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Writing Centers Are Watching: Surveillance, Colonialism, and Data Tracking

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Abstract: Writing center studies is currently reckoning with the complicit relationship between writing centers and the state. Here, we continue that work, inquiring specifically into digital surveillance as a colonial technology. Using the framework of feminist, queer, and decolonial surveillance studies, we critique examples of data collection in our Writing Center and offer takeaways to help writing centers reduce their dependence on data-based surveillance.

Keywords: writing centers, colonization, in/visibility, decolonial work, data collection

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Writing center studies is currently reckoning with its complicit relationship with the state. Here, we, folks from the Texas A&M University-Commerce Writing Center continue that work, inquiring specifically into digital surveillance. This project grew out of a Fall 2023 semester-long, all-staff consultant Inquiry Group focusing on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and privacy. Conversations in these weekly meetings prompted us to reflect on the different data we collect: the stories it can tell, our justifications for collecting it, and ultimately the ways this collection positions our writing center to work for sovereignty. Knowing we needed to perform a deeper self-assessment of our writing center, and understanding collaborative work as a tenet of feminist research methodology—particularly when that work requires space and time for strategic collaboration (Kirsch and Royster)—we formed a research group in Spring 2024 consisting of the faculty writing

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center director, undergraduate consultants, and the graduate assistant director.[1] Together, we examined the forms we use to collect writer data and present here our preliminary conclusions.

Part 1: Surveillance as a Modality of Colonization

Reckoning with our writing center's complicity with the state requires grappling with the colonization inherent in our values and practices. For decolonial feminist scholar María Lugones, colonialism manages populations by "articulat[ing]" "all control over sex, subjectivity, authority, and labor … around it[self]" (2007, 191). Colonizers manipulate and reiterate colonized peoples' experiences of their self-identity (including racial- and gender-identities), their work, and their agency. Colonization is predicated on surveillance. Any populations that are not easily made docile, whose difference might interrupt the homogenizing processes of assimilation, are problems for sovereignty (Dubrofsky and Magnet 2). Due to this threat, the state seeks to extinguish their difference, if not their existence (Dubrofsky and Magnet 22). The ever-present sense of being monitored causes subjects—othered and not—to "police" their own behavior (Dubrofsky and Magnet 2). Thus, surveillance is essential to imperialist control. "Surveillance" often carries with it a sense of novelty, of emerging technology like facial recognition, data harvesting, fitness tracking, etc. Although new technology certainly increases the modalities of surveillance, Simone Browne reminds us surveillance long predates the internet (8–9). For example, slave ships were constructed to allow white traders to observe stolen people (33), and New York's eighteenth-century lantern-laws "mandated enslaved people carry lit candles as they moved about the city after dark" (11)—a surefire method of making those visible who most likely didn't want to be visible.

If colonization is dependent on surveillance, then surveillance is dependent on visuality, both physically and metaphorically. Ahmad Sa'di explains that the colonization process first begins with categorization of populations, making large groups into smaller groups (152). In the wake of the Indian and Jamaican rebellions against British colonizers (1857, 1865), the British categorized population groups, especially those "inimical to colonial rule, visible and easily identifiable to the colonial gaze" (153). They photographed native peoples and circulated the images as examples of different populations, thus allowing fellow surveillants to essentialize the native groups from single images (153). The colonial gaze is the surveillant gaze. Living in that line-of-sight places populations in categories of "seen" and "not seen." Christina V. Cedillo complicates the seen/not-seen binary clearly:

1 We combine feminist collaborative practices with an equitable approach to labor. We share this to explain that our goal was equity in labor over equity in the representation of our voices in this article. Everyone participated in the research and development of ideas. Kelin (faculty director) and Angela (undergraduate consultant) did a majority of the further research, drafting, and revising. Kelin, Angela, and Shannon (graduate consultant) performed the self-assessment described below. Breeanna (graduate assistant director) assisted with revision and editing. When we share reflections directly, we do so with first-person pronouns as an indication of who is speaking. All labor performed by the consultants was paid work time for the Writing Center (and one long night of revising while attending the South Central Writing Center' Association Conference together). Because I, Kelin, have spent the most time with this piece, and because it takes up administrative decisions made by me, my perspective is most prevalent. Our research, self-assessment, and responses to what we learned were collaborative, and Angela and Shannon's voices below represent those conversations.

> Invisibility can simultaneously protect vulnerable people and render them susceptible to violence; visibility can invite public support while increasing surveillance and policing. The experiences of marginalized people show that relationships to in/visibility cannot be generalized. (203)

Visibility causes both safety and danger, and invisibility causes both danger and safety. A population's vulnerability is determined by their value to the state. Under colonization, literacy performance creates in/visibility. In schooling systems, the colonial searchlight is trained on the uptake of the colonizer's language (Sa'di 155). This practice is still true in U.S. education. While teaching in a Detroit high school, April Baker-Bell received "pressure" from administration to teach students to use Standard American English, or as they put it, the "'language of school'" (4). She said that other teachers did not understand "that standard English is a byproduct of white supremacy" (6). Baker-Bell names this colonizer language "White Mainstream English" (WME), emphasizing the white normativity of the language instead of the invisible ubiquity implied by "Standard American" (3–4). Of course, WME is the primary modality of writing center work.

Recent writing center (WC) scholarship critiques and builds upon a turn-of-the-21st-century exploration of the WC's imperialist role in the management of populations. Nancy Grimm urged writing center studies to understand our oppressive language practice, and the compulsion of teaching and using the colonizer's English, as a method of maintaining sovereign status quo, and therefore as a form of control over non-WME-using populations. Thus, if WME education is a form of control, WCs are sites of its regulation. Eric Camarillo compares writing centers to "border processing centers," as "they decide who can and who cannot enter the university; that is, who does and does not belong." Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski also articulate this regulatory role of the writing center as colonization. They note that instead of seeking to alter a writer's product, WCs aim to change the writer's process—their social, cultural, and behavioral relationship to writing—a deeply interior target, a more productive target for assimilation.

WC scholars with decolonial perspectives remind us how colonization acts through contemporary writing centers. Romeo García explains that WCs don't exist in a post-colonial world; they exist in the currently-still-colonial world, and their regulatory work functions as contemporary colonial action (40). The existence of writing centers is predicated on the colonial goal of the standardization of English. The WC then polices by offering writers support in learning the official discourse of the state. In our experience, nearly all writers, when asked if they want support in writing WME or in another version of English, will choose WME. Of course they would. Why come to the writing center to receive support in creating their own voice? The consultants may have expertise in different languages and in multiple varieties of English, but what they obviously share is experience with WME. When constant surveillance drives the desire to behave in the best interests of the state, when writers are pursuing degrees at state-funded institutions, when they are holding down jobs, caring for family members, or simply overwhelmed by course work, who would choose, when prompted in a writing center session, to write against the state?

With Wonderful Faison and Anna Treviño, García asks "If the WC will always rewrite itself as colo-

nial, where does that leave us, then, with regard to a hope for a different WC?" (90). They want WC studies to understand that actually *resisting* colonialism requires that we don't "recenter" ourselves with "colonial logics of management and control" (90). To do so, García urges WCs to *listen to and hold histories* as a way of taking up a decolonizing response to WC colonial complicity ("Unmaking" 40–41). We are listening to Browne and Sa'di as they remind us how surveillance is a *historical* form of colonization. We are oriented by their work to ask how surveillance is borne out in the writing center. This recent decolonizing work in writing center studies has addressed colonization in sessions, in intra-staff relations, and in supervisor-consultant relations, so we turn to an arena barely addressed: digital surveillance. García, Faison, and Treviño ask WC studies to recognize the "inescapabilities of our complicities" (92). Following Browne's warnings and García's call, we take up writing center digital platforms as study-able tips of colonial-complicit icebergs, and as recent manifestations of historical forms of colonial control.

Part 2: But Writing Centers Run on Data!

If you work in a writing center, you know we run on data. Collecting data is generally known as a best practice in WCs; it is justified by a desire to know the writers whom we serve (Parsons et al.). Indeed, this is a practice that is engaged in at all levels of the WC, from broad strokes numbers that show our value to funding bodies, to emerging trends in participation that teach us what services writers use most, to evaluations showing us what writers value about the WC, to a consultant learning about what a writer wants to do in an upcoming session. As a consultant, I, Angela, regularly use the Registration and Appointment Form data to determine what I need to do to best help the writers who come to me. The spaces writers use to tell us about themselves and their goals are seemingly helpful in creating a productive session. Serving our writers to the best of our ability is the mission of the WC, and I believed that knowing about them beforehand could make it much easier to do so.

Registration and appointment data play important roles in WC assessment beyond session preparation. Rebecca Jackson and Jackie Grutsch McKinney show us that far more WCs are collecting data for record-keeping than for research. They reference the "perennial story of writing center directors caught between the desire to conduct knowledge-making research and the imperative to 'keep good records'" (3). Good records can lead to good funding and positive visibility on campus (Thompson 36). Neat books also fulfill the professional obligations we share with campus service units. As Jackson and McKinney suggest, a WC survives year-in-year-out on the back of its data reporting—not on the value of its research.[2]

Tracking is in service of whiteness, Alexandria Lockett reminds us. She says, "In attempting to make WCs a 'respectable' place, which is code for a certain ideology of whiteness that is concealed through the word 'professionalism,' researchers"—and we would add administrators— "risk neglecting that very place" ("Why I Call it the Academic Ghetto"). In scrambling to represent ourselves in numbers up the leadership ladder, we miss the actual writers in the center.

2 Thank you to Preslee Beumer, a former graduate Assistant Director for the East Texas A&M Writing Center at the time of writing, for her research that led to this paragraph.

With this ingrained desire to "professionalize," to prove our worth to institutions through our numbers—to surveil—WCs use basic and sophisticated technology of all sorts. These range from hardware like card scanners used to count attendance, to software like Microsoft Excel used to manage and analyze data, to campus-wide education management platforms like the Education Advisory Board's Navigate360, used to manage and track appointments and communicate with campus partners. The East Texas A&M WC previously used Navigate360 as the appointment management system, and one of my, Kelin's, first moves as director was to phase it out. I didn't want any WC data to be visible to any faculty member or administrator with power over students. That included consultants, who somehow had access to writers' GPAs and course histories. I cut ties with the Education Advisory Board immediately and started our subscription to WCOnline.

WCOnline is the premier online "management solution" that offers "cloud scheduling, record keeping, and reporting." Within the platform, the data-savvy administrator can quickly discover their overall utilization rate, the popularity of sessions on Mondays at 1 p.m., the completion rate of an individual consultant's session reports and evaluations, the number of first-year students using the WC in September, and so on. That data, what we think of as a first layer of surveillance, comes from the cloud scheduling, which tracks appointment times, lengths, cancellations, no-shows, etc.

There is a second layer of surveillance to data collection through WCOnline: the layer controlled by the WC administrator. This is the layer we chose to investigate, as it captures a WC's colonial mentality in interaction with surveillance technology. The administrator controls four major forms:

- Registration Form
- Appointment Form
- Client Report Form
- Session Evaluation

In each of these forms, the WC administrator controls (1) what the form prompts say; (2) various ways that information can reach consultants; (3) whether the question is required or optional, and (4) the form the prompt takes ((see fig. 1), small fill-in box, large text box, dropdown (single selection); checkboxes (single or multiple selections); and Likert scale. In theory, whatever data a WC wants to acquire about their writers, they can—should their writers trust them enough to share that information. Not only are the data tracking possibilities boundless, but WCOnline makes customizing, organizing, and exporting that data simple.

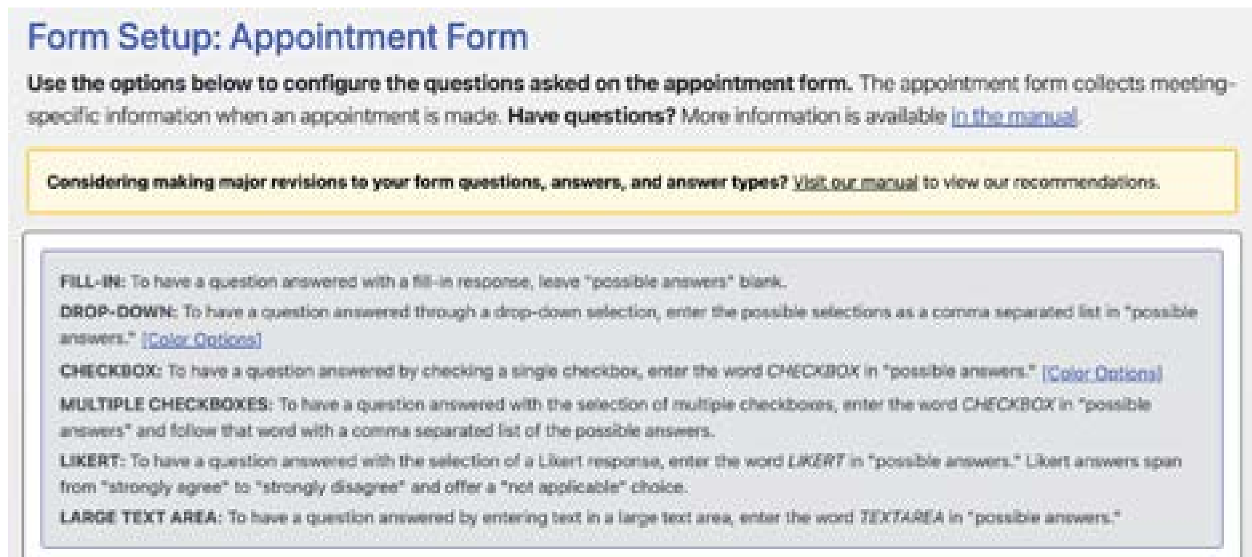

Fig. 1. Administrative view of the Appointment For from WCONLINE, v24.7.2, *Twenty Six Design LLC,* 2024, commerce.mywconline.com. Accessed 13 Aug. 2024.

Part 3: Gender Surveillance in our Registration Form, from the Faculty Director's Perspective

After acquiring WCOnline, my next task as director was to write the Registration Form. At the time, I, Kelin, viewed these forms as opportunities to familiarize difference, to re/introduce the writing process meta vocabulary that is part of WC lingo, and to figure out "who" exactly was coming to our WC (with the anticipation that I would need to pursue other funding partners in the future).

One prompt I included to familiarize writers with differences was an optional small fill-in box asking "What are your preferred pronouns?" (fig. 2). Following the WC data logic *du jour*, I believed we could better support our writers by knowing and using their preferred pronouns instead of our assumed pronouns. At my previous institution, our Registration Form was sometimes the first time a writer encountered the possibility of preferred pronouns. That WC was situated in an area with relatively vast cultural awareness of gender identity. Moving to a place not known for its progressive constructions of gender, I figured that the pronouns prompt (optional, of course) could serve the same pedagogical role. As the Fall 2023 Inquiry Group on AI and Privacy required we re-access our daily practices, I recognized the pronoun question for what it *could* become to *the state*: a list of individuals' gender identities.

Fig. 2. Writer's View of the pronouns prompt on the Registration Form from WCONLINE, v24.7.2, *Twenty Six Design LLC,* 2024, commerce.mywconline.com. Accessed 13 Aug. 2024.

Towards resistance, García urges us to "be conscious of how histories of racial violence continue to be ignored and suppressed in the present" (40). He calls this "transformative listening," a way of attuning oneself to the community they serve (33). In the case of the pronoun prompt, I was listening to the community from my previous institution. Further, I was also listening to what that community told me when I was a WC assistant director, five years prior to starting at East Texas A&M. García says, we need to listen to the histories of our *local* contexts, but my "best intentions" here drove me to instead *talk at* my new local community through the Registration Form. I wasn't listening to the racialized and gendered history of colonization (Lugones 2007 and 2010), to the history of colonization in writing centers, and to the history of surveillance as a colonizing action.

A few months after the Registration Form went live, a colleague of mine was starting a trans support group for students, staff, and faculty on campus. He said that he would not officially register the group, because in the Texas political climate, he did not want to create any lists of names of transgender people that could fall into the wrong hands. He was right. Nine months after creating the form, Ken Paxton, Texas' Attorney General, sent a request to the Texas Department of Public Safety. He asked them to "compile a list of individuals who had changed their gender on their Texas driver's licenses and other department records during the past two years" (Hennessy-Fiske). Although I was thinking in terms of exposure, or, the positive potential of visibility, he was thinking in terms of surveillance, or, the relative safety of invisibility. By prompting writers for their preferred pronouns, I created a list. Anyone willing to share pronouns in their Registration Form now has them listed alongside their name in our records. All Ken Paxton needs to do is compare that list to the names and genders (and/or sexes) writers filed when they entered the university. As Christina V. Cedillo suggests, sometimes visibility (names on a list) creates danger.

The dangers of in/visibility are clear in Writing Centers. In a study of queer WC directors, Travis Webster studied visible labor as "nameable, countable, measurable, and translatable to a job description" while invisible labor "accounts for work not often associated, understood, or recognized as generating capital for an institution but from which such labor elicits and capitalizes on identity, emotion, and embodiment from the institution's workers" (100). As Christina V. Cedillo indicates, invisibility can be positive. For the directors in Webster's study, invisibility offers the opportunity to support students and build community out from under the thumb of administration. Conversely, visibility can place queer directors in danger. Participants addressed how their visibility led to toxic workplaces with direct and indirect bullying (107–109). Webster delicately connects this vulnerability with how visibility in medical texts and media leads to the death of queer people (107–109) because the historical oppression of a group cannot be separated from how sovereignty manages (disposes of) populations in local contexts. As Lugones says, colonization seeks to control sex and gender as it does labor and subjectivity. WME may be an obvious form of control at work in WCs, and Webster shows us, it isn't the only one.

When I first built the Registration Form, I considered the "who" the form allowed me to track in terms of "standing" and "degree program." Standing helps us, for instance, learn how many first-year and

graduate students have registered in WCOnline. I asked about "degree program" because I wanted to be able to track which departments use our services the most. Departments that use us could be potential collaborators in—and funders of–our programs. With this information, we can target outreach towards departments that don't use our services. Now I understand that, of course, "preferred pronouns" creates a "who" population as well. Anyone not wanting to feel tracked based on pronouns may feel othered, watched, distrustful of the Writing Center, and/or scared of us, and justifiably so.

Part 5: Varied Surveillance in our Appointment Form

García, Faison, and Treviño ask us to recognize the "inescapabilities of our complicities," to always ask of ourselves "'for what reason and toward what ends?'" (92). So, as a smaller research group in Spring 2024, we did. We started with the Appointment From, which appears when a writer clicks on an open session to book. We asked ourselves a series of reflection prompts for each question/prompt on the form. Here are some examples:

- How does this question help a consultant better understand and/or support a writer in a session?
- Is there a pedagogical purpose to this question? If so, what?
- What trackable categories are generated by this question?
- What narratives can be crafted with this data?
- Which other campus stakeholders might want to know patterns or individual information derived from this question?

Kelin, Angela, and Shannon responded to each question in individual questionnaires to avoid influencing one another's perspectives. Next, we compared our individual responses. In terms of "for what reason," or, the justification of putting a question/prompt on the Appointment Form, three categories emerged:

- Consultant preparation for sessions
- writer education (in our WC's lingo and philosophies)
- writer population tracking

Fig. 3. Administrator's View of Question #5 from WCONLINE, v24.7.2, *Twenty Six Design LLC,* 2024, commerce.mywconline.com. Accessed 13 Aug. 2024.

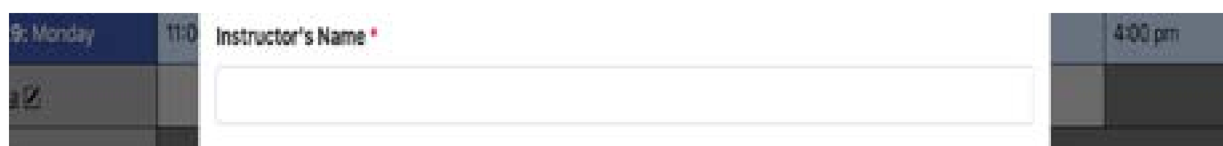

Fig. 4. Writer's View of Question #5 from WCONLINE, v24.7.2, *Twenty Six Design LLC,* 2024, commerce.mywconline.com. Accessed 13 Aug. 2024.

Reading our reflections around Question #5, a prompt for the Instructor's Name, we noticed all three categories of justification (see fig. 3 and fig. 4). The most straightforward justification for Question #5 came from my, Kelin's, reflection. I appreciated Question #5 for its role in writer education. As a professor frustrated by students not learning, misspelling, or mispronouncing my name, I wanted to invite (in actuality, require) students to practice writing their instructor's name. In so doing, I position myself as a teacher and writers as students, again, working against the peer relationship and agentive-writer positionality we aim to create.

This positioning is true for all the questions/prompts that I created with the reasoning being "writer education." At the threshold point of the Appointment Form, the moment when a writer is thinking through the session they might book, the WC itself is, as we'd say it, "trying to teach them something." The pedagogical reason for Question #6, "Where is this project in the writing process?" is to either introduce or reinforce the meta vocabulary for the writing process. It has a multiple checkbox list including "Brainstorming," "Planning," "Researching," "Reading," "Drafting," "Revising," "Editing," and "Not Sure." Although repetition of meta vocabulary in changing contexts is good for learning the words, this moment is an opportunity to introduce ourselves to the writer. Instead of prompting the writer to tell us in their own words where in the process their project is, instead of setting ourselves up to listen to the writer and learn their vocabulary and experience, I've written a question that immediately requires writers to frame their experience in the terms of not only the WC, but in the stages of an academic writing process. Would a writer believe us when we say we love to work with nonacademic projects? Why would a writer believe us when we say WME is a choice? Similarly, Question #5 prompts the writer to share the "Instructor's Name," and it's required. Question #3 asks: "What is the writing project for? If it's for a course, give us the number and title (for example, ENG 333: Advanced Writing Nonfiction)." When Question #3 tries to resist an explicit relationship with academic en-

deavors, Question #5 reinforces our alignment with course work by literally requiring an instructor's name. If a student wants to work on a blog post, they have to know they can write "N/A." Question #5 doesn't even suggest how to subvert itself.

In terms of surveillance, Question #5 makes *instructors* visible. Although we don't anticipate department heads or other administrators requesting session data being broken down by the instructor, the fact is, we have it. Take tenure, for example. An instructor's record of how many of their students visited the WC, depending on the committee, could be a positive or a dangerous visibility. Positively, the committee might see WC visits as a sign that the tenure candidate supports student engagement and retention. If the committee believes the WC to be a remedial space, and especially if the tenure candidate has an accent or is marked in other ways, that committee might see student usage as a sign of weak student performance or a lack of pedagogical strength in the instructor. Even if this is a speculative example, the fact remains that the WC made a list, and the WC can't control how that list will be interpreted and acted upon.

The converging issues with Question #5 beg the question: if the project is for a class, do we need to know the instructor's name to best support the writer? I, Angela, have found that the practice of asking the instructor's name is only useful if I know the professor. I could go into the session confident that I would be able to help the writer meet the professor's standards. However, this practice is only useful in sessions where WME is the goal. If we are striving to cultivate a WC in which students know that WME isn't the only way to write, then why ask a question that reinforces that the WC is for WME? After all, this is information that can easily be discussed in the session.

Agreeing with Angela that Question #5 doesn't necessarily improve our chances of supporting writers, I, Shannon, want to extend my critique to how this question aligns our work with the colonization practices of the academy. This question assumes that a writer is bringing in an academic project. It leaves out the possibility that a writer wants to work on a personal project. I visit the WC with creative writing pieces unrelated to academia. By setting up the Appointment Form with the fixed mindset that a project is academic-related, is it possible we are discouraging writers from seeking out ways to improve themselves as writers detached from the institution?

Questions or prompts written to educate the writer work against our efforts to meet the writer as a peer. They reiterate the WC as colonizer, as do the surveillance focused questions/prompts. As many of our Appointment Form questions exist for multiple reasons, the question becomes, does having a function of preparing consultants for a session take priority over the problematic nature of surveillance and writer education? Our answer is no, and we aren't alone.

Part 5: Slashing Surveillance as a Decolonizing Action

Faison, Treviño, and García depict WC colonialist logics as "white benevolence" wherein white people and those aligning with whiteness—largely white women in WCs—disseminate Western language and epistemologies that aim to "save" colonized people (82). The authors consider actions taken by WCs to separate ourselves from our colonial foundations as acts of white benevolence because these actions don't accept the impossibility of such a goal (87).[3] The existence of WCs is predicated on the colonial goal of the standardization of English. To imagine a fully decolonized WC, or a WC somehow otherwise detached from colonization, is not a possibility in higher education.

Resistance is possible, and we've created a list of five principles we are bringing to our surveillance practices moving forward. Angela Haas' basic tenets for decolonial methodologies include "'redress[ing] colonial influences'" and "'support[ing] coexistence[s]'" (22, cited in Itchuaqiyaq and Matheson). Before categorizing our concluding principles as forms of decolonization, we listen to Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyaq and Breeanne Matheson urge researchers[4] to extend "the definition of decolonial" to "deman[d] … more robust implications for the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples" (22). Our aim with the following principles is to resist and revise colonial logics, but these principles do not carry implications for the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. García defines the work of a decolonizing agent as "ethically and socially committed to social justice for all. It is having those critical conversations that question even the well-intended progressive and leftist practices" (49). Following his lead, if these principles are not fully a "decolonial" practice, perhaps they are discrete "decolonizing" actions. Said differently, these principles don't decolonize digitality in our WC, but they work towards decolonizing it under our current conditions. The principles include: collect less, self-assess more, be honest, listen more, and talk more.

Collect Less

We are revising our forms and asking much less about our writers. For the Appointment Form, we don't plan on having more than name, project description, and a description of the writer's current context relating to that project. Parsons et al. resist the WC will-to-record-keep. As their WC was integrated with the practices of research librarians, they learned there is quite a difference between the "best practices" regarding data in WCs and libraries. Library best practices emphasize the importance of patron privacy. The American Library Association requires the guarding of users' data, arguing "that without adequate safeguards for information, patrons' records could be weaponized, compromising our intellectual freedom and even our democ-

3 Further, Pritha Prasad and Louis Maraj consider "benevolent gaslighting" when white aggressions are transformed into learning moments (often positioned as misunderstandings) that benefit the racial education (and further empowering) of white people (324). In the terms of Faison, Treviño, and García's "white benevolence," an example of "benevolent gaslighting" would occur when white directors learn of their past colonizing practices, and instead of owning those actions for what they are, they position them as necessary learning moments that further position those white directors as credible and credentialed.

4 Though Itchuaqiyaq and Matheson are speaking to researchers in the field of Technical and Professional Communication, we feel their encouragement can apply to Rhetoric and Composition broadly.

racy" (11). Employers might want to find out if their employees are searching for new jobs, for example; it would be a violation of the patrons' privacy to share this information with the employers, so libraries gather as little information about their patrons as possible (11). Similarly, WCs are part of universities, which are state institutions. What if the university (and therefore the state) decides that it wants writers' information that has been stored within our systems? If libraries practice limiting the data they collect and store about their patrons, WCs can too.

Self-Access More

Though it is self-evident for any social justice practice, it deserves saying, particularly when practitioners leverage white privilege. When we started considering surveillance in the Fall, I, Kelin, thought we'd perhaps remove some questions from our forms. After a pointed assessment of those forms, they are profoundly changing in nature to center the writer and collect as little information as possible. As director, one of my current assessment projects is to read my end-of-year reporting requirements carefully. Which numbers are *required* to be there, and what controls do I have over them? Which numbers are the most important to our funding sources?

Be Honest (with Writers About What We Track and Why)

In "Writing Center Reporting Strategies That Subvert Institutional Absurdities," Erica Cirillo-McCarthy et al. describe how tied contemporary writing center funding is to "administrative speak," (which includes vocabulary like "'utilization,'" "'student credit hours,'" "'resiliency,'" "'retention rates,'" and "'impact'"). They reflect that this "transactional" language works against WC values. To resist and urge directors to emphasize expertise, be explicit about labor, and center lived experiences. To these subversions, we add strategically limiting data collection (Collect Less), learning what are the most important things to track (part of Self-Access More), and being honest in forms about what is being tracked and why. Knowing our intentions, writers can make choices about what to share.

Listen More

García considers "transformative listening" a form of "actional and decolonial work" (33). Although this includes, of course, listening to writers, it requires listening to complexities, frictions, and connectives of local histories and contexts (40), geographies (33), and materialities (41).

And Talk More

We don't need to create lists to learn writers' preferred pronouns (or their instructors) to better

support them. Instead, we need to listen—transformatively—to what writers choose to share with us on their own terms and in their own time. Indeed, our job literally necessitates listening to writers. Without collecting data, we then envision a staff that communicates with each other, informing the group when there is important context or information to know about the writers (and instructors) in our networks.

Conclusion

In the general terms of colonial surveillance, without performing the colonizers' language, WME, writers are made visible. As Dubrofsky and Magnet theorize, that visibility can lead to the danger of sovereignty targeting non-WME-using populations for assimilation and control. Further, those who resist control risk becoming a population who, as Rachel Lewis would say, becomes "disposable" to the state. Lewis revisits Radcliffe's "rhetorical listening" to give it a queer abolitionist orientation and a grounding in transformative justice. Transformative justice is a "response to violence" that "seeks safety and accountability" instead of punishment (Carruthers xi). Lewis draws on Charlene Carruthers, who urges those working in and towards transformational justice to "reckon with how the carceral state," the sovereignty that imprisons, "has colonized our own ways of dealing with conflict" (Carruthers 82). While "conflict" here could mean violence (the sort that leads to questions of (de)carceration), Carruthers discusses conflict in terms of the workplace, friends, and social media. We take her statement alongside our reckoning with the colonizing practices that constitute WCs. And, though it may be a connection in name only, we connect the transformative commitments in Lewis' version of "listening" to García's "transformative listening." Each requires openness, identification, attention, and transformation. Lewis' queer abolitionist listening adds relationship building, which feels like a strong addition to transformative listening as a form of decolonial work in writing centers.

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