ohmann, I am not suggesting a return to non-credit bearing remedial courses that culminated in high stakes tests, effectively functioning as unmovable gates, blocking too many students from ever earning an advanced degree. For there are some important benefits to ALP writing classes, namely the corequisite aspect, which enables students to earn credits while doing the work of college courses; and the smaller cohort, which offers the possibility of more personalized instruction. At Kingsborough, for example, ALP classes are capped at 8 students who get 2 hours of extra instruction on top of the standard 4 hours of class time integrated with the rest of the composition class. This manageable class size, a key component of the original ALP model developed by Peter Adams at CCBC, allows time to get to know and respond to the individual needs of each student writer and more opportunity to do essential one-on-one writing workshops. It also enables ALP students to ask for help when they need it. I worry, however, that these benefits are far outweighed by the larger accelerated pipeline structure of ALP, particularly as it now functions at all

six of CUNY's community colleges, which were mandated by the Office of Academic Affairs to phase out stand-alone developmental courses and replace them with corequisite ALP models by fall of 2022. Understood with this top-down mandate in mind, ALP appears to operate as an arm of a corporatized university more interested in credentializing students than teaching them, offering a fast ineffective fix—a pass through the composition pipeline—for structural problems equally impacting students' lives and learning. And by participating uncritically in ALP's accelerated pipeline process in the name of social equity, many justice-oriented composition instructors are becoming alienated from their work and unclear about the value of their teaching/labor. Recent research on faculty attitudes toward corequisite reforms at CUNY demonstrates that as ALP faculty face the daunting challenge of teaching "more content in less time," they

> struggle to understand how the accelerated corequisite timeframe could adequately support the needs of all students, particularly those who would benefit from traditional developmental education courses' emphasis on developing the college success skills (e.g., time management, critical thinking, and study skills) necessary for long-term success. (Fay et al. 18)

Although ALP writing instructors (hopefully) are no longer teaching the formulaic writing methods Ohmann criticized, they might still be preparing students as unskilled workers, thereby reproducing an underclass suited only for the lowest level jobs. By buying into (no pun intended) the prevailing pipeline framework and notion that their main responsibility as ALP instructors is to move basic writers along through the college system, and quickly, they may be scaling back on requirements and instruction, e.g., reducing the number of units/assignments/drafts, covering less challenging reading or replacing it with more accessible visual media, abandoning the teaching of scholarly articles and the research required to find them, and devising endless, easier ways for students to get better grades. By providing ALP students with only bare bones literacy skills, instructors are contributing to a wider "dumbing down" of young Americans due to years of disinvestment from and attacks on public education (Hartman 2022). And, because learning is always a two way street, ALP students who also buy into the ALP pipeline's accelerated ride through composition requirements may be less likely to take the time to avail themselves of the extra help instructors provide, such as office hours, or the extraneous services on offer, such as writing tutoring,

which is not automatically structured into ALP at Kingsborough, as it once had been in longer developmental course sequences. In their 2019 survey of faculty at three CUNY community colleges, Ilse Schrynemakers et al. found that most instructors "perceived students' reading and writing skills as below necessary proficiency levels for college" and did not feel that changes to developmental education, including the adoption of ALP, were effective. They report that results "showed faculty's desire for higher academic standards, including more stringent college placement thresholds; the maintenance and expansion of semester-long developmental education sequences; and the need for more reading and writing instruction in all credited content areas." In a follow up study one year later, these researchers found that 59% of faculty perceived grade inflation, and 37% believed that the expansion of ALP and elimination of developmental sequences would result, or already has resulted, in the lowering of academic standards (Lane et al.). Corroborating this evidence, I admit that since the pandemic in my own ALP course, which is themed around issues of translingualism and language justice, I have had to reduce the amount of reading we do, sadly cutting back on several core texts. This spring I regretfully eliminated James Baldwin's influential work "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me What Is?", which seemed far too difficult for my ALP students, several of whom were still struggling with easier readings. Because I feel so strongly that we should all be teaching Baldwin's text in our basic writing classes, for its courageous reclamation of Black English and brilliant insistence on historical analysis, this cut really hurt, and certainly contributed to my own feelings of alienation.

Instructor Alienation and the Expansion of the ALP Pipeline at CUNY's Community Colleges

While acceleration is being promoted for individual, institutional, and even national economic gains, CUNY has joined the speed learning bandwagon, gradually growing ALP writing at its community colleges until it has eclipsed the developmental sequence. (For instance, Kingsborough started with only five ALP sections in 2013; in fall of 2023 we ran over ten times that with 57 ALP sections.) But amid this educational culture of acceleration, another powerful movement is brewing. Books such as *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* by Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*'s special trends report, *Burned out and Overburdened* (Jan 2021), along with articles such as "The Great Faculty Disengagement" (McClure Fryar) (and as I write this article, in my inbox,

Chronicle of Higher Ed's latest, "Overcoming Faculty Fatigue"), warn us that the neoliberal landscape of higher education and the academy's culture of acceleration is overwhelmingly alienating for instructors. Berg and Seeber demonstrate clearly that higher education's neoliberal emphasis on speed, productivity, and efficiency is making college and university instructors unwell. Our responsibilities, according to the authors, have "ballooned" (their words) far beyond our job descriptions and ken. Seeking to address this increasingly alarming problem, the Modern Language Association (MLA), the largest professional organization for professors of language and literature, chose "working conditions" as its theme in 2023. In his winter newsletter, Christopher Newfield, the MLA president at the time, explained the choice for the theme in this way: "Your work had additional care labor layered on during the pandemic, and this labor has not been removed. You've knocked yourself out to maintain educational quality in a year summarized by the headline 'My College Students Are Not OK' (Malesic)." More recently, a Call for Papers for a special issue of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* (47.1 Fall 2023), edited by Jacob Babb and Jessie Blackburn, indicates that those of us administering composition have hardly escaped "the consequences of burnout, exhaustion, and low morale" resulting from the "shifts in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic and the tumultuous sociopolitical landscape of the 2020s." They call for research "toward administrative practices that make space for carework and well-being."

We need look only as far as our own ALP writing courses to see some of the ballooning of responsibilities that Berg and Seeber discuss. Certainly, in the more than 25 years that I have been involved in directing developmental writing at both private and public institutions in New York City, including Kingsborough, I have watched the demands on instructors of basic writing increase unsustainably. Basic writing instructors have long been called upon to do tremendously heavy lifting—to create sophisticated scaffolding for the diverse learning styles, different levels of preparation, and multilingual and multicultural orientations of their classrooms. Still, the simultaneous occurrences of the long pandemic and CUNY's wide-scale institutionalization of ALP have further exacerbated our exhaustion. ALP writing faculty at Kingsborough and elsewhere are now tasked with an ever increasing list of duties, including mastering multiple technologies, online platforms and multi-modal approaches; performing emotionally draining psychological and classroom management interventions during a time of increased mental illness; being expected to know and counsel students about rapidly changing and shrinking school resources; maintaining COVID-19 safety

protocols; drumming up clever ways to sustain student attention and course engagement because focus appears more fractured than ever, and following up with students who disappear from class by repeatedly calling them on the phone. Plus, at Kingsborough, 42% of ALP courses are currently taught by adjuncts or other non-tenure track faculty whose labor there, as elsewhere in colleges across the nation, is already alienated by stressful job precarity including "short contracts, no assurance of renewal, low pay" and " little if any say in faculty governance or in the making of the curriculum" (Ohmann and Schrecker). Almost another 30% of ALP classes at KCC are taught by literature PhDs or creative writers, some with little exposure to composition pedagogy or developmental education theory. And while our tiring duties and unmanageable expectations have multiplied since the pandemic, at several of the CUNY community college campuses, faculty have not yet fully returned to campus. The resulting ghost town feeling of our empty hallways and lack of available community to confer with and confide in has intensified what Karen Uehling identified as the "almost impossible challenge for basic writing faculty to find and enact a professional identity" (66).

These alienating circumstances of ALP writing at CUNY's community colleges have also been aggravated by the administration's adoption of a new placement system to determine college readiness. In 2019, CUNY began using a proficiency index (PI)—an algorithm based on student high school GPA plus SAT and Regent scores if/when available. At first pass, this new placement metric seemed promising because it takes multiple student measures into account, as opposed to earlier placement mechanisms that used timed assessment tests, such as the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW). In practical application, however, the CUNY placement PI is dysfunctional to the degree that there are "major concerns" about its effectiveness across colleges among faculty, staff, and administration (Fay et al. 14). Typically, in the ALP courses I teach every semester, fully half of the ALP cohort—at least 4 out of 8 students—seem misplaced. Often the strongest student in the entire composition class is placed in ALP, and at least 2 or 3 other students placed in ALP would be much better served by ESL courses. The remaining half of the ALP cohort usually needs more than the minimally supportive extra two hours that Kingsborough's model offers. And my ALP courses don't seem to be an exception in this regard, for Fay et al. found that "there is widespread perception" among CUNY faculty that "there is a lack of available [ALP] models appropriate for students with more profound support needs" (7). This problem is partly the result of a general trend of ALP over placement/under placement because CUNY's PI algorithm still does not

combine, as Hunter Boylan correctly asserts placement measures should, "standard indicators together with assessment of affective characteristics and life circumstances" (Levine-Brown "Interview" 20; See Boylan). On balance, Kingsborough faculty and students alike are befuddled by the results of the ALP placement system, and the particulars of the algorithm have not been clarified or broken down for us by the administration. But while students don't understand why they land up in the ALP support class, which demands two more hours of their precious time, what they do understand well is that time is money. So, they are resentful—and definitely stigmatized—because they must stay longer than the other students, or come earlier, or worse yet, commute to our far-off campus on an entirely different day to attend the ALP class. As a result, ALP students often want to leave ALP lessons early or skip them entirely. In response, ALP instructors feel pressed to construe the ALP support portion as entertaining, well-spent time. At Hostos Community College, for example, instructors spin the ALP class as a "cozier" Composition 1 or the "English 110 after-party" (Fay et al. 4).

What's more, burgeoning trends in composition and basic writing theory that have called for even more labor from writing instructors might be making our alienation worse. For instance, the trend advocating practices of extreme flexibility in assessment and curriculum design (see, for example, Powell's call for "Absolute Hospitality in the Writing Program") can make it hard for ALP instructors, particularly at institutions like mine where our quarters are only 12 weeks long, who must operate within a time bound term and vis a vis the ALP passing pipeline. These instructors need to set boundaries about when writing is due, and the very notion of flexible time for the completion of assignments is directly undercut by the forceful speed-focused model of the accelerated pipeline. Other trends, such as those suggesting we hone new areas of expertise beyond our job descriptions, folding in work that should not be ours (see, for example, Bruno's suggestions that we integrate institutional policy into our courses), while admirable in so far as that they correctly identify the needs of students that exceed writing instruction, may also add to our burden. Finally, all these discrete classroom solutions create more alienating labor for ALP writing instructors by ignoring Deborah Mutnick's salient point that we cannot solve students' unpreparedness for college because "the root causes of weak literacy and other academic skills are not located in the sphere of education—teachers, curricula, methods—but rather in oppressive social structures and growing economic inequality." By putting the onus on ALP instructors to solve sys-

temic problems with classroom-oriented pedagogical changes, these trends play into the neoliberal culture of job creep undergirding our alienation.

Conclusion: ALP's Accelerated Pipeline vs. CUNY's Broken Plumbing

The alienation of CUNY's ALP instructors matters in a discussion of post pandemic basic writing because teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions, as Diane Ravitch has famously observed. Kingsborough's campus is a perfect example of Ravitch's point, with its aging infrastructure in obvious disrepair due to years of austerity and further neglect from disuse during the pandemic. Last spring, for the entire semester, the computers in our classroom did not work properly. Despite multiple visits from Information Technology Service staff, the computers could not maintain internet access, so students repeatedly lost written work mid-task, until many gave up and used their phones instead. Then, during the final week of class, a water main broke, forcing campus to close for the last few days of the semester, truncating an already short term. Making light of the sorry state of our campus, to which instructors and students have mostly grown accustomed, several of us faculty joked about our unexpected "toilet holiday." We got by with Blackboard, and my students managed to submit their final portfolios, which are assessed for pass or fail by another ALP instructor, virtually from functioning home devices.

Read against the robust image of the accelerated pipeline used in the nationwide promotion of ALP, this local broken plumbing is a humble reminder that things at our colleges and in our classrooms are not working. Rather than just a sad joke about the conditions of our labor and learning space, let this broken pipe be a cautionary tale about ALP, reminding us that beyond the fast fix of the accelerated pipeline through gateway courses, much deep time-consuming structural work needs to be done to fortify both the equity in our students' educations and the wellness of the faculty who want them to succeed. Just as ALP students need nonacademic wraparound support (Mangan) to help them throughout their whole college experience, ALP faculty need extensive assistance to mitigate their alienation and safeguard against their burn out ("Burned Out and Overburdened"). Faulty college placement systems that reduce students to numbers, like CUNY's current PI algorithm, can improve by adding the slow and thorough work of interviewing incoming students to better understand their individual starting points, circumstances, and needs (Boylan). And writing programs can benefit from

spacious and thoughtful conversations among ALP faculty toward a better understanding of the crucial terms *social equity* and *social justice* as they relate to the goals of their writing courses and pedagogies; and collective reflection on how the system of higher education works "as an engine of inequality, starting with the inequality of learning, which has worsened as a result of this century's practice of measuring and managing" and "top-down, often autocratic governance" (Newfield) that mandates accelerated solutions for complex problems. Finally, students and faculty need to work together to resist the academy's culture of speed and its juggernaut of neoliberalism, which is barreling over them with the force of faster and bigger—albeit not necessarily better—pipelines.

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Time as a Wicked Problem: A Study of Community College Faculty Experiences with State-Mandated Acceleration

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ABSTRACT: California legislation (AB705, signed 2017) mandated accelerated community college writing education and implementation to begin just before the COVID-19 pandemic. This study captures faculty experiences with mandated pandemic-era acceleration via analysis of 131 open-ended faculty survey responses representing 60 of the 116 California community colleges. Using an activity system framework to analyze responses, we find that while faculty navigated a new simplified acceleration activity system due to legislation focused on accelerating writing education, their commentaries suggest that a more complicated, dynamic acceleration activity system emerged in which time became a determinate force that pushed and pulled on actors, objects, and outcomes. We argue that acceleration and basic writing both require a more inclusive conception of time to be leveraged as the tools of educational equity and open admissions they aspire to be. We advocate learning from faculty, holistic and contextual assessment of the initiative, fuller funding of the initiative to include support, and appreciation for the multiplicity of student experience and purpose.

KEYWORDS: acceleration; ALP; AB705; basic writing; developmental education legislation; time; writing in the two-year college

Community college acceleration has been legislated into effect across the country, including Texas, Florida, Connecticut, and, recently, our home state of California (Scott-Clayton). Elements of the acceleration movement were introduced decades ago in California, when in 1997 the California State University system was mandated to reduce the number of students held for remediation from 45% to 10% by 2007 (Goen-Salter). In 2010, the California Acceleration Project propelled the acceleration movement forward, presenting it as an educational reform movement (Henson and Hern) that prioritized student completion of community college in the largest community college system in the country—particularly for students from historically underrep-

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resented minority groups. Focused on writing and math "preparatory" or developmental education, these state-level efforts are described as a remedy for educational inequity with time to college completion as the ultimate metric of student success. In 2017, California Assembly Bill 705 (AB705) mandated that California community colleges accelerate writing coursework by directing them to "maximize the probability that the student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and mathematics within a one-year timeframe" (AB705; AB1705). Proponents of this legislation cite equity concerns because students of color are overwhelmingly placed into lengthy developmental course sequences—what we would call basic writing courses—and as a result are less likely to complete college (Henson and Hern). However, developmental education specialists have questioned the efficacy of legislated changes in writing education that do not account for the lived experiences of community college students nor the expertise of community college faculty and other scholars in the field (Armstrong; McGee et al.; Suh). For many of the 116 colleges in the California community college system, work implementing this bill came to fruition in the Fall of 2020, moments before a global pandemic forced higher education institutions to transition to online spaces. Therefore, questions about AB705—and the recent additional AB1705 that extends legislative reach to placement processes for writing and math—are tied in practical terms to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mandated acceleration and the pandemic impacted California basic writing courses simultaneously, profoundly influencing the ongoing debates about what students need, how existing systems can be adapted to meet stu-

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dent needs better, and the markers of student success that should be used to measure acceleration's effectiveness. Given the scale of the California community college system that serves 1.5-2 million students per year, the most readily available metrics of student success thus far have been quantitative data about student retention rates, course completion, and transfer to four-year colleges [see California Acceleration Project (CAP), Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), California Education Lab, and Wheelhouse: The Center for Community College Leadership and Research as well as national perspectives from Complete College America (CCA), and Brookings Institution]. These data sets and analyses (e.g. Li) provide invaluable macro-perspectives about the impact of postsecondary education acceleration legislative efforts.

Nonetheless, the day-to-day classroom happenings of acceleration remain less known, suggesting a need for richer qualitative research to provide contextualization of this datum to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of two-year college writing circulating within and across cohorts of students, faculty, curricula, and pedagogical practices. As California writing program administrators working at postsecondary four-year institutions, we pursue two questions with this study:

- What are community college faculty experiences navigating AB705?
- What are the most pressing issues or factors—from curriculum to institutional systems and legislative frameworks—shaping their curricular and pedagogical decisions in response to acceleration?

In pursuit of these questions, we launched a qualitative study in April of 2022 that captured California community college faculty experiences and mindsets. Faculty voices were, and remain, absent from many of the quantitative reports on community college student success; however, we argue that faculty experiences and dispositions toward acceleration in the post-AB705 system help us understand implementation, particularly the pedagogical approaches and impacts on students as well as faculty and curriculum. We use an activity systems framework, one that accounts for more dynamic understandings of how actors and systems interact, to analyze survey responses and explore how faculty represent the acceleration mandates in their responses. In viewing this more complex system of acceleration, we find that while models like the corequisite course structure have proven effective when removing pre-transfer basic writing options for students,

California community college faculty responses expose larger, unresolved questions about the community's conceptions of time and its impact on definitions of student success and preparedness.

We argue that acceleration models, which change the speed and intensity of basic writing courses, need: 1) more dynamic paradigms of time and 2) 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. These measures of success must evolve past a singular metric of time to completion and transfer, instead holding space for different types of student success that are defined by students' purposes, which can be varied and diverse. Doing so will bring us closer, as a field, to the equity goals we share.

BASIC WRITING REFORM: THE ACCELERATION MOVEMENT

Scholarship documents a long history of basic writing being used as gatekeeping mechanisms in higher education (Ritter; Soliday; Stanley) and the reforms designed to improve, reduce, or eliminate reliance on basic writing classes and programs (Melzer; Otte and Mlynarczyk). Recent reform movements have come in a variety of forms, including changes to admission, placement, course structure, and curricula (Hassel et al.), all in a response to disconcerting statistics that demonstrate how basic writing students are less likely to attain a degree (Adams "ALP FAQs;" Cho et al.; Henson and Hern; Nastal). For example, Jessica Nastal used survival analysis to find that only 12% of students who placed two levels below college-level (transferable) writing "survived," i.e., passed college-level writing. Of those students, Black students were least successful in the three-course sequence, only 9% completing the college-level writing course (Nastal). Further studies confirm that placement mechanisms and lengthy course sequences disproportionately impact students of color and students from historically underrepresented backgrounds (Henson and Hern; Ihara). Leslie Henson and Katie Hern found that when students enter community colleges in basic writing courses, they complete community college at a rate of 41%; in contrast, students placed directly into transfer-level courses complete community college at a rate of 71%. These statistics are similar to Nastal's findings. Henson and Hern further demonstrate that placing basic writing students directly into transfer-level writing resulted in students passing at higher rates (except Black students, whose pass rates stayed the same) (Henson and Hern). As a result, they argue that placements using standardized test scores caused a "disparate impact"

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to disadvantaged students, highlighting that only 50% of students at Butte College, a California community college, who started one course below transfer level completed college in two years (Henson and Hern).

Despite these studies that show how multiple levels of basic writing create barriers for many community college students, there are many developmental education scholars who challenge this wide sweeping reform as part of a one-size-fits-all approach to basic writing curriculum because students come with different backgrounds, experiences, and educational goals reflective of their cultural and linguistic diversity (Armstrong; McGee et al; Suh). Further, equity drives these reforms. Equity is a shared goal of many, if not all developmental educators just as it is a goal of many, if not all, writing educators. However, a shared definition of equity among basic writing faculty may not exist (Suh). Drawing upon recent scholarship, Emily Suh defines equity as "parity of outcomes across groups distinguished by race, with the additional interaction of other socioeconomic, linguistic, gendered, ability or other markers by which one or more groups has been systematically oppressed or disadvantaged" (249). Parity of outcomes, as Suh defines it, has not been fully achieved by the reforms, based on current data. As a result, criticisms from developmental educators remain significant especially if these reforms move community colleges and its faculty and students further away from the mission of access and support for all students (McGee et al.; Suh) and into a scenario where implementation happens without critical reflection (Armstrong).

These opposing views highlight a critical discussion around the reform movement that often provokes binary-driven questions about the changes: is it better to give students additional time to acquire college-level literacy skills through basic writing courses, or is extra time a barrier to marginalized students' timely progress (Ihara)? Existing models of basic writing reform—stretch and paired courses—change the nature of the relationship between time and success by extending preparation time (Glau). Some models attempt to answer this question by stretching time across multiple terms to allow students more time to develop as writers (Davila and Elder; Glau; Peele). At the same time, most college systems have decided that extra time is a barrier to equity, especially for students of color (*Complete College America*; Henson and Hern; Nastal; *Time is the Enemy*). In response, accelerated course models—studio and corequisite courses—have become a frequent strategy for shortening the length of time students spend completing required writing course sequences (Jaggars and Bickerstaff; Nodine et al.), effectively accelerating coursework to push students toward completion.

The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) of the Community College of Baltimore County made this expedited course model famous. The ALP program, pioneered by Peter Adams and currently co-directed by Haleh Amizi and Elsbeth Mantler, utilizes a corequisite course model in which students may be placed into an additional 3-credit support class alongside their 3-credit first-year writing course (Adams et al.). The model's success in Baltimore, according to the most recently available data, saw student pass rates shifting from 38% to 75% (Adams "Giving Hope"). The success of the program may be attributed to the contextual nature of the curriculum that explores life and affective issues, small class size, more time in a cohort with an instructor who knows how to integrate reading and writing, and shortened time to completion (Adams "Giving Hope"). ALP is a strong model for corequisite implementation in its emphasis on small cohorts and curricular reform; however, as AB705 has revealed, through its silence on classroom size and curriculum, the ALP is only one particular, context-driven way that people have approached acceleration. Like most curricular innovations, ALP is successful at least in part due to its contextual responsiveness. Its success is tied to its situatedness, designed for a particular teaching and learning community set in a specific institutional context. The strengths of ALP, therefore, are also some of its transcontextual limitations, making it difficult to easily transplant the approach to another situation without context-driven adaptation.

The success of ALP has been well documented; however, the correlation of success and shortened time and other factors like curriculum or class size is less demonstrated. Rachel Ihara's study of placement and assessment changes in the ALP program at Kingsborough Community College, CUNY highlights these difficulties. She found when the college moved basic writing students into an ALP-model classroom, with 17 non-ALP and eight ALP students in a classroom together, ALP students performed better on a collaborative portfolio assessment than non-ALP students, raising more questions than answers. As Ihara points out, "pass rates alone don't tell us *why* students pass, or don't pass, when assessed via portfolio" (100). Ihara questions whether these findings demonstrate issues in placement processes, assessment irregularities, or curricular non-standardization because in basic writing programs, like Ihara's, there is often more standardization and collaboration among faculty. As post-secondary institutions reduce reliance on and availability of basic writing instruction, it offers opportunities for scholars to research the effects of these reforms, like Adams, Ihara, Henson and Hern. However, collectively, these studies already highlight that one

significant consequence is a narrowing definition and role of time as the singular metric of two-year college writing success.

TIME AND ACCELERATION

The legislative decisions driving the acceleration movement, like AB705/1705, rely on time as a primary measurement of success. Studies overwhelmingly indicate that the length of the basic writing course sequence correlates with a lack of student persistence, though scholars still question what causes such correlations to occur (Ihara). By using acceleration as a reform for this problem of persistence, basic writing is not necessarily erased; it is changed in terms of time and delivery. It shifts from elongated or distributed time (across multiple terms) to additional concentrated time (extra time dedicated to writing in a single term). Typically, the same number of units is ultimately earned, but 6 units completed in a stretch model of basic writing, for example, takes two terms while 6 units completed in an accelerated model takes one term. In all the reforms of placement (Henson and Hern; Ihara), curriculum (Adams et al.), and assessment (Ihara), students who may have previously placed into multiple levels of basic writing still experience more instructional time than other students. What changes, in these two different models of basic writing instruction (stretch and corequisite acceleration), is the speed, intensity, and saturation of that teaching and learning time in each iteration. However, time itself is not neutral—some students have more than others, a difference that is steeped in issues of racial and class privilege.

Writing studies scholars have shown how time and equity are connected by challenging normative time. "Crip time" acts as a challenge to normative considerations of time by critically evaluating conceptions of "how long something should take" and bending "the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" (Kafer 27). "Crip time" disrupts normative paradigms that ask those with disabilities to adhere to normative conceptions of time and, instead, requires that we reconsider time as a tool for accommodating all students who also have their own perceptions and experiences with time in classes. Tara Wood argues that the use of normative time in classrooms disenfranchises some students and suggests that "cripping time" in the writing classroom allows faculty to accommodate all students with perhaps the most impact in basic and first-year writing courses (264). Andrea Venezia, Kathy Reeves Bracco, and Thad Nodine found students who were placed into basic writing courses were upset by what they then deemed as time lost—time in high school classes that left them needing to take basic writing classes—and

retrospectively viewed as "wasted time." For other students time operates as a spatial metaphor, becoming something we move—or speed—through (Margolies and Crawford). Metaphors of time also relate to commodification—something that can be saved, wasted, spent. These inequities around time became apparent in accelerated writing models during a pandemic, a moment in history when time was flattened by shelter-in-place orders, online living (for work, for school, etc.), and the perpetual calculation of risks and loss. Time, often marked by memories of new or special activities or, at least, a variety of stimuli and experiences throughout the days, lacked such distinction and definition. At the same time, educators and students were confronted with the fractures of asynchronicity—where time is experienced as individual and perhaps solitary phenomena.

Changing conceptions of time in accelerated writing classes were further distorted by a switch to online instruction, forced by the pandemic. Before the pandemic, research found completion of developmental education courses was negatively impacted by an online course structure (Sublett). In the community college system, researchers have found students were almost 7% less likely to complete an online course (Hart et al.) and success rates for online courses were almost 14% lower than students in face-to-face classes (Johnson and Cuellar Mejia). These findings align with research on online developmental classes across the country and point to the very precarious position many students and faculty found themselves in during the Spring of 2020 when, at least in the California community college, the acceleration of basic writing programs intersected with COVID-19 and its alteration of our experiences of time itself.

These conversations highlight the complex equity concerns affecting basic writing. Placed into the context of California, the largest and most diverse community college system in the United States, a monolithic approach to addressing these complex problems lacks promise. Studies show that a return to the previous model of multi-leveled basic writing sequences would harm our most at-risk students (Henson and Hern; Nastal); however, studies also show that successful reforms cannot ignore context in a sweeping mandate, provoking this study to better understand faculty experiences and pedagogical insights after AB705/1705 to contextualize the mandate.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ACTIVITY SYSTEMS

In the past several decades, activity system analysis has been used to capture complex learning systems and theorize humans and their environ-

ments as holistic systems, making it a useful framework to analyze accelerated writing courses. As demonstrated in figure 1, the first-generation theory visualized

Figure 1. Vygotsky's First-Generation Theory of Mediated Action (1978)

Lev Vygotsky's well-cited conception of how humans interact with their world with a simple three-pointed triangle listing tools, subject, and object, leading to an outcome.

Later, Yrjö Engeström expanded the mediated triangle to account for subjects, or those who participate in an activity and work toward a common outcome. In this often called "second generation" of activity theory, Engeström's triangle details specific, transactional aspects of human activity. As shown in figure 2, each activity system representation includes: tools, or the material resources used by subjects; object, or the goal of the activity; rules, or regulations that might constrain the activity in some way; community, or the group the subjects belong to; division of labor, or shared responsibilities determined by the community; and outcomes, or the consequence of the activity.

Sociocultural theories of learning have added substantially to this representation of activity systems over time (e.g. second- and third-generation activity theory). Second-generation activity system models (see figure 2) have become popular in 1) understanding dynamic human interactions in educational settings like classrooms in particular (Barab et al.), 2) examining issues of social justice in school organizations (Sumbera), 3) making improvements to school systems (Yamagata-Lynch and Smaldino), among other applications. This iteration of

Figure 2. Second-Generation Activity system model as presented by Engeström (1987).

activity system theory is a productive theoretical framework for understanding shifts in educational institutions. This propensity to understand educational change led us to activity systems as a model for understanding this mandated acceleration. Specifically, we use both the first-generation and second-generation activity system models to understand the competing notions of time and mediated activity made apparent through the analysis of our data.

METHODS

Survey

The study included a Qualtrics-based survey with 35 Likert, open response, and rating-scale questions.[1] Respondents were asked to describe curricular models implemented as a result of AB705, how new models impacted assessment and pedagogy, and how faculty responded to these changes. The survey was sent to faculty listservs, faculty directory emails from the ~70 most highly attended community colleges in California, and relevant social media groups from April 7 to June 15 of 2022, making it difficult to know the exact number of faculty invited. The survey garnered 216 responses, 189 of which were considered complete; responses came from 66 different community colleges, representing 57% of the 116 total community colleges.

Our analysis focuses on the responses from a singular open-ended question (Question 19): "Has the pandemic impacted these curricular and pedagogical concerns (class size, instructional time, reading and writing assignments, activities assigned to students, assessment strategies, etc.)? Please elaborate below." While the survey prompted participants to respond to a number of different questions, we focused on this question in our analysis because it was the only one that allowed participants to speak to AB705 implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. As with all qualitative work, we understand this study to capture only a portion of the narrative around AB705.

Participants

A total of 131 responses were collected for Question 19 from participants at 60 different California community colleges. Respondents overwhelmingly identified as female (65%) compared to male (21%) and non-binary or transgender (3%); respondents were more likely to be white (73%) and heterosexual (66%). Further, 10% of respondents identified as a person with a disability, 50% were former community college students, and 36% identified as first-generation college students. Only 23% of respondents identified as contingent or part-time faculty and 95% of respondents had over seven years of teaching experience. Further, 20% hold a doctoral degree and almost 60% hold master's degrees in varying fields.

Data Analysis

To better understand the open-ended responses of this question we took a grounded theory approach where we qualitatively coded responses. The 131 complete responses were anonymized; three researchers then open-coded the responses in separate sheets and memoed, identifying possible themes and articulating descriptors for themes. We later met to reconcile emerging themes and build a beta code sheet of descriptive codes (Huberman and Miles). We then selectively coded using the beta code sheet and met again to refine the codebook, building a final codebook containing 23 individual codes (see Appendices A and B). Each researcher then coded the 131 responses using simultaneous coding to where codes overlapped to identify a single piece of datum (Saldaña); over several meetings, we then rectified codes for three-way agreement.

Final codes were a combination of attribute/descriptive codes (Saldaña 70) we had defined, marking the presence of a word or phrase; value codes,

capturing beliefs of faculty (Saldaña 110); or holistic codes, which capture overall themes (Saldaña 142). In rectifying, the three readers noted a "1" for a present code and a "0" for non-present code. We then followed a tradition of quantitatively analyzing categorical data for a different perspective (Young 358), helping us to identify pieces of a larger system at play. Once we rectified our individual codes via consensus-driven code decisions, the frequency of each code and relationship between codes was analyzed via statistical correlation analysis conducted in SES. Table 1 details the highest correlating codes with "Time."

Table 1. Pearson Correlation of Select Codes with Time

	Changed Assessment Practices	Student Support	Reading	Pedagogical Impact	Life Issues (Student Struggle, Obstacles)
Time	.305**	.432**	.291**	.336**	.523**

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It was through this quantitative analysis of the qualitative coding that we could see the impact of *time* on changes made to assessment practices ("Changed Assessment Practice"), perceptions of missing student support ("Student Support"), integration of reading activities into instruction ("Reading"), shifts in pedagogical thinking ("Pedagogical Impact"), and instructor perception of external student issues impacting classrooms ("Life Issues"). These were the highly significant correlations, meaning these codes were very often likely to overlap with each other; however, other codes ("Plagiarism," "Modality," and "Teacher Agency") were also significant in correlation with "Time" at a higher p value ($p \leq 0.05$). We then examined these codes again, coding these correlating codes for a fourth time for how *time* as an influencer appeared in each of these categories. This re-examination revealed many moving pieces, or a more expansive definition of the players and components of the system of acceleration, than we had originally anticipated, which resulted in our analytic framework.

Through the analysis, we were able to see how time was a binding concept that impacted all manners of this complex system that clearly reached beyond subject, object, and outcome, and recognize how the system was

pushing and pulling on each other as denoted in the arrows in figure 2. As we organized our codes to consider their correlations, an activity systems approach was key to seeing how they interacted. In our analysis of Question 19, an activity system framework allowed us to understand how codes related and, most importantly, what mediated faculty sentiments.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

How the Pandemic Impacted Accelerated Pedagogies

Overall, the rich and varied responses highlight the complex activity system created by the intersection of the pandemic and AB705 legislation. The many players, from faculty to students to administrators to legislators, converge in ways that complicate the acceleration model's reliance on a "commonplace pace" (Wood 261). Before the pandemic, a shared conceptualization of time (instructional time, time students devoted to preparation before entering transferable courses, time students had to devote to a course to be successful, etc.) was normalized across seemingly similar levels of basic writing courses. Prior to legislation, many schools shared similar basic writing class sequences; while many of these sequences were problematic and troubling in how they impacted students, they provided a shared sense of how basic writing would appear over time. The pandemic exposed the divergent experiences and navigation of time in basic writing classrooms depending on student—and instructor—context, demonstrated in technological access and literacy inequities, availability of time and resources beyond the classroom, and different approaches to corequisite models. Thus, while reforms like AB705 have proven effective at reducing lengthy basic writing sequences for students, faculty responses also expose larger ongoing questions about the conceptions of time itself, particularly in terms of time's impact on definitions of student success and preparedness.

Acceleration Model is Contingent Upon Traditional Conceptions of Time

New conceptions of time infiltrated many instructor responses, their elaborations emphasizing time as a key factor in their changing and challenging pandemic-era, post-AB705 professional lives. Thirty-six (27%) of our faculty respondents included time, implicitly or explicitly, as a significant or complicating factor in their COVID-era professional lives. Time—the shortage of time, the differentiated experiences of time, the distribution of time,

the socio-economic impact of time, the lack of shared time—wasn't just a frequent concern of our respondents but pointed toward a new conception of time as a crucial resource or currency of faculty-student life during the pandemic.

Several faculty participants described a shift in how their own time was spent. They described how time historically spent in the classroom instructing students was repurposed as time preparing curricular materials that would have to live outside of shared instructional time, identifying and recommending supports students needed to survive during the pandemic (counseling services, technological support, special accommodations or arrangements to account for the student's new navigation of COVID-19 time, etc.), and helping students to "catch up" and "get prepared" for the course to account for the instructional time they missed earlier in the pandemic. One faculty respondent described this issue with instructor time: "More of my time is spent 'catching' students who don't turn in assignments on time or at all, developing remediation plans for plagiarism, and teaching the basics that were previously covered in up to three levels below. This would leave little time for actual preparation, instruction, and grading; however, I have sacrificed my mental and physical health to keep these standards up." Faculty were asked to do more, do it faster, and do it with less time for pedagogical preparations, professional development, or personal wellbeing. This respondent is also detailing time spent on student surveillance and a perceived need to address citation and source use practices that they believe would have typically been developed in basic writing classes.

Faculty participants also described changes in student attitudes and use of time; COVID-era students not only reported to faculty that they had less time but faculty perceived students as also less willing to dedicate their time to traditional academic activities (like attending class sessions, meeting deadlines). Students were described as "less responsive" to sharing their time, "less willing to use their time for class purposes," and unable or unwilling to do things "on time." Several respondents described students' decisions to not engage the classroom material, something that happened pre-pandemic but not as often, as a conscious choice made due to the pandemic. Some respondents noted students' intolerance for completing assignments that students perceived as of little value: "the lower stakes scaffolding assignments were often perceived as 'extra' or 'unnecessary' by students, so they wouldn't engage as much." Students seemed less willing to "give up" their time, which became more precious during the pandemic, perhaps due to financial pressures: "Yes, as more students experience financial burdens,

they have less time to devote to the additional study needed. Plus, they invest minimal time in online classes." As perceptions of time were influenced by pandemic living, student and faculty time was also no longer synched or shared—not in actual time spent together regularly or in understanding of the roles that time plays in postsecondary education. Socioeconomic issues like these have always been present for students but were highlighted in new ways and reflected in choices about time for the faculty.

An additional, notable shift in faculty time paradigms manifested in their commentary about grading and assessment. Approximately 33% of coded mentions of time correlated with grading and feedback. Faculty described grading during the pandemic as "taking more time," reporting that their typical assessment methods like contract grading and conference grading became both more difficult and "more essential to student success." Therefore, faculty reported spending more time on teaching than ever before: "Teaching online takes the actual contact away and adds so much time to the instructor's grading (at least it did for me)." Here, time has shifted in use; depending on the grading scheme, this could mean more time evaluating students compared to instructing and coaching.

The intersection of AB705's acceleration of student writing instruction and the COVID-19 pandemic makes the crucial, yet messy and complex nature of time in required writing courses especially apparent. On top of other real-world concerns, students and faculty had to also determine how to use their time including when to share their time with each other, when to yield their time in service of the course/learning, when to seek synchronous experiences, when to retreat to asynchronous engagement, and when to refuse to yield their time to the course altogether. Instructional time, as the course itself, was no longer contained to specific meetings in physical spaces, but expanded and dispersed into the crevices of both student and faculty life. While the pacing of community college writing courses changed via AB705, the pandemic simultaneously brought about cultural shifts in how conceptualizations of time and experiences of work (working at home, asynchronous expectations of work, etc.). Changes in both time and work brought with it new challenges for equity that faculty responses deeply reflected.

Faculty responses about how COVID-era challenges impacted their pedagogical and curricular life after AB705 make two things abundantly clear: 1) AB705 and the acceleration of student writing education is premised upon traditional, linear time that is containable and shared by faculty and students in predictable ways and 2) the pandemic has altered how we perceive, understand, make decisions, and utilize time in writing courses. We

need new paradigms of time that can account for the entire system of required writing courses (different kinds of students, faculty, institutional contexts, etc.), not paradigms that privilege just one part or iteration of the system.

Definitions of Student "Success" via Completion Prove Problematic

Responses suggested that understanding student success was also deeply impacted by the pandemic and AB705, wrapped up in the centrality of time as a metric. Thirty-seven (28%) of the responses to question 19 mentioned success in terms of student learning and, most saliently, in terms of retention, where success is defined as keeping students in their class. As one respondent commented, "I would argue that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between AB705 impacts/causes and those of the pandemic in each circumstance due to the extreme impact the pandemic has had on student behavior/performance." The inability to detangle impacts of AB705 from the pandemic was a salient theme across responses that touched on success, even though respondents were aware of this and even worked to try and distill AB705 from the pandemic.

Specifically, faculty pointed to a conflict between their own definitions of student success (i.e., learning) and administrators' or legislators' definitions of success (i.e., time to graduation or transfer, speed of completion, retention). As scholars have pointed out, the narrative about developmental education is being driven by policy groups (McGee et al.) to the exclusion of community college faculty. As a result, some faculty felt that the legislation—and the course goals it seemed to forward—was forced upon them, asking them to "play the retention game, so pedagogy is not so much a concern as retaining students." The faculty who were dealing with changes to course sequences due to AB705 and modality due to the pandemic seemed to suggest that their definitions of success rubbed up against the mandated administrative or legislative definitions of success. Many faculty responses to this question highlight the deep frustration emerging from AB705 implementation that Armstrong describes as policy without pedagogy, reform without evaluation, and mandates without expertise. One respondent wrote, "At the same time, there has been an immense amount of pressure from my campus to pass every student and there is a lot of shaming that happens if you have low pass rates." Another claimed, "Well, many teachers are teaching at a lower level and grading more easily to increase pass rates and the chancellor acts like the data proves the accelerated model works best, but the statistics

are flawed." Faculty responses reveal that AB705 tries to legislate not only placement, curriculum, and student learning but also success itself; through AB705's declaration that "the student will enter and complete" English coursework "within a one-year timeframe," it conveys the erroneous idea that learning happens in regularized, predictable, and controllable patterns that are experienced in inherently equal ways for students and faculty alike. Critical faculty comments that express their frustration with assumptions about success were the dominant sentiment in our survey results, exposing the misalignment of writing skills developing over time, an accepted premise in basic writing scholarship, and AB705 which flattens time—and therefore paradigms for writing development and student success.

At the same time, these pressures of student success affected the pedagogical approaches and therefore opportunities faculty pursued. For example, in one instructor's explanation of these pressures to pass students, to maintain retention numbers and therefore maintain data needed for administrators, they noted changes in pedagogical approaches that were intended to align with best practices in the field for accessibility among students: "We talked about this when AB705 forced its way in the door and added to it during COVID. It included being flexible about late work or work not handed in. But more important included action, recommendations, and urgings to pass papers that would have marginally failed before (some encouragement to give more A's)." While this respondent shares frustration at some of the consequences of heightened flexibility, this new goal of flexibility also provided an opportunity for faculty to reconsider the inequities apparent in time as both a finite and relative resource. New awareness of time, for example, allowed faculty to more fully utilize what disability experts have recommended for years—cripping time in classes: "Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time" (Kafer 27). The challenge, according to respondents, is that in this pandemic-era accelerated system, *all* students must crip time—with individual guidance and support from faculty or not—to succeed. Success and time become interdependent in complex ways that student support structures and pedagogies, particularly those legislated by AB705, cannot yet accommodate.

The acceleration pressure faculty felt at the time of the survey has been further exacerbated by the flexible pedagogical accommodations made throughout the pandemic: "The 'hand holding' heavy support that started with the pandemic has continued. There is a strong sense that we must get unprepared students through." In all cases, faculty felt expectations and

criteria used to measure student success had changed, regardless of the class. Whether this is the impact of AB705, the pandemic, or some combination of the two, there is apparent tension among faculty and administrator or legislator expectations, especially when student success is determined via student throughput data which equates educational success with speedy course completion. Faculty responses highlight how definitions of success as primarily *temporal* created new pressures for faculty. Faculty respondents, in this acceleration paradigm, must play "the retention game" and felt a need to "hand hold" their students as definitions of success in their classrooms shifted, changing how pedagogy, assessment, and classroom time were approached as well.

Perceptions of Academic Preparedness during the Pandemic Must Expand

Throughout the coded responses, faculty indicated students were struggling in accelerated classes for a variety of reasons: academic unpreparedness, online learning issues, and emotional and financial trauma. Academic unpreparedness was the most often cited issue with the accelerated model during the pandemic; 38 (29%) of the 131 faculty respondents identified a lack of student preparedness. Initially, the lack of preparedness could be seen as deficit-model thinking, whereby writing faculty view basic writing students as not prepared for a transfer-level writing course. That deficit model was certainly evident with 19 out of the 38 respondents who claimed students were not ready for the content of the accelerated class. For example, one respondent said, "Students are less content prepared than ever." However, with most of the 19 responses, the academic struggles were more nuanced. For some, the issue was the newly accentuated differences in ability, which would happen in any accelerated class where students who would have been in a basic writing class are now mainstreamed: "We now have more time in class (we added a unit)—but it's all I can do to cover the existing material/activities now that student abilities vary so dramatically." For others, the academic struggles would not have existed pre-pandemic, but did now because of the difficulties students encountered in online high school classes: "[students are] extremely unprepared for even my simplified content. How much of this is that they really would have benefited from a dev ed class, and how much is that they lost out on quality teaching these last couple years?" In this and other responses, respondents note a matrix of issues, from high

school instruction to learning differentiation to administrative pressures that raise concerns about student preparedness.

Another oft-cited reason for students' lack of success in the accelerated classroom during the pandemic was online learning issues, with 12 of the 38 respondents identifying some struggle with succeeding in an online classroom environment: "The pandemic has amplified the effects of the digital divide—students who are comfortable in self-guided online instruction have been more successful while students less comfortable/adept have done poorly and/or disappeared." The extra time and support accounted for in accelerated pedagogies did not easily translate for students into asynchronous pedagogies because many students did not have the skills needed for independent learning and needed more time to develop online learning and teaching skills. Complicating this issue further, for students, the digital divide was amplified by the lack of choice in modality: "In the past, students would self-select to take an online class, and during the pandemic, many students who did not want to be online were forced to." This faculty respondent, along with others, highlighted one of the issues with agency we saw throughout this survey question. Students did not make the choice during the pandemic to take an online accelerated course. So, students who need the community and accountability of in-person instruction did not succeed in the online environment. Ironically, many faculty also claim students continue to opt for online courses, even when in-person ones are available, and even when they continue to drop out of online courses.

These issues of student preparedness—academic and online learning—are exacerbated by student's financial and emotional trauma during and after the pandemic. Sixteen of the 38 faculty respondents described the economic and mental health issues causing instability for students. As one respondent explained: "Not only are the classes more difficult because of the lack of preparatory courses, but now the apathy and anxiety of a pandemic—not to mention the dependency on technology and remote learning—teaching often feels more like therapy than actual instruction." The issues of student preparedness are an overdetermined mix of emotion, motivation, capability, and technological adeptness. The ALP curriculum from CCBC includes reading and writing about the financial issues facing students and other affective issues that help faculty and students connect the classroom to their lived experiences (Adams, "Giving Hope"). Similar curricular reforms are not included in AB705/1705 legislation; instead, colleges are left to decide curriculum on their own, with the only limit being time to completion. Students and faculty are moving through an accelerated

curriculum in a time of extreme crisis, marking a highly complex curricular moment. One respondent summed up this complexity effectively:

> Thus, we are not only working to support students of varying levels of skill, but also, managing students in crisis. In strict curricular terms, this manifests in absences, missing assignments, and students performing far below their potential. In human terms (the most important terms), the trauma of the pandemic manifests in heart-breaking ways for both the student and instructor. I spend much more time in office hours helping connect students with services than pre-pandemic, or simply listening to challenges of their lives. As a result, the emotional labor in teaching first year English has increased dramatically— in some cases, leading to 'compassion fatigue,' a phenomenon we've been talking about on campus.

Faculty described economic upheaval, issues with childcare, competing commitments, housing instability, mental health crises and more. The extra support of an accelerated curriculum does not account for these other upheavals that force students to choose how to spend their time in the new paradigm that defines success narrowly as *speed*. When success is defined by speed, students cannot error and bounce back; accelerated courses cannot accommodate this kind of developmental learning. Likewise, traditional conceptions of time and definitions of success, filtered through the acceleration movement's goal of quick completion of transferable coursework, does not allow for nuanced understanding and, therefore, response to such complex challenges.

IMPLICATIONS

Accounting for Time in the Activity System of Acceleration

Faculty responses to our survey make their mediated position clear; faculty shared their pandemic-era acceleration experiences and reactions through the lens of their interactions with the larger activity systems where students, technology, institutional demands, learning outcomes, and more are present. The activity system that faculty responses broadly reflect is a complex one with negotiation and exchanges between actors at the heart, reminding us of figure 2 depicting the second-generation conceptualization of an activity system where many actors are accounted for.

We created figure 3 (below) as a manifestation of AB705/1705 legislation and the values and priorities it establishes. It points us toward the first-generation Vygotskian activity system (recall earlier figure 1) that can only account for part of the system. AB705/1705 legislation only accounts for three factors: students (subject), acceleration legislation (rules), and transfer for college completion (object), all governed by two significant forces: student success as defined by retention and student success as defined by completion of a college degree.

Figure 3. A Simplified Acceleration Activity System (e.g. first-generation) that legislators perceive has only three factors (student subject, legislation rules, and transfer to a four-year college) acted upon by the singular outcome of retention and completion as student success.

Figure 3 captures the simplified AB705 activity systems that legislators believe faculty would navigate, highlighting how the singular definition of student success as retention and completion of a four-year degree governed all. In this simplified acceleration activity system (see figure 3), faculty, institutional communities, tools, and labor concerns are removed from the landscape as well as any sense of multiple conceptualizations of student success.

Once we attempt to account for our codes and data analysis results in the AB705 activity system model, however, we found that the analyzed survey responses suggested that faculty, after experiencing the limitations of the simplified acceleration activity system (see figure 3), developed and deployed more nuanced practices, captured in our Dynamic Acceleration

Activity System (see figure 4). Figure 4 maps faculty responses onto the more

Figure 4. The Dynamic Acceleration Activity System (e.g. second-generation) enacted by faculty who, responding to mandated acceleration and pandemic, grapple with time as an actor itself.

nuanced second-generation theory of mediation and exposes time as perhaps a more meaningful and productive governing concept.

Figure 4 more accurately presents the experiences faculty shared when looking at their responses holistically. In our Dynamic Acceleration Activity System (see figure 4), student success is mediated by the subjects (both faculty and students), by tools like Zoom and the campus course management system, and by the division of labor as faculty adjust their pedagogy in response to mandated changes all the while determined and constrained by time. Participants articulated that a new or even warped definition of success, where faculty felt pressured to pass students and uncertain of the learning goals of the courses they teach, was the ultimate outcome of this activity system. What we find important is that this more complete Dynamic Acceleration Activity System makes the critical role that *time* plays apparent as the constraining and determinate factor that seems to push and pull on the entire system, particularly as it was experienced during the pandemic. Through AB705 and the pandemic, time has become different and more

troubling than ever, while being instituted as one of the most defining factors of successful implementation of acceleration.

Considering How Time is Experienced

Time as a wicked problem is felt acutely in basic writing education—how to use time, scarcity of time, etc. Time intersects with acceleration legislation like AB705 because legislation not only treats time as monolithic but demands accelerated time—speed—as ideal. Faculty survey responses make the problem of monolithic, determinate ideations of time in basic writing courses apparent and troubling.

The singularity of time mandated by AB705/1705 collided with the pandemic as it forced institutions, faculty, and students to confront the complex problems of time by challenging reliance upon and assumptions about shared time. Given the public health emergency, accommodations for the plurality and complex nature of time were baked into pandemic-era pedagogical, curricular, and programmatic responses to student need. It became impossible to ignore the plurality of student experience, need, use, and construct of time. Student experiences of time were inherently individual, even in the same course, impacted by individual student situations outside of school. Meanwhile, faculty's different experiences of time became impossible to ignore; faculty had their own individual time constraints as well as fundamentally different experiences of professional time based upon online teaching preparation levels. Divergent faculty experiences with time during the acceleration-era pandemic created extreme frustration, captured in the classroom experiences faculty shared in their survey responses.

While faculty respondents to our survey seemed to frame their experiences with time as a determinate concept itself, they also described their experiences with time as individual and unique. Thus, faculty and students both experienced the contradictions that time creates; time is an individual resource, experience, and construct for faculty and students, but it is also the one finite constraint that measures success or failure in the monolithic temporal world of acceleration via legislation like AB705/1705. Faculty and students must bend to AB705's construct of time or break.

Pedagogical and curricular traditions of basic writing courses historically wrestle with the limitations of time; acceleration-era basic writing courses face even more intensity once governed by monolithic experiences and understandings of time. Pre-acceleration treatments of basic writing time in California community colleges, where several pre-transfer courses were

sometimes required, extended time in untenable ways, creating a troubling "commonplace pace." Likewise, speed as an essential quality of successful basic writing time creates yet another troubling new "commonplace pace." Simplified acceleration activity systems such as those presented in figure 3 compress time's complexities down to speed of completion. While the old paradigm of time where students languished in lengthy developmental sequences was not equitable or reasonable and ought to be abandoned, the legislated time as standard and fixed is at odds with the lived experiences conveyed in survey responses and perhaps, our participants seem to say, at odds with the ultimate goal of community college. If we assume the premise that basic writing education is a universal, one-size-fits-all endeavor, we also assume that education is only for "normative" or "typical" students.

NEXT STEPS

Our survey sought to understand what was happening in basic writing courses in California community colleges as faculty dealt with both new legislative mandates and the challenges of a global pandemic. We wanted to understand how approaches to teaching basic writing were impacted by these pressures. Analysis of survey responses highlighted several key points: there are different, even competing conceptualizations of accelerated basic writing education at work simultaneously; the approaches faculty reportedly developed or utilized do not easily align with the simplified acceleration framework suggested by legislation; and *time*, as a governing concept and metric, needs more attention.

Basic writing faculty must insert their expertise as developmental education—and basic writing—professionals so they can "mold and take ownership of the narrative surrounding the field" (McGee et al. 9). While faculty may not have control over the amount of instructional time they have, for example, they can change how they think about, talk about, and attribute value to that instructional time. They can premise the acceleration-era basic writing pedagogy on a complex understanding of time and thereby dispel and resist the false narrative of a "commonplace pace" (Wood) that can control and define us all. While more work is needed to understand the complete activity system, our research team suggests several next steps as faculty move forward in adapting accelerated models and shifting from the top-down implementation:

1. *Learn from faculty teaching in classrooms.* Faculty frustration is abundantly clear; legislators need to hear from *all* perspectives

of faculty about the work of acceleration as faculty are the ones doing the work of acceleration. While administrators and faculty who are strong proponents provide insight into the acceleration story, faculty practitioners who implement the legislation across the 116 California community colleges have invaluable observations, feedback, and ideations to contribute.

2. *Meaningfully assess acceleration measures.* Currently, only one metric of success (speed of completion) is used to evaluate the efficacy of this basic writing reform in California and beyond. We advocate for a return to the roots in writing studies of contextualized assessment practices focused on local outcomes that fit the students, faculty, and curriculum (Broad et al.; Huot). These local assessments should be shared, published, and used to understand and revise the reform and to contextualize the quantitative metrics of policy. More holistic assessment measures might include capturing student narratives, curriculum assessment, and more consideration of varying definitions of success in downstream courses.

3. *Fund the change.* Mandated acceleration requires increased funding for continued faculty training, lowered course caps, and wrap-around services (e.g., embedded tutoring). The models on which this legislation is built (i.e., ALP from CCBC) rely on these features, making them not something to strive for, but basic necessities that ought to be provided during implementation. With class sizes still at 30 students and faculty doing more with less, the success of this reform will remain tentative and inequitable for students and faculty. WPAs and allied administrators should advocate for the resources needed to experiment with different kinds of support for faculty and students that refocuses attention on *learning* as a central feature of student success.

4. *Embrace multiplicity of student experience and purpose.* Community college was never meant to be a one-size-fits-all experience. As faculty grapple with what is perceived to be a shift in the purpose of their classes, it will be important to further examine the students in these classes, their purposes for college, and how they intend to use their education. As it stands, the goal of transfer denotes a singular kind of student with a particular purpose in mind. It's

> more than likely that students arrive with a variety of purposes beyond transfer and these multiple purposes need to be considered in future iterations of acceleration and its definitions of success.

We wanted to understand the faculty experience of state-wide mandated acceleration in the largest community college system in the country. We are honored that the 216 faculty who contributed to our survey trusted us to share their concerns and experiences with a legislated, top-down decision about their teaching. The reform that AB705 provided to basic writing in California was necessary; students should not languish in lengthy sequences of developmental classes and get pushed out of the college system as a result. However, many California community colleges and higher education institutions were already working to address this issue in a way that suited their local student population and context (e.g. Goen-Salter; California Acceleration Project). As a result, we have learned that faculty responsiveness has been impacted in varying ways by a sweeping, broad-strokes reform that erases the ability of faculty to act from their expertise and the research of the field, emphasizing the need to have faculty understanding and action further integrated with matters of policy. Faculty *are* the greatest asset and tool of education reform efforts, yet their perspectives and experiences implementing legislation like AB705 are largely absent from conversations about new goals, assessment metrics, or the supports (for students, for faculty, etc.) necessary to pursue them.

Notes

1. This study was approved by the IRB at University of California Davis, Protocol #1864094-1.

APPENDIX A

Final Codebook Used in Analysis

Faculty Perception & Experience	Code	Working Definitions
	Feeling directed by AB705 or Admin to pass students	Respondents describe (administrative or peer) pressures around implementing co-reqs/passing students despite perceived quality of work
	Differentiated Instruction	Respondents describe needing adjust their teaching/assessments/etc. to fit a wide variety of students/skill sets to accommodate different learning needs esp. in an online environment
	Resistance to co-req	Respondents describe co-reqs with negativity or critique the model; critique that the model doesn't work online.
	"Students are not prepared"	Students are characterized as unprepared for the class (skillset, technologically, etc.)
	Faculty Workload Increase	Respondents describe an increase in instructor labor
	Faculty Impact	Respondents describe an impact to job stability, mental health, professional self-esteem, sense of professional agency, etc.

	Standards/Rigor	Respondents indicate a change in standards or rigorous course content
	Student-Faculty Interaction	The type, quantity, or quality of student-faculty interaction has changed as a result of AB705.
Learning Practices Circumstances	**Code**	**Working Definitions**
	Class Size	They mention class size
	Low Enrollment	They mention low enrollment
	Modality	Respondents discuss how modality (online instruction) impacted their teaching/students/etc.
	Changed Assessment Practices	Respondents discuss shifts in assessment, grading, etc.
	Student Support	Students need more support or they need support they Care not getting: non-academic and academic.
	Reading	They mention reading or reading activities.
	Plagiarism	They mention plagiarism concerns
	Pedagogical Impact	They describe changes in pedagogy or attitudes about pedagogy.
	Success	Respondents describe what is valued/pursued as success; respondents describe completion or retention as success.

	Teacher Agency	They describe events/changes as happening to them or taking advantage of the changes to make positive changes in their teaching.
Student Characteristics	**Code**	**Working Definitions**
	Life Issues (Student Struggle, Obstacles)	Respondents describe the obstacles students are navigating.
	Student Engagement	Respondents describe changes in student participation, collaboration, completing work, etc.
	Student Agency	Respondents describe events/changes as happening to students or students taking advantage of the changes happening to students. Respondent perception of student choice/agency/ responses to change.
Other	**Code**	**Working Definitions**
	Time	Respondents describe time as an important element; changes in how time is perceived, changes in how time is spent, changes in how time is handled instructionally, etc.
	Data	Respondents describe the quality, reliability, presence, or credibility of data collected during AB 705/ pandemic.

APPENDIX B

Codebook Excerpt

Has the pandemic impacted these curricular and pedagogical concerns (class size, instructional time, reading and writing assignments, activities assigned to students, assessment strategies, etc.)? Please elaborate below.	Feeling directed by AB705 or Admin to pass students	Differentiated Instruction	resistance to coreq	students are not prepared	faculty workload increase	faculty impact	standards / rigor	student-faculty interaction	Class Size	Low Enrollment
The pandemic greatly changed everything.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yes. Smaller classes. Students struggling with online learning and the course content	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
The pandemic has made contract grading even more essential to my students' success. Students have needed more time, more opportunity for revision, and more leniency on due dates.	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yes. Teaching online takes the actual contact away and adds so much time to the instructor's grading (at least it did for me).	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
Honestly the students I've taught have always been scrapping for survival, so the pandemic was just more of the same plus students who lacked digital access or couldn't learn online	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
I switched to a minimal grading approach after first pandemic semester, when we were encouraged to focus on the SLOs for assessment and not worry about the "points." That was really revolutionary for me.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Short-term class size reduction due to low enrollment.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Online teaching is harder with the students being forced into English 1A who would otherwise take prep classes	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0

Figure A. Screenshot of the final coding rectification sheet which lists codes 1-10 codes.

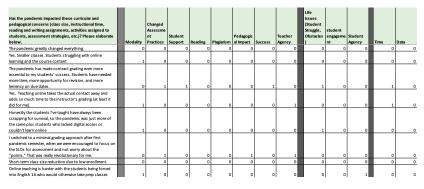| Has the pandemic impacted these curricular and pedagogical concerns (class size, instructional time, reading and writing assignments, activities assigned to students, assessment strategies, etc.)? Please elaborate below.	Modality	Changed Assessment Practices	Student Support	Reading	Plagiarism	Pedagogical Impact	Success	Teacher Agency	Life Issues (Student Struggle, Obstacles)	student engagement	Student Agency	Time	Data
The pandemic greatly changed everything.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yes. Smaller classes. Students struggling with online learning and the course content	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The pandemic has made contract grading even more essential to my students' success. Students have needed more time, more opportunity for revision, and more leniency on due dates.	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Yes. Teaching online takes the actual contact away and adds so much time to the instructor's grading (at least it did for me).	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Honestly the students I've taught have always been scrapping for survival, so the pandemic was just more of the same plus students who lacked digital access or couldn't learn online	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
I switched to a minimal grading approach after first pandemic semester, when we were encouraged to focus on the SLOs for assessment and not worry about the "points." That was really revolutionary for me.	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Short-term class size reduction due to low enrollment.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Online teaching is harder with the students being forced into English 1A who would otherwise take prep classes	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0

Figure B. Screenshot of the final coding rectification sheet which lists the last 11-23 codes.

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Recalibrating Confusion: Reflections on My Hybrid ALP's Deictic Center

John Paul Tassoni

ABSTRACT: *This narrative essay describes a basic writing instructor's engagement with student confusion in a hybrid Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) course. The story examines the ways confusion can mark sites of engagement for students and teachers and how ALP courses, in particular, might mediate effective (and ineffective) forms of confusion.*

KEYWORDS: *Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), Confusion, Pandemic, basic writing, Sites of Engagement*

Introduction

Along with other instructors in this time of COVID-19 (see Malesic; see also McMurtrie), I recently experienced maybe my worst semester ever. I'm talking about the 2021-2022 school year, the term in which I taught the second iteration of what had been (I thought) a carefully configured Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) offering. In respect to social distancing, I set up this hybrid, mainstreamed basic writing (BW) class so that students could complete the asynchronous version of our open-access division's first-year composition (FYC) course, engage with portions of our online Studio offering, and meet with me (masks required!) once per week in hour-long, small-group sessions. Conceptually, then, students would experience the FYC curriculum, asynchronously share their reflections on this curriculum via the Studio component, and then gather with several other class members and their instructor to talk over anything that anyone felt needed talking over.

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As viable as I believe this ALP model to be (the first iteration's students, in fall 2020, performed quite well), I regret to report that many class members in this second cohort frequently missed the small-group sessions, and whenever anyone did attend, we often ended up staring at one another as if we were all somehow in Zoom boxes, cameras off and muted (see Malesic). Far more than the usual number of students habitually left assignments uncompleted, submitted them weeks after their due dates, and approached them in ways I had not heretofore imagined. Never before in my 35-year career had I found myself turning from submission to submission with such a sense of dumbfoundedness. "No!," I would cry aloud, and then "Nooo!!," and then "Oh, Nooooo!!!"

As Mina Shaughnessy would advise all BW instructors, I used these moments to sound the depths (236), to figure out why my students might be doing what they were doing and what I might do differently. As I would with any course, I used my soundings to revise this hybrid class in the midst of the semester—defined terms more thoroughly on the Canvas site, provided more rationale, made changes in the wake of whatever had just occurred and in anticipation of whatever missteps I sensed lay ahead. In regard to this particular ALP class, though, it occurred to me that I could try all I want to create a coherent curricular narrative, hyperlink to my soul's content, but nothing was going to prevent a good number of students from perceiving a gap in that narrative, imposing a meaning of their own, or neglecting to click a link altogether. Because of consistent questioning from one student, however, a student I'll call Di, I came to realize that what I instead should favor is not curricular clarity (much as I still try) but rather expressions of confusion: those times/places in which my students find conflict with course guidelines and expectations, email me or say to me, "I'm confused." I've come to see how this one student's regular and frequent expressions of confusion across our ALP course's many instructional modalities provided for us a site of engagement with course matters; at the same time, Di's questioning threw into relief for me ways that ALPs (online and hybrid versions in particular) might themselves mediate confusion.

Reflecting on my response to Di's questions in this hybrid ALP course, I am reminded of how much teachers, BW teachers especially, need to appreciate expressions of confusion for what they often are: signs of students' engagement, where aspects of writing instruction and students' experiences with that instruction come into conflict in real time. I recall, among others, Min-Zhan Lu's arguments as to how conflict and struggle do not represent enemies to BW but rather constructive forces (888). Rather than instantly

work to eradicate expressions of confusion, to swiftly take students to another round of written guidelines, mini-lectures, unanticipated interpretations, and hyperlinks, I've come to see expressions of confusion as a deictic center (not as disarray), and I think this view of confusion speaks to ALP's future in virtual and hybrid spaces as well as to ways an ALP itself might productively mediate confusion.

A deictic center is the linguistic point of reference upon which a spatial relationship is established (see Holmes). My student's expressions of confusion, I believe, became just such a center for us in relation to all the *up ahead*'s, *back there*'s, *back then*'s, and *over there*'s that our ALP comprised. Confusion signaled for me a (dis)orientation in regard to curricula arranged along multiple time/space stations (see de Saint Georges 156-157), and Di's articulation of confusion seemed to provide us both with a sense of *here and now* in relation to them all, a *here and now* that helped us consider where we had come from and where we might go. In the reflective essay below, I channel the confusion that my student's expressions of confusion spurred in me in regard to our ALP course. I highlight the sorts of complexities that confusion represents and, in my concluding section, use them to speak to aspects of ALP that might facilitate and other aspects of ALP that might curtail students' productive engagement with writing instruction.

Di Raises Her Hand

Due to various, ongoing issues, Di often cannot join her in-person, small-group sessions. Almost weekly, she asks to compensate for her absences through one-on-one Zoom sessions, and given the pandemic conditions, I make every effort to oblige. Over the course of this semester, she will attend only two in-class meetings, but she and I will hold 11 virtual sessions. It is during maybe our fifth or sixth Zoom meeting when I point out to Di that I have started smiling whenever she says "I'm confused." I share with her ways I've been playing with "confusion"'s etymology, especially as it relates to actions like "bringing to ruin" or "mixing or mingling together" ("Confuse"). I let her know that my take on these meanings (one where confusion is shared, mutual) helps me wonder where her prior knowledge/expectations might mix with and/or bring to ruin assumptions (hers/mine) shaping the curricula in our hybrid course. I suggest to Di that she is not confused because she doesn't know things; she is confused because she does know things, things that don't always sync with our course's guidelines. Di agrees, and her articulations of confusion become the point at which I try to

orient us in regard to the (dis)array of assignments, expectations, deadlines, webpages, goals, and assumptions that constitute our ALP class.

As my Zoom calls with Di accumulate and new questions come up, new inquiries beginning with "I'm confused," the more I notice we both now are smiling. I'm focused on my conversations with Di here, frankly, because unlike most others in her cohort, she often volunteers questions (in Zoom sessions, over email, in her Studio and FYC posts) about the nature of assignments—she is very much engaged in very discernible ways. Not only will we meet for these 11 Zoom sessions, we will also exchange over 170 emails during this school term (scheduling or rescheduling meeting times, affirming due dates, clarifying expectations, reporting on progress, offering directions as to where submissions and resources might be found, conjecturing as to when drafts might be graded and returned, expressing confusion, etc.). Our course is basically online, so she doesn't always get to raise her hand in class, but for the sake of my discussion here, I'd like you to imagine always this one student raising her hand.

Thinking of Di and the frequency and nature of her questions, I focus (momentarily) not on what I'd consider the kind of confusion you see over a threshold concept, where students are abandoning old ways of thinking for something new and vital (Meyer and Land 1). I first see Di's expressions of confusion, rather, as moments where guidelines are not interpreted in expected ways, where a curriculum for a moment derails. When Di asks me questions, she does not seem to be, at least not on the surface, grappling with a concept known to be complex but rather one that I (and colleagues who helped design our asynchronous FYC and Studio offerings) assumed to be a given. However, after thinking more about this, I can't for sure say this distinction holds true. In other words, I'm not sure where my guidelines necessarily end and the concepts of college writing begin, especially for the students referred to our BW offerings, students whose ACT scores in reading and writing, writing samples, and/or previous GPAs project a bumpy transition to college work.

"I'm confused by what this assignment means by 'revise.' Where is that supposed to go?"; "I'm confused by what these directions mean by 'proposal.' This is a revision, right?"; "I'm confused—I thought that what I wrote was the 'outline'"; "I'm confused why there's a summary in that bibliography but that you didn't want summaries in this bibliography": "I talked about ethos, pathos, logos; I'm confused why you say not to"; "I'm confused why I have to keep writing about the same topic. Can't I research something else?": with questions like these, Di very much seems to be grappling with

the gate itself, with the course guidelines, but at the same time, I'm thinking she also may be paused at some key concept—a concept involving process, research, terminology, or genre. I've come to see ways concepts in college writing likely mix in moments such as this with students' prior educational experience: revision might be integral to the writing process, but a revised draft is something that needs to be posted somewhere; annotations serve a purpose in the writing process, but they don't always manifest as something graded; key vocabularies provide for a conscious orchestration of rhetorical moves, but not all assignments ask that that consciousness be articulated; extended research assignments help familiarize students with more nuanced approaches to content and scholarly sources, but this extension doesn't necessarily align with the autonomy student writers might desire in their college careers. Concepts in college writing do not exist here independent of the course in which a student is enrolled; a student's development as a writer mingles with their efforts to stay on board the train that is a curricular narrative. Luckily for us, Di does not hesitate to pull the request cord, to let us know when it's time to step off for a bit, share our understandings and intentions, recalibrate our destination(s). Confusion might very well be an emotion that an individual feels, but its expression is also a social act signaling a mix of forces: Di, the curricula, and I are all in this together, this confusion.

Di and her cohort often interpret the guidelines to exercises in ways our design team did not anticipate. I read her classmates' online submissions and in-class silence and believe very much these students are confused, but I don't know if they know they are confused. I wish they did feel confusion, wish they were more like Di. I've got Di's "I'm confused" in my head and project that onto others in the class. I claim they are confused, but they rarely express to me a sense of confusion. Rather, I am making a value judgment— "You are confused. You are mixing something here, although I'm not sure what. You are bringing to ruin my carefully laid plans for this exercise. Will you please tell me that you're confused? Can you please feel confused?" In multiple ways, I say this much in class (and in multiple emails to individual students), beg for confusion, but on some symbolic plain, I've left myself muted, camera off. I've got to wonder—are students really confused in these moments that I declare them confused? Are they rather acting with confidence, perhaps ballasted by prior experiences that they've imported to our course sites and that override our curricula? Have they just confused us, their teachers, brought to ruin our belief in coherent lesson plans and our unexamined assumptions about students as some "mythical average norm" (Ostroff 1.9)? When I think in terms of demographics, of the underserved

student populations so often overrepresented in our BW offerings, our course design team's assumptions here, our failures to anticipate or invite mingling/ mixing, our resistance to ruin, all signal exclusionary practices. What was it we hoped would remain pure and stable, unconfused?

The online curriculum has already been mapped out, even to some extent the Studio component as well, and these students who remain on board appear content to stumble somnambulistically or, perhaps, as Cheryl Hogue Smith might say, anesthetically ("Interrogating" 64) down what looks to be a "sequentially graded curricular path" (Prior), one online assignment at a time: complete an exercise, respond to others' posts, post a comment to Studio, respond to others' Studio posts, submit a draft, provide feedback to others' submissions, write a reflection, write another reflection, visit the writing center, write a summary of that visit, move to the next module. Examining their work, I often feel as though the majority of the class is content to click through the course pages and intermittently submit material with little understanding (or with too much unhelpful understanding based on prior experiences) of where they had just been and/or with little anticipation of where they could be headed. Feedback I post along the way seems rarely heeded, if heeded at all. If this course were indeed a train, students would be randomly unboarding and boarding again at stations along this curricular track (destinations unknown), complying (or not) to some approximate degree with whatever directions that one cart's conductor might convey.

Maybe others in Di's cohort are not mixing, but are reluctant to mix, hesitant to transfer/transform—hesitant to consider the fact that our formal papers invite a different kind of attention (from them, from me) than does the informal writing exercises that precede them, that the annotations they completed in the prior module are not duplicated in their actual research paper, that the remix of that paper they are working on now does not need them to make statements about the rhetorical moves they are attempting. That was the rhetorical analysis paper; for their own research-based arguments and remix of those arguments, they need to do rhetorical analysis behind the scenes (before, of course, we ask them again to articulate their rhetorical intentions in subsequent reflections). "Largely," Cheryl Hogue Smith writes, "basic writers write ineffectively because when they read and try to interpret academic texts, they are missing much of the cultural knowledge and academic information possessed by better prepared students" ("Diving" 670): Smith is talking here about literary and scholarly texts, but BW students must also bring a certain understanding to syllabi and assignment guidelines as well. This understanding is prerequisite to the curricular

cohesion that the course designers—all experienced writers and college teachers—intended and assumed. Their/our intentions did not invite conflict and struggle, confusion, the raised hand as central to BW: we thought it our goal to avoid these things. Throughout these online components of my hybrid ALP course, I see now there are multiple aspects that can and probably should lead students to mix, to mingle expectations, to be confused, to raise a hand: right now, only Di does.

Di raises her hand. When I call on her, she says, "I'm confused." At this point in our mutual confusions, there's no way I can possibly read this moment as an exhibition of deficit. Something is mixing, confounding, coming to ruin. My "tale of learning" (see Prior), never as seamless as I might think, most probably mixes with a story my student unravels and writes inside her head. Maybe she picks up on something I said earlier in our Zoom meeting, or something we exchanged in an online thread, or something I said in an email the week before, maybe even something another teacher or parent or friend or book said at some other point in her life. Maybe Di is now way up ahead of where I imagined us to be, configuring some application for something I might not even be saying.[1] Whatever, this confusion is our site of engagement at which these multiple semiotic resources now come together in real time (see Scollon, *Mediated* 28). Di says she's confused, we both smile, and we dwell here, stop to see what this might mean and what we might do next.

What This Might Mean and What We Might Do Next

This pandemic experience reminds me that my BW curriculum could, and perhaps should, promote confusion as an advanced state of knowing—of knowing something is mixing, that something needs to be laid to waste. That something laid to waste could be the "sequentially graded curricular path" that is our online FYC course (Prior), a path prefigured before any of these ALP students even clicked on its first module. What often comes to ruin in these moments is the "tale of learning," as Paul Prior would call it, founded on the idea that learning, that becoming, happens along a narrow track inside a single domain (Prior)—a graduate program, a probationary period, any writing program geared to move students along as efficiently as possible, with little regard to local circumstances (Inman 1), circumstances as local as a hand raised. There is not much, if anything, in praise of confusion in these tales: in them, confusion is something to overcome, not the likely outcome of a student's attempts to board.

Educators describe confusion "as an important epistemic emotion" that "can help students focus their attention and effort when solving complex learning tasks" (Nawz et al. 118). Among the many emotions students might experience in regard to a BW curriculum, then, confusion can facilitate their engagement with that curriculum. I believe Di's expressions of confusion helped us both to find a focus among my ALP's multiple time/space stations and to locate trajectories vital to her becoming as writer (see de Saint-Georges 156-157). A productive confusion arouses curiosity and spurs focus; it brings us into contact with what is mixing, coming to ruin, and directs us to what we might build out of these ruins. A productive confusion can help students make connections, form trajectories out of an ALP's various time/space stations. ALPs themselves represent sites conducive to productive confusion. Nonetheless, the fact that eight of the other 11 students in Di's ALP section eventually received failing course grades indicates to me that aspects of ALPs can curtail rather than facilitate a useful confusion.

While Di's expressions of confusion seemed to steer us both in productive directions, many things in my ALP course, obviously, went terribly wrong. What went wrong points to the complexity of BW students' relationship to writing instruction and the ways that ALP is especially positioned to incite and address this complexity. By its very nature, ALP's reliance on different time/space stations (see de Saint-Georges 156-157)—usually an FYC class and corequisite workshop—invites engagement with either site at different (time/place) points in the course. Teachers can use the workshop, for instance, to look back on past FYC lessons, or pre-teach concepts vital to future assignments, or dig down ever deeper into current projects. Likewise, feedback instructors provide on ALP students' FYC papers might reference concepts discussed or even personal revelations shared in the workshop. Granted, stand-alone courses can provide opportunities for all of this to and fro and round and round as well, and an ALP offering might indeed provide a linear curricular calendar; ALP, however, more so than most mainstream curricula, embeds the to and fro and round and round by design, embeds the up ahead's, over there's, past struggles, current concerns in ways that students' life circumstances and divergent skill levels represent stations in themselves. An ALP is specifically designed to capture and attend to student need at the multiple entry and exit points BW students often encounter: a missed assignment, extended absence, accommodation issues, a failed paper, confusion over guidelines, etc.

An ALP's curricular path is not narrow nor unidirectional but widened and transected, at times circular, vertical, even detoured by design. In light

of Paul Prior's work on ways people learn, ALP could very well represent a "trajectory of semiotic becoming," not a linear tale of learning. "Becoming happens not inside domains," he writes,

> but across the many moments of a life. Becoming happens in spaces that are never pure or settled, where discourses and knowledge are necessarily heterogeneous, and where multiple semiotic resources are so deeply entangled that distinct modes simply don't make sense. (Prior)

At best, then, an ALP model like the one I describe here, one intentionally comprised of multiple time/space stations, can represent Prior's "trajectory of semiotic becoming." The representation manifests in relation to confusion, which marks a point of attention, a site of engagement where students and teachers can interrogate guidelines and expectations for FYC and establish trajectories of becoming. In this sense, a raised hand functions not as a disruption but as a continuity, a practice students exercise to thread their development as writers from nexus to nexus (see Roozen and Erickson 2.03.2): their raised hands open windows through which the students and their teacher can resemiotize the ALP's trajectories, draw attention to where teacher and students might transect these trajectories with students' own past, current, and future interests and knowledge. My dialogues with Di about confusion—her raised hand—marked our deictic center, our focus, our continuity among the many stations in time and space an ALP gathers.

Where this attention is absent, though, ALP's multiple stations (in the case here, not only an asynchronous FYC site, but also an asynchronous Studio site, face-to-face meetings on campus, all the assignments along the way, and wherever it was that students went whenever they unboarded our curriculum) disperse but do not engage. As Rodney H. Jones writes, "The same configurations of tools at the same moments in time and the same point in space may for some people function as sites of engagements for particular actions, whereas for others they may not" (41). For other class members, my ALP's configuration could very well have appeared as disconnected, atomistic, one countless text entry after another. The fact that many students were not submitting assignments or submitting them well after due dates meant that discontinuous points of need persisted at multiple points in time along the online curricula's linear framework: students were everywhere and nowhere all at the same time. Meanwhile, the online course just kept going, whether students were on board or not, due dates spilling

out ahead on our Canvas calendars. The multiple time/space stations, complicated by the random rates of submission and attendance, cast my own presence, as well, among various points in time and space. Despite my efforts to optimize what Prior might describe as the "embodied, dispersed, mediated, laminated, and deeply dialogic" aspects of an ALP design (Prior), my sequentially graded online curriculum (one Canvas page after another) seemed to tram most of the students farther and farther from the junctions at which we needed to meet. Had it not been for Di's raised hand, my own sense of continuity among this hybrid ALP's stations would be difficult even for me to ascertain. As Hope Parisi and Cheryl C. Smith might say, I would have had little chance of shifting "*there* to *right here* and the goal-oriented *sometime soon* to *right now*" (1, emphasis in the original).

In my ALP model, the weekly face-to-face sessions were meant to serve as *the place* that would orient us in relation to students' work in the virtual spheres and to any other time/space that proved relevant. I can only guess as to why the on-campus meeting did not function in this way: in light of Cheryl Hogue Smith's epigraph above, I am now the one, after all, doing the most abstracting. Perhaps I could have (and I really think I should have) devoted more time to community building; maybe our division's newly designed on-line FYC course, which replaced the bare-bones shell the previous ALP cohort had completed, inserted too much curriculum between students and myself (More is less?); perhaps I should have recognized that the Studio, aligned as it was with our own FYC class, could not really function like a Studio—the thirdspace that Grego and Thompson imagine (205-206); and given other teachers' accounts of student disconnection in this time of COVID-19 (see McMurtrie), not to mention other obstacles our students face inside (e.g., the legacy of No Child Left Behind; the rapid shift to online learning; the transition back to face-to-face sessions) and outside of school (e.g., work schedules, unreliable internet access, childcare issues, domestic abuse), I'm not hesitant to acknowledge that forces beyond my course impact students' approaches to learning.

In my soundings, I must also consider the degree to which one-on-one meetings and technologies like Zoom (rather than in-person, small-group meetings) might better mediate expressions of confusion (see Gray-Rosendale and Stammen). In Di's cohort, another student who frequently asked to compensate for missed meetings through Zoom also successfully passed the course. (His research paper, in fact, won honorable mention in a university-wide competition that celebrates student research.) No other student in the class accepted my offer to meet via Zoom when they could not attend

the in-person sessions. In the course's previous iteration, the small-group meetings were all conducted via Zoom, rather than in person, and they were well attended. A few of those Zoom sessions I facilitated during this ALP's first iteration would last no more than a quarter of the hour we'd reserved. I trusted students to say what needed to be said: if students had no questions or comments, I'd remind them of whatever assignment might be due next or maybe comment on/raise questions about some trend I'd observed in a recent batch of papers or Studio thread, and then we'd all head back into Canvas. I didn't have to worry about students commuting long distances only to have class dismissed after a few minutes: when we needed a site of engagement, these sessions were here for as long as we needed. Meanwhile, that cohort reliably completed the Canvas assignments (more reliably, I could argue, than any BW class I'd taught previously), and when conversations did occur in our Zoom sessions, they involved discourse on the content of students' projects as much as clarification of guidelines. In the end, all but one of those twelve BW students passed FYC. I'm wondering how fortunate I might have been to catch this first cohort in fall 2020. At this point, students weren't too removed from the on-campus interactions they'd been having the prior spring, before COVID-19 shut down in-person sessions, and at the same time, few were now neophytes when it came to virtual learning spaces.

The second ALP iteration, involving Di and her cohort, occurred at a point in the pandemic where schools were encouraging returns to campus. We sat spread out in our large classroom, sometimes just two or three of us, we all wore masks, and we were all perhaps more used to Zoom boxes at this point than we were the spontaneous give and take that one might hope for in a face-to-face course. No one expressed to me any reservations about the face-to-face arrangement, although looking at these sessions, espying these students gazing at their monitors while I attempted inquiries into their Canvas experience, you might reasonably guess that the students were still more inclined to their being home on their laptops than in any sort of on-campus, collaborative situation with peers and an instructor. Multiple factors could have contributed to the ineffectiveness of this second cohort's face-to-face sessions (not to mention their online participation), but what I do believe at heart is that the absence of confusion, or at least the absent articulation of confusion, kept those weekly meetings/windows closed to sites of engagement. As I remember them now, that second cohort's face-to-face meetings seemed always yet another *there*, never really becoming the sort of *here* I'd meant them to be. Few class members, as I recall, ever raised their hand; no one else could see Di's.

Di's raised hand (or, more literally, her "I'm confused") marked moments in which we needed to derail that linear tale of learning my online curriculum represented and to see that derailment as our deictic center, not as disruption or deficit, but as the point at which we might orient ourselves in relation to all those other points comprising our ALP and their role in our becoming. My seeking to centralize Di's confusion rather than merely eradicate it throws into relief ways an online curriculum (actually, any curriculum that values expediency over local circumstance) can enact an indifference to BW students' interests and concerns. Along with other limitations to hybrid developmental writing courses (see Harrington), I worry that online curricula, especially much of that swiftly developed in response to COVID-19, can trammel students' (lack of) engagement with material rather than invite the "embodied, dispersed, mediated, laminated, and deeply dialogic" experiences that BW students actually need at their points of need (Prior)—experiences that an ALP is especially positioned to provide. And, to repeat, I don't mean just to single out online learning: I target my online courses here because they made visible to me a prescribed tale, one where the raised hand can mark a discontinuity rather than the heart of the matter, and one where that hand is not always forthcoming nor easy to see. Almost any course in any form can falsely shepherd this sense of invisibility.

If I could turn back time, I would try to engineer a space in which confusion is expected and central, help establish a trajectory wherein the raised hand functions as destiny. If I could do it all again, I would use our opening face-to-face sessions (community building!) to introduce students to the concept of confusion that I developed in my exchanges with Di. In those early group sessions, I would try to help class members generate stories about confusion, and I would ask students to bring written summaries to each subsequent meeting (or write their summaries while within those sessions), summaries of what they perceive to be their current assignments' guidelines, where they feel most confused and least confused over any of those guidelines (see Angelo and Cross 154-158). I would, as well, arrange for online discussions on guidelines themselves, make homework about students' interactions with and about their suggested revisions to requirements, about where we've been and where we might go next, and above all, about how all that is being experienced (or not) right here/now.

I would also organize our Studio discussions around aspects of confusion I hear articulated (or sense unarticulated) in our face-to-face meetings: "I noticed no one asked about what the guidelines meant by a 'nuanced solution.' Can you tell me what you understand 'nuanced solution' to mean?"

In my responses to drafts, I would make confusion central to what we do so that online hybrid ALP offerings might challenge tales of learning that discount BW students' complex approaches to writing and writing instruction: "Tell me why your paper looks like this here and not like that sample there? Why did you decide that this was the route?" I would do whatever I could to help students unpack the significance of their/our confusion, to view what's mixing right here and right now, what it all means, and what to do next.

Overall, I would advance confusion in a way that grounds ALP courses in students' own moments of becoming. I would, as well, make a point of unmuting my confusion. I would turn on my camera and raise my own hand in our in-person sessions, and I would keep it raised until someone there called on me. On some days, this might even be where I'd start.

Notes

1. My thanks to Aurora Matzke for her insights regarding the meaning of a raise hand.

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Letting Go and Going All In: A Reflection on Liminality

Sara Heaser

ABSTRACT: *During the COVID-19 pandemic, institutional parameters shifted unexpectedly, which influenced how writing instructors took up and taught their courses. This article reflects on an instructor's experience teaching a corequisite support course during the pandemic, utilizing the concept of liminality, as basic writing scholarship draws on various metaphors that position basic writing courses "outside" the university. To reconsider how her course may have functioned for her students in different ways while face-to-face instruction was limited, the author positions her experiences designing the course and its placement measures alongside the unexpected, inconsistent conditions of teaching during crisis.*

KEYWORDS: *corequisite writing courses, COVID-19, course design, curricular design, first-year writing, liminality*

Like many of you who are reading this, I teach first-year writing (FYW) and corequisite writing courses regularly. I suspect many of us agree that teaching feels different after the pandemic. We are still discovering the implications of the pandemic on our students, our institutions, and ourselves, despite that to me at least, quarantining and mandatory masking feels like a different lifetime. Whether these changes we feel will be permanent, time will tell. My colleagues and I are just beginning to look at the past with each other to commiserate with those who understand the mental and emotional labor of teaching alongside grief and austerity. In the moment I kept on, never articulating exactly what was happening in front of me. I don't think I knew how to. But now I can safely assume I'm on the other side of the pandemic and it feels less risky to investigate the past. In this space of recovery and reflection, there is much admission and thus, vulnerability.

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I teach at The University of Wisconsin La Crosse (UWL), a four-year comprehensive institution that enrolls about 10,300 students (9,400 undergrad); it is also a predominantly White institution (PWI). The average ACT score for incoming students is 24; the average GPA is 3.6 on a 4.0 scale; and 25% of these students graduate in the top 10% of their high school class. We have a single semester, three-credit standalone FYW course, Eng 110: College Writing, of which about forty sections are run each semester. Additionally, a small number of students (less than fifty) place into our graded, credit-bearing corequisite FYW course, Eng 100: College Writing Workshop, which is offered in the fall only. Students who take both Eng 100 and Eng 110 also enroll in FYS 100: First-Year Seminar (3 cr). And, so students enrolled in Eng 100 have a similar FYW experience as their peers, and they are enrolled randomly across all sections of Eng 110. To provide some additional context, Eng 100 is fairly new. It officially replaced Eng 050, a non-credit bearing, pass/fail prerequisite course in the fall of 2018. Eng 050 created unnecessary barriers for students, and we wished to remove them. To confidently make these changes, my colleagues and I researched corequisite models nationwide while considering our own local contexts and the needs of our student population. And not surprisingly, this was not my first serious foray into the metaphor of liminality at work in the university. There are many turns of phrase within scholarship about basic writing courses existing in liminal spaces, like "on the boundaries," "in the margins," or "on the borders." I was familiar with this discipline's metaphor already as I taught Eng 050, but it was helpful to consider exactly how it could be interpreted differently for a new corequisite course that also exists on the fringes of a university, albeit in different ways. For example, if this new space for Eng 100 is liminal, (but perhaps less liminal than Eng 050 because of its credit-bearing status) how can we continue to honor the knowledge students bring and the labor they do? Could centering the course around student knowledge create an equitable, tangible space as opposed to the transitory spaces driven by a deficit model I read so often about in scholarship?

Questions like these encouraged us to revise our placement measures to be more equitable, too. Historically, students were placed into Eng 050 based on a timed, online exam, the Wisconsin English Placement Test (WEPT). For some students, low WEPT scores are enough for direct placement into ENG 100. For others with midrange scores that neither affirm or deny the need for Eng 100, we require they complete a survey that gathers information on their writing habits, experiences, knowledge, and anxieties or perceptions via Likert-scale questions. The survey also asks them to read about the "Habits of

Mind" from the Council of Writing Program Administrator's Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (such as persistence, creativity, etc.) and Allison Carr's "Failure is Not an Option" from *Bad Ideas About Writing* and answer a prompt that considers how the two texts connect. Students have a month to peruse the survey and draft their responses. A team of three FYW instructors review the responses and many students do not need Eng 100, but it is clear about a quarter of the students do. The survey mimics a more authentic writing task seen in our Eng 110 courses. So then, we are more accurately and authentically able to see an incoming college writer at work.

As I reflect on this context provided here, I realize how intentional our choices were about Eng 100 and its role within our FYWP and the wider university. The goal of a corequisite FYW course is long-term retention and student success—a move from an introductory support course that only a few on the edges are privy to into a required, rigorous college curriculum. I see how much scholarly knowledge demonstrated itself as advocacy in this experience: we are very aware of the implications surrounding corequisite and basic writing placement, course design, and instruction as it is so often treated as less than and/or in transit (i.e., liminal): a short stopover on the way to more important knowledge. We cared deeply about these students as writers entering the University, about *how* they enter the University, and about the writing experiences they have during their very first semester.

But still, as the headlines became ominous, telling of an unknown and quickly spreading illness during winter of 2019/20, I had only taught Eng 100 and its new curriculum twice (Fall 2018 and 2019) to two small sections of students (15 each). During my first two iterations of Eng 100, I did notice one characteristic that Eng 100 and Eng 050 students shared was a lack of awareness and preparedness for academic literacies and higher-order concerns within their coursework. The Eng 100 course I designed in response was labor-based contract graded and included three key writing projects that centered around establishing their own agency and authority as student writers. I was well-read on the scholarship around corequisites (see all the context above) but a near novice in the coreq classroom. I was mostly theory, little practice, and still testing out this shaky curriculum I was on the verge of ditching. I made a rookie mistake over and over: a corequisite course is *not* a BW course, and it is *not* a FYW course; they're all close cousins and do not confuse who is who or to assume to know e-x-a-c-t-l-y how they're related.

It was clear to me how the Eng 100 work connected to the learning outcomes students were tackling in Eng 110. However, I vividly remember a student asking, "Is this class study hall?" I guess the connection—the

courses are cousins! Come on! —wasn't so clear after all. I was flailing in a newly created liminal space I *thought* I was handling. But not just yet, as this student had so helpfully declared. Sometimes students have a way of publicly declaring our shortcomings. In short, I was unprepared for two courses to co-exist in one liminal classroom.

Acknowledging Liminality

I've addressed how liminality can be literal and physical, a space utilized for transition to another space, like a set of stairs or an airport or an extra ungraded, required writing class before the "real" writing class. But it can also be a state of mind: a phase of life ends, another is set to begin, and we may feel unsure of what is next. Like when we start college. Or when we endure an unexpected pandemic that upends routine and has no firm end in sight. Or perhaps when both of these events happen at the same time! Either way, liminality has a sense of in-betweenness, one foot in, one foot out. There's a border, and we are in flux between a more tangible space or sense of permanence.

I have had enough time to discern exactly how teaching Eng 100 was an intensely difficult liminal experience, pandemic aside: it offered a glimpse *into* Eng 110 and unfolded *alongside* Eng 110 in ways that Eng 050 could not. Eng 050 was a standalone course with its own objectives that students had to meet *before* enrolling in Eng 110. I could easily assess whether a student was ready for Eng 110 when they were finished with Eng 050. There was a clear sequence between one course and the other, both with fixed definitions of student success. Although convenient for me, this firm boundary was disastrous for the Eng 050 students: P/F grades and credits that disappeared into a void. Eng 100 on the other hand, relies on Eng 110 context and coursework for students to succeed, neither of which is immediately nor specifically clear to me, the Eng 100 instructor, because my students come from a variety of Eng 110 sections. I'm familiar with programmatic goals, but not how those are taken up by individual Eng 110 instructors. And the boundaries of Eng 100, because it is centered around student interpretations of their experiences in Eng 110, are unpredictable.

Because of these fluid borders, I am everywhere and nowhere simultaneously when teaching Eng 100. I am everywhere, stretched into the roles of academic advisor, counselor, RA, tech support, consultant, mentor. Not to mention Writing Instructor teaching first-year students how to successfully adapt to their FYW course that I may know a lot or little about. My students

and I, by necessity, had to be forgiving with each other. We are working through writing in college as outsiders, figuring out a way into Eng 110 together. Context is in short supply, and I learned awfully quick to be flexible, curious, and compassionate. This multiplicity felt like working backstage in a theatre production in black head to toe, mic 'ed up and offering my Eng 100 students feedback and directions as they take on the *real* leading role in front of an authentic audience: like the corequisite support coursework wasn't the *real* work. Oh yeah. Each Eng 100 student is starring in a different performance at the same time, all semester long. Keep up!

Testing the Boundaries of Liminality

When Eng 100 was on my roster for Fall 2020, COVID-19 shifted our understanding of liminal spaces and challenged our traditional understanding of the university. For this metaphor of liminality to function clearly in our minds, there needs to be central ground, a control to which an object or idea can exist outside of the permanent. Eng 110 is this norm; the university is this norm. But by Fall 2020, the University itself had become liminal: it existed within an LMS, on Zoom calls, in emails, on PDFs, *so many Zoom calls*. The university's buildings, lights on and unlocked, were mostly empty, a stark contrast to a bustling campus of student orgs, extracurricular events, rec leagues, and study groups huddled around tables in the Union. Eng 110 (and other courses forced online) became a chaotic mash-up of recorded lectures and to-do checkboxes and Dropboxes and synchronous online group peer review and just. more. online. *stuff*. Similarly, some physical spaces once utilized for gathering and socializing, on campus and off—restaurants or theatres—became ground zero for viral contamination and sat empty. Other spaces that served a particular function took on new purposes as the virus changed how humans could physically interact, like gymnasiums turned testing centers or garages turned homeschool centers. Grocery stores and libraries, places where I once lingered, felt transitory because I limited my exposure by getting in and out as quickly as possible. Socially and culturally accepted norms and systems had broken down, and there were no rules for the new world in the meantime.

At UWL, online instruction was strongly encouraged, but not a requirement; aside from health concerns, classroom space to accommodate social distancing recommendations was nearly impossible to find. The online LMS components of all sections of Eng 110, once supplementary to face-to-face instruction, were now central ground as all sections moved online. How

could a corequisite assist a course that itself felt ephemeral, liminal? What could "support" even mean in this context?

I dared the unthinkable: could I flip the script and arrange my Eng 100 to be face-to-face? What if Eng 100 was the control in response to the newfound liminality of Eng 110? Just seven students were enrolled; all were on campus. I took a chance and listed my course as in person (something which may not be possible for individual instructors in many campuses), hoping that after a Labor Day weekend of unpacking, my students would show up healthy and we'd at least have a first day of class together. Fingers crossed for more.

As I reflect, a thought: *What was I thinking?!* This was the pre-vaccine era; I risked infection daily, bringing it home to my family with two young children. The students I was teaching lived in dorms, which are ripe conditions for COVID-19. And who is to say they were making safe choices to keep *me* and others safe? But that voice in my mind: wouldn't these students benefit in so many ways from consistent face-to-face class? If I was healthy, shouldn't I at least try to make it work? After all, my other three courses were online, as well as all my administrative work; this twice-a-week interaction was the little face-to-face contact I had with humans other than my immediate family. Back and forth, back and forth my inner dialogue ran and ran. This tug on my moral compass is a special breed of anxiety I do not miss. Today, a sense of shame for positioning work ahead of my family and my own health when I had the choice not to still lingers. But that's for a different reflection.

Liminality, Backwards and Inside Out

Well, what did this Eng 100 as tangible space look like? It *looked* depressing and unforgiving: like an episode of "The Walking Dead," minus the zombies. Allow me to paint the scene, about four weeks into the semester. The mood in the empty hallways was November evening, even though it was 9:30 am on a September Tuesday, let's say. Our classroom: cavernous, sterile, meant for forty, but just seven students and I, spread out across long, rectangular tables fit for a lecture-style class. The prep to emerge: freshly scrubbed up to the elbows, a clean mask, a recent negative COVID-19 test. The prep to teach: two pre-packaged wipes from the sanitizing station to wipe down the keyboard, mouse, and front desk and table area. Our class meetings felt clandestine. I expected a man in a suit to burst through the door at any moment, count our masks, measure the feet between us, shout at us to disperse

immediately. This is what we worked against. But as soon as I say, "Let's get started," hands are in the air and the mood shifts:

"I don't understand what my professor wants me to write."

"I can't find the instructions for my next essay anywhere. She said on Zoom yesterday she posted them online, but I can't find them, and I am supposed to read them and think of a topic by Friday."

"We're supposed to write a discussion post about this piece we read but everyone has already said what I have to say, and it just sounds like I'm saying what everyone else said. But we lose points if we do that."

On behalf of my students, questions like the above were an incredible display of vulnerability. This delicate foray into collaboration is the kind only vulnerability can bring. About four weeks into the semester, I cared a lot less about meeting particular criteria and more about interrogating the confusion outside of that classroom, and the students were also ready for this challenge. Too much was unpredictable: whether we'd continue with face-to-face class anyway; whether their Eng 110 instructors would fall ill and cancel weeks of class at a time; whether they or myself would be in quarantine; whether they'd need to take care of a family member, or much worse, whether tragedy struck, and they'd be absent to grieve the loss of a life. What was the use of an attendance policy? Or required conferences? Of expectations of consistent, stellar work? Of deadlines? I recall in Spring 2020, in the middle of an anxiety-fueled discussion (on Zoom of course) with FYW colleagues, someone piped up: "Look. We're trying to stay alive. This is just a writing class." Survival became the baseline, anything more was a perk. It felt cruel to expect more than the minimum from my students.

One shift in my own expectations meant I had to continue to sit uncomfortably with an imperfect model of Eng 100 while a worldwide pandemic upended any chance of "normal" instruction. I so desperately wanted to figure out how to perfect this corequisite and to just stop feeling like I didn't know what I was doing. For Fall 2020, I needed to be realistic. This was not going to be the semester where I figured it out. And as I write now in 2023, two thoughts:

This was actually the semester in which I figured it out.

Hence this narrative.

But, if at the time I had a realistic acceptance of what was possible, then why did I insist on meeting in person?

I think at the moment, I just wanted to interact with students. That's really what I love about my job. The students. Maybe I wanted a bit of a routine and a space to make sense of so much murkiness and unstable ground that COVID-19 had wrought. Having a class—the prep, the focus, the high, the reflection—might make me feel a little more normal. I must have been searching for something from the before that could help me feel normal. All of us have something that we did that helped us cope, and this was one of mine.

Any progress we made that semester would be considered a win against the near insurmountable challenges that on any day could entirely derail a student's engagement in and commitment to the course. My mantra was: Just show up. Communicate with me honestly and often. We will figure out what we're doing each day. We will figure out grades and points as we go. I was especially thankful I had experience with contract grading, which is an assessment system well-suited for unpredictable situations, as flexibility is a natural feature. It was a trust exercise, live and in person. I had to let go, embrace the liminality. It was just a writing class.

But I still wanted to honor their time and knowledge. The first half of each class period, we focused on two or three students' concerns about Eng 110 and offered whole class feedback about those concerns (hence those hands in the air). The student who was sharing their Eng 110 work was responsible for providing the context, purpose, and audience for us, and we then took turns asking the presenting writer follow-up questions to assist them as they made sense of their particular writing task. Our conversations were about writing online discussion posts, reading assignment sheets, navigating the course LMS and figuring out what information is pertinent and what is supplemental, drafting an email to an instructor, providing feedback in an online peer review and interpreting feedback they received themselves.

I integrate peer review often in my FYW courses (who doesn't?), but I knew that model would be difficult given Eng 100's attention to individual student context in Eng 110. Despite these considerations, I value student-to-student feedback and wanted to center student expertise in Eng 100. This workshop model put a lot of attention on their work, so it was also risky. Much responsibility was on the students to prepare, discuss, and talk with each other like writers. Covid-19 had also raised the stakes and made day-to-day engagement in online coursework more confusing, difficult, and time-consuming. There was an avid *need* for a steady space to sort out the liminal collaboratively. This workshop model thrived because it was

consistent and reliable, a steadfast response to a course that felt ephemeral in its online presentation.

I focused on encouraging students to see connections between each other's writing assignments, the work they were doing in their own Eng 110 class, and the work we were doing in Eng 100. I resisted the habit of intervening and giving direct feedback to the students and instead attempted to question motivations for rhetorical choices to foster their own understanding. To solidify these connections between courses and different writing projects, after our discussion students wrote a reflective exit ticket (in an online document) that asked them to consider how the feedback they heard that day connected to their own Eng 110 work. If they were a featured writer, their exit ticket focused on summarizing, ranking, and interrogating the feedback they received. Then, we assigned who was up to be reviewed during the next class period by checking in on their current Eng 110 project.

The second half of our class period was spent making progress on our Eng 100 curriculum. For this aspect of class, I drafted either a short writing activity, discussion prompt, think-pair-share, or something similar based on the progress we made during the class prior. At times I had to modify this in the moment because of a revealing moment in workshop. Students worked alone, in pairs, or trios, depending on the task; if working alone, they paired up later to share and discuss their new ideas. Each student had a shared folder online (I also had access) where they kept their work (like their exit tickets, for example); if working in pairs or groups, they wrote while sharing a document to encourage collaborative writing despite an awkward socially distanced seating arrangement.

A caveat: *everything* we did in class was saved in shared, accessible and editable folders online so students who missed class could follow along; so I (and the students) could return to previous work as a repository of resources; and so we could see trends and themes as our writing unfolded. It was rewarding to see the files accumulate and to track physical progress as the semester unfolded. This was such a small detail, but it made a difference during a time when again, little felt consistently reliable.

While they worked, I quickly reviewed the exit tickets to note key patterns and find additional connections to the Eng 100 coursework. To wrap up class, we came together as a group to discuss challenges, questions, and concerns. Sometimes this meant looking directly at a student's draft in progress, other times, it meant I identified a particular gap in their knowledge and provided a model, did a thinkaloud, or pointed them to resources at our campus library. Again, flexibility was key as instruction depended on

themes in student inquiries. Feedback could be needed anywhere, so it felt like it was everywhere, all the time. We repeated this set up every class period, twice a week. For the most part, attendance was miraculously consistent, and together, each student did successfully complete Eng 100 and Eng 110.

2023: Epilogue, or Intentional Liminality

This small cohort and our experiences together gave me a sophisticated sense of how first-year writers interpret (and misinterpret) writing situations in their courses. The semester was also the most comprehensive view of our FYWP I had yet to encounter at the curricular and programmatic level. It was just a writing class, but wow, what a writing class it was. And just think, this reinterpretation of what liminal could be had happened a bit serendipitously. As much as COVID-19 took from away from us, it did give me an opportunity to be innovative with how I spent my time with my Eng 100 students. Had I not had this time, I suspect I'd have continued to forge ahead, eyes on the larger institutional goals of the course, never looking into the eyes of the students in front of me, nodding along as they unraveled yet another experience as a FYW student I was not privy to otherwise. Although I had many other students that semester enrolled in my courses online, the seven I had face-to-face I remember more vividly; at times, they felt like my only students. They received an enthusiastic, invested version of myself every class period—I was never burned out from teaching sections back-to-back and always eager to step away from a screen. Most importantly, I was facing the liminal alongside them as COVID-19 raged on. I did not have any answers for them. I was just as helpless.

Aside from my Eng 100 curriculum, what also stands out are the conversations in between, before, after, and around all the talk about writing. I had many conversations with that class I never had with students before and will likely never have again. It became clear we were coping together. Sometimes we talked about the irony of boredom alongside raging anxiety: the repetition and loneliness of three or four classes online, one after another while at the same time, illness lurking everywhere, ready to pounce. Sometimes we did some freewriting, or I read poetry out loud. *Try to Praise the Mutilated World* by Adam Zagajewski felt appropriate. For most of us, it was our only face-to-face interaction in a classroom that semester, and it was telling. Life outside of class was bleak, and, heck, sometimes class was bleak. Sometimes having class felt weird, like an exercise in existentialism as the world outside the walls was blurry and muted. Why talk about developing essay topic ideas

alongside news that the morgues are running out of room? Sometimes class was a celebration of little things: we watched a funny video online or shared what local places were offering great takeout options.

I remember during COVID-19's initial days, reading online about slow hobbies becoming trendy again, like baking bread and knitting and puzzles, all which require patience for a timely and sometimes unknown process. Perhaps my course needed something similar: time and space to work itself out, gently. That I was able to sit and witness the bread rise, so to speak... what an unforeseen circumstance. Had the rest of life been "normal," unaffected by COVID-19 and raging on at pace, I do not think our classroom would have unfolded as organically.

Today, my Eng 100 classroom has a similar dynamic: inquiry and unsureness are welcomed and encouraged. The course is still liminal institutionally—it exists only to support another required general education course. But it does not *feel* liminal teaching this course in the classroom anymore. The slipperiness of our knowledge making feels sure and expected. Nor is it a study hall; the course holds its own as an equal counterpart to its sister course, Eng 110. I am secure in my roles, whatever they may be on whichever day of class. I can trace this confidence back to where the shift out of the liminal began: Fall 2020. No, I suppose it was not a shift *out* of the liminal. It was a shift into *accepting* the liminal and learning to hold still, to let things be, within dynamic parameters. Sometimes we need to shift into what is plausible and more importantly, possible, within larger moments of austerity.
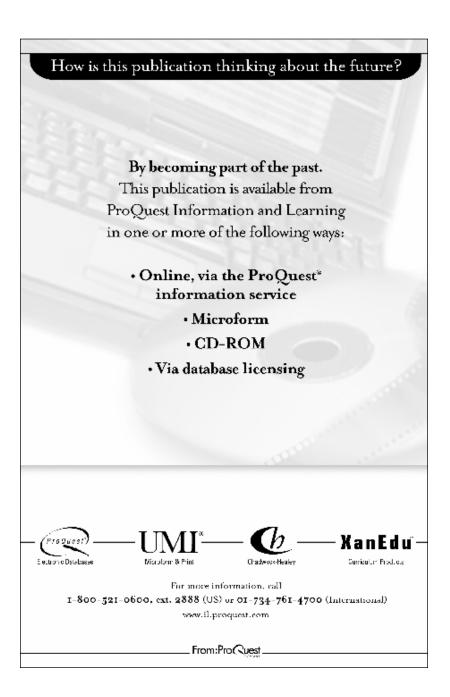
While drafting this piece, I wondered about those seven students and what their lives are like now. I used our campus software to search for their names. Their faces in tiny boxes on the screen didn't do much to honor the complexity of all I knew about their ambitions and fears, their growth and frustrations. But as I scrolled through the alphabetical list, I leaned in close to the screen in disbelief. Not a single student was still enrolled. All had withdrawn. I was shocked. They seemed so eager and invested in their own learning during class. Even more, they persisted through a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic while enrolled in college. If they could do that, what else can they do? But what happened? What was the thing, or the moment, that set off the thought, "I can't, or won't, do this anymore?" What was the thing that took precedence over their education?

The rest of the day, I told myself different narratives about the *why.* Or how this happened. It was probably financial concerns. Or maybe they lost momentum and college wasn't it for them. Or no, they probably found an opportunity in which they saw themselves succeeding somewhere else.
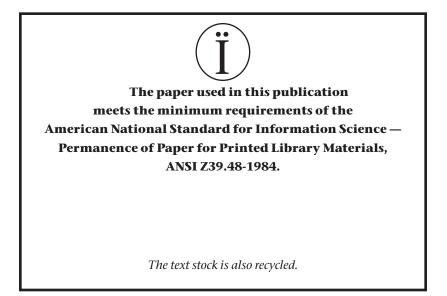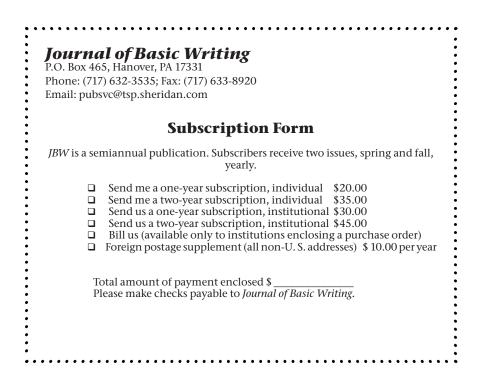
Then I shifted to what they might remember from our time together. I still carry this experience, and these students, with me today. What do I hope they hold, if anything?

I hope that when they think of their time during Covid-19, they think of Eng 100 as a space of respite, where writing was used to make sense of the shifting world around them. That they knew their voices and writing mattered and at that moment in time, their questions and discussions together provided a much-needed sense of unwavering community and creativity when little else could. This is a high ask of a writing class, and it is true for me. Whether this is true for my students, I will never know. But I will say it anyway in an act of self-preservation.

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