

Subverting from the Inside: Inclusive Assessment Practices in First-Year Writing

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Abstract: In this article, the authors respond to Natasha N. Jones' timely question: "How do you work within a system . . . to change and resist the very system that you are working within?" ("The Complicity/Complexity Problem" 5). They extend Jones' question to their situation as WPAs at Texas Tech University, where their FYW program is, to quote the CFP for this collection, "doing the work of antiracist pedagogy . . . during this current wave of backlash." They situate their labor-based grading contract initiative within a politics of locations framework and share the ways in which they navigated conservative scrutiny by building a coalition of first-year writing instructors invested in equitable assessment. The authors hope their experience will contribute to conversations about how WPAs do strategic work, anticipate potential ramifications, and navigate risk in our current political climate.

Keywords: pedagogy, assessment, first-year writing, grading contracts, DEI, writing program administration

When Michelle LaFrance and Elizabeth Wardle facilitated the 2019 symposium for developing a feminist ethos for WPAs in the twenty-first century, their driving questions aimed to push the field further towards intersectional, inclusive WPA work as they asked: "How do we build an intersectional feminist ethos into WPA work?" and "What does 'radical inclusion in WPA work' require, look like, inspire, or unfold?" (LaFrance and Wardle 13). These questions—and, importantly, the responses by senior scholars, early career WPAs, and graduate students—built upon decades of feminist WPA scholarship and lived experiences and propelled us towards the future where we have a responsibility to center intersectional, inclusive practices at the heart of our work (Bishop; Cole and Hassel; Glenn; Nicolas and Sicari; Ratcliffe and Rickly). These timely questions were with us before 2020 and these questions remain deeply important as we transition from triaging during a pandemic to reflecting on the future of our work as feminist WPAs.

In many ways, the pandemic was an important catalyst for our programs. We find ourselves in a time and space that is inherently different from our pre-pandemic academic contexts

and constructs. For many folx in writing program administrator positions, we responded to ever-changing situations for the past three years by “leveraging our disciplinary expertise and the tactic of rhetorical feminism to work through issues . . . all while finding ethical ways to reenvision the status quo” (Glenn 190). The pandemic largely disrupted the status quo in many—if not all—of our writing programs, and while each program and university responded in their own ways, this disruption made space for something new to emerge. We are thinking deeply about our programs as important sites for writing, teaching, and administrating *and* as sites of ethical practices for our students, our teachers, and ourselves. We are in a reenvisioning era where we can resist returning to a previous status quo—one that likely privileged certain folx, languages, writing practices, and positionalities—and instead, we can use this transitional period to center equity and inclusion in our writing programs. It is, as Fedukovich and Doe reminds us, “an important and challenging time to explicitly identify as a feminist Writing Program Administrator (WPA) and to envision how feminist principles might be enacted in our programs” (31).

It is in this context of programmatic investigation that we share our experiences as the Writing Program Administrator (Callie) and an Assistant WPA (Michelle) at Texas Tech University, an R1, Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in Texas. We began the 2022-2023 academic year with a commitment to investigating assessment practices in our FYW program, and we launched a labor-based grading contract pilot in our second sequence FYW course, Advanced College Rhetoric, in Spring 2023. Programmatically, we were ready to embark on a labor-based grading contract pilot to reenvision our assessment practices. Students and teachers were back on campus, experiencing a more stable environment post-pandemic, and our administrative team wanted to make the most of that new environment with an effort to align the writing program with our feminist ethos focused on intersectional and inclusive practices. Moreover, we had institutional support from our department to begin the pilot study. At the same time, a backlash against DEI initiatives in Texas dominated the news cycle with the governor directly targeting our institution, among other state universities. In this article, we respond to Natasha N. Jones’ timely question: “How do you work within a system . . . to change and resist the very system that you are working within?” (“The Complicity/Complexity Problem” 5). While Jones offers a critique of DEI programs, we extend her question to our situation at a public university in Texas, and we explore how our FYW program is, to quote the CFP for this collection, “doing the *work* of antiracist pedagogy . . . during this current wave of backlash.” We provide the example of our labor-based grading contract initiative—launched under intense conservative scrutiny—hoping that our experience will contribute to conversations about how WPAs do strategic work, anticipate potential risks and ramifications, and build coalitions to do this work together.

Institutional Context

We began working together in the First-Year Writing (FYW) program at Texas Tech in Fall 2022. Callie, an assistant professor, was in her first year as the WPA after a year as the acting

WPA of the program. Michelle was a fifth year PhD candidate and was an assistant WPA for her final year in the PhD program. Our institution has an undergraduate population of approximately 33,000 students, with 30% identifying as Hispanic (“About TTU”). The FYW program is housed in the English department, and it benefitted from previous programmatic changes. In 2017, the previous WPA, Michael Faris, wisely introduced an innovative rhetoric-based curriculum with pedagogical development that supported university retention and engagement initiatives.¹ The FYW program now serves approximately 10,000 students a year through a two-course sequence: ENGL 1301: Essentials of College Rhetoric and ENGL 1302: Advanced College Rhetoric.

For the first two years following the major programmatic revision, our FYW program was in a crucial phase of working with the new curriculum, new textbook, new delivery models, and new instructional methods. When the pandemic hit, our program navigated the challenges abundantly well under the direction of our program and department administration. The FYW program traversed complex modalities, institutional mandates that FYW would continue to offer face-to-face classes, and the health considerations of our students and teachers, all while undergraduate enrollment increased, almost in spite of a global pandemic. As we navigated these years, our program administrators and teachers became more comfortable with the new curriculum, something that comes with time, regardless of a pandemic. Importantly, we began to critically reflect on our curriculum and the ways in which we operate to meet course objectives while also thinking deeply about our students, specifically the ways we prioritize—or fail to prioritize—equitable and inclusive practices. Continuous, incremental change was embedded within the fabric of our FYW program well before we launched our grading contract pilot.

When Callie took over as WPA, there was already a key inclusivity-focused curricular change in the works for ENGL 1301, our introductory rhetoric course: a language autoethnography assignment that Michelle Flahive, at the time a PhD student and assistant WPA, and Michael Faris had adapted from Corcoran and Wilkinson’s language autoethnography. The assignment itself values “the rhetorical and linguistic expertise” of students (Corcoran and Wilkinson 19), asking students to analyze their own language practices, and even the creation of the assignment itself recognized the expertise of graduate instructors/students to develop curriculum and spearhead projects that matter to them at a personal level. Since 2022, we have expanded the assignment to all ENGL 1301 classes. Although the language autoethnography assignment and the removal of standard academic English language in FYW prompts are important moves toward radical inclusion in our curriculum, as new administrators, we were interested in embarking on an additional aspect of the program which had yet to be studied in our institutional context: labor-based grading contracts as a more inclusive and equitable assessment method for FYW. Fortunately for us, a cohort of instructors gathered with interest in creating a new and better assessment paradigm for our FYW students.

1 See Brawley 2023; Das 2022; Faris 2023

The Grading Contract Pilot and the Attack on DEI in Texas

In Spring 2023, we initiated a labor-based grading contract pilot in twelve ENGL 1302: Advanced College Rhetoric sections. Although the pilot and our study of it exceeds the scope of this article, a few specifics are helpful to situate our initiative and rationale behind it. We recruited five teachers, in addition to Michelle Cowan, who occupied different roles and ranks in the department: one lecturer in FYW, two advanced PhD students, and two second year MA students. Our teachers came from diverse backgrounds and areas of specialization, including technical communication, rhetoric and composition, creative writing, literature, and film. Some of the teachers in the pilot had twenty years of teaching experience; others had two. This breadth of disciplinary and pedagogical diversity enriched our study, as each teacher brought new perspectives and areas of interest to the pilot. Given the size of our program and the make-up of teachers—predominantly graduate students across disciplines—the teachers in the pilot did not artificially skew the pilot by only having teachers with rhetoric and composition areas of emphasis participate. Each instructor held their own motivations for participating in the study and taught their courses differently based on their previous training and interests. Some instructors were looking for fairness—or assessment they could better justify to their students. Some instructors wanted to diversify their teaching experience and felt that learning a new grading approach would be beneficial on the job market. Most wanted to de-emphasize grades so students could be more creative, take risks, and feel less fear and animosity about the course. One instructor was specifically looking for an assessment approach she could adapt for creative writing classes. In this regard, we were thinking about developing a diverse and inclusive group of researcher-teachers from the very beginning, considering what we might learn from their experiences, knowledge, and curiosity².

As we thought through how to construct our assessment pilot, we were aware that incremental changes to curricula and assessment can lead to positive differences in student outcomes, but grading schemas that stick too closely to traditional norms usually continue to reinforce the same patterns of marginalization and normative thinking about writing that our program was looking to avoid (Carillo; Huot et al.; Inoue; Kohn). We were interested in making a bolder move toward labor-based grading contracts, but evidence of the impact of labor-based contracts on a large number of classes had yet to appear in the scholarship (Cowan), a gap we are now working to fill. Our location within an R1 institution meant that we not only had a desire, but also a commitment to pursue high-quality research into alternative assessment approaches. This project had the potential to increase inclusivity and equity in our first-year writing classes, while also providing our graduate instructors with an opportunity to participate in an innovative and timely research project. We framed our project as an effort to train our teachers, encourage engagement from students, promote revision, and give more agency to students. It is in this framework that we proposed our

2 In a commitment to decentering positions of power and privilege, we will not be sharing more specifics about the pilot in this space, for our findings and experiences from the pilot must be equally shared by those who participated in this labor, not just those of us, like Callie and Michelle, who held administrative positions over the process. We will be writing collaboratively in the coming months about our pilot, our study of it, and the impact of this work on our FYW program and, to a larger extent, on the field.

grading contract as a more equitable and radically inclusive assessment practice for *all* students, not to mention an avenue for us to explore how we teach writing and engage our students in the process of it.

Although the term “grading contract” tends to be bandied about these days as an antiracist practice (which it certainly can be), grading contracts offer numerous benefits. One of the major benefits we hoped for was increased communication and innovation among instructors. We intended to get instructors thinking differently about assessment, and our research team demonstrated that many instructors were hungry for new approaches and ideas. No matter our intention, we understood that using the term “grading contract” would instigate assumptions about our motivations that were correct in part but did not encompass the whole. Certainly, grading contracts can mitigate instructor bias and encourage non-standard forms of writing (Inoue), and we wanted to achieve those goals. However, framing our pilot as a DEI initiative became a point of serious contemplation—with significant implications—for us, especially as the Texas government began issuing negative statements about DEI efforts one month into our Spring 2023 pilot.

On February 6, 2023, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott restricted DEI initiatives at state-funded agencies, stating that: “The innocuous sounding notion of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) has been manipulated to push policies that expressly favor some demographic groups to the detriment of others” (McGee, “Gov. Greg Abbott”). For Texas public institutions, Gov. Abbott’s decree focused on hiring practices, a direct response to a *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece on DEI hiring practices in the biology department at Texas Tech University.³ Gov. Abbott’s directive follows a trend in Republican politics that claims the demographic groups being disenfranchised are not historically discriminated peoples and that DEI offices are focused on promoting “woke” liberal agendas⁴ It was not surprising—though still incredibly disappointing—that, shortly following Gov. Abbott’s public statement, the Texas Legislature introduced Senate Bill 17, which would ban DEI offices and programs at state public institutions, as well as DEI training for public employees (Texas Legislature). In April 2023, the Texas Senate approved the bill (McGee), and on May 22, Senate Bill 17 passed the house (Menchaca), making Texas the second state (preceded by Florida) to ban DEI offices and mandatory DEI training at state institutions. This legislation has upended well-established practices in higher education, placing any activities associated with DEI under intense public scrutiny (McGee, “Texas House”).

We conducted our pilot study during the timeframe when Senate Bill 17 was proposed, debated, and accepted. While we worked to build camaraderie among our study instructors, as project leaders, we could not help but be aware of overarching questions: What does this mean for our home institution, an R1 public university, and its faculty and graduate students who are trained for and tasked with high-quality research activity? We are committed to federal grant funding,

³ See Sailer, John D. “How ‘Diversity’ Policing Fails Science.” *Wall Street Journal*, 6 Feb. 2023.

⁴ The Manhattan Institute and the Goldwater Institute, right-wing think tanks, are largely behind this legislative push across the U.S. (Rufo et al.).

which often entails DEI requirements, and to our own scholarly, pedagogical, and personal convictions around the diversity, equity, and inclusion of all peoples. What does it mean that our Chief Diversity Officer resigned in May 2023 and is leaving not only our institution but the state? What does it mean for us, an untenured assistant professor and a—at the time of this writing—PhD student, to run a labor-based grading contract pilot that we deeply believe in and are committed to and that is, as we stated earlier, a radically inclusive assessment practice for *all* students? And are we putting graduate and NTT instructors at risk by encouraging them to participate in this study with us? We do not know the answers to these questions. We infer that as readers, you may also be contemplating this complexity with us and wondering how all of this will play out in the months and years to come. We are, too, and would be grateful for the solidarity. Importantly, this is a very real context in which we work and live and in which we are piloting an assessment practice that we know to be theoretically sound and pedagogically ripe for investigation in our FYW program. We will not pause an effort that we believe in because of this uncertainty, but we do not ignore it either. In effort to grapple with these tensions, we tap into Ratcliffe and Rickly’s framework of the politics of locations as we navigate and mitigate these complicated politics, and we attempt to theorize an answer—or at least a start to one—for Natasha Jones’ question: “How do you work within a system . . . to change and resist the very system that you are working within?” (5).

Navigating and Mitigating within the Politics of Locations

Over a decade ago, Ratcliffe and Rickly reminded the field that our work as feminist writing program administrators is always within the context of the politics of locations—administrative, institutional, and cultural—and the intersections between these locations deeply impact the ways in which we perform our labor (viii). We have touched briefly on these locations throughout this piece, particularly our own positions within our university and department contexts. We named ourselves as early-career administrators for a FYW program that is not new but that was recently drastically reinvented, and we identify as administrators with a commitment to an ethic of care (Leverenz) and an intersectional feminist ethos (LaFrance and Wardle). Our professional location—a public university in the state of Texas under intense legislative scrutiny, not to mention the court of public perception—is a complex one. And the gender disparities and labor inequities endemic to that space (the second location in Ratcliffe and Rickly’s framing) are aspects we could address more thoroughly than we have in this article but will resist for the sake of time, space, and focus. For the task at hand, we turn to the third location—cultural location—and the ways in which we navigate and mitigate our labor-based grading contract initiative within this context. We offer an intersectional approach to thinking about these locations as distinct and, also, as overlapping, a poignant point for those of us at public universities in our current political climate. As we pilot this alternate assessment method, we are not just doing one thing, but many things, in complicated contexts and with people whose intersectionality cannot be ignored. Our tactics are largely indicative of our own positionality, our power to make change within the FYW program, and institutionally, our lack of power as a pre-tenure WPA and graduate student assistant WPA.

In their theoretical situating, Ratcliffe and Rickly place Rich's theory of location and Butler's theory of performance in conversation, stating that "agency and restrictions on agency arise not solely from individual will, but rather from whatever acts are allowed (or disallowed) within cultural scripts" (x). We find this language to be particularly helpful as we think about our own language relating to our grading contract initiative and the hidden scripts that are culturally written for us and those that we write—and rewrite—in this process. A quick glance at some of the primary current texts on writing assessment scholarship, particularly related to grading contracts, reveals language that folks may latch onto as buzz words without taking the time to actually learn about this assessment method (Inoue and Poe 2012; Inoue 2015). Within writing studies scholarship, framing labor-based grading contracts as an antiracist initiative is a script that has been written by the leading scholars in the field. It is well established that grading contracts have been used for decades to mitigate instructor and institutional biases that tend to privilege middle-class, white, or so-called "standard" Englishes and counter racism, as well as opportunities to negotiate course requirements, holistically assess work, motivate students, and/or foster social engagement in the classroom, all of which are often framed within a DEI context (Blackstock and Norris Exton; Brubaker; Inoue; Massa; Poe et al.; Taylor). These are important rationales that circulate at our national conferences and in our discipline-specific publications. It is, however, not a script that directly translates outside of these locations, particularly in the context of the attack on DEI in states such as Texas, Florida, and a growing number of others. It is not a script that we can use at our institution to describe our grading contract initiative, not in the era of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, sudden personnel departures, and public statements by the governor that directly name our home institution. Does this mean that we abandon the script and toss it aside, along with the decades of research on this specific value and benefit of the assessment practice? No! Rather, the politics of our locations require us as researchers, teachers, and administrators to be particularly attuned to the multifaceted cultures in which our work is embedded and the complex perspectives through which our work is scrutinized.

As we articulate our grading contract initiative to university stakeholders, we find ourselves drawing heavily on the many benefits of grading contracts. At first, support on the basis of equity was enough. For example, in Fall 2022, Callie wrote an internal grant proposal to Chair and the Executive Committee of the English department. She used the phrase an "inclusive and equitable assessment initiative in 1302" to describe the grading contract initiative, as well as referred to the project as a "study [of] the ways in which we can incorporate anti-racist commenting and grading practices in the FYW program." Interestingly, the Chair's primary concern regarding this initiative had nothing to do with our descriptors of the pilot. Rather, they were concerned with university perception that this alternate assessment method in FYW would resemble a prior failed distributive grading initiative. For context, the FYW program at TTU has long been under intense university scrutiny, primarily related to the extremely high drop/fail/withdraw (DFW) rates the program saw under the pre-2017 model, which included a distributed grading system that was controversial from the very beginning. Since 2017, FYW and English department administrators have worked

diligently to articulate the revisions and to change the narrative of how upper administration, advisors, and students view the FYW program not as a gatekeeping course but as a gateway course where students could be successful in the FYW sequence and develop important skills for further academic success and civic engagement. Once Callie was able to clarify that the grading contract initiative was not a return to distributive grading in any shape, form, or fashion, the Chair wholeheartedly supported our work. This support extended to funding, as the Chair and Executive Committee unanimously approved a grant to fund this project and were—and are—supportive of our clear and transparent objectives for this pilot.

However, as we continued pitching aspects of this ongoing project in Spring 2023, the political climate changed swiftly. We initiated conversations with additional partners across campus, such as the University Writing Centers and Teaching, Learning, and Professional Development Center, two well-respected and valuable resources at TTU. These campus partners were—and are—interested in our pilot and in having conversations about our work. At the same time, we were all increasingly aware of the amount of FOIA requests and public scrutiny at our campus. Therefore, we began to think through best practices for garnering university support during this specific context, and we found it beneficial to articulate the broad array of possibilities alternative grading affords. For example, grading contracts can emphasize student customization and individual goal setting and be instruments that facilitate more interaction and communication between students and teachers (Cowan). Similarly, grading contracts can also increase student buy-in, allow for negotiation to meet specific instructor and student needs, encourage the writing process as a process not as end result, and promote risk taking and the opportunity to do something new and different in our work. Moreover, a process-focused approach to assessment can help us better reach students who feel overlooked or disempowered in the classroom and continue to challenge more confident writers. This assessment method is also an opportunity to introduce graduate writing instructors to evaluation methods that are not dependent on teacher preferences or prior training in which kinds of writing are labeled “good” or “bad.” These principles speak to racial, gender, and class diversity, but they also speak to the ways in which all students can feel left behind, unchallenged, invisible, and at the mercy of systems that have nothing to do with their lived experience. Thus, this project is helpful for initiating conversations about the priorities of our writing program and the ways in which grading contracts are tools to push us all towards a clear focus for our pedagogies, curriculum, and assessment practices.

These are goals and objectives that can be communicated to stakeholders in ways that may make this alternative assessment practice more accessible and approachable—dare we even say, less threatening. In addition to campus partners, we saw this firsthand as we began working with the teachers in our pilot, who helped assess the grading contract in light of differing pedagogies. The instructors played a major role in articulating what mattered to them and the impacts they saw in their classrooms. Through regular bi-weekly team meetings, we were able to align the contract with our overall program objectives while preserving the autonomy of highly

motivated instructors. There were diverse interests in and support for piloting the grading contract. Some instructors used the contract to show students they valued labor or engagement over subjective ideas about “writing quality.” For those instructors, the contract helped them implement more definitive measures of completeness that could be described qualitatively rather than applying numerical assessments that necessitate subjective judgments about “flow” or “style” that tend to be mysterious or opaque to students. Others wanted to see how students responded to a different kind of grading scheme, hoping they might take risks or work in different ways. Others were attracted to the opportunities to customize the contract with individual students. Importantly, there was not one set rationale held by all the teachers in the study. Building a coalition of teachers meant that we did not mandate a one “right” reason for participating in the study. Rather, this was an invitation to collaborate, to learn alongside one another, and to explore the ways in which this alternate assessment practice relates to our objectives—programmatically, personally, and pedagogically.

Although our goals and rationales varied, we did agree to all work with a common contract, which was labor-based—similar to Inoue’s (2019) but with many differentiating factors, largely to account for students’ shifting abilities and motivations in a post-pandemic academic space. When we presented the initial draft of the contract to the teachers at the beginning of the semester, they immediately started making changes through group conversation. We brainstormed, revised, and adapted the contract to accommodate everyone’s input and to value the collective nature of the study. Moreover, to build unity among our group, we listened to and encouraged feedback at meetings every other week throughout the semester as well as through mid-semester and end-of-semester surveys. From the beginning, we sought to balance the need to let all voices be heard and to agree upon a single contract to use. For instance, our contract centered around a B, but some instructors felt strongly that it should not. We wanted to begin with a contract that matched ones already used in composition scholarship, and we had long discussions about the rationale for presenting the B as the center of the contract. Opting for one instructor’s approach over another’s in instances where compromise was only marginally possible was challenging but resulted in important conversations about the contract. It also amplified our goal to build a coalition of teachers in a manner that provided spaces for dialogue, valued diverse input, and recognized our collective knowledge and experience in creating, executing, and studying this pilot.

Another essential discovery was how instructors diverged from the contract or made their own innovations to widely varying degrees throughout the course of the semester. Some instructors were extremely hesitant to make adjustments to the contract for their classes, whereas others immediately made small modifications that fit their classes. Working with instructors to amend the contract individually and as a group was an ongoing process—a process that revealed the grading contracts as instructional technologies that do much more than mitigate bias or encourage diverse expression. They can bring instructors and departments together through discussions they would not have had without the contract. Our meetings about the grading contract exposed institutional

norms about rankings, homework, deliberate practice, and how we value different kinds of student and instructor achievement. Many of the conversations we had as a study team were about what to ask students in our mid-semester and end-of-semester surveys. Most of our questions, which we wondered if we could ask, were concerned about student's obligations outside the classroom and how a grading contract might help them manage competing interests. We were also very concerned with students' mental health. As teachers and administrators, we were constantly thinking about equity, diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality, and while these core values deeply impacted our approaches to the grading contract study, we were also increasingly cognizant of the ways in which we could talk about this work *outside* of our coalition and in the politics of locations we occupied in this specific time, space, and context.

Continuing the Work

As we reflect on where we started and where we go from here with alternate assessment practices in FYW at Texas Tech, we have hope for the future, with awareness for how our coalition of teachers navigated our initial pilot and plan to continue this work in the coming semesters. As we develop a future trajectory for the project, which includes new pedagogical development, invitations for guest speakers, and collaboration opportunities, we have to take the Texas legislature into consideration. We saw the many facets of the classroom impacted by the use of these grading contracts. Our instructors critically evaluated their teaching practices and philosophies, and students reflected on their writing in ways that emphasizes and values process, student agency, and collaborative buy-in. Our efforts to build a coalition with our pilot instructors helped us see how we can position the nature of our study in terms of innovation, student participation, expanded languaging, and the development of an academic self for both students and teachers. While it can seem that initiatives that value DEI principles may be untenable at Texas state institutions in this political climate, we have found ways to continue this important work and to positively communicate that work to stakeholders in our context.

For example, when seeking funding from different programs and departments at our institution, we do not describe our project in terms of privilege—whether to privilege certain voices or decenter others. Rather, we share how grading contracts can help students see themselves as active collaborators in the assessment process versus receivers of it. We describe how students learn to navigate the course with rhetorical awareness and learn about different audience and stakeholder perspectives. We explore the ways in which grading contracts can be a means to decenter grades and re-center revision. We highlight how grading contracts can increase students' attention to course and project goals. We encourage the recognition of a greater variety of writing styles in the classroom and the space to see writing—and the writing process—differently. We invite conversations about grades and assessment in the classroom and programmatically, and we encourage teachers to participate in this process. Much of our initiative centers on not only what is beneficial to undergraduate students, but also what we can do to expand the experience, ex-

expertise, and confidence of graduate students teaching in FYW. The scripts we use to describe our work are not fixed. Just like the grading contract allows space for negotiation, so do our conversations about it. As feminist administrators, we have a unique opportunity to create space for this dialogue, to navigate the intersecting locations in ways that open doors for conversation with folk who are in the discipline and far removed from it. When we do this well—and admittedly, we’re still very early in the process!—we can potentially anticipate and mitigate stakeholder resistance that could deter important progress for our programs, our teachers, and our students.

As a field, we must make bold, intentional, coalitional moves to build and support social justice initiatives in our writing programs (Jones, Gonzales, and Hass). At the same time, we must also consider how the language and methods we use to describe our work might allow us to move forward disciplinarily while remaining grounded and secure in our institutional and cultural realities. In response to Jones’ question, we choose to navigate and map our locations, critically assessing the audience(s), contexts, and cultural scripts allowed (and disallowed) in those different spaces. By fostering an awareness of locations and the coalitions that locations make possible, we can more effectively articulate the benefits of our assessment methods and the goals we have for our institution’s FYW program. We continue to dive into the complexity of what we are doing rather than reducing it into a specific type of initiative, one that often is—purposefully, even—used by those outside of the discipline to harm us and our work. It is in this framing that we further refine our approach to communicating our labor-based grading contract initiative and clarify our goals for implementation as we navigate the politics of our locations and promote the multifaceted benefits of this alternative assessment method.

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