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## Students at a Crossroads: TA Development Across Pedagogical and Curricular Contexts

Cassandra Ann Book  
*Old Dominion University*, [cabook0129@gmail.com](mailto:cabook0129@gmail.com)

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STUDENTS AT A CROSSROADS

TA DEVELOPMENT ACROSS PEDAGOGICAL AND CURRICULAR CONTEXTS

by

Cassandra Ann Book  
B.A. May 2010, Butler University  
M.A. 2012, University of Louisville

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Approved by:

Louise Wetherbee Phelps (Co-Director)

Kevin E. DePew (Co-Director)

Daniel Richards (Member)

Neal Lerner (Member)

## ABSTRACT

### STUDENTS AT A CROSSROADS TA DEVELOPMENT ACROSS PEDAGOGICAL AND CURRICULAR CONTEXTS

Cassandra Ann Book  
Old Dominion University, 2020  
Co-Directors: Dr. Louise Wetherbee Phelps and Dr. Kevin E. DePew

A longstanding question in rhetoric and composition has been how to best educate composition graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs). Although many assume that writing centers are useful spaces for TAs to practice pedagogy and learn about writing processes in preparation for classroom teaching, recent scholarship complicates the claim that transfer from writing centers and/or practicums into composition classrooms is straightforward. Moreover, no study fully considers how the role of the writing center and teaching writing in English MA programs intersects with students' development as teachers, writers, and scholars. This project brings together several strands of scholarship—the transferability of writing center experience into new contexts, the development of TAs, enculturation of new graduate students, and the MA in English curriculum—to respond to questions about both composition TA education and English masters-level education. This qualitative and two-year longitudinal study, based in critical and feminist paradigms, addresses the role of two teaching contexts, the writing center and composition classroom, in six English MA students' development as teachers, writers, and scholars. Analysis of interviews, observations, and texts focuses on the interaction between these areas of development. The project found a disconnection between, on one hand, students' goals, intellectual interests, and experiences and, on the other hand, the English MA program's design and values. However, though the program's design did not easily facilitate integration and sometimes resisted transfer, several participants managed to create significant and meaningful

pathways across contexts for learning about teaching, writing, and research. Overall, the participants brought to their first-year classrooms from the writing center their value of individual constructive response to writing and relationship-building. Their work and presence in the writing center also helped them internalize (for themselves as writers) and teach (to others) complex concepts such as writing-as-a-social process, conventions of certain academic genres, and the affective needs of writers. In reflecting on these major findings, this project concludes with recommendations for reforming the curricula, including TA education and professionalization, in so-called “traditional” MA in English programs similar to the research site.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my teacher, friend, and mentor, the late Dr. Marshall Gregory. Thank you, Dr. G, for teaching me the meaning of pedagogy and showing me the meaning of teacher.

*“The teacher who knows how to befriend students teaches them how to befriend the world: how to work for the humanization of the social order, how to be critical of self without falling into self-loathing, how to be critical of others without being thoughtlessly callous, and how to be compassionate of others without being unduly sentimental.”*

— Marshall Gregory

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

For the first year of my Master of Arts (MA) English program, I received a teaching assistantship to work in the writing center. Though my curricular emphasis was literary studies, I immediately took great interest in my writing center work and practicum course. As an undergraduate English literature major, I was never expected to think about academic writing as a set of genres or as embedded with differing disciplinary values, but I needed to learn more about these concepts as a tutor along with strategies for teaching a variety of writers one-on-one. For a project in my writing center practicum course, I questioned how graduate-student-to-graduate student tutoring challenged notions of “peer-to-peer” writing tutoring. In my second year of the program, I cautiously left the writing center and started teaching first-year composition, which similarly excited and challenged me. Though I loved close reading and literature, I ultimately discovered that teaching writing gave me a sense of a profession and identity I could imagine for myself in the future. After graduation, I pursued jobs related to writing and teaching, and I have happily worked in writing centers ever since finishing my MA.

While some in the field of rhetoric and composition might be quick to describe my story as a “conversion narrative” from literature to rhetoric and composition (see Kopelson), my experiences as an MA student, writing center administrator, and PhD student studying rhetoric and composition suggested to me other explanations. Instead of switching from one end of the English studies spectrum to another, the time in my MA was a time of growth and learning as I tried out new, and overlapping, identities such as writing consultant, literature scholar, writing studies researcher, first-year writing instructor, and English graduate student. My teaching experiences in the writing center and first-year composition classrooms were as much a part of

my learning as my coursework in literature and teaching practicum courses. In my current role as a writing center administrator who is passionate about tutor development, I want to know more about how development works in various contexts. I created this project to study the experiences of six MA students who all had teaching assistantships (TAs) in both the writing center and composition classroom during their two-year MA English program. The study's goal was to examine their development as teachers, writers, and scholars over the course of the two years with a focus on the interrelationships among their student and teacher selves and practices.

One pressing exigence was my commitment to writing centers, the role they play in the growth of student tutors (or, as I will now refer to them, "consultants") and the often-unrecognized role they play in departments and programs. Although I recognize that the use of TA labor is contentious and may create tensions in English departments and writing programs (Grouling and Buck; Nicolas, "Can WPAs," "Writing Centers"), the reality is that many writing consultants are TAs. As a writing center administrator who has worked with both undergraduate and graduate student consultants across disciplines, I cannot help but observe, as I try to encourage, their growth as teachers, writers, students, and professionals in their time in the writing center. Regardless of how consultants arrive to work in the writing center, the sometimes exhausting, sometimes exhilarating work of one-on-one tutoring, adapting every hour to a different student's needs and writing contexts and collaborating with writers from across a college or university, affects consultants as writers, students, and future classroom teachers. While there are various assertions that the writing center plays a role in the development of consultants as teachers and future professionals (e.g. Clark, "Staffroom"; Hughes et al.), no study fully considers how the role of the writing center and teaching writing in English MA programs *intersects with* students' development as teachers, writers, and scholars. Because I find that other

studies overlook the pedagogies in the writing center, this project is forthright with its investment in better understanding the role of the writing center in the development of MA students.

However, this project ultimately extends beyond the purview of the writing center. It follows TAs from the writing center into teaching first-year writing and through their coursework. Although it begins in the writing center, it is about the network of student experiences in an English MA program.

This qualitative and longitudinal study considers the role of two teaching contexts, the writing center and composition classroom, in graduate student development as teachers, writers, and scholars. Simultaneously, the study questions how curricular focuses impact the teaching of writing. Addressing these questions may help WPAs, graduate program directors, and graduate faculty better capture that network to improve training for current consultants/teachers and better foster lifelong learning habits in graduate students/future professionals. The study argues for writing centers, practicums, and composition classrooms as sites for complex learning and reciprocity for TAs.

While this study brings together several strands of scholarship across fields— the transferability of writing center experience into new contexts, the development of TAs, enculturation of new graduate students, and the MA in English curriculum— most immediately, its audience is WPAs, of which I include writing center directors (see Haviland and Stephenson). However, those across fields in English studies, particularly those interested in learning about graduate students' experiences and improving graduate education, will also find insights here. Following the development of six MA students, tracing their teaching experiences in two teaching sites and through their MA curriculum, demonstrates how their identities, knowledges, attitudes, pedagogies, and goals change over the course of a program and what factors might



influence the development of professional identities and pedagogies that programs hope to foster in graduate students.

Although I agree with Melissa Ianetta et al. that research is needed on the impact of TAs on writing centers as programs, this study's scope is on the graduate students who work in the writing center and composition programs within an MA program. Moreover, this study focuses less on arguing for the general benefits of writing center experience in a TA program and more on how TAs develop specific attitudes, identities, and philosophies related to teaching writing and how those attitudes translate into their writing classrooms, their writing, and their professional identities. When referring to development of "identities" in this study, with an acknowledgment of the complexity in the concept, I mean a sense of community membership as Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger describe newcomers' relationships to communities of practice. Lave and Wenger note that "a deeper sense of the value of participation to the community and the learner lies in the value of participation of the community and the learner lies in *becoming* part of the community...an increasing sense of identity" (111). Christine Pearson Casanave's work builds on Lave and Wenger's notion of identity-as-becoming in terms of academic identities; Casanave emphasizes the work of negotiation involved in such becoming:

I view people's identities as continually in the process of being constructed as the members of academic communities learn to engage in different sets of practices and envision themselves on different possible trajectories. Students, teachers, and researchers all come to an academic setting with a history, with a more or less well-defined sense of where they want to go, and with opportunities to engage in practices that define them as members of the school community and perhaps also as emergent or expert members of a disciplinary or rhetorical community. (*Writing*, 22-23)

Given that the participants in this study sought out graduate-level study, the study presumes that they are interested in becoming members of communities, especially academic disciplines and teaching professions (composition and writing centers). Developmental questions connect with scholarship on TA development and training, which indicates that the practicum content may be less important than fostering reflective practitioners, lifelong learners, and connections across academic and nonacademic contexts. Moreover, what has yet to be explored at all is the writing center's role (and the TAs in general) in the development of graduate students as academic and nonacademic writers and professionals, which connects to writing center scholarship on the long-term impact of writing center work and the importance of emphasizing transfer for consultants.

### **Research Questions**

To contribute to and bring together multiple conversations, this study describes and theorizes six English MA TAs' teaching and learning experiences in a two-year program that requires writing center work in year one prior to classroom teaching in year two. The research questions I address are:

1. What teacherly, scholarly, and/or professional identities and practices develop for TAs in an MA English program?
  - a. How does the writing center impact first-year English MA students' teacherly, scholarly, and/or professional identity formation and writing and teaching practices?
  - b. How does the first-year writing program impact second-year MA students' teacherly, scholarly, and/or professional identity and writing and teaching practices?

- c. How does the MA English curriculum impact teacherly, scholarly, and/or professional identity formation and writing and teaching practices?
  - d. How do participants' developing teacherly, scholarly, and/or professional identities and practices interact with personal identities or prior-to-graduate-school knowledge and identities?
2. How does consulting with diverse writers (levels, ages, cultures, races, nationalities, languages, abilities, genders, sexualities, and disciplines) in the writing center impact MA TAs as future writing classroom teachers and current graduate student writers?
    - a. How do second-year MA TAs transfer writing center theory and practice knowledge into their classroom teaching?
  3. How do TAs conceptualize declarative knowledge (knowing that) and procedural knowledge (knowing how) of writing in terms of their writing for coursework and disciplinary genres?
    - a. How does this conceptualization relate to their teaching activities in the writing center and classroom?
  4. How do social and interpersonal relationships in the first-and second-year (e.g. cohort peer, faculty, staff, PhD student mentor) impact learning as a graduate student over the course of their MA degree?

Completions of MA degrees in English Language and Literature has grown steadily since 1987, the first year statistics were available (American Academy of Arts and Sciences). In 1987 at little over 5,000 students completed the degree. By 2015, that number grew to a little over 8,000 (American Academy of Arts and Sciences). Margaret Strain and Rebecca Potter argue that English MA students, though large in population, and thus potential influence on the discipline,

are overlooked in favor of research on undergraduates or PhD students (*Degree*; see also Mossman). While their claim may be true, research exists in rhetoric and composition that relates to MA students' experiences in English MA programs, notably student experiences with writing centers and TAs. Therefore, two primary strands of scholarship underlie this study: 1) Writing centers as graduate student professionalization 2) Composition TA training and development. After discussing literature from writing center studies and rhetoric and composition, because this study concentrates on the experiences of English MA students with diverse interests in a "standalone" MA program, I situate my study in key conversations regarding graduate student enculturation and calls in English studies to reform the MA. Since early conversations surrounding writing center and TA education, WPAs and writing center administrators have maintained that writing centers are useful professionalization and preparation for classroom teaching, but few empirical studies consider how, why, and the specific implications for MA programs. Moreover, across scholarship in writing center studies and rhetoric and composition, the category of "graduate students" is often used too broadly; MA in English students have needs and goals distinct from their PhD peers.

### **Writing Centers and Graduate Students**

Though the image of a writing center for many includes only peer undergraduate tutors (see Bruffee; Carino; Trimbur), graduate student writing consultants are neither rare nor a recent phenomenon. Two recent surveys, the 2016-17 Writing Center Research Project (WCRP) and the 2013-14 National Census of Writing (NCW), indicate that approximately half of all writing centers employ graduate students (Table 1).

Table 1: Employment of Graduate Students in Writing Centers<sup>1</sup>

All Survey Responses			Research-Intensive Institutions	
Survey	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
WCRP 2016-17	131	48%	62	76%
NCW 2013-14 4- year institutions	262	48%	133	81%
WCRP 2001-02	49	37%	23	90%

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<sup>1</sup>The questions varied slightly across surveys. For the WCRP 2016-17 survey, the question was: “Tutors/consultants in the center are: (check all that apply):” Options included: “High school students, undergraduates, faculty, professional staff, graduate students, work-study, volunteers, other.” The percentages also appear to be misrepresented on the website— the percentages for responses add up to 100%; however, they should be higher than 100% if respondents checked all options that applied (for instance, many centers employ both undergraduate and graduate tutors). Using the raw data, I made my own calculations for percentages. For the WCRP 2001-02 survey, only the raw data is available in a worksheet without exact questions. A column lists “consultant\_class” (presumably “consultant classification”) as the heading with “undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, volunteers, professional staff, other” as available options. For the NCW for four-year institutions, the question is: “Are some or all of your consultants graduate students?” The available response is either yes or no. The website breaks the responses down by Carnegie class.

By isolating research-intensive institutions, like the research site for this study, from the entire pool of responses, the percentage of writing centers employing graduate students rises noticeably to 81% (NCW) and 76% (WCRP 2016-17). Revisiting the WCRP data from 2001-2002 shows that the current numbers are on par with the past (Denny).

A significant number writing centers at doctorate-granting institutions, like the research site for this study, employ graduate students. Such a high number highlights the importance of scholarship on this population. The category of “graduate student consultant” is diverse in terms of position setup (e.g. TAship or hourly), discipline, background, and level (e.g. MA, PhD, MFA). While it can be assumed that many graduate student consultants are MA students, the exact percentage is unknown. The 2011 Association of English Departments’ (ADE) report on the MA in English found that around 25% of programs that responded to the survey offer assistantships to 75% or more of MA students in their first year; about 32% of programs offer it to 75% or more in the second year (10). Many of those assistantships, particularly in the first year, may be in writing centers because the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SAC COC) accreditation agency requires graduate students to have eighteen graduate credits to qualify to teach in the classroom. TAs, in particular, master’s-level TAs, create a unique set of considerations because they are new graduate students and may not fully identify as the “advanced” student or qualified instructor that the institution sees.

While writing center studies recognizes that graduate student consultants are one population of tutors, only a few studies unpack the experiences and pedagogies of graduate student tutors. In the 1990s, Thomas Michael Conroy and Neal Lerner brought attention to issues unique to graduate student consultants, such as content knowledge, conflicting roles, and authority. Similarly, two more recent studies point to the importance of research that isolates

graduate student consultants and their impact on the writing center (Grouling and Buck; Rollins et al.). These studies show how the position of a graduate student—neither peer nor professional—affects an individual’s pedagogy and the collective ethos of a writing center. Brooke Rollins et al., using discourse analysis of three transcripts, studied how graduate student consultants enact authority in writing center sessions. Although the institution and writing center granted them a degree of authority as “writing assistants,” the tutors felt pressure to attempt more of a peer role, which resulted in a lack of collaboration in sessions. Rollins et al. argue that true collaboration, one goal of a dialogic writing center session, did not happen in the sessions they studied because the tutors went to linguistic lengths to hide their authority. In their interview study of a center that employed undergraduate and graduate students, Jennifer Grouling and Elizabeth Buck compared attitudes toward professional development. They found that graduate students who were required to work in a writing center had less motivation to embrace their identity as a tutor and continue to develop that identity. Grouling and Buck argue that directors should take steps in training to address tutors’ varying relationships with the writing center. While these studies begin to establish the positioning of graduate student consultants, they do not track where these tutors go after completing their work in the writing center or how their writing center experience impacts their curricular work. Writing center studies need to learn more about how centers are both autonomous units and connected to other units and programs through their staff.

### **Writing Centers as Teacher Training**

A widely circulating assumption is that writing center experience is helpful for future classroom teachers because it provides a space to interact with and see the writing process up-close. An oft-cited source for this claim is Irene Clark’s 1988 “staffroom interchange” in *College*

*Composition and Communication*, “Preparing Future Composition Teachers in the Writing Center.” Clark argues that the writing center is an ideal space for TAs to “learn through firsthand observation how the writing process actually works” (347). Clark relies more on theoretical parallels than empirical evidence, which seems to be fitting for the short “staffroom interchange” genre. From as early as 1981, several others have made similar personal experience-based claims about the writing center as a space to practice student-centered pedagogy and interact with writing from across the curriculum (Anderson et al.; Broder; Harris; Gadbow; Jackson; King et al.; Magnuson; Van Dyke). While these articles are dated, and many were published in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, more recent ones simply accept the writing center’s usefulness in TA development as dogma. For example, Jule Wallis and Adrienne Jankens argue that writing center experience is helpful for their program’s GTAs: “Tutoring allowed new GTAs... to become adept peer tutors, to observe and develop best practices for teaching, and to create lasting connections with fellow GTAs, senior GTAs, lecturers, and students” (167). The belief that writing center experience is always beneficial for teachers (past or present) circulates widely, building on a theoretical argument and supported by first-hand experiences, rather than empirical evidence.

Notably, the few empirical studies sprinkled throughout various publications also generally support the notion that writing center experience assists in forming student-centered and process-oriented pedagogies. Zelenak et al.’s 1993 study, published in the *Journal of Developmental Education*, builds on Clark’s claims by surveying 39 graduate students who were teaching English or composition concurrently with writing center tutoring. Zelenak et al. found that the “tutor/teachers” noted specific areas of pedagogy that the writing center seemed to impact, such as prioritizing “higher-order” concerns (versus sentence-level) and developing



empathy for students. Robert Child's and Jane Cogie's studies both interview and observe graduate students after they have worked in the writing center. Cogie's participants felt that "the behind-the-scenes insights into students and the workings of the composition classroom it provides, shed light on the individual nature of the writing process, the needs of their students, and the importance of listening and responding to each student with care" (10). They also expressed that "they were more motivated and prepared to experiment with a variety of strategies and types of assignments in their classrooms" (Cogie 80). Child's results were also positive overall, but more nuanced. While experienced teachers who tutored and then returned to the classroom felt "that diminishing authoritarian roles opened their classrooms," brand-new teachers felt some "anxiety and frustration" (180) with the classroom environment. Therefore, the self-reported practices and brief observations of graduate student teachers do support the argument that writing center experiences can be helpful to future classroom teachers in areas such as building empathy, individualizing responses, and understanding writing processes. Yet Child's study further suggests that graduate student classroom teachers may struggle adjusting to roles and degrees of authority required of them.

Finally, building from the backdrop of circulating assumptions, programmatic needs, and the few empirical studies, Ianetta et al. surveyed twenty-eight WPAs about the formal and informal relationships between writing centers and new TA training. Their survey was an "attitude inventory," which asked the respondents to agree or disagree with statements about the relationship between tutoring and teaching. They developed the question prompts by identifying the main claims in the literature. They found that WPAs generally agreed that writing center experience enhances future classroom teachers. Yet the WPAs' open-ended comments were sometimes more hesitant, cautious that the set-up is really best from the writing center's

perspective as only a training environment. In fact, Melissa Nicolas harshly critiques the “training wheels model” of assigning TAs to the writing center, arguing that forcing graduate students to work in the writing center before teaching composition sends a message to students and institutions that the writing center should be marginalized and expertise is not needed (“Can WPAs”; “Writing Centers”). Moreover, Nicolas takes issue with most of the transferability arguments, ultimately noting: “I still can’t see the connection between coming to graduate school wanting to read and criticize literature and the work many graduate students in English are asked to do in the writing center; so I’m sure the connection for many of the tutors is, at best, fuzzy” (“Writing Centers”). Overall, Ianetta et al. suggest a more nuanced view of the practice of employing TAs, “acknowledging both the harmony and dissonance between classroom-and center-based writing instruction deepens TAs’ understand of both scenes of instruction and the pedagogies there enacted” (118). They explain that “clearly emerging in this study, as in previous research, is an argument for the value of writing center experience in teacher preparation. What is less clear, however, is the impact of such programs on the writing center” (118), for example, the inevitable “turnover” rate of TAs as consultants. In sum, Ianetta et al. and Nicolas uncover the need for empirical studies that point to the benefits and risks for students and writing programs of employing TAs in the writing center prior to teaching.

### **Writing Centers and Transfer**

Closely related to the idea of using the writing center to prepare graduate students to teach is scholarship concerning how all tutors might use skills, knowledge, or concepts learned in the writing center in new contexts. Although “transfer” is typically known in rhetoric and composition as the movement of writing and rhetorical concepts developed in a writing course to new writing contexts (e.g. Yancey et al.; Wardle, “Understanding”; Nowacek), Dana Driscoll

turns to the broader definition of “transfer of learning,” to study undergraduate tutors. Driscoll reminds that “in its most basic definition, transfer of learning is the ability to adapt knowledge, strategies, or skills from one context to another” (154). She argues that writing centers “can aid in [tutors’] learning of writing, interpersonal, and metacognitive skills that can transfer to broad educational, professional, civic, and personal contexts” (154). Perhaps the most well-known attempt to capture the long-term impact of tutoring is Bradley Hughes et al.’s “Peer Tutor Alumni Project.” The study surveyed former undergraduate tutors at three different institutions to find out the impact of the writing center on professional and personal lives. Their participants indicated that they felt that writing center experience influenced their current selves in the following areas: “a new relationship with writing, analytical power; a listening presence; skills, values, and abilities vital in their professions; skills, values, and abilities vital in families and in relationships; earned confidence in themselves; and a deeper understanding of and commitment to collaborative learning” (14). Hughes et al. make a sweeping argument about the role of writing center tutoring in the professional and personal lives of alumni.

Although neither Janet Alsup et al. nor Jacob Blumner use the term “transfer,” their arguments for a role for the writing center in undergraduate education curricula, as fieldwork, similarly advocates that skills and concepts that tutors develop in the writing center transfer appropriately to classroom teaching contexts. Testifying from their respective positions, English education faculty member, writing center administrator, and undergraduate writing tutor, Alsup et al. describe the various benefits of “field” experience for undergraduate education majors. Likewise, Blumner highlights the need for education majors to learn how to individualize teaching strategies but also points to the shared scholarly roots of English education and several writing center theories (e.g. Vygotsky). Alsup et al. and Blumner parallel the arguments made for

the writing center as a step in TA training. Finally, Dayna Jean Defeo and Fawn Caparas conducted a small phenomenological case study of graduate consultants and determined that during their work in the writing center, they did not consider it particularly meaningful; however, later they identified personal and professional benefits. Defeo and Caparas's study lends support to Grouling and Buck's argument that graduate student consultants are a unique population in terms of their relationship to the writing center. However, Defeo and Caparas's findings suggest that even if graduate students act less engaged, the writing center may still positively affect them.

Driscoll does not leave such transfer of learning as described by Hughes et al., Alsup et al., and Defeo and Caparas to chance; instead, she advocates for focusing on transfer in the undergraduate writing tutor education course. Driscoll's course is open to undergraduate students across the curriculum who may or may not eventually work in the/a writing center; many of her institution's education majors take the course as a general education credit. Therefore, Driscoll's transfer-based curriculum adapts to the students' and institutions' needs (see also Driscoll and Harcourt). Driscoll's assessment of transfer in the course, through analyzing student interviews and reflections, was exceedingly positive. Whether structured or unstructured, the work of several scholars concerning tutors moving writing center theories and practices into new teaching-related contexts is promising, but composition TA labor has its own set of considerations.

### **Composition TAs**

Scholarship on "training" (i.e. education) of TAs for composition classroom teaching is more abundant than writing center research on graduate student consultants. TA research also provides insight into studying the relationship between formal training (see Latterell for an overview), enacted pedagogies, and individual theories of composition. A major theme in

studying TAs is the notion of TA resistance to the writing program's theories, teaching practices, and/or pedagogies. The scholarly notion of TA resistance is typically traced back to Wendy Bishop's descriptions of it in pedagogy training for PhD students who were also secondary teachers (*Something Old*). Bishop describes two models of training as the "competing theories model" and the "convergent theory model." While the competing theories model presents available theories, encouraging students to choose, the "convergent theory model" may introduce multiple theories, but ultimately acknowledges one, such a process pedagogy, as the dominant and preferred approach (xiv). The participants in Bishop's ethnography variously demonstrated their discomfort with, ambivalence of, or acceptance of their graduate program's convergence model. Nancy Welch, from an English graduate student's (she does not reveal if she was an MA or PhD student) perspective, and in what is hopefully an extreme example, demonstrates the deeply resistant feelings of TAs who feel forced to "convert" to a specific writing pedagogy and corresponding ideologies. In her example, the graduate faculty and writing program did not allow reflection or dissent to a pedagogical approach that included "identity-changing, ideologically-situated assumptions about language and learning, about the relation between individuals and institutions, about the construction of knowledge and the construction of self" (388). Bishop and Welch demonstrate that conversion, or forced enculturation, comes in many forms, explicit or implicit; TAs often have prior learning experiences or identities that conflict with a composition program's pedagogy or curriculum.

Additional representations of TAs as resistant come from the perspective of WPAs because typically a WPA is tasked with training TAs to teach first-year composition, TAs who are not all academically interested in rhetoric and composition. For example, Douglas Hesse

suggests that TA resistance may be tied to unreflective habits of MA and PhD<sup>2</sup> students (and TA training in the writing program), which produces TAs unable to see the parallels between themselves as graduate students and their students, both encountering and struggling with new genres and expectations. Ultimately, the narrative of the TA as resistant calcifies into the perspective that all TAs must be enculturated into “the cultural ideologies of composition” (Dobrin 21). Sidney Dobrin argues for a central political role for the TA practicum course in English Studies because “by training students who do not intend to pursue composition (teaching) as a career choice to recognize that teaching composition is a difficult and legitimate endeavor” (11). Dobrin goes on to advocate for strategic use of that political role for rhetoric and composition, “the course, generally speaking, is not merely a space in which new teachers are ‘trained’ or even professionalized, but one in which they are enculturated into the cultural ideologies of composition” (21). While Hesse identifies a problem— a disconnect between a student-self and a teacher-self— Dobrin provides a solution in the form of forced conversion to composition studies’ views of writing pedagogies.

Though research into TAs often begins simply with the narrative of the resistant TA, several empirical studies reveal the complexity in this resistance and provide alternative, more complex, narratives. For instance, Elizabeth Rankin admits that her year-long study of second-year TAs<sup>3</sup> was fueled by her observation that her practicum students “resist[ed] almost everything— even from each other” (ix). Similarly, Sally Barr-Ebest frames her five-year longitudinal study of PhD and MA TAs<sup>4</sup> through the lens of their resistance to process pedagogy.

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<sup>2</sup> It seems understood that they are TAs in the English department.

<sup>3</sup> She does not specify if the TAs were master’s or doctoral level, or in which discipline, though it seemed understood that they are English graduate students.

<sup>4</sup> She does not specify, but it seemed understood that they are English graduate students.

The goal was “to investigate how teaching writing as a process in graduate seminars enhances students’ understanding of composition theory and pedagogy to illustrate how this understanding is internalized through writing and applied in the students’ teaching, and to explore the reasons for and manifestations of students’ resistance” (6). Though Barr-Ebest begins the study with an extremely narrow definition of resistance, she ultimately finds reasons for resistance that are rhetorical, pedagogical, and epistemological. Similarly, Rankin discovers, through multiple interviews over a year, that the resistance she observed is not simply directed at theories of composition pedagogy; it is directed toward “theory” generally and culturally circulating images of teachers as authorities. Additionally, Dylan Dryer’s study of ten English MA TAs in their first semester of teaching, shows TAs resisting the notion that their students may encounter parallel difficulties in learning-to-write as the TAs do and have. While the TA participants in his study projected onto first-year students the exact same problems they struggled with in their own writing, they did so in an “albeit in a curiously flattened way” (431). Dryer explains that the participants did not project their own complex learning processes on their students, such as conflicts with identity, confidence, or agency.

Developmental approaches to training and research demonstrate more nuanced experiences of doctoral-level and master’s-level composition TAs and suggest ways to engage their learning in the practicum. Shelly Reid et al.’s three-year, two institution study considers the role of TA practicums in TAs’ current pedagogical practices. Their surveys and interviews of English MA and MFA TAs indicate that the practicum did not have a huge impact on pedagogy; personal experiences had more of a role (see also Estrem and Reid). Moreover, Reid et al. found that the TAs “unevenly integrated” pedagogy concepts from the practicum course (33-4). Reid et al. posit that this is because the TAs are learners and it takes time to learn. One semester is not

enough; they call this uneven learning the “interteaching mode” (34). A recent study by Carolyn A. Wisniewski, also with MA TAs, supports Reid et al.’s findings, arguing that new TAs, even those with available resources, struggle to problem-solve or use disciplinary or programmatic resources. Elizabeth Bishop and Shari J. Stenberg articulate corresponding theoretical understandings. Bishop argues that

new graduate students in English— including those who track into degree programs in literature, rhetoric, *and* creative writing— are constituted by the theories of learning that they bring with them... We need to ‘read’ them better if we truly aim to improve our programs. Overall it is necessary to ask our graduate student (teacher)s to share their attitudes and expectations, to articulate their tacit theories, for tacit theories rapidly come into conflict with the explicitly new theories being both introduced into many programs whether through coursework, or dialog, or both.” (“Attitudes” 194)

Bishop suggests that WPAs find ways to connect with TAs’ extensive prior learning experiences and bring those into TA training. Stenberg echoes the call; she “challenge(s) the ‘teacher-as-trainee’ metaphor by reconceiving the (new) teacher as a complex subject who brings a complicated pedagogical history into the classroom” (65). Moreover, she argues that this constant learning and reflective practice should be for all professors, not just new teachers. Shelley Reid (“Teaching”), like Barr-Ebest, argues for putting writing into the TA training curriculum and shaping the curriculum to encourage reflection on self-as-learner, which would ideally address the phenomenon that both Hesse and Dryer describe. Reid argues that “writing pedagogy classes need to provide writing experiences that allow students to experience productive, guided difficulty in writing— and thus to become true learners in the field” (“Teaching,” W198). I deem these perspectives “developmental” because of their focus on new



teachers as fully realized learners with histories who need time and opportunities to reflect and integrate new theories and identities.

Several other qualitative or ethnographic studies validate the approach to TAs as complex learners. For example, Christine Farris's four ethnographic case studies of MA and PhD students in an English department found that the TA participants successfully became "reflective practitioners... to shape and reshape their working theories of composition" (151). The program they taught in allowed them "to teach relatively autonomously" (152), but they still had certain local and global constraints. Farris points out that while the program clearly advocated for an expressivist approach to teaching composition, the TA participants' theories of writing and pedagogy did not fall neatly into one paradigm or theoretical stance. More recently, Jessica Restaino followed four TAs, MAs and PhDs in English, in their first semester of teaching composition to consider the tensions between theory and practice. She argues that the day-to-day demands of the classroom often outweigh incorporating composition theory and that the position as both teacher and student complicates their pedagogy. She, too, views TAs as learners: "While they function as teachers in classrooms, they are equally functioning as students, learners who need to understand what it means to teach writing in the context of the larger university and also in terms of the constantly evolving scholarly fields(s) of composition and rhetoric" (57). Finally, Jennifer Grouling<sup>5</sup> posits that "dichotomies work against the formation of a coherent graduate student/teacher identity and our construction of our GTAs as complex, multifaceted learners." She concludes, through interviews and analysis of a practicum course portfolio, that "ultimately, the GTAs who are struggling in one area bring that resistance into the other. Likewise, those who

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<sup>5</sup> Her participants were three graduate students in an English department: three MA (literature), three MFA, and one PhD (rhetoric and writing).

are able to accept their dual nature as student-teacher in a way that allows each identity to inform the other are more positive about graduate school and teaching in general.” Qualitative and ethnographic perspectives home in on the experiences of TAs who are grappling with the rapid and conflicting introduction of new roles, ideas, and expectations.

### **Graduate Student Enculturation**

As Grouling observes, learning to teach writing occurs in tandem with curricular experiences as graduate students in a discipline. Research on graduate student enculturation into academic disciplines finds that the uptake of new roles and genres as students and novice scholars is often a complex process for new graduate students (e.g. Casanave, *Writing*; Prior, *Writing*; Riazi). Famously, Carol Berkenkotter, Thomas Huckin, and John Ackerman’s case study of “Nate” (now known to be Ackerman), a first-year PhD student in rhetoric and composition, describes Nate’s initial difficulty, but ultimate linguistic integration, into stylistic and disciplinary conventions of rhetoric and composition. Much of the scholarship that advises on graduate student writing pedagogy focuses on the needs of PhD students to have explicit guidance on genre conventions and disciplinary values, ideally from an insider in the discipline (e.g. Aitchison and Paré; Autry and Carter; Brooks-Giles et al.; Cotterall; Danby and Lee; Paré et al.).

However, Catherine Prendergast argues that linear “initiation narratives,” such as Nate’s, are flawed. Using Bourdieu as a framework, she suggests that initiation, and thus development, does not always fit into neat narratives because identity, particularly disciplinary and professional identities, necessitates a degree of performance (46). Prendergast posits that Paul Prior’s work on graduate students (“Response, Revision”; “Tracing Authoritative”) is perhaps a better model for studying graduate student development in English departments because “Prior’s

study is not so much a study of one subject’s development as it is a study of disciplinary activity. Significantly, his work asserts a distinction between being a member of a discipline and acting as one, and this distinction between being and acting is an inherent if not overt one in most poststructuralist thought” (48). Prendergast’s notion of the complexity, resistance, and difficulty in developing a disciplinary or scholarly identity<sup>6</sup> reflects many of the methodological limitations and the tentativeness of the claims of my study— it is ultimately impossible to claim that any identity has been developed or impacted through the sequence of events in an academic program; however, like Prior’s methods, this study aimed to capture multiple pathways and overlaps in learning to show that development in one area may influence understanding and actions in another.

### **Reforming the MA in English**

Interdisciplinary conversations within and across disciplines in “English studies” initiates the final conversation with which this study intersects; there is a growing interest in reforming the MA English curriculum. In 2011, the ADE report on the status of the MA in English, through surveying programs and using the National Survey of College Graduates data, concluded that there is a disconnect between students’ goals and understandings of the degree and department curricula and understanding of students’ goals. While many English MA students and graduates considered the MA degree as a teaching credential, most programs defined their top goals as “developing critical and theoretical knowledge,” “increasing the skill and range of students as readers of literature,” and preparing for admission to a PhD program” (6-7). Likewise, Strain and Potter’s 2016 edited collection *Degree of Change: The MA in English Studies* posits that the

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<sup>6</sup> See also Casanave, *Writing*; Casanave, “Local”; Casanave and Li; Leki et al. 39-41; Prior, *Writing*; Salter-Dvorak.

“standalone” or “terminal” MA in English degree must be conceived beyond a “stepping stone” to a PhD: “The MA, more than the PhD, is positioned in a dynamic contact zone— a place where disciplinary knowledge, student need, and local exigencies interact and where disciplinary identity is constantly negotiated” (xvi). Finally, Peter Vandenberg and Jennifer Clary-Lemon argue for doubling down on the MA in writing studies; their view explicitly pushes against traditional academic markers of success in a discipline (i.e. production of PhDs): “We instead encourage a view of the MA degree as a locus of situated, locally responsive, socially productive, problem-oriented knowledge production grounded in humanistic and liberal arts traditions— a graduate-level manifestation of the civic and professional potential that our scholarship has begun to imagine for undergraduate writing programs” (259). The ADE survey, Strain and Potter’s collection, and Vandenberg and Clary-Lemon provide convincing arguments for continued emphasis and curricular revision of the English (and writing studies) MA in order fully realize the MA’s local and disciplinary potential and to benefit students. Yet these scholars do not focus on the extra-curricular, but often programmatic, experiences that shape graduate student learning, such as TAs, internships, and tutoring.

As Vandenberg and Clary-Lemon imply, writing studies as a discipline has much to contribute to understanding how teaching writing or workplace writing (e.g. TAs or internships) work alongside, or exist in tension, with the English MA curriculum. When Strain and Potter and Vandenberg and Clary-Lemon point to a shift in understanding the MA as serving unique disciplinary and local needs, the “needs” tend to align more with pedagogy and writing than the production of specialized research (see also Bartlett). Rebecca Potter acknowledges that this focus underscores the “programmatic split in English studies between rhet/comp and literature” (63). For instance, Potter finds that hiring in English departments for positions

requiring an MA tends to privilege candidates with composition experience. She contrasts this need with the traditional literary studies emphasis in many MA English programs: “Whereas in writing studies one easily finds a vibrant discourse concerning changes in the profession, the minimal contribution of literary studies to this discourse gives rise to the question, how does the more traditional MA in English, with its emphasis on literature, serve its graduate students? What is the role and place of the literature track in English studies at a time of increased professionalization?” (61). Potter raises questions for standalone “traditional” MA programs and how they meet disciplinary, local, and student needs. Yet professionalization, programmatic, and curricular discussions in writing studies, Vandenberg and Clary-Lemon aside, tend to stay at the undergraduate (e.g. Giberson et al.) or doctoral level (e.g. Ball et al.; Marback; Peirce and Enos). For instance, *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, includes chapters on “Using Threshold Concepts” in First-Year Composition, Writing and Rhetoric Undergraduate Majors, and Rhetoric and Composition Doctoral Education, but nothing for master’s degrees such as the MA, MFA, or MAT. To begin responding to Potter’s questions, writing studies needs to understand student experiences during and after the standalone English MA of students with various curricular concentrations and career goals, especially those engaging with writing programs.

After detailing the study’s methodology in the next chapter, chapters four through six focus on one area of development— teacher, writer, and scholar. Though the chapters use one area of development as a thematic lens, they purposefully incorporate the intersections between development in other areas. For instance, development as a writer necessarily overlaps with learning to write as a teacher. All four chapters address aspects of research question one, regarding the development of identities and practices, and question four, social and interpersonal

relationships. Chapters three and four respond to research question two about the impact of the writing center. Finally, chapters five and six consider question three, concerning declarative and procedural knowledge of writing.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

To describe and theorize how TAs develop professional identities and pedagogies, I developed a methodology based in feminist, qualitative, and critical paradigms.<sup>7</sup> Through considering the overlaps in learning among participation in the writing center, writing program, and MA curriculum, this study worked to trace the interrelationships among TAs' developing and existing identities, knowledges, and practices as graduate students and teachers. Multiple methods and data types to helped examine TAs during a two-year MA in English program. Studying participants longitudinally during a time when they are expected to take on new roles aimed to reveal complex trajectories of teacherly, writerly, and scholarly development.

I employed qualitative methods, which have been used in previous TA and teacher research, and feminist and critical methodologies, practiced in rhetoric and composition, that demand attention to ethical research practices, such as researcher reflexivity and reciprocity. Because I was situated in the research site as a writing center administrator, and I value feminist research practices, in this chapter and the following chapters, I bring attention to and reflect upon my role as participant-observer. After explaining the methodological exigencies, this chapter details the research site, including the institutional profile, writing center, first-year writing program, and English MA curriculum. It then justifies participant recruitment and provides a brief profile of the six participants. The data collection section includes details about conducting interviews, collecting artifacts, and observing participants. The data analysis section describes

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<sup>7</sup>. The study was reviewed and approved by the IRB at the research site and is on record with the Old Dominion University IRB through an IRB Authorization Agreement (IAA). The IRB reference number for this study at both institutions is 17.0815

my process of qualitative grounded theory coding and interpretation. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of my feminist researcher positioning and how this study relates to the paradigm of Replicable, Aggregable, and Data-Driven Research (RAD).

Writing studies has recently begun to emphasize the importance of longitudinal research, drawing on models from other disciplines (Bazerman et al.). Many longitudinal studies in rhetoric and composition focus on undergraduate students. For instance, researchers interested in transfer of learning, such as Elizabeth Wardle (“Understanding”) and Anne Beaufort (*College*), consider how undergraduate students mobilize writing concepts from first-year writing to writing across the curriculum. These studies of transfer reveal the challenges students face in applying concepts from one writing context to new ones. Longitudinal studies of teachers (e.g. Hong et al.), including TAs of writing courses (Barr-Ebest; Farris; Rankin), demonstrate the complexity and struggles in identifying as a “teacher,” while holding other personal and professional roles, such as graduate student. Finally, higher education researchers’ longitudinal studies of graduate students track enculturation into anticipated roles and professions; they point to socialization and value-matching as important factors in successful long-term enculturation (e.g. Nyquist et al.; Sweitzer). Though Bonnie Devet notes that longitudinal research is a potential avenue for transfer research in writing centers (142), and Jackie Grutsch McKinney argues that the field of writing center studies “need(s)” more empirical studies that “capture complexity and situatedness through... longitudinal, qualitative design” (*Strategies*, 17), currently no longitudinal studies of writing consultants exist. There is a clear need for research in writing studies that considers graduate students across their multiple roles as students, disciplinary novices, and teachers.



## Research Site and Participants

This study is situated in an MA in English degree program at a large research 1 (R1) urban institution in a mid-sized city in the southern United States, hereby referred to as “River Valley University.” The research site encompassed the institution, writing center, first-year composition program, and English MA curriculum. The study’s participants, MA English students, were selected for two-year TAs in the English department, which consisted of working in the writing center (year one) and teaching composition (year two). River Valley’s English department offers an MA in English (with emphases in literature, creative writing, or rhetoric and composition) and a PhD in English with a focus in rhetoric and composition (see Appendix A for MA program timeline). I selected this site and participants, first, because of my familiarity— both as a former TA in the MA program and as the current Associate Director of the Writing Center. Second, the site’s TA program for MA in English students was ideal for capturing a trajectory from tutoring to teaching writing.

I chose to focus solely on the English MA TAs at River Valley, as opposed to English PhD TAs, because MA students constitute a large percentage of graduate students across academic departments in the U.S. — 89% by 2020 according to the National Center for Education Statistics (Hussar and Bailey 73-74). Yet in English and writing departments, while there is research on our graduate students broadly, generally less is known about MA students’ unique motivations, needs, roles in the disciplines, and teaching labor. While there are many formative curricular and extra-curricular experiences for graduate students, as a writing center administrator, the role of teaching writing in master’s students’ teacherly, writerly, and professional development particularly interests me.

## Writing Center

In the first year of their TAship, all English MA TAs at River Valley are assigned to the writing center, which is a service housed in the English department, but available to all students, staff, and faculty. This arrangement is typical for master's-level English TAs at institutions accredited by SACS. SACS requires that graduate teaching assistants, who are assigned as instructors of record, have at least “18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline [and] direct supervision by a faculty member experienced in the teaching discipline, regular in-service training, and planned and periodic evaluations” (SACS COC). Therefore, writing centers often become a landing place and default teacher training space for English MA TAs while they earn credit hours prior to classroom teaching. In fact, the tutorial staff at the writing center at River Valley is entirely made up of English TAs, primarily first-year MAs.

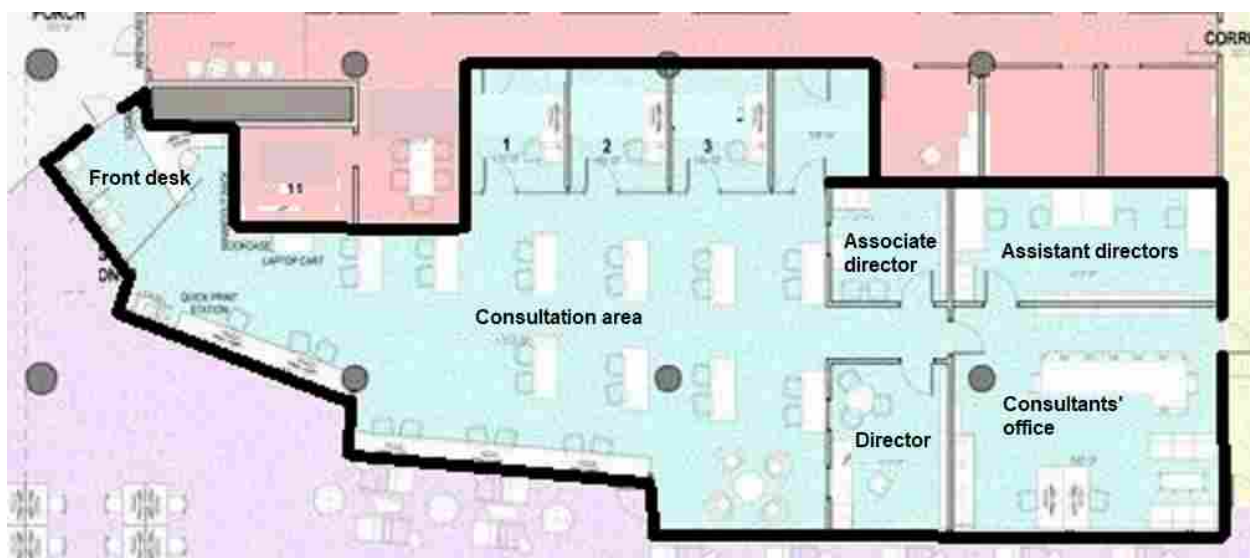
The writing center staff at River Valley includes English TAs, a faculty director, and two professional staff members. Approximately eleven TAs on staff are first-year English MA students contracted to tutor twenty hours per week.<sup>8</sup> Four English PhD TAs serve in specialized “Assistant Director” roles, which typically include administrative work, tutoring, and mentoring. Additional English TAs (second-year MAs and PhD students) are sometimes assigned to the writing center in place of teaching a course. The writing center director, “Evan,” is a full professor in English specializing in rhetoric and composition. Evan’s vision and philosophy guide the pedagogy and tone of the center, which emphasizes writing as a process, lifelong learning, and a commitment to hospitality (Haswell and Haswell). Finally, two full-time professional staff— an Associate Director (myself) and an administrative assistant— help with

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<sup>8</sup> One participant, Charlie, split her twenty hours between working as an academic journal editorial assistant and as a consultant in the writing center.

managing day-to-day activities, mentoring, organization, and long-term planning. Though the writing center is part of the English department, it is located in a different building from English faculty offices and classrooms. The writing center is on the first floor of the main university library. The office space includes a front desk, consultation area, offices for the administrators, and an open office for the MA consultants (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Writing Center Office Layout



### First-Year Writing Program

In their second year, the participants taught first-year composition (FYC). The FYC program, again housed in the English department, consists of a two-course sequence required for all undergraduates at River Valley: introduction to college composition (English 101) and intermediate college composition (English 102). The learning outcomes of English 101 center on

rhetorical awareness, critical thinking, writing as a process, structural (including multimodal) conventions, and student agency. The learning outcomes of English 102 build on English 101 while adding emphases on research writing and cultural diversity competency. The administrative staffing of the program consists of tenured English faculty and English PhD TAs. During this study, two faculty members shared the duties usually assigned to one “Director of Composition.” One professor, holding the title “Director of Composition,” managed the bulk of administrative responsibilities, while a professor with expertise in rhetoric and composition, “Lisa,” taught the required practicum course. Finally, three English PhD TAs, holding the titles of “Assistant Director of Composition,” helped the Director of Composition with her duties.

Second-year MA TAs are usually assigned to teach two 101 courses in the fall semester and two 102 courses in the spring semester, a 2-2 course load. While this is the typical iteration of the program, two participants in my study were exceptions. First, Steve was selected for a TAship in his second year, the “Assistant Director of Creative Writing.” For this assistantship, he taught one section of 101 in the fall and one section of Introduction to Creative Writing in the spring. To fulfill the rest of his TA contract obligation, he assisted the creative writing program with organizing author readings and events. Second, in Lindsey’s spring semester of her second year, she taught one 102 section and was assigned to the writing center for ten hours per week, which replaced her second 102 section.

### **English MA Curriculum**

In addition to their work as TAs, the participants completed the coursework for the thirty credit hour terminal English MA degree. The curriculum consists of a required core (fifteen credits), electives (fifteen credits), and a culminating project (CP) or thesis. The core consists of five three-credit courses: Introduction to English Studies, a selection of a pre-1700 literature

course, a selection of a 1700-1900 literature course, a selection of a post-1900 literature course, and a critical theory course. In addition, in their first semester, all MA TAs are required to take the practicum Writing Center Theory and Practice, which counts as an elective. In their third semester, MA TAs take Teaching College Composition, a practicum for first-semester MA and PhD English TAs (also counting as an elective). Therefore, MA TAs have nine credits (three classes) of remaining electives and/or thesis guidance hours. The MA program directs students to select an emphasis in rhetoric and composition, literature, or creative writing.

The thesis or CP, typically undertaken in the final two semesters, ideally showcases students' specializations. Literature and rhetoric and composition-focused students write critical projects, while creative writing-focused students compose creative projects. A critical CP is a revision of a research paper written for a course, prepared as an article submission to a journal selected by the student. The creative CP is a significant revision of creative writing, approximately 10-15 pages of poetry or 23-30 pages of prose. A critical thesis is a longer contribution to the field, while a creative thesis is a larger sampling of creative work. Both CPs and theses are written under the guidance of a faculty member, but only the thesis must be defended. Despite encouraging students to select an emphasis among literature, rhetoric and composition, and creative writing, the overriding coursework emphasis is literary and cultural studies, with a secondary focus on composition (for TAs).

According to the 2013 report by the Association of Departments of English's (ADE) Ad Hoc Committee on the Master's Degree, the four most common required courses for MA English degrees nationally are research methods, literary theory, American literature, and British literature (23). River Valley's curriculum, with its emphasis on literature and theory, seems to follow national trends. However, the ADE's report highlights the disconnect between English

MA curricular offerings and career trajectories of MA graduates, whom they found tend to go on to work as secondary teachers, postsecondary teachers, or “a broad category including artists, broadcasters, editors, entertainers, public relations specialists, and writers” (6, 30). Curricular goals, implicit and explicit, play an important role in shaping and limiting the MA students’ development as teachers, writers, and scholars.

### **Participant Recruitment**

Since all MA TAs work in the writing center during their first year, and I worked in the writing center at River Valley at the time of this study, I recruited participants during the writing center’s staff orientation in August 2017. The orientation was held a few days before the start of the 2017-2018 academic year. Positioned as both the writing center’s associate director and a PhD student at another institution (Old Dominion), I gave a short speech about my study’s purpose, goals, methods, criteria for participation, expectations for participants, and potential benefits. I then sent a follow-up email with the same information. I was seeking to recruit MA TAs who were beginning both their TAship and the MA program in order to make comparisons across one cohort. Six of nine qualifying MA TAs volunteered to enroll in the study (see Table 2).

Table 2: Study Participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Bachelor's degree</b>	<b>Prior teaching experience</b>	<b>Description of scholarly interest at the start of MA</b>
Paul	M	22	Majors in English and psychology	Writing center tutor for three years as an undergraduate	Literature, possibly African American fiction
Lindsey	F	23	Major in English, concentrations in literature and writing	Writing center tutor for three years as an undergraduate, online tutor for Pearson Smarthinking post-bachelors	Rhetoric and composition, writing centers, and pop culture
Grant	M	37	English for Secondary Teachers	Public high school English teacher, teacher for summer program for high school students	"English broadly," specific interests in rhetoric and creative writing
Jana	F	28	Major in English, dual concentration in literature and writing	Writing center tutor for two years as an undergraduate, undergraduate TA, writing fellow	Literature with an interest in feminist and postcolonial theories
Steve	M	22	Major in film, minors in American Sign Language and creative writing	Undergraduate TA	Open to any emphasis, but creative writing is his "passion."
Charlie	F	23	Majors in journalism and history	Coordinator and teacher for youth programs at a community center	Rhetoric and composition, specifically composition

In my experience, the participants represent an adequate sampling of students in River Valley's MA program, which tends to draw applicants from the city, state, and region. Four of the six participants completed a bachelor's degree immediately after high school, finished their bachelor's degree within six years, and enrolled in the MA within one year after their bachelor's. Two took a more "non-traditional" path, pursuing other careers before a BA and MA. Three participants identify as female and three as male. All speak English as a first language and are white. Five completed bachelor's degrees at institutions in the same state as River Valley University; one completed her BA in a bordering state. All entered with some type of teaching experience. In the first interview, they all stated that they were seeking teaching experience at the postsecondary level and credentialing to teach. While the program advertises areas of emphasis among rhetoric and composition, literature, and creative writing, there is no official declaration at the beginning, nor does an emphasis appear on official transcripts. Though they began with a variety of interests, I hesitated to classify the participants into disciplines at the onset because several of them maintained fluid or tenuous disciplinary identities during the study. However, I included their stated areas of interest in Table 2 as a point of reference.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection's goal was to represent TAs' development across teaching and learning contexts and chart the interrelationships among these contexts; therefore, I collected interviews and artifacts from the multiple contexts that my participants found themselves in as TAs and graduate students (Table 3; see Appendix A for timeline). Six interviews traced the participants' narratives across contexts over two years. In the student contexts, I collected significant writing projects each semester and observed and wrote field notes of one class meeting of each of the three courses taken by all participants. In the teaching contexts, I recorded



a writing center session each semester and collected a sample of the participants' feedback to their students' writing. I also conducted class observations of 101 and 102 once per participant each semester and collected related course materials

Table 3: Overview of Data Sources

Data Source	Data Collection Methods	Frequency/Quantity	Description
Interviews	Audio recordings, transcripts	Six one-hour semi-structured interviews per participant	I met with participants and asked them about their background, goals, influences, opinions toward the program, and their identities. I often employed artifacts such as writing center session transcripts, their writing, or a teaching document as a means of prompting questions and reflection.
Graduate course observations	Field notes, artifacts	Observations of three graduate courses (two practicums and Introduction to English Studies)	I observed as a nonparticipant observer and typed notes on the structure and content, and noted interactions among peers and faculty. I collected the course syllabi.
Graduate coursework	Artifacts	All major writing projects completed during coursework	Participants emailed me copies of their final papers for courses and their CPs. These papers represent their academic output during the program.
Writing center observations	Video and audio recording, transcripts	Two sessions for each participant, one per semester during year one; Sessions lasted up to 50 minutes	Participants selected one session each semester to record. The participant recorded the session with a digital camcorder. I transcribed the sessions, focusing on both verbal and nonverbal communication. The writing center sessions represent a sample of the participants' writing center pedagogy.

Table 3: Overview of Data Sources, Continued

Data Source	Data Collection Methods	Frequency/Quantity	Description
Composition class observations	Field notes, artifacts	Two class periods for each participant, one per semester during year two; Class periods were 50 or 75 minutes	I observed as a nonparticipant observer and typed notes on course content, teacher/student interaction, and positioning of the participants.
Feedback to students	Artifacts	Ten commented papers per participant (five randomly chosen each semester) during year two	I collected the written feedback to students as a sample of response practices.

## Interviews

Although in my analysis and reporting, I drew concepts across multiple data types, semi-structured interviews provided participants' first-person recollections and reflections across their experiences during the two years. Elliot Eisner reminds educational researchers that we cannot simply come to our own conclusions: "We need to listen to what people have to say about their activities, their feelings, their lives" (183). In the data analysis section of this chapter, I will discuss my role in interpreting their narratives. The thirty-six (total) approximately one-hour interviews occurred at the beginning, mid-point, and end of each academic year, between August 2017 and May 2019 (see Appendix B for interview guides). I selected these times to capture the TAs' descriptions of their experiences at the same time they encountered new teaching situations, practicums, and courses (beginnings of semesters), their reflective feelings as they continued in that teaching context (mid-points), and, finally, their reflections on their years, program, and thoughts about the future (end of academic years). For interviews 2-6, I developed the interview questions based on previously gathered data. I asked questions about background, history, feelings, goals, writing practices, teaching practices, artifacts, rationale and influences, philosophies, and identities.

Scholars who study TAs rely on interviews because they allow participants to explain and reflect upon their teaching and student experiences in their own words. In semi-structured interviews, researchers prepare in advance areas and concepts to cover to maintain consistency (Corbin and Strauss 39). For this study, conducting multiple semi-structured interviews throughout participants' time in a graduate program helped me compare and trace my participants' changing perspectives and earn the participants' trust as a researcher and mentor. Cynthia Selfe and Gail E. Hawisher, who maintain "feminist understandings of interviewing as a

process not of extracting information but of sharing knowledge” (36-37), argue that semi-structured and multiple interviews (even via different mediums, if necessary) are an important tool for understanding literacy, being collaborative, and creating meaning that is “local, fragmentary, and contingent” (36). Semi-structured interviews, as opposed to open-ended interviews, were both a practical and an ethical choice. As a researcher who is situated in the research site in a position of authority, the flexible structure allowed me to: be respectful of the participants’ time, avoid forgetting to bring up a point, and set boundaries, while also giving participants opportunities to draw upon my knowledge and expertise. Although I put on my researcher hat, as opposed to Associate Writing Center Director hat, during each interview, I could not abandon my role as the Associate Writing Center Director and, thus, a mentor. During the interviews, it was not uncommon for me to clarify a program policy, cheerlead, advise, and empathize.

In advocating for critical research practices, Patricia Sullivan and James E. Porter argue that “research methodologies must recognize and account for the roles that participants are assigned (and play) in the course of a particular study, just as they should account for researchers’ positioning” (31-32). On one hand, following Selfe and Hawisher’s feminist understanding of meaning-making from interviews as productively collaborative, I valued the opportunity to collaborate with participants during interviews. On the other hand, WPAs who study TAs who report to them caution that TAs often feel the need to perform for the audience of WPAs (Cherisi-Strater and Grutsch McKinney; Rankin), skewing the conclusions in favor of what TAs think WPAs want to hear. While interviewing of one of her former TA practicum students, Rankin noted that the participant seemed to perform for her: “He feels he is performing for me, even as we talk, is evident in his occasional comments about hoping I’m finding useful

things in our interviews and feeling sorry that I have to transcribe his rambling monologues” (91). Rankin’s participant demonstrated anxiety in his multiple personal and professional roles for various audiences— student, family, girlfriend, peer, teacher—which extended into the interview space. Similarly, I recognized that my role in the research site affected how the participants responded to my interview questions. My participants, too, to differing degrees, apologized that “this is a horrible interview” (Grant) and that “I’m kind of long winded, I’m sorry I’m taking so much time” (Steve). Yet I believe that more commonly the participants simply omitted information if they felt it was uninteresting, irrelevant, or made them uncomfortable to discuss with me. I find evidence of this when they withheld specific details about a problem or a complaint, especially when it involved others in the program, such as a faculty member or student. Lindsey, for instance, did not want to share the names of two PhD students who made several of her courses miserable: “I think that like the other p— I don’t want to name names, but you’re probably going to know anyway.” I felt that if I pushed them for more details, during the times when they were purposefully withholding, it would be an abuse of my power. For some of the participants’ negative experiences, the interview data does not always fully represent situations, and this is a limitation of this study. However, due to the study’s longitudinal nature, in later interviews, participants sometimes circled back to events in which they had previously been hesitant or vague. Furthermore, collecting artifacts and field observations allowed me to understand their experiences from multiple perspectives.

While there were limitations to the interviews, my questioning also created new moments of reflection for the participants. Heidi Estrem and Shelly Reid note that their study’s interviews with TAs, conducted by research assistants to avoid the bias I just discussed, functioned as much-needed moments of reflection:

Our results strongly suggest that all of our TAs would benefit from more opportunities to name principles, connect them to multiple sources, and reflect on them. Without such prompting, new instructors might settle on a set of absolute principles quite early (e.g., “I always privilege classroom community”); the good news is that the transcripts also demonstrate how easily a space for guided teacher-talk can provide other opportunities for articulation and reflection. (463)

My participants seemed to recognize the reflective function of the interviews, commenting on how they often surprised themselves in their responses. Jana, a self-described introvert who rarely talked in her graduate courses, frequently commented during the interviews about their usefulness: “We also have been sitting on so much stuff, like so much is changing and happening, and we need to have that kind of way to talk about it.” The interviews benefited the participants by having an opportunity to develop a deeper relationship with a mentor and to reflect on their experiences.

### **Artifacts and Field Observations**

Even though the interviews include information from both teaching and learning contexts, other data and artifacts were needed to triangulate the interviews and create depth. Kevin E. DePew, citing sociologist Norman Denzin, argues that “method triangulation,” or using multiple kinds of methods, helps to avoid researcher bias and flaws of one method (53). Multiple methods complicate narratives and ground knowledge created by the study in “local, situated practices” (Sullivan and Porter 10). While interviews validate feminist research practices through creating “jointly constructed” (Griffin) realities between researchers and participants, interviews often fail to capture in-the-moment thinking (Prior, “Tracing Processes” 184-185) or may misrepresent an experience or motivation. For example, Dana R. Ferris found in her study of

teacher response practices that, for some participants, “there was discontinuity between their stated philosophies and actual responding practices as observed in the sample texts they provided” (20). While I value interview data as the participants’ representation of their experiences, it was important to verify and triangulate their representations as much as possible. Discovering “discontinuities” (Ferris), and potential reasons for them, is also important, in terms of describing teacher development. Collecting observations of practice and artifacts added layers to the narratives presented in the interviews.

### **Artifacts and Observations in Teaching Contexts**

I collected artifacts and observations in both teaching contexts, the writing center and FYC classrooms. In the writing center, I audio- and video-recorded two sessions for each participant, one per semester. Student writers participating in the writing center session signed informed consent documents. The participants chose which session to record. Some selected a completely random appointment; others selected an appointment with a writer with whom they regularly met. The goal of recording two sessions was to look for change over time in the participants’ pedagogies. In the FYC context, I collected teaching observations and samples of their written feedback to students. I arranged observation dates and asked participants to send me class materials in advance, such as the related major assignment prompt, slides, lesson plans, in-class activities, and readings. I observed in-person as a nonparticipant observer, taking notes and avoiding interacting with the class, though I introduced myself at the beginning of each class. To account for response practices, I collected two sets of commented papers (one set each semester), written for the unit I observed. For each set of commented papers, I randomly assigned each paper a number and then randomly selected five numbers (five papers) to include in the final data



set. During my observations, I informed the first-year students about their writings' role in the study and offered them an opportunity to opt out.

While I coded the writing center session transcripts, classroom observation notes, and commented student papers as data, they also served as examples of teaching practices that the participants and I could refer to during interviews to ground their memories and descriptions. Specifically, I used these artifacts, transcripts of the writing center sessions and their comments on student writing, as prompts for “stimulated elicitation” (Prior, “Tracing Texts” 188-189) during several interviews. A stimulated elicitation interview includes an “external stimulus, some object that can trigger and support memory as well as serving as a source for new reflection” (189). For the writing center sessions, during interview three, I emailed the participants their two transcripts in advance with areas that interested me highlighted. I suggested that they review the transcripts, begin to think about the highlighted sections, and consider the following questions: What do you think is interesting or important? How do the sessions represent you as a consultant/teacher (or not)? How are the two sessions different? Similar? How do they show changes, or even growth, from first to second semester? During the interview, we discussed the highlighted sections. During interview five, I first asked their philosophy and process for commenting on student writing and then asked them to discuss that in the context of the one randomly chosen feedback example from their 101 class.

Although I did not perform discourse analysis of the writing center transcripts or comments on student writing, discourse analysis' emphasis on understanding language in use (Brown and Yule), as it is practiced in composition studies, influenced my approach to coding the transcripts. For instance, Ellen Barton, citing Thomas Huckin, emphasizes the importance of context, which my interview data provided. Moreover, Peter L. Mortensen argues for

composition researchers to attend to both the intersubjectivity and intertextuality in analyzing talk about writing, which the interviews and writing samples (discussed in the next section) provided. In educational settings, such as writing centers and composition classrooms, interactions between teachers and students are both a moment of pedagogy and social/cultural/linguistic/interpersonal exchange; analysis of the language in these moments in conjunction with self-described attitudes and practices can better explain what happens.

The dialogue, or “talk,” of writing center sessions is fundamental to unpacking writing center pedagogy; writing center researchers have taken several approaches to analyzing this talk. Robert Brown questions how tutors attempt to account for the responses of non-teacher audiences, such as an admissions committee for personal statements. Brown codes session dialogue, using a theory developed by Erving Goffman, based on tutors’ approaches to accounting for audience. Brooke Rollins et al., also relying partly on Goffman for a theoretical framework, study graduate student consultants’ exercise or co-option of authority through analyzing talk features such as directives. Finally, Steven Corbett (“Using”) analyzes session transcripts rhetorically and linguistically in conjunction with contextual interview data. Recording and coding the session transcripts, and discussing them with the participants, allowed for a close understanding of the participants’ practices and theories related to teaching writing in the writing center context, particularly their ethos and positioning as graduate student consultants who are also preparing to teach composition.

### **Artifacts and Observations in Learning Contexts**

Because this study seeks to understand relationships among teaching writing, disciplinary identity development, and writerly growth, I collected all the major papers or projects written by the participants throughout their program and conducted observations of one class meeting of the

three required courses for all TAs. In year one, I observed Writing Center Theory and Practice and Introduction to English Studies; both occurred in the fall semester. In year two, I observed Teaching College Composition, the teaching practicum. I also collected their CP or thesis. Analyzing writing for the courses beyond the practicum allowed me to trace their scholarly interests, see how the curriculum challenged and limited them, and explore writing issues. In “Tracing Processes: How Text Comes into Being,” Paul Prior advises that researchers “elicit writers’ accounts of their goals, their contexts, their processes, their feelings, the meanings they see in their texts, the influences they are aware of or can reflectively construct for what they’ve written and done” (179). During the semi-structured interviews, I included questions to prompt reflection on writing. In addition, their written texts again provided opportunities for “stimulated elicitation” (Prior 188-189). For example, in advance of interview three, I asked the participants to select a paper that they wrote in their first or second semester that demonstrates their “scholarly self.” I then read the paper closely before the interview. During the interview, I asked: “Why did you choose this paper as the one that demonstrates your scholarly self? What does it show about you? Is there anything it doesn’t show? How has your scholarly self changed or emerged?” Data from the participants in learning contexts and their reflections on the data helped to demonstrate their learning of genre, their scholarly interests, and their writerly ethos.

### **Transcription**

I fully transcribed the audio- or video-recorded data—the interviews and writing center sessions. Although transcriptions are never a perfect representation of a recording, detailed and consistent attention to linguistic and nonlinguistic communication assists researchers in realistically representing an exchange and making meaning of a transcribed conversation (McLellan et al.). While I used many of the same transcription symbols (Table 4) for both types

of talk, my philosophy and approach to transcribing and recording the details of the talk differed. For both types of talk, my raw transcription attempts to mimic the tone and feeling of a conversation by including backchannels, nonverbal sounds, filler words, pauses, interruptions, and overlaps. However, while these notations were helpful to me when describing and interpreting interview segments, I recognized that all of these notations in addition to the words can be distracting to my audience. Therefore, when pulling on an interview transcription to use in the published work, I edited out some of the filler words or sounds (e.g. uhs, likes) and my backchanneling (e.g. yeah, mhm). I preserved some filler words and sounds (like laughter) to communicate to the audience the participant's tone, for example, lighthearted or uncertain. Overall, the interview transcriptions are horizontal; they read more-or-less like a play script.

Table 4: Transcription Key

<b>Communication</b>	<b>Symbol</b>
Overlaps in speech— writing center sessions	[words]
Interruption	—
Backchanneling from the other speaker while one speaker maintains the floor	( )
Reading, quoting someone, reenacting a conversation, or recalling one’s thoughts or words	“ “
Actions and nonlinguistic sounds	(( ))
Short pause	(pause)
Skipped segment- interviews	...
Skipped segment- writing center sessions	[...]
Long pause - writing center sessions	(time)
Unintelligible work or sound	/?/

The writing center sessions required more attention to nonlinguistic details because they included video and were complicated pedagogical interactions. I was also an outsider in the conversations. Writing center researchers invested in understanding session talk have recognized the importance of representing the complex conversational characteristics of writing center sessions, to not present them as simple turn-taking, as in a play script (Gilewicz and Thonus). Simply transcribing as a play script leaves out significant sources of communication and meaning (Gilewicz and Thonus). Magdalena Gilesicz and Terese Thonus propose using “close vertical transcription” (CVT) to highlight the multiple streams of communication happening at once, such as verbal language and sounds. Mary Roser and Regan Wann remind researchers of the importance of body language in communication in writing center sessions and that all transcription choices are inherently partial and biased. To balance preservation of the meaningful linguistic and nonlinguistic features while maintaining the feasibility of transcribing twelve sessions, I opted for a middle ground between the extremely detailed CVT and a flattened horizontal description. I included all backchanneling, overlaps, descriptions of significant body language, and interruptions. I also timed the significantly longer pauses and noted the length in the transcription. A primary difference between my transcription method and an exact CVT is that, in mine, backchanneling does not appear on its own line. Instead, backchanneling appears in parentheses within the primary speaker’s words. I believe this assists the audience in processing the speaker’s words without interruptions of backchannels, which do not feel like interruptions in everyday talk but can feel intrusive in CVTs. Unlike the interviews, when quoting a writing center session transcription in the published work, I did not edit out filler words or backchanneling.

## Data Analysis

To account for the full range of influences on the TAs' pedagogies and identity development, I draw on theoretical models, such as Kevin Roozen, Rebecca Woodard, Paul Prior, and Jody Shipka, and Roozen et al. For example, In Roozen et al.'s discussion of three case studies of teachers, they found that the teachers' related literacy activities outside of teaching— a writing group, fan fiction writing, blogging about science, and National Writing Project involvement— each impacted their pedagogy. Roozen et al. argue that “each of these cases exploring teachers' identities as literate persons in the world suggests the importance of locating teachers as well as students in the laminated trajectories of their sociocultural lives” (204). By “laminated trajectories,” Roozen et al. mean that the teachers in their studies “weave together every day and professional worlds and identities, transforming in at least some key ways their teaching practices” (207). Rebecca Woodard defines lamination as “the coexistence of multiple activities, in any given activity” (37). Through collecting and analyzing multiple data types over time, the goal of data analysis was to demonstrate the interconnections between past and current student and teacher knowledge and development.

Using the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis software, Atlas.ti, I performed several recursive rounds of coding to draw meaning and relationships across data sources and time. I open coded, tagging chunks of text that seemed relevant, on a rolling basis over the two years. After open coding the first year of data, there were 118 codes. I then performed a second cycle of coding on the first year's data with the goals to reduce redundancy, develop categories related to the research questions, and move more towards analysis and away from simply describing. After this second round of coding, I ended with 125 codes and 12 categories (groups of codes). During year two of data collection, I coded as I collected data, employing any relevant

codes generated in year one, while also open coding for any new codes and categories that emerged. After finishing coding both years' data, I had 160 codes and 16 categories. Many codes overlapped purposefully to keep the data set open to multiple angles of analysis. For a more extensive discussion of coding and analysis see Appendix C.

Throughout the process, as is consistent with grounded theory, I kept a research journal recording my actions, reflections, and decisions. I also wrote formal and informal notes, memos, and reflections because memoing lays the groundwork for analysis and developing meaning from coding. In *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, Johnny Saldaña explains that in grounded theory the coding process has “an ongoing interrelationship with analytic memo writing” (55). Alasdair Gordon-Finlayson further emphasizes that “coding is simply a structure on which reflection (via memo writing) happens. *It is memo-writing that is the engine of grounded theory and not coding*” (164). While coding was integral to my process of discovering meaning in the data, the memos were vital in analysis and drawing themes from the codes. Atlas.ti, like similar programs such as NVivo, served as a repository for data. Its primary function in my project was code management, organization, and quotation retrieval, not analysis. Although it has tools for data analysis for trends and patterns, the only “analytical” tools or reports I used within Atlas.ti were to retrieve data sets. For instance, I could run reports for all coded data segments tagged for a specific round of interviews or across interviews for one participant.

Finally, interpreting participant experiences, particularly making inferences across data types, was a challenge for this project. In this study's context, the participants were naturally well-versed in explaining and reflecting on their lived experiences as teachers and graduate students, but they were also growing in their knowledge of the research topic of the study—



writing and teaching writing. The analytical method of “interpretive phenomenological analysis” (IPA) from the discipline of psychology explains how I approached my role as an author of their experiences. IPA recognizes that participants make meaning of their lived experiences, but “the end result is always an account of how the [researcher] thinks the participant is thinking” (Smith et al. 80). At times, my interpretation of an event’s significance differed from a participants’ explanation. I also frequently made connections across data types such as interviews and observations that participants did not make.

However, it was important for me to create additional space beyond the interviews, for participants to respond to and shape my interpretations. As is consistent with feminist and some grounded theory approaches to research methodologies, I shared some of my initial results and thinking with the participants. Some of this sharing was informal and unplanned, such as during the interviews. More formally, during data collection, I shared a conference presentation with Lindsey that relied heavily on her interviews and the first semester’s recorded writing center session. I sent her the written paper in advance of the conference and asked for her thoughts or corrections. Joyce Magnotto Neff sees such collaboration as a benefit of using grounded theory: “As I collect and code data for my studies, I cycle my early interpretations to study participants. Their reactions promote additional teasing out of institutional, political, and social issues... the analytical procedures in grounded theory make space for these data” (145). Feminist researchers argue for the ethics in this practice because the study is representing individuals. I was not able to be as open and collaborative as I would have liked during the data collection and initial rounds of coding because I worried that doing so would unconsciously affect the topics participants brought up or emphasized. However, after the data collection phase ended, I shared drafts of each chapter, three through six, and encouraged, but did not pressure, participants to respond

however they liked. Their responses helped sharpen key parts of the text, particularly when they agreed and disagreed with my analysis and/or clarified details.

### **Researcher Positioning**

Though my study is not an ethnography, I looked to ethnographic and feminist methods to ethically position myself in the study, interact with participants, and critically reflect upon my role at the research site. Mary P. Sheridan discusses the roles of “ethnography” in writing studies, emphasizing that ethnographic methods may be purposefully used, even when the study is not an ethnography. During the study, I was positioned in the research site as the full-time staff Associate Director of the Writing Center. While this role afforded me insider knowledge of the research site and participants, giving me an ease of access to information and rapport building, as I have discussed, my positioning had specific considerations in terms of navigating power and ethos construction during data collection and analysis. Neal Lerner points out that the position of a writing center administrator studying consultants as participants “challenges the relationship between researcher and participants as our roles shift from colleague and friend to observer and evaluator. These shifting roles can limit the methods we choose to collect data and threaten the veracity of our accounts” (“Insider” 53). Thomas Newkirk theorizes more broadly about the phenomenon that Lerner describes; Newkirk argues that composition researchers, like many WPAs, who “study down,” or study subordinates, including teaching assistants, “have a special obligation to recognize the vulnerability of those they study” (“Seduction” 5). As I have discussed throughout this chapter, I was hyper-aware of my positioning throughout data collection and interactions with participants.

While at the beginning of the study I certainly recognized and tried to anticipate the tensions among my goals-as-researcher, goals-as-professional WPA, and goals-as-mentor, the

specific methodological situations in which I found myself challenged the “me” in all three of my roles— researcher, WPA, and mentor. Heidi McKee and James Porter remind that “self reflexivity and critical consciousness about one’s own position, gender, and status are key features of feminist thinking. Feminist researchers are continuously attuned to the dynamics of power in all phases of a research project” (155). I actively worked to use reflection on challenges to make the ultimate goal as being “careful and respectful” (McKee and Porter 155) of my participants’ time, honesty, and perspectives. However, ethically positioning myself was a process that unfolded throughout the study.

Admittedly, I was not always successful and was oftentimes confused about how to ensure that “the welfare and betterment of research participants... is paramount, taking precedence over research findings, over methodological considerations, over disciplinary or institutional values” (McKee and Porter 155). While planning for the tensions embedded in my role was not always possible, I practiced reflection-in-action and reflective practice (Schön) as I made minute-to-minute methodological decisions. During interviews, as I have already mentioned, I often had to decide when to prod and when to leave a response. While avoiding prodding led to some gaps in my data, prodding too much would have felt coercive. Although my goal was to put the participants’ welfare before my own, several moments of failure to put my participants first stand out. For example, I had trouble scheduling a second interview with Charlie. She had confirmed late the night before but arrived ten minutes late for the interview. We proceeded but ended up going a few minutes later than scheduled. After the interview, I wrote in my research journal that “I was annoyed because I wanted my full hour of an interview... She said she was sorry and just busy. I tried to emphasize that I just didn’t want to coerce her or make her feel pressured into doing the interview. I feel awkward sending multiple

emails.” Because I did not stop the interview on time, Charlie was late for her shift in the writing center, which was becoming a habit of hers. That day, the writing center director confronted her about her habitual tardiness, and she cried. I felt horrible about the entire situation and, through reflection, realized that I had put my research before the participants’ needs. If I had a do-over, the interview should have been conducted another day; I should have probably put it off several weeks. In the second year, I found myself in a similar situation with Charlie. Instead of sending multiple emails, I simply sent one, a follow-up, and waited for her to contact me. We had the interview, much later than I had wanted, but she had not been ready sooner because of multiple personal issues. My research journal helped me to reflect upon and keep track of both methodological decisions and my positioning. Looking back, especially in the first year, it shows my struggles to work through my multiple roles in the study (researcher, WPA, mentor).

I took specific actions to mitigate the vulnerability of my participants during data collection. Setting boundaries for the study quickly became an important goal as I observed my participants daily as their supervisor. For instance, interviews never took place in the writing center or classrooms. I reserved a study room in the campus library, though interviewing in my office would have been more comfortable and much quieter. I hoped that, by placing us both in a neutral location, participants would feel less pressure to perform for the Associate Director of the Writing Center and be more open to speaking to me as a researcher.

Sullivan and Porter argue that “without direct benefit to participants during the research process, research risks being manipulative, oppressive, even matri/patriarchal” (108). I hypothesized that the primary benefit of participation was having sustained communication with a mentor. Restaino provides one example of the practice of a graduate student researcher taking on the role of mentor. She situated herself as a participant-observer in her ethnographic study of

TAs' first semester of teaching composition. As a more experienced graduate student, she offered herself as a completely open resource to participants with the caveat that everything, including ranting at happy hour and panicked emails, would be recorded and catalogued as data (5-6). I wanted to offer similar reciprocity to my participants, but recording all our communication (considering I saw them daily for a year) was not only impractical, it was unethical. Instead, I offered reciprocity in two ways during the study. First, during the interviews, if we veered off topic, but it was on a topic in which the participants were seeking guidance or advice from me, I did not reorient the conversation. I assured the participants that they could approach me with questions about life or the program at any time. Second, I offered optional monthly group meetings in which I acted as a mentor to the participants. The first year I attempted to structure these meetings as "writing groups," in which participants brought writing to get feedback from myself and the other participants, but they seemed less interested in this structure in the second year. In the second year, we simply met for coffee once a month. Not all participants consistently joined these meetings. While at the beginning of the study I considered using recordings of these meetings as data, I ultimately reconsidered because I wanted a space focused solely on participants' and not researcher needs. Finally, I felt an obligation to not only provide advice when asked but to share my experiences when appropriate during data collection and any other interactions with participants. In other words, even though I tend toward introverted, I worked to allow myself to be vulnerable. After one meeting, I wrote in my research journal: "One important moment for me was when Charlie asked me about what I was [currently] writing and I realized that I am feeling the same fears as they are— that my professors will think I'm stupid or I'll embarrass myself in front of my professors and peers" (10 October 2017).

### **RAD or FRM?: Paradigms and Disciplinary Needs**

Rhetoric and composition and writing center scholars may question how my methodology fits with the paradigm of Replicable, Aggregable, and Data-Driven (RAD) research, attributed to Richard Haswell (“NCTE/CCCC’s”; See also Driscoll and Powell; Driscoll and Perdue, “Theory, Lore”; Driscoll and Perdue, “RAD Research”; Serviss). Driscoll and Perdue argue that the field of writing center studies needs to build a knowledge base and do it in ways that are easily communicable to other disciplinary audiences (“Theory, Lore” 201). Tricia Serviss contends the turn toward RAD in rhetoric and composition “suggests a significant ongoing shift in writing studies research. We are turning quite explicitly towards research methods themselves as crucial sites of inquiry and as acquisitions necessary for the field’s health and expansion” (3). Although the methodology I outline to capture the complexity of TAs as students/teachers in a situated context does not lend well to attempting RAD, an empirical methodology can still speak to the core values of RAD. Citing Haswell as well, Jenn Fishman reminds researchers that longitudinal studies have particular demands that might resist replicability; she (and Haswell) offer “feasible, replicable, and meaningful” (Fishman 178; Haswell, “Documenting Improvement” 308) as a heuristic for longitudinal studies:

Feasible and meaningful are terms that can— and should— invite field-wide deliberation about how and why we conduct longitudinal studies, while ‘replicable’ can and should be interpreted broadly to mean not only rigorous scientific replication but also deliberate and appropriate use of shared research designs, protocols, and evaluative procedures across various kinds of studies. As a combined mantra and heuristic, FRM can also prompt us to ask: What is feasible for me to collect, organize, and analyze? What meaningful

conclusions can I draw from the data I gather? How will my study test previous researchers' findings? And how will others be able to replicate and test my work? (178)

Such questions, along with attention to a feminist orientation for my methodology, have guided me in data collection and analysis. For instance, Serviss names transparency in reporting research as a value of RAD, which also aligns well with feasible and feminist research practices. I have adhered to transparency in communicating methods: "Such transparency means exploring the struggles and failures that precede completed projects, minimizing the mysterious, unknown spaces between method and findings, the gap containing what Lunsford calls the 'hidden' aspects of research" (Serviss 17). Serviss advocates for attending to the messier aspects of methodology, the unplanned or spontaneous factors.

In addition, valuing aggregability, or the notion of building on prior research, is crucial for the growth of knowledge in a discipline. A lack of aggregability has been a major issue in writing center research, as Neal Lerner argues. He strongly warns against un-aggregated research practices, which he found through a citation analysis of *Writing Center Journal* articles from 1980-2009: "This inward gaze is an indication of a tight-knit genealogy, an unpromising present that does not quite seem healthy for the biodiversity of future generations, as well as a missed opportunity to offer writing centers as sites of intellectual engagement to composition studies as whole" ("The Unpromising Present" 67). In this measure, my study builds on prior research, including several noted writing center RAD studies (e.g. Hughes et al.). However, it also connects this writing center scholarship to studies of TAs (Dryer; Hesse; Reid et al.; Grouling). The point of aggregation is to bring together multiple questions to ask new ones, which, for this study, means bringing together kairotic questions and knowledge related to the English MA

degree and TAship as they are situated in writing center studies and writing program  
administration scholarship



## CHAPTER III

## DEVELOPMENT AS TEACHERS IN THE FIRST YEAR

*Charlie: I feel like the MA has given me a pretty good like grounding, not necessarily of... what kind of scholar I want to be, but what kind of teacher I want to be. Like because I think it's been an interesting position of being a student and being a teacher and being able to see it from both sides. So, I want to be like the kind of teacher that can be supportive and like help to build up students' strengths, and I think that my experiences have really like solidified that. (Interview 6)<sup>9</sup>*

Standalone, Charlie's revelation that her development as a teacher surpassed her development as a scholar is not necessarily surprising. What is more surprising is that all the participants noted that their writing center and classroom teaching experiences were either the, or one of the, most significant aspects of their MA degree. In other words, teaching experience was equal to or exceeded their scholarly forays. Because this development was so significant for the participants, I chose to organize this chapter and the following chapter as chronological description and analysis of their development as teachers. While both chapters trace the interactions among their teaching and student contexts, this chapter encompasses the first year of the study as the participants worked as writing consultants and became introduced to the MA program. Chapter four includes their development as classroom instructors.

Though their assistantship was demanding, the participants saw their teaching in the writing center and first-year writing classrooms not simply as work for a stipend and tuition, but as professionalization. After reviewing relevant scholarship, this chapter profiles the participants, highlighting their incoming goals for the program. It then traces their experiences in the writing

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<sup>9</sup> To indicate which interview the quotation was taken from, following each quote I will include an abbreviation of I and the number of the interview. For instance, the first interview will be "I1."

center, focusing on how the writing center's professionalization, structure, work environment, and ethos honed their confidence in talking to students about writing, concepts of writing, understanding of student populations across the institution, and the role of feedback in writing processes. Working in the writing center confronted them with often under-the-surface questions about their positioning. They found themselves on quicksand— trying to find footing on a spectrum of peers and experts. Finally, the chapter explores unexpected intersections between development as teachers and curricular practices. This chapter primarily draws on interviews, writing, and observations collected in year one.

In following MA TA teacherly development over two years, chapters three and four are in conversation with composition and writing studies scholarship that reveals the complex positions and teacher identity development processes of new graduate TAs. Research on composition TAs has hinted for quite some time that TAs' relationship to teaching, writing, writing programs, and professionalization is multifaceted and conflicted, often appearing as resistance to professionalization efforts (Barr-Ebest; Bishop, *Something Old*; Dryer; Hesse; Rankin; Welch). Both Jessica Restaino and Jennifer Grouling's work highlights the intersections of institutional worlds— students and teachers— in which TAs teach, learn, and learn to teach. While identifying and performing as both student and teacher does not necessarily put TAs at a disadvantage in terms of being an effective teacher, Grouling's work suggests that WPAs set aside the notion that it is possible to isolate teacher development from student development. She concludes, through interviews and analysis of a practicum course portfolio, that TAs “who are able to accept their dual nature as student-teacher in a way that allows each identity to inform the other are more positive about graduate school and teaching in general.” Grouling's finding

suggests that facilitating reflection on the intersections of identities and practices may be essential to successful TA development and training.

A major challenge WPAs face is how to work with, instead of against, TAs' prior knowledge and identities in liminal introduction to teaching spaces, such as practicums.<sup>10</sup> Although WPA and composition scholarship has historically made strides in defining expectations or "best practices" for training TAs (CCCC, "Statement on Preparing"; Latterell), recent scholarship indicates that TAs do not successfully incorporate new knowledge from the field into their teaching practices (Reid et al.; Wisniewski). For instance, Reid et al. found TAs in their study across three institutions relied more on personal experience than their "formal pedagogy education." Building on Reid et al.'s work, Carolyn Wisniewski studies how novice MA TAs frame and solve pedagogical problems. Her research demonstrates that TAs have trouble framing classroom issues as opportunities to integrate prior knowledge and new strategies from professionalization efforts. Structuring TA preparation so that it values reflection on prior knowledge and identities and encourages the learning of new practices and theories may be a difficult, if not impossible, expectation for the initial training or course for new TAs.<sup>11</sup>

Another way to frame the question of building on "prior knowledge" is through the concept of transfer. While "transfer" has fairly recently become a key word in composition studies (Wardle, "Understanding"), writing center and WPA scholarship have been interested in the concept of how tutors move knowledge, identities, and practices from writing centers to classrooms for some time. Although the actual evidence is more nuanced, WPAs often

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<sup>10</sup> Kathleen J. Ryan and Tarez Samra Graban outline these tensions and suggest feminist pragmatic rhetoric as one framework to balance administrator and student needs.

<sup>11</sup> Shelly Reid et al. and Lauren Obermark et al. argue for additional semesters of required pedagogy coursework for TAs. For MA TA training, this structure is not feasible.

unquestionably assume that writing centers are an appropriate to ideal training context for future writing teachers (Ianetta et al.). Several first-hand accounts and small qualitative studies argue that writing centers are fruitful ground to learn about writing processes, identifying and prioritizing writing concerns, and empathy (Alsup et al.; Broder; Blumner; Child; Clark; Cogie; Gadbow; Harris; Jackson; Zelenak et al.). Three recent empirical studies generally support the benefit of writing center work for future endeavors, including teaching: Hughes et al.'s well-known Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project, Driscoll's writing center teaching-for-transfer course, and Defeo and Caparas' phenomenological study. Except for Driscoll, who employs a teaching-for-transfer curriculum in her undergraduate writing center course, these studies are little help to WPAs looking to design programs that explicitly facilitate transfer. Moreover, these studies are retrospective accounts and do not reveal participants grappling with transfer issues in-situ. This study describes participants grappling with transfer issues in-the-moment and considers how programs facilitate or hinder transfer.

### **Participant Profiles**

Building on the participant information provided in Table 2 from chapter two, the following narrative profiles highlight the participants' teaching background and goals as they entered their first semester. These descriptions are based primarily on the first interview, but I included some details from later data collection when appropriate.

#### **Paul**

Homeschooled in grade school and high school, Paul attended a private Christian university where he met his now wife. While studying for his BA in English and psychology, Paul worked in a writing center for three years; however, he had little direction or structure at his undergraduate writing center, having to "figure out for myself like how to tutor and help people"

(I1). He immediately enrolled in the MA in English at River Valley University, identifying the literature concentration, intending to continue to a PhD in English literature. He chose River Valley because it was within a three-hour driving distance from his hometown and because he was offered a TAship. He clarified that his desire to pursue an MA and eventually PhD was based on his interest in teaching English:

I want to be a professor, but it's more because I like teaching than because I like research, even though I do like research, research is cool. It's more that I wanted to be a teacher and didn't want to teach high school, or like I didn't want to teach kids because I'm not really like a kid person. That was just a natural— it's like well, if I can't teach them, I guess I'll just teach college kids. (I1)

While Paul's expression of his goal to become a professor seems confident, he added that he saw the classroom teaching experience afforded to him in the second year of the MA as somewhat of a trial to see if he actually liked teaching: "Teaching next year gives me... it sort of lets me try [teaching] out, but in a way that if, like for some reason [I] just really, really hate it, I can just go in another direction" (I1). It was clear that Paul wanted to "try" teaching college students because he saw it as a clear path to a future, but he also views the MA as an opportunity for personal growth rather than simply a stepping stone to a career as an English professor: "No one likes being like 22 and having to decide what they want to do for the rest of their whole life, you know?... I really want to try to get that focus narrowed down in the next couple years and really put some real thought into it" (I1). Paul came into the program with the notion that he may continue to a PhD and eventually become a professor, but at the same time, he was not certain about this reasoning and career path.

**Lindsey**

A first-generation college student, Lindsey grew up moving frequently from town to town with her family around Appalachia. As a teenager, she worked at McDonald's and odd jobs to help pay for family expenses. She was recruited into and graduated from a tuition-free, private liberal arts work college, where she majored in English, with concentrations in writing and literature. She worked in a writing center for three years as an undergraduate and took a "gap year" between her BA and MA. During that year, she applied to MA programs and worked part-time. Although she applied to several schools, she selected River Valley because of the stipend and TA assignment to the writing center before classroom teaching. Her stated goals were to obtain a PhD in rhetoric and composition and eventually direct a writing center. She "love[s] being in higher ed" and has a "general passion for being in school forever" (I1), but she recognized the MA as a key step to meet her goal and start her on the path to figuring out her research interests and specializations. Because her goal was to obtain a PhD in rhetoric and composition and work as a WPA, like Paul, she saw the teaching experience in her second year as a key test to know if she was on the right career path: "I really hope that I do well with teaching... And I don't like figure out that I hate teaching or something... Really ultimately, I hope that I don't hate this by the end of this. That's like my number one goal: I don't hate everything" (I1). Lindsey started the program with a clear career goal, path, and a realistic understanding of the role of the MA in becoming a WPA.

**Grant**

After high school, Grant worked "odd jobs and was in the Army for a while" until enrolling as an undergraduate at River Valley at age 25. After four semesters, he dropped out, but, several years later, he enrolled at a different state university to study English for Secondary

Teachers. He taught English at a local high school for four years before enrolling in the MA at River Valley. He left the full-time high school teaching job to pursue an English MA because he felt age-related pressure to learn more, get a higher degree, and, at that time, the state law required public school teachers to start their master's degree within five years. He selected River Valley because of its proximity to his home. The TAship offered an opportunity for fully-funded personal and professional growth while taking a break from teaching high school. In terms of growing in his teaching, Grant explained: "I'm sort of looking forward to taking what skills I already have and turning those into a broader and better teaching ability" (I1). He further explained why teaching was a fit for him as a career: "I want to keep finding things that are satisfying, not just like on a personal level, but also that they're, they have some impact outside of me" (I1). In terms of scholarly interests, he described a "passion for rhetoric," and was strongly considering pursuing a PhD in rhetoric and composition, but also has a much neglected interest in creative writing.

Grant's family and economic background played into his identity and drive. He recognized that upon his graduation, he will be the only one in his family with a master's degree. Grant described being a nontraditional undergraduate as influential: "I was a nontraditional student...having had that huge experience between high school and getting to my degree was really, really awesome. Not only did I get to build a family clearly, but I, like, had...some experiences outside of academia and...I've always sort of used that as a motivation for why I wanted to do what I wanted to do" (I6). His family— wife and two high school-aged children—are important to him and factor highly into his decision-making processes: "What I want for my family and thinking about my family and the past has a lot to do with what I want to do with it [a

degree] now” (I2). Being able to support his family, financially and otherwise, was a primary factor as he considered his future career plans.

### **Jana**

After studying and working as a cosmetologist for four years after high school, Jana pursued her associate’s and ultimately her BA degree in English, with concentrations in writing and literature at a regional branch of a state university. She identifies as a first-generation college student who took financial responsibility for her undergraduate education. As a junior, she was recruited to work in a writing center, which led to undergraduate roles as both a fellow (embedded tutor) and teaching assistant. She pursued her MA immediately after completing her BA degree because she wanted career opportunities and to be the first in her family to have a graduate degree. Her past writing center experience pushed her to imagine herself in a career in “academia,” possibly writing centers, which she explained that “you have to have a master’s, at least to get in the door” (I1). She selected River Valley because it was the only MA in English program close to home and family. Specifically, she mentioned the desire to have more exposure to areas of English studies and literature than she did at her undergraduate institution. She saw the opportunity to study new areas and imagined herself as a future English teacher: “There’s so many genres that I’ve never had the chance to study. Like I never had the opportunity to take world literature classes, so here, you know, I have more of an opportunity to build a foundation and stuff that I would maybe be interested in teaching at some point” (I1). Jana’s mindset as she entered the program was fairly exploratory, recognizing if a career in “academia” was for her, then she would need the MA and to be exposed to more aspects of literature and pedagogy.



### **Steve**

Steve was a traditional undergraduate student at the same state university as Grant and Charlie, though they did not know each other before the MA. Steve enrolled in the MA immediately after completing his bachelor's degree. He majored in film (housed outside of an English department) and minored in both American Sign Language and creative writing. While his primary focus as an undergraduate was film, which included both production and analysis, he was drawn more to the film theory and analysis courses than the production courses. He decided to pursue his MA in English to expand upon his film and creative writing background because he thought it would be difficult to find a secure job related to his film degree. He chose River Valley so he could move back to his home city and attend the same institution as his partner. He was drawn to an English graduate degree "because the creative writing classes I had and the professors I had were so open and so welcom[ing]" (I1). He also saw the MA as an opportunity to reinvent himself as an "English" person rather than a film person: "[My] short term goal is to enjoy my time here, I think, and enjoy being with the English-minded people, as opposed to the film-minded people" (I1). He expressed an interest in teaching as a career: "I would like to teach, I think, as a profession... no younger than high school" (I1). He hoped the TAs hip would help him clarify if he actually wanted to teach as a profession: "I'd always thought...that that's what I wanted to do and having this opportunity to do it in a like a college— a collegiate setting— is very nice as well. So hopefully I'll get a little bit more clarification once I start doing that" (I1).

### **Charlie**

Charlie went to a "really traditional high school" where she had an English teacher who "was so amazing" and eventually inspired her to pursue a career as a writing teacher. Though she originally wanted to study engineering in college, because her father is an engineer, as an

undergraduate at the same state university as Steve and Grant, she majored in journalism and history. She did not pursue engineering because the school that offered her the most scholarships did not offer programs in engineering. Charlie's year-and-a-half of studying abroad in England, France, and Japan influenced her personal and professional trajectory. She met her partner (an American) in Japan and traveling piqued her interest in the culturally situated nature of writing and communication. She considered attending law school but decided to enroll in an MA in English focusing on rhetoric and composition after discussing her interest in teaching writing with her partner's former English professors. Although she applied to several institutions, she chose River Valley because of its proximity to her family and home city, its well-regarded rhetoric and composition faculty, and the hope that she would apply to its PhD in rhetoric and composition. Her stated goal was to pursue a PhD, so she could "have this passion [for writing] and it still be my career" (I1). During the year between her BA and MA, she worked at a community center teaching adolescents. She was "excited about learning to teach and write in new ways" (I1), and her clear mission was to teach: "I really want to be a teacher is the main thing. Like a lot. And I want to be able to teach adults or like new adults... And because I think there's a lot of um more developed ideas that you can get from, you know, people who have been through, like, primary and secondary education, and I really, really want to have that experience of working with those people and teaching" (I1). Charlie had certainly done her homework and reflected on her future and viewed the MA as a stepping stone to a career teaching writing.

While all the participants are clearly unique, there are commonalities in their descriptions of their interests and goals for the MA, particularly how they talk about the role of the TAs in their goals and the decision to enroll in an MA at River Valley. Charlie, Paul, Grant, and Lindsey all identified the possibility or certainty of a PhD in their future, while both Steve and Jana

strongly hinted at that goal. The five participants who had not had extensive teaching experience all stated that they see “teaching,” fairly generically, as their future career, while at the same time noting their desire to simply try out the role of teacher. While Grant entered the program with a degree in secondary education and significant high school teaching experience, he saw the TAship as an opportunity to teach in a new and challenging context and grow his skill set, with an eye toward a PhD. All of them mentioned that they would either not have enrolled or would have hesitated in enrolling without the TAship offer, primarily because of the cost of an unfunded MA, but also because they wanted the teaching experience. Notably, their eagerness to have teaching experience did not create initial resistance to their obligation to work in the writing center for a year— in fact, the general sense was gratefulness that their education was funded, mixed with a bit of relief they were not expected to teach in their first year, as Lindsey said: “I didn’t want to just have to be responsible for a bunch of students automatically” (I1).

Given these students’ goals, how then did the practicums, writing center, and composition program facilitate their teaching identities, skills, and practices? As a reminder, the trajectory of the four-semester MA with a TAship begins with two semesters of work as a consultant in the writing center, where nearly the entire staff consists of the first-year MA TA cohort. In the first semester, the participants took three courses: Writing Center Theory and Practice practicum, Introduction to English Studies, and another required or elective course of their choice. The second semester participants took various required and elective classes. In the second year (third and fourth semesters), the participants taught first-year composition (English 101 and 102). In their third semester, they took the required practicum, Teaching College Writing, and one or two other courses (see Appendix A for timeline). All participants completed

thirty credit hours during these four semesters, which includes seven required courses and three elective courses.

### **Cohort**

The writing center was a big presence in the first year. All the participants, except for Charlie, spent twenty hours per week working there.<sup>12</sup> With the writing center as a home base, the participants recognized their cohort as being one of the most important influences on their development in the first year, including their teaching development. Logistically, the writing center offered an office space—separate from the spaces used for consultations or administrators—in which the MA TAs could work, talk, and congregate (see Fig. 1 in chapter two). The amount of time spent in their office, along with shared course and work experiences, linked the participants and the rest of their cohort quickly into a social and support network. When reflecting on key moments in his first semester, Paul recalled: “I thought it was funny at the very beginning of the semester, whenever Steve<sup>13</sup> brought in that beach ball ((laughs)), and we all signed the beach ball” (I2). The beach ball was “a symbol of this semester at the writing center for us... that little beach ball that we’ve been keeping. I think a lot of the time the most memorable moments are just, like, the fun that we have in the backroom in between sessions” (I2). For Paul, the ball symbolizes the cohort’s bond. While they did not all form friendships, though Lindsey and Steve became close in the first year, they were more friends than colleagues.

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<sup>12</sup> Prior to starting the MA, Charlie applied for the opportunity to convert half of her teaching assistantship during the first year to an editorial assistantship in the English department. She worked ten hours per week in the writing center and 10 hours as an editorial assistant for a scholarly journal. It was beyond the scope of this study to consider how spending less time in the writing center and more time in another work environment affected Charlie. However, she did mention from time-to-time that she was aware that she spent less time in the office with her cohort and had fewer tutoring hours overall. She also made important connections with faculty and other students while editing the journal.

<sup>13</sup> When the participants refer to other participants or the institution, I simply use the pseudonym for clarity's sake.

However, the carefree nature of the beach ball contrasts with the real stress the participants felt as first-year graduate students and TAs. In his final interview, Steve made a point to describe the stress of being a master's student and TA and to remind me that he often put on a "brave face:" "Being a master's student can be a very depressing time, and I think it's worthy to say that, like, even if I'm jokey, and I'm trying to put a brave face on, it's been very hard sometimes. I am very thankful that the counseling center has been a tool for me, and that I've had someone to talk to in that aspect" (I6). It is important to note that social support cannot fulfill all emotional and mental health needs for graduate students; however, in the first year, the cohort seemed to provide a helpful sense of solidarity for many participants. Jana's perspective underscores the role of the cohort beyond simply having fun together, highlighting sharing experiences of classes and work:

I think the biggest [relationship] has probably been the peer relationship, just with like the people that I work with. 'Cause I'm in all my classes with them too, and it's been really nice to have that kind of support system... especially as things get more hectic and more stressful and everyone's kind of stressing about the same things, it's helpful for everyone to be stressing about the same thing. (I2)

The other participants echoed Jana's sense of the emotional support and camaraderie within their cohort.

Their relationships with their cohort are not only linked to participants' development as teachers, but they also played an important role in their overall adjustment to their TAs and classes. Jana references the two courses that the entire cohort was enrolled in during their first semester, the writing center practicum, which was only open to TAs in their cohort, and Introduction to English Studies. I observed one class meeting of each course, which were both

scheduled in the same room. For the practicum, the desks were arranged in a circle, while they were moved into rows facing the front for Introduction to English Studies. In Introduction to English Studies, there were only two non-MA TAs enrolled. They often relied on one another for formal and informal feedback on their own writing, frequently scheduling writing center appointments with one another during their off hours, which will be discussed in chapter five. They created a network with their peers, in which they could support one another and share experiences from their courses, writing center work, and adjustment to graduate school.

While all the participants saw their cohort as overwhelmingly positive, I would like to point out a drawback of the cohort model represented in this research context. Although the participants possessed diversity in terms of gender and class, a lack of diversity in terms of first languages, race, ethnicity, geographic region, age, and abilities may inhibit reflective thinking and exposure to new ideas, thus fostering white privilege in the writing center space (Barron and Grimm; Grimm; Grutsch McKinney, “Leaving”; Faison and Treviño). For instance, in the second interview, I asked the participants how aspects of their identity, broadly speaking, impacted writing center sessions. A shared experience from the participants who identified as white females were sessions in which they felt that writers challenged their knowledge and authority. The white male participants did not share similar stories, but vaguely recognized their privileged position as white men. The bias that women and marginalized groups and bodies experience should be discussed in training and education spaces, facilitated by writing center professionals, because it helps all consultants reflect and share experiences across differences and empathize with writers and peers. Except for this one example, the consultants struggled to see how their identities (aside from their graduate student identities) might affect a session.

Additionally, those who are not (or could not pass as) white, middle class, and under thirty could be inadvertently excluded from cohort bonding. Grant, who was 10-15 years older than most of his cohort, felt like an outsider at times. Although Grant said his experience with the cohort was “largely positive,” he also said: “I’ve had a little problem with identity in there I guess... I think because they know that I’m married with kids and stuff, and they’ll go out and do things and talk about it in there and I’m not a part of that conversation and... every once in a while that’s kind of been a little sad” (I2). While he felt excluded, he said that he understands. A lack of diversity within cohorts, and, by extension, writing center staff, inhibits the range of discussions related to identity and embodiment and simply a representation of inclusivity in writing center spaces (Valentine and Torres). While the cohort and writing center office created opportunities for the participants to bond over shared experiences, the cohort lacked diversity. Because this program generally attracts a similar profile of student, this fact underscores the need for MA programs and writing centers to not simply hope diversity comes to them. Instead, graduate programs and writing centers need proactive diversity agendas.

### **Writing Center Practicum**

During the first semester, the cohort facilitated one another’s teaching development by promoting active class discussions in the writing center practicum, which, in turn, encouraged informal conversations in their office space. The practicum’s content (see Appendix E) included readings from writing center and composition scholarship. The structure of each twice-a-week meeting included announcements, open discussion about day-to-day issues, and discussion of the theory/practice of the week’s readings. The writing assignments included a literacy and teaching narrative, analysis of observed writing center sessions, a self-reflection essay, and a research proposal. During the semester they took the practicum, the participants reported the strongest

feelings that the course was helpful for their tutoring. For instance, Lindsey, who worried that the practicum would be “review” (I1) because she was already quite confident in her identity and practices as a writing consultant, reflected at the end of the semester that “you got to talk out things and also like learn about what other people were doing in their sessions... The readings were useful...And, also, I just like reading about writing centers ‘cause I’m a nerd... I kind of wish that this had been the kind of training that I actually received in the beginning of writing center work for me” (I2). Hearing about what was happening in others’ sessions and the reading selection stood out to Lindsey. Paul, who also had prior writing center experience, but no prior training, pointed out the necessity of talking with other consultants: “I feel like taking [the practicum] and talking with other writing consultants and maybe just learning a little more pedagogy in general has helped me to kind of recenter like what I think it’s important to focus on in these sessions” (I2). The practicum’s effectiveness relied in part on the closeness of the cohort and the conversations in the practicum.

The practicum created models for how to talk informally about writing center sessions in the office space. Jana, who also had prior writing center experience for comparison, recalled the role of physical proximity to prompt conversations: “I mean just since I’m actually like in the back room working with everyone now, which wasn’t how it was at [my former writing center], we talk about it more, and so there’s a lot more opportunity for me to come back and be like ‘that appointment didn’t go very well’... There’s a lot of times where we all talk through stuff together” (I3). Although the participants reflected positively on the writing center practicum in interviews two and three during their first year, by the end of their program, several expressed skepticism of the necessity for two required practicums. The primary reason cited was that the practicums took away from other electives, such as creative writing or even more specialized



pedagogy courses that fit their interests. Additionally, after taking both practicums, some participants felt that there was an overlap in the content between the writing center practicum and the teaching composition practicum.

Interconnected with the role of peers facilitating development in and out of the practicum, the participants relied on mentors in the writing center. Charlie appreciated the regular attendance of mentors in the practicum. In addition to Evan (the writing center director who taught the course), the assistant directors (PhD students), and associate director (myself) attended select days and guest taught throughout the semester. Charlie recalled the presence of mentors in the learning space: “It’s really nice that we have like the class that like you’ll come to and then Evan teaches and that [the two assistant directors] come to” (I2). Though Charlie was the only participant to emphasize the role of access to mentors during her first year, reflecting in their final interview, comparing their writing center experience to their teaching experience, other participants recognized the role of access to mentors while working in the writing center. For example, Jana remembered a specific instance in the writing center in which she thought, “I don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t know how I’m gonna handle this,” when confronted with a writer working on a literature review. One of the assistant directors “came out and like gave me materials and was like, ‘here’s how to do this, here’s what you need to tell them’” (I6). Steve added, “Evan was great with, like, support because I had never done it before” (I6). Although the participants passively noted, or even took for granted, the presence of administrative support in the writing center while they were working in the writing center, retrospectively, it stood out to them.

### Coursework Outside the Practicum

Although practicums are technically part of a program's curriculum, their purpose is to support the work of the TAs. Both practicums at River Valley are required for TAs and count as a elective courses. In addition to the writing center practicum and Introduction to English Studies, the participants each chose one other course their first semester: Afrofuturism and African Science Fiction (Jana and Paul), Spatial Rhetorics (Lindsey, Grant, and Charlie), and Creative Writing I (Steve). In their second semester, they were enrolled in fewer shared classes: Contemporary Theories of Interpretation<sup>14</sup> (Paul, Lindsey, Grant, Steve, and Charlie), Shakespeare and Modernism (Jana and Grant), Creative Writing II (Steve and Grant), Rhetoric of Race in Medieval England (Paul, Lindsey, and Charlie), Composing Identities: Exploring Literacy, Culture, and Agency (Lindsey), George Eliot: Victorian Rebel (Paul and Jana), Victorian Travel Literature (Charlie), Studies in Chicago Renaissance (Steve). The curriculum primarily contributed to their development as teachers by providing opportunities to practice imagining themselves in the position of a teacher. Additionally, when PhD or undergraduate students took courses with the MAs, it provided the participants opportunities to reflect upon their positioning.

The Contemporary Theories course, which was a requirement and taken by five participants the semester before teaching, primarily stood out negatively to several of the participants. All except Charlie were critical, resistant, or ambivalent to the majority of the course readings and class discussions. As Grant politely put it, "I was not a huge fan... It was

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<sup>14</sup> The course catalog lists the course as "Contemporary Theories of Interpretation," but the instructor titled it "Contemporary Theory." The participants often referred to it as simply "Theory." This is a required course, but Jana elected to take the course in her second year.

kind of a, I wouldn't call it a love-hate relationship, but it was like maybe a like-hate relationship" (I3). While chapter six will explore the reasons for such resistances, including the text selection, reading difficulty, and the curriculum's role in their individual goals, at this point I want to emphasize the contrast between the frustration that Grant describes and four participants' descriptions on their work on the final assignment. Grant, Paul, Steve, and Lindsey saw value in an option for the final assignment, which was to create a syllabus for an undergraduate or graduate theory course. Paul admitted that creating a syllabus was yet "another challenging aspect" of the course, but that "I think I needed the practice putting together a syllabus, right? But I think I was a little disappointed in the final product. Just because, so I did mine on Marxism, and I feel like it just takes more time than I realize to put together a syllabus" (I3). The assignment allowed Paul to synthesize what he learned in the class and practice and perform the role of a college instructor. Similarly, as a former high school English teacher, Grant found the activity useful in considering a new teaching context. Paul's and Grant's reactions demonstrate that they were learning about writing in a new genre for a new role.

Steve and Lindsey used the syllabus assignment, much like Paul's focus on Marxism, to call upon a scholarly interest for a themed undergraduate theory course; this choice led them to make discoveries about teaching. For example, Steve, whose undergraduate major was film, created a course related to feminism and film, "and that was really helpful. I really liked that assignment and I got good feedback on it, so that was the one thing that was good about that class" (I3). Creating the syllabus sparked anticipation for teaching: "I was kind of dreading it (teaching) at first, but then the assignment from theory where I had to craft the syllabus, that really helps, and it made it more of an exciting thing that I'm curating this... the lesson plan and the syllabus, that learning environment is exciting" (I3). Steve discovered that the process of

creating a syllabus could be a creative process, in which he played the roles of curator and designer; this likely appealed to him because, by his second semester, he began to strongly identify as a creative writer.

In addition to pulling on content knowledge, such as feminism or Marxism, from outside of the theory context, the participants also pulled upon pedagogical knowledge— both explicit and tacit. Several brought in writing pedagogy. Lindsey, who maintained a passion for writing centers, wrote in her theory syllabus' rationale: "It is important to me that I conference with students at least once during the semester, especially before the larger projects are due... This is something I imagine doing next year in my [English] 101 courses as well." Lindsey's pedagogical strategy of conferencing connects to her unabashed valuing of writing center theory. Her tone at this moment is confident in her pedagogy, while she also suggests how she might transfer the practice into her real classroom the next semester. However, while the participants did draw on writing center pedagogy, they also drew on their own experiences as graduate students, essentially imitating courses, particularly graduate seminars. In their syllabi, all the participants assigned weekly responses and a final paper. All had high expectations of mastery of critical theory and genre conventions, although the participants all admitted to me that they did not feel mastery of theory or genre themselves (see Dryer and Hesse for a similar phenomenon). For instance, Steve's final assignment, which asks students to write about a film not included in the class syllabus states: "Like the mid-term, this thesis statement should be arguing something, putting the films we watched in conversation with your chosen theoretical ideas. These papers will be graded like a research paper, and should [be] looked at as such." Producing a university course syllabus, a new genre to all of these participants, required them to use prior knowledge to create teaching practices. Sometimes they enacted these practices uncritically.

Course content outside of the practicums can also be influential to pedagogical development; obvious examples include courses that counted as rhetoric and composition electives. Though there were few opportunities to take pedagogy-focused courses, aside from the practicums, in Lindsey's second semester, she enrolled in *Composing Identities*, which was taught by the writing center director, Evan. This class included pedagogy in its conversations, which positively influenced how Lindsey thought about student resistance in writing centers and composition classrooms:

I still don't think I have a clear like unders—maybe not understanding—but like vision of what [resistance] actually looks like, or what it should look like in a classroom, but that's something that's really stuck with me. Because I think you see that in consultations all the time, especially with like extra credit ones where they just come in and they're like 'yeah so like here you go' ((laughs)) ... You see resistance in that setting all the time, but you know I've never thought about it within an assignment or even in a classroom, I guess because I guess I just still have the idea of like a high school classroom in my head where everyone should be paying attention. (I3)

While the course was not aimed at development for the TAs, it was influential in introducing Lindsey to conversations in composition studies. Before the course, she only had experience in writing center studies. In this class, she began to connect key concepts across teaching contexts and see herself as both a writing center consultant and a future teacher. Before this course, she had not considered herself a composition teacher at all.

Two other examples of how the curriculum contributed to their teaching development include classes that enrolled other levels of students — some courses combined MA and undergraduate students and others enrolled both MA and PhD students. Jana described

undergraduates in one course approaching her in her role as a writing consultant: “In my Shakespeare class... there were people who, I think Grant and I both had this happen, where we worked with them in the writing center before, and so I think they felt comfortable talking to us about assignments and stuff” (I3). The participants navigated their roles as MA students and writing consultants in this classroom dynamic. Moreover, in response to a presentation assignment in the same course, Jana reflected on how doing the presentation pushed her to rethink her ethos as a teacher: “They looked at me the whole time like I was just a total jerk and like talking above their heads, and so that was an important— like I really need to think about who my audience is... It was challenging because I felt embarrassed at the time, but also it was important to like learn more about who I’m going to be talking” to as a teacher (I3). Jana’s experience as a graduate student interacting with undergraduates in a course context pushed her to consider her roles as a graduate student, writing consultant, and future instructor, particularly in terms of her ethos as an instructor.

While certain MA students were models for undergraduates, and students like Jana reflected on their roles as such, English PhD students served as models in shared MA/PhD classes. In Lindsey’s case, some contributions of the PhD student TAs in her Composing Identities class created a chasm between her identity as a first-generation, working-class student, her philosophy of teaching, which is rooted in writing center work, and her goal to pursue a PhD in rhetoric and composition. As a brief digression, this is one of the moments discussed in chapter two when the participants tried to withhold information. Lindsey did not want to name the PhD students because, I assume, it felt like unprofessional gossiping. Because she was trying to explain the situation without revealing their identities, her language is vague. Lindsey explained that “at certain points... it was very obvious that people had certain opinions about

first-generation and like working-class students that made it very like uncomfortable to like label myself as one of those” (I3). Because of her work in the writing center and her identity, her disagreements with the PhD students’ pedagogical approaches were both personal and philosophical:

The PhD students and the way they talk about students. [It] just reinforces the fact that these [first-year composition students] are people. We should talk to them as people... It just, it kind of reinforces why I think writing centers are important, which is that individual connection with someone on campus, where a lot of these students don’t get that at all. Because when people talk about the conferences and how they “don’t want to do them,” and “it’s so hard to have like ten minutes with a student.” I’m like, “no, it’s not!” That’s something that’s super important in my pedagogy. Whenever I go teach next year, like I’m going to conference with students because otherwise how are you going to teach people you don’t know? (I3)

Lindsey’s experience with these PhD students throughout her second semester (several were also in the Contemporary Theories course) was a turning point in her future goals and teacherly identity development. Though she continued to see how her well-developed writing center values might apply in classroom teaching, she felt frustrated that not all composition instructors share her beliefs about the importance of understanding and valuing students’ varied experiences.

Simultaneously, these encounters contributed to Lindsey’s decision to abandon her goal of pursuing a PhD, but to maintain a goal to work in writing centers or a writing-related career:

I legitimately just don’t want to be ingrained in this institution, *in like that kind of role...* I think that being around a lot more PhD students probably affected that... It’s just a completely different thing than what I expect to be as a PhD student or a professor or

whatever. And that doesn't seem to be the norm and *I'm just not really into playing the role like past this right now*. Like I want to finish my master's and go do something else, even if that is work in a writing center. Or do something like copywriting or random nonsense that's not attached to academia. But like I just don't feel, I don't feel a need to do a PhD. I don't think that it's the best thing for my life right now and I don't really want to do it ((laughs)). (I3, emphasis added)

For some context, at the end of her first semester, Lindsey had expressed feelings of not wanting to continue to a PhD because she was feeling like an outsider, stating that “academia has always been my comfort zone, but it feels less like a comfort zone these days” (I2). However, her experience with PhD students in her Composing Identities class seemed to cement her feelings that not only did she not belong, but she also did not want to belong, because she would have to change.

Unfortunately for the field of rhetoric and composition, at least for the foreseeable future, Lindsey will not be contributing her perspectives as a PhD student. She just could not imagine herself taking on the role of a PhD student, and eventually professor, who seems distanced from student experiences. I am not saying that the two PhD students she described represent all PhD students (nor would Lindsey), nor am I saying that Lindsey's recollection of their perspectives fully represents their attitudes toward students. This is how she interpreted the situation and how it affected her. Regardless, the words, actions, and identities of PhD students, faculty, and more advanced MAs do matter and influence how MAs imagine themselves and their futures.

Observing and imitating models is often an important aspect of new identity development and, in this case, rejection (Weidman et al.; Thornton and Nardi). In Lindsey's second year, she began to gain some perspective on her future goals beyond writing centers or “random nonsense that is



not attached to academia.” She developed a passion for classroom teaching equal to or surpassing her investment in writing center work. She ended the program conducting a national search to secure a full-time position as a composition instructor, professional writing consultant, or writing center administrator, roles that she presumed would not require her to set aside her identity or values of recognizing student experiences.

### **Teaching Practices in the Writing Center**

Now that I have covered the participants’ incoming goals and how their cohort, practicum, and curriculum contributed to their development as teachers in the first year, this next section describes their teaching practices in the writing center. Two concepts emerged as significant after interviewing the participants over the course of their year in the writing center and reviewing twelve video-recorded sessions. First, like Lindsey’s description of what she values in writing center pedagogy, the participants valued developing relationships with writers. Second, related to developing relationships, was a sense that sessions should be student-centered. In talking with the participants and analyzing their sessions, what I call “radically student-centered” attitudes emerged. These attitudes value writer self-direction as the primary marker of session success. Finally, the participants’ sense of their authority and positioning was often an unspoken force driving their decisions in sessions.

The tutoring manual that the participants read for the writing center practicum course, *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*, states: “As a writing center tutor, you’ll create an atmosphere of trust for the writers who seek your help... The rapport that you can create with writers is one of your best assets as a tutor” (Gillespie and Lerner 8). While the goal of building trust is typically framed for the writers’ sake, the participants showed that they valued developing relationships not just for the writers’ sake, but for their own sake in feeling like they

were an effective tutor, increasing their confidence as a new consultant, and showing genuine interest. The participants used recurring appointments with writers to describe the importance of developing relationships. Thinking about two writers in particular, Jana explained that she likes “getting to know writers on a deeper level” and “learning about where people’s writing came from” (I2). She first recognized the importance of this in undergraduate positions as a TA and fellow. In recounting her work with a multilingual graduate student, Jana shows her investment in the needs of the writer and the importance of building the relationship gradually. In providing an example of how such relationships open up opportunities to discuss a range of language issues, Jana explained that “one day we spent a very long time trying to figure out what ‘people of color’ meant and if she was a person of color, and so, it was just really like not even related to writing sometimes” (I2). Jana’s description shows that, through recurring appointments, consultants can develop trust with writers and better individualize the sessions to their needs.

A second benefit of recurring appointments, specifically for new consultants, is that recurring appointments allowed them to gauge their growth as a tutor through the writers’ growth. While Jana noted that “I liked seeing how her writing progressed” (I2), Charlie explained further: “I think that that’s been really good for me to like see how they’re progressing as like I’m progressing. So that really stands out to me in terms of like how I’m trying to grow as a writing teacher, writing center tutor” (I2). Steve too felt that repeat appointments “help kind of like, justify me and like the work that I’m doing” (I2). For new consultants, as Charlie and Steve are, the opportunity to work with a writer over several weeks or a semester is a unique opportunity to deepen tutoring skills and perhaps take risks. Developing relationships with writers allows consultants to both individualize sessions to writers’ needs and, as they continue this process over several appointments, use the writers’ responses to their pedagogy to adapt

their own choices. Ideally, the participants wanted to see growth and change in writers to parallel their narratives of learning to tutor.

The participants' descriptions of developing relationships with writers were not limited to only repeat appointments. Both Steve's and Lindsey's relationship-building technique hinged on what they called making a "personal connection" early in appointments. Steve reflected on one of his recorded sessions: "What I strive to do... is to make that personal connection. Preferably right at the top, just to kind of add to the sense of camaraderie and to work better together" (I3). Lindsey affirmed that "the personal connection is really important in me, which is why I start out consultations like with conversation first, rather than like 'whatcha' talkin' about in this paper?'" (I1). Even, and especially, when Lindsey met with a writer for the first time, she strived to learn about the writer and gain their trust before discussing the specific reason for the visit. Lindsey and Steve's beliefs echo Gillespie and Lerner's assertion that "many [writers] come with apprehensions and vulnerabilities... So taking a few minutes to get to know the writers is really important. Even if you only have a short time to work together, it's important to set a collegial, congenial, friendly tone during those crucial first minutes" (28). Both Steve and Lindsey strived to help the writer feel comfortable in the writing center space and with themselves as facilitative writing center tutors, rather than authoritative writing experts.

While Grant also discussed valuing relationships, he saw writers' trust of him *as the expert* as key to a productive session: "I'm sort of gunning for the relationship all the time, and that, that definitely applies to the classroom, but it's less, I have less opportunity in the writing center, especially if it's our first meeting... but I'm trying to, I'm trying to make sure they trust me, not only through like my mannerisms but my content knowledge" (I2). Grant's emphasis on "content knowledge" reflects his unease with how he perceived writing center theory to value

“peer” tutoring above an expert-novice model (Bruffee; Carino; Trimbur). Because his age, education, and high school teaching experience set him apart from the novice writers visiting the center, he frequently insisted that he saw himself as an expert writing teacher and not a peer. Grant’s straightforward description of why and how he develops trust quickly and consistently reveals the often-unspoken power dynamic that the other participants, including Steve and Lindsey, frequently ignored, hid, or tried to diffuse (see Carino and Rollins et al.). Participants like Lindsey or Steve may not realize or want to admit that developing relationships does not erase hierarchy in sessions.

Of the twelve writing center recordings I collected, five of them were with repeat writers. Jana’s session, recorded in the fall semester, agrees with the participants’ perspective that a close relationship can enhance the effectiveness of sessions. When a writer trusts the consultant, the consultant feels more comfortable and confident and vice versa. Yet Jana’s session also demonstrates how consultants more easily move among roles such as collaborator, expert, confidant, near-peer, and cheerleader when they are familiar with a writer, ultimately assisting the writer toward greater agency. Several of the recorded sessions I analyzed revealed the consultants having difficulty moving among multiple roles; they stuck either with expert or peer, even when it was not effective. Jana’s session was a follow-up with Jessica,<sup>15</sup> a nontraditional student taking a Literature of the Holocaust class. Jana opens with the friendly dialogue described by Steve and Lindsey, and Jessica immediately picks back up a conversation from the previous meeting, “Okay. I feel like I’ve gotten a little more cohesive thinking.” Jana responds “Okay,” and Jessica launches into a stream-of-consciousness monologue, attempting to recap

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<sup>15</sup> Jessica is a pseudonym. All the writers participating in recorded sessions signed Informed Consent documents for participation in the study.

Jana on her thinking process for developing a thesis statement that ties together multiple literary works. Jana seems unfazed. She knows that although Jessica's first visit to the writing center was for extra credit, she has returned because she liked the experience of working with Jana.

According to Jana, Jessica "just feels like she can't write without passing it through someone first. Like, she doesn't trust her own ideas and she's just not confident in her writing" (I2). Jana patiently backchannels Jessica with "okay," "right," and "mhm" and takes notes. Jessica's speech seems to end with Jessica implying: "See my thought process there?" Jana responds with what I call "echoing," which is when the consultant or teacher simply repeats back something the writer has said in an attempt to validate or draw attention to a specific point. Jana's echoing, in this case, seemed to be an attempt to validate Jessica's ideas and help identify key aspects of Jessica's thinking. Jana wanted to move Jessica toward communicating a coherent thesis around her ideas, which Jana seems to know is the goal of the session, though it had not been stated explicitly. However, her echoing launches Jessica into more rambling.

When the echoing seems to fail at reining in Jessica, Jana tries being more direct, which opens a more collaborative dialogue:

Jana: Okay good! Yeah, I mean kind of what I'm seeing right now is that both of these pieces here could be combined and, like...

Jessica: Kind of as my thesis

Jana: and can be molded into a thesis so: "They all exist in the present, but are so shaped and constricted by history that they can't really live in the now." Um, their

Jessica: Collective traumatic past

Jana: Their collective traumatic past have kept them

Jessica: Their history

Jana: They're rooted in the now. It's impossible for them to move out of that space. And then you could tie in that point about how it is shaped by, you know, it's memories, it's physical objects, it's you know they're, are there are specific links to the past that are keeping um from moving past? Their histories, so their history is always being filtered through the voices of the dead. Right? 'Cause the prompt specifically uses that kind of language or the dead continue to speak to us.

Jana continues to try to collaborate toward constructing a thesis, but Jessica seems to be in a circular thought pattern, unable to meet Jana. At this point, Jana shifts into more of an expert in literary analysis to scaffold Jessica's thinking: "So, if you're going to start your thesis by framing it with that type of question, then the rest of your thesis needs to give some kind of answer that you plan to address throughout the paper. So, how do you see these characters and these authors assimilating that history into the present that they're telling in their stories?" While Jana is still collaborating and validating Jessica, her statement here provides some transparency for why she was trying to move Jessica in a certain direction, pointedly describing the genre of a literary analysis. Jana later employs more scaffolding and references the paper Jessica wrote before this one. Jessica admits she feels frustrated that her current paper is more difficult than her last, which prompts Jana again to change her approach. She tries an even more directive tactic, dictating a thesis that Jessica does not seem to grasp.

When her directiveness fails, Jana then sets aside the goal of generating the thesis statement in the session, because she recognizes that Jessica is overwhelmed. Jana instead initiates a conversation about the writing process. Jana suggests: "It might be helpful for you at this moment to set aside the idea of a thesis and just start kind of crafting your argument in terms of like what you want in your body paragraphs." Jessica admits she feels her "mind is just all

over the place.” Jana then shares her experience composing a conference paper for her Introduction to English Studies course, which she presented the night before: “I had to do the same thing where it was so big and I was trying to make so many arguments that I just had to write down the individual arguments and then find a way to connect them.” The session ends with Jana encouraging Jessica not to “put a ton of undue pressure on yourself just because the last paper came easy,” and Jessica expresses her appreciation for Jana’s help.

When I first watched this session, I saw Jana holding back too much at the beginning, unwilling to curb Jessica’s ramblings. However, after speaking with Jana about her pedagogical motives in the second interview, it is clear that Jana’s knowledge of Jessica’s relationship to writing made her hold back a bit in dictating or directing the session’s agenda. She was careful not to squash Jessica’s passion for her ideas and the topic. Jana also wanted to facilitate feelings of academic belonging in Jessica: “I do feel like I need to be really encouraging and like make her feel like she fits in in academia still. Because I think that’s something that she kind of worries about but I think it changes definitely how she thinks about writing, cause she feels like she’s mentioned feeling like she’s been left behind” (I2). While at moments the session seemed to get off track, the session ended with perhaps the message that Jessica did not realize she needed: that she can do this. Moreover, Jana moves from a sounding board, to a directive tutor, to an experienced and sympathetic peer.

Lindsey and Grant self-described themselves as opposite types of consultants. Lindsey consistently saw herself as the peer tutor; Grant saw himself as the expert writing teacher. Like Jana, both have examples of sessions with repeat writers where they purposefully move between various positions within their roles to scaffold the writer’s knowledge. In Grant’s session, the writer is trying to formulate a thesis about Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Grant, who is not familiar

with *The Tempest*, shifts between a fairly stock lecture about thesis statements and asking facilitative questions with the goal to use his knowledge of genre to scaffold the writer's knowledge of the play. Here is an excerpt from his lesson on thesis statements, which leads to a moment of collaboration:

Grant: Okay, awesome. So I'll tell you a strategy I've used in order to create a thesis and ((writer looks at Grant)) and the idea is, and I'll show you kind of an example here (okay), the idea is that you want to be, you want to be narrow and sort of what you're focusing on, but also, at the same time, and this is a little confusing, I'll make sure you understand, but you also want to sort of be broad at the same time, which allows you to talk about all sorts of different things that still support that thesis (okay) [...] so, I'm, like, if you were going to take that another argument on, say, school uniforms. Um, so, if you said "school uniforms should not be required," okay, that's a thesis statement, right? (mhm) Um tell me like really quickly how you would set up that argument, like what would you do to support that?

Writer: Would you make kind of like three main points about—

Grant: You certainly could, yeah

Writer: Why they shouldn't be

Grant: Yeah what you end up doing, even though that is pretty narrow, we're only talking about school uniforms, you end up having this list feel to your paper, so reason one, reason two, reason three, however many reasons you come up with and the only thing that connects those is that you believe that they are not cool, right? Um, another way to approach it, and this is where you are narrow, but also broad, you can include what I call



an abstract, which is, uh “school uniforms create a negative school culture” [...] And that's kind of a technique I've used to create thesis statements [...]

Writer: Right, right, um, yeah, 'cause I think I what I was going off of here was, like, [Caliban's] behavior (mhm), um about how at first he seems, um look I guess I, at first started out, he seems sensitive and eloquent, um, because he seems like he's the innocent one at first, um and then his behavior changes because he becomes brutal wanting to murder Prospero.

Grant: Gotcha, so really it's this progression of character change? (Yeah) Is that what you're trying to focus on?

While Grant is clearly most comfortable in the role of an expert teacher, within this role he takes time to lead the writer to her own realizations. As is evident in this session excerpt, he does tend to lecture to the detriment of allowing the writer to speak and work through her understanding of the play and thesis statements.

However, Grant's role in slowly leading a student writer to find her own answers is a new pedagogical concept to him. In reflecting on what he learned from his writing center work, Grant iterated frequently that he learned that working with student writers one-on-one necessitated significant time, time that, as a high school teacher, he never had or felt he needed. Teaching also involves helping students at often-minute levels of the writing process: “I remember starting off in [the writing center] and being really apprehensive about what in the world I was going to talk to these people about for an hour. And slowing that whole process down, really getting into that work and being able to talk about individual pieces of the paper... really changed how I approached those [101 or 102 teacher-student] conferences” (I6). His writing center work affected how he approached and reflected on conference time the second year as a classroom

instructor: “And I still don’t give an hour in conferences to my 101 and 102 students, but I can give them 15 minutes now and feel like that’s probably not enough time” (I6). While Grant saw his role as a consultant primarily through the lens of his identity as an English teacher, the expectation of working with a student writer for 50 minutes, along with his training in writing center theories, helped him expand his notion of teaching to include extended one-on-one interactions with students in the middle of their writing processes.

In Lindsey’s spring semester session, she worked with a writer whom she has worked with several times before on a scholarship essay. She uses her knowledge of the writer, gained through working with her on other scholarship essays, to propose that she include or exclude aspects of her life in the personal statement. Lindsey reflected: “I’ve worked with her like a bajillion times... so, like I was really comfortable and like I knew her well enough to be like ‘why don’t you talk about this in your personal statement?’” (Lindsey I3). Jana’s, Lindsey’s, and Grant’s sessions demonstrate that developing relationships with writers does not fit neatly into defined roles such as “peer” and “expert.” Consultants may work within and beyond their self-concepts of tutor when they feel that the student trusts them and they are familiar with the student’s goals.

On the other end of the spectrum, friendliness or other gestures toward the goal of seeming approachable did not always correspond with collaboration or effective tutoring. For example, Steve’s session, recorded in the fall semester, includes plenty of small talk and friendliness, but not much collaboration or moving the writer forward in her process. The session is with a first-year MA student in the math department, Tina, who was required to visit to work on a philosophy of teaching statement as part of her teaching practicum. Although their institutional positioning is similar, and established quickly in the appointment, Steve approaches

the session not as a near-peer, but as an attempt at being a friendly writing expert. The session jerks between “personal connection” talk (and laughing) and Steve’s “recommendations.” It makes sense that some of the session would be spent discussing commonalities between Tina’s and Steve’s experiences. Topics include: how she ended up as an MA student in math (she already did an MA in Music; math is her other passion), what course she’s teaching now (College Algebra), and where she attended college. Instead of relegating these conversations to either the purpose of making the writer comfortable or leveraging them to help with her writing, Steve often falls into simply conversing, as with this exchange about the seriousness of Tina’s practicum professor, when he just states what comes to his mind:

Steve: ... I think what you said earlier about him kind of grading this lax-ly is correct (yeah) because this is so personal (yeah) ((Steve writes on notepad))

Tina: This whole class, like (pause) is basically it is what we do in class is helping us as a teacher, but as far as assignments, it’s very chill (yeah). He knows that we’re working hard in all the other classes. This is is just to kind of keep

Steve: M-A-T isn’t an acronym, right? It’s just the first few letters of ‘math,’ right? (yeah) I know in English it’s like E-N-G. Which every

Tina: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. MAT is just Math. It just has to be three letters (mhm)

Steve: So I think, um, the big thing that I’m kind of recommending here is to kind of have something in the beginning that you can kind of thread through the paper (uhhuh) so, I think giving your, like, teaching philosophy (mhm) up at the front and then kind of explaining in the middle [how your experience in MAT]

W: [What that looks like]

Instead of positioning himself as a fellow peer also learning to teach, curious about another discipline's approach to the same situation, he tries to be a mildly interested observer, indicated by his frequently writing notes on his notepad, taking dramatic sips from his mug, and announcing his "recommendations." While he may switch among the roles of commiserator and expert to try to develop a relationship with the writer, neither seem aimed at the purpose of moving the writer forward in her writing process. Steve admitted that his lack of confidence about his knowledge and authority played a role in how he positions himself in sessions generally; this session seems to be no exception.

In both their sessions and interviews, several participants expressed the belief that sessions should be student-centered. A positive and effective example of this perspective is Jana's avoidance of control in the session with Jessica. In interviews, Paul, Jana, and Charlie verbalized their underlying philosophy:

Paul: I try to keep it very focused on like what that particular student needs out of me (I2).

Jana: I try to meet the student where they are as much as possible. And I think that that's reflected in these [sessions]... I try to be hands-off as much as possible, which is not always possible, but I like to just listen to the writer talk (I3).

Charlie: I think dialogue is part of like my pedagogy I would say. And, like, being patient and listening and waiting for a writer to make a decision, instead of like forcing a decision on a writer and that was a lot easier with the first session, cause I worked with, [a writer] like, I don't know, like, half a dozen times before that (I3).

Paul, Jana, and Charlie want students to take (or maintain) ownership of their writing. They seem to be aware of the potential for tutors to take too much control over the session's agenda.

Moreover, these attitudes reflect common notions in writing centers that suggest that a consultant's only goal is to help writers meet their goals.

These attitudes are well-meaning, and to those familiar with writing center theory, they may sound tediously commonplace. Though not assigned for the participants' writing center practicum course, Jeff Brooks' short 1991 *Writing Lab Newsletter* article "Minimalist Tutoring: Making Students Do All the Work" is a popular article for tutor training and is often cited as the prime example of "nondirective," or facilitative, tutoring technique. Brooks urges tutors to avoid the "trap" of becoming an editor and, instead, simply work to keep a student on task: "The student, not the tutor, should 'own' the paper and take full responsibility for it. The tutor should take on a secondary role, serving mainly to keep the student focused on his own writing" (2). Brooks' vision is that of a student who is either a self-directed learner or can be pushed to become self-directed; all that is needed is time and a patient ear. In addition, little expertise about writing is needed to "tutor" effectively.

While today many writing center professionals view Brooks as an extreme representation of "hands off" tutoring, (Shamoon and Burns; Corbett, "Tutoring Style"; Brooks et al.), many popular writing center texts still echo his maxims, including texts assigned in the participants' practicum. Although their overall advice closely follows Brooks' language, Gillespie and Lerner offer an extended comparison of the "continuum" (25) of tutors and editors. At the same time, they maintain: "We advise you to tutor, not to edit; after all, it's the writer whose name is going on that paper, who's paying for those credits, who'll be getting the grade" (25-26) and "You need to respect writers' need to discover — with your help — the information they need to clarify a point or expand an argument" (28). Furthermore, Evan, the writing center director, has a particular interest in student writer agency; the topic for the September 28, 2017 class session

was “Agency and Student Writing.” In addition to a chapter from Gillespie and Lerner, the class read selections from Richard Haswell and Janis Haswell’s *Hospitality and Authoring: An Essay for the English Profession*, in which they urge writing teachers to view teaching as an act of traditional hospitality and welcoming of student writers (authors). They also read selections from Bronwyn T. Williams’ *Literacy Practices and Perceptions of Agency: Composing Identities*. Williams argues that emotions mediate experiences and memories, including those of reading and writing. He draws on writing centers for positive examples to show how teachers might help students “approach literacy practices with a sense of agency and the ability to face and overcome challenges” (33). To make the point that teachers should work to create positive associations with writing, he again brings in writing center practice: “While the consultant will certainly point to questions or concerns about the writing, the student has a great deal of agency to frame and direct the appointment. There is no grade given, the consultant’s goal is to help address the student’s concerns about writing” (34). While most, if not all, students of writing center theory and practice are exposed to the concept of writer agency, the students in this particular course were encouraged to think deeply about writers’ experiences of agency in sessions.

All of these perspectives are from reputable sources and all (except Brooks) are careful not to argue that students only need a generalist facilitator. For instance, Gillespie and Lerner acknowledge that disciplinary and genre knowledge is useful for knowing which questions to ask (27), and Williams also outlines the consultant’s role in pointing the writer to strategies for approaching future writing situations (34). Yet the participants in this study struggled with such nuances in practice. Their unapologetically student-centered attitudes created issues when students clearly needed expertise or direction. When the participants focused, to a detriment, on students’ stated needs, it became what I deem “radically student-centered.” Negative

consequences included a preference for working with students who were self-directed and blaming students' lack of self-direction for unproductive sessions. What they identified as being student-centered at times absolved them of their responsibility to provide perspective and guidance as someone with more knowledge of writing and rhetoric.

The first example of the negative consequences of this understanding of student-centered pedagogy is Charlie's spring session with Eli. After establishing that Eli was visiting the writing center for an English 102 research paper because his professor "told us to come here for help" (Eli), and that he "just wanted to go over like grammar errors and like verb usage and stuff," Charlie takes these statements as expressions of the students' goals, which were coded to her as apathy. She does not prod for further information about his assignment or writing process. She immediately asks if he has been to the writing center before, and he responds affirmatively. Their conversation proceeds:

Charlie: And you typically read the paper out loud?

Eli: Uh one time I did, and then one time he just went over it.

Charlie: What do you find more helpful?

Eli: Uh it's up to you. Either one. I can do either one.

Charlie: Really it doesn't matter to me, so, it's whatever you think is more helpful.

Eli: Uh we can both go over it I guess. ((Pushes paper in between them)) [Like maybe]

Charlie: [Okay, like]

Silently read it (yeah) or do you want me to read it out loud? Okay

Although it is a bit unclear from my perspective what Eli is expressing, what is clear is that Charlie wants Eli to take control and decide how the session will proceed. She gets slightly frustrated when he does not choose, and the session proceeds with her reading silently and

commenting aloud, which greatly reduces the writer's ability to contribute. While reading his paper, she stopped periodically to ask questions and offer advice, but, as the silent reader, she has control over the session's direction. In writing center practice, usually either the writer or the consultant reads aloud during a session (Gillespie and Lerner 30). Gillespie and Lerner recommend that writers read aloud to maintain "control" and authority and encourage the consultant to actively listen (30). Though, at times, the consultant reading aloud can be useful to help the writer hear his or her own writing. Reading aloud also simply makes sessions more interactive and assists the writer in identifying proofreading errors, questionable logic, and/or inconsistencies. However, Charlie is quick to abandon this practice in the session because it came into conflict with one idea about student agency.

A missing aspect of the beginning of this session is any discussion of a *realistic* agenda. Though Charlie takes the first step to prompt Eli to state his concerns, which were "grammar errors and like verb usage and stuff," she does not follow up to understand why these are his concerns or to prod if he might have other concerns about the assignment or genre. Thomas Newkirk argues in "The First Five Minutes," one of the texts read in the participants' writing center practicum, that "unless a commonly-agreed-upon agenda is established, a conference can run on aimlessly and leave both participants with the justifiable feeling that they have wasted time" (303). Although Newkirk is writing in the context of student-teacher conferences, the importance of agenda-setting is just as, if not more, important in writing center sessions in which the consultant presumably has very little knowledge of the assignment or writer. Charlie does not ask to review the assignment prompt and makes several assumptions about Eli and his writing. As the session proceeds, Charlie does not focus on grammar. Instead, she provides her opinions on how to improve the paper, for example: "I would say that with quotes, sometimes it's helpful



to um like introduce the quote like in the sentence like saying ‘according to so and so, (okay) a common myth,’ but I think a lot of these quotes too you could put in your own words, and still cite it.” To her credit, she asks plenty of facilitative and audience-focused questions, such as “What are you trying to say there, what is it that they miss out on slash take too much of?”

Charlie seems to have assumed that Eli did not want to or could not be a collaborator, nor did he genuinely want to be there because he was required to attend and did not prefer reading aloud.

The way she proceeded with the session did not allow him to gain much of this agency back.

In reflecting on the session in interview three, Charlie and I had a fairly candid conversation about my concerns, mostly related to the silent treatment of the paper. In having the conversation, I discovered other reasons for Charlie’s actions, including her feelings of burnout in her second semester in the writing center and uncertainties about the practice of reading aloud in the writing center: She said initially that:

I feel fine about my choices because, maybe I should have been pushier, but I just think that sometimes if I, like, get the feeling that a writer doesn’t really want to do something or that’s not what they’re here for... ultimately, it’s not me as a writer and it’s not my paper, so, I want to give them the agency to say like even if it’s just through body language... “I don’t want to do that.” (I3)

Charlie’s explanation echoes Gillespie and Lerner’s admonishment that the writing is the student’s, not the tutors. However, in adhering to the principle, Charlie was unsure what her role was in circumstances where the writer displayed little agency. Charlie thought it was not her responsibility to “push” the writer into engaging in the session, so she was left with few other options. I linked Charlie back to an earlier comment she made in the interview about “appreciat[ing] dialogue in sessions,” (I3) and asked her how she reconciled that value with her

actions in Eli's session. She then admitted that she probably should have encouraged Eli to read aloud or offered herself to read aloud. Her hesitation included her history of working with children (and in her own experience as a student), not wanting to shame students by requiring they read aloud, and her growing frustration with writers only visiting because of a requirement. Her concerns about the implications of always pushing for reading aloud are absolutely warranted (see Block), but instead of using such concerns as an opportunity for reflective practice or discussing them with peers or mentors, she was caught in a loop of confusion and frustration each time the situation arose. My point here is that the consultants sometimes used the "student-centered" mantra as a way to cope with their insecurities as new consultants (e.g. perhaps they did not have the answers). Especially when working with writers who did not take immediate control, they felt less of a responsibility to figure out how to help the writer.

A second example of the pitfalls of the "radically student-centered" attitude is from Jana's spring session with a multilingual graduate student who was writing a blog, with whom she had worked several times. I noticed that in the writer's paper, she used the word "sarcastic," when she likely meant "ironic." Yet Jana did not correct her. The exchange in the session goes like this:

Writer: ((reading)) "I found it sarcastic that they targeted men to work on." And here it's another argument maybe. "I also found sarcastic that they targeted men to work with" to, ((typing)) um, define masculinity? Should I mention that it was presented in the, in the... you know it was mentioned in the presentation. I mean it was presentation was /?/ itself

Jana: Yeah uh yes you might say "I also found it sarcastic that the presentation targeted," no sorry.

Writer: That it targeted men to work with redefining masculinity in this presentation or according to this presentation ((writer types)) or maybe according to these speakers something like that?

In discussing this moment with Jana, I discovered that she had already talked to the writer about this word choice in a previous appointment. The writer had been adamant that she meant sarcastic, not ironic. Therefore, Jana did not again suggest she change it. Jana went on to explain that she hesitated to be “really directive,” although she felt that the writer wanted her to be at times. Her hesitation came from not wanting to appropriate the writer’s language: “I’ve noticed places before where she’s used words that don’t, I don’t think translate to English as well as she thinks that they do... She actually speaks several languages, but I don’t want to push her too far out of her voice and— her— the way she would normally say things for the sake of sounding the way I think it should sound, right? (I3). Jana’s attitude here is again one that seems radically student-centered. In this case, the writer is both extremely self-directed and wanting an opinion of a native English speaker. Jana is leaning on an interpretation of advice from writing center scholarship to not dictate or appropriate the writer (such as Servino’s “Avoiding Appropriation”), but not thinking critically about the consequences and “grey areas” of following this guideline (Rafoth 46-47). While it is a small moment, it is indicative of pushing the notion of “student-centeredness” to an extreme that might do students a disservice, withholding from them the knowledge that they may need.

### **Readiness for New Teacherly Identities**

While all the participants seemed to embrace their identities and practices as consultants in the writing center for the ten months they worked there, for most of them, being a writing center consultant was a way station on the journey to their goal of classroom teaching. Indicators

of burnout increased in the second semester recorded sessions, including leaning too heavily on the radically student-centered attitude or, ironically, disregarding student input (e.g. skipping reviewing the assignment or discussing a session agenda). Steve offhandedly noted that his second-semester sessions seemed shorter, especially “extra credit people this semester, where they came in and they didn’t want to spend a whole lot of time there” (I3). When I mentioned to Steve that he dominated his recorded spring session with corrections and barely let the writer talk, he admitted that “some of that could have been wear like, wearing me down of my work in the writing center and kind of becoming burnt out with it a little bit” (I3). As we talked more, it became clear that he was embarrassed by my analysis of his session because he had developed a bad habit that he was unaware of: “I have a lot of self-doubt about how I’m going to be as a teacher and how I was as a consultant. So, I’m hoping that it doesn’t feel like I’m just like ‘you should do it this way and there’s no other way around it.’ Because I do kind of want to foster this environment with experimentation with writing” (I3). Understandably, the consultants felt burnout after spending twenty hours a week every week for nearly ten months doing consultations. Twenty hours may simply be too much—the 2016-17 Writing Center Research Project Survey reported that only about 6% of all writing tutors worked twenty hours a week or more. Moreover, while support existed for the consultants in their second semester from peers and administrators, there was no formal professional development akin to a practicum, so they may have unconsciously assumed there was nothing significant for them to improve upon. A short and terminate appointment to the writing center (and classroom teaching likewise) risks developing consultants who start eager and who perform generally well, but tend to fall into uncritical patterns and have little incentive to progress.

The participants all stated they were looking forward to their upcoming classroom teaching assignments, which started in the fall semester of their second year. Charlie expressed that “I am looking forward to having the chance to teach and like seeing what I really need to work on in terms of teaching” (I3). Steve, having recently discovered that he was selected to teach creative writing in the upcoming spring semester (the fourth semester) instead of 102, was eager for that specific role, but also “just being in front of the classroom” (I3). Both Jana and Lindsey were passionate about writing center work, but they still definitely felt ready to move on to teaching. Jana, who worked in a writing center during her junior and senior years, said, “I think I’m excited to like be outside of the writing center for a minute. ‘Cause I’ve been doing it for three years now, and I love it, but I also want to see writing from the other side” (I3). By the end of her first semester, Lindsey, who worked in a writing center for several years as an undergraduate had already “started thinking more and more about myself as, like, a future teacher... someone who is going to teach... and how to mesh those identities” (I2). By the end of her second semester, she shifted toward a sense of nervous excitement to have more authority: “I’m really excited to get that experience, but also it’s going to be a huge. It’s gonna be completely different. Whereas coming into the writing center this year wasn’t different for me... ‘cause I had, what, three years before this? So this felt like the one comfort zone I had. And now I have other comfort zones.” (I3). Paul, too, felt like teaching was much more of a challenge than writing center work, which he had done before. He anticipated learning classroom teaching “on the fly” (I3), like he did as an undergraduate writing tutor. Finally, Grant, who had started his MA with feelings of burnout as a high school teacher also looked forward to teaching: “I’m really intrigued and kind of ramped up” and had a sense of burnout from the schedule demands of the writing center: “I’ll look forward to the second semester of next year when I’m teaching

two classes and I have one class and I'm just worried about my CP. That's gonna feel like a breeze compared to what we've been doing" (I3). All of the participants, including those who were dedicated to writing center work, saw classroom teaching as a logical next step in their progression as a teacher. They perceived classroom teaching as more of a challenge and responsibility.

The participants cited the opportunity for teaching experience as one of their primary drivers for pursuing graduate school. In the first year, the writing center space facilitated interactions with their cohort, which in turn created opportunities for them to talk about both their teaching and classes. The cohort created a support network for the shared experiences; however, it was also characterized by a lack of diversity, markedly in terms of race, ethnicity, and language. The courses outside the practicum gave them opportunities to imagine themselves as teachers, such as the assignment asking them to create a syllabus in Contemporary Theories and interactions with undergraduate and PhD students. Yet, for Lindsey, the interactions with PhD students were not positive. Instead, she imagined herself in their position and, ultimately, rejected that future self.

In their work with writers, the participants valued developing relationships, and doing so helped them become more confident moving among authoritative and facilitative techniques. However, they sometimes struggled with their positioning, expertise, and authority as a consultant, frequently adopting a "radically student-centered" attitude that helped them evade responsibility and dodge their agency in a session. Despite such struggles, their experience in the writing center honed their confidence in talking to students about writing and exposed them to concepts of response and writing pedagogy. Throughout the first year, their identities of student, cohort member, and consultant were woven together.

## CHAPTER IV

## DEVELOPMENT AS TEACHERS IN THE SECOND YEAR

*Cassie: What's been the most significant aspect of the MA and GTA program for you?*

*Paul: I guess in some ways it's a toss-up between the classes that I've taken and the work experience that I've obtained through the writing center and teaching. But overall, I think the work experience has been a little bit more useful for me. Because, at the end of the day, is like taking classes that much different than it was in my undergrad program? Not really... But what really does make an MA program I think different than an undergrad program is the fact that I was teaching, the fact that I was working in the writing center, getting that professional experience. (Interview 6)*

In their second year, the participants taught first-year composition, an experience they had eagerly anticipated. While they quickly embraced identities as writing instructors, the composition program's professionalization efforts frustrated them. In comparison to their experience in the writing center, the second-year environment was isolating. As such, they had low confidence in teaching and a diminished sense of belonging to a local or global community of writing teachers. As suggested in the literature review in chapter three, the question of how TAs integrate prior knowledge is key for WPAs. This chapter highlights when participants seemed to integrate or contradict their previous work in the writing center and their own experiences as students. The participants responded to and applied their writing center experience in ways that challenge common assumptions about the value of writing center work as teacher preparation.

Drawing primarily from data collected in year two of the study, the first section of this chapter analyzes the participants' responses to the formal professionalization efforts of the

composition program, which were most visible in the composition practicum course during their first semester. While they found aspects of the course useful, specifically those they identified as “practical,” they sometimes struggled with when and how to integrate their own ideas about teaching and pedagogy within provided structures. The second section emphasizes the contrast between their socialization as first-year TAs in the writing center and second-year TAs in the composition program. The participants felt more isolated and less supported in their second year. The next section describes the participants’ struggles to balance their time as both graduate students and composition instructors. Finally, the last section explores the participants’ practices as classroom teachers, focusing, once again, on their approaches to relationship-building.

### **Composition Practicum**

To understand the context for the participants’ responses to teaching composition, I begin this section with an explanation of the composition program’s leadership structure during the study. The program has historically been administered by the Director of Composition, a tenured or tenure-track composition specialist in the English department. One of the role’s main duties is to teach the composition practicum each fall semester to second-year English MAs and first-year PhDs. However, due to the resignation of the former Director of Composition and subsequent hiring freeze at the university, the duties of the Director of Composition were split. A rhetoric and composition faculty member, “Lisa,” taught the practicum (see Appendix E for syllabus), but she was not the Director of Composition. A faculty member with a specialization in literature, but with significant administrative experience, was the Director of Composition. Each year the Director of Composition selects three PhD students in the English rhetoric and composition program to be Assistant Directors of Composition. One of their responsibilities was to act as mentors for new TAs. The Director of Composition divided the practicum students, who



included both second-year MA TAs and some English PhD TAs, into three “mentor groups.” The practicum course instructor required the TAs to attend weekly one-hour meetings with their mentors, in addition to the practicum course meetings. This weekly support structure was designed to encourage the practicum students to focus on composition theory and pedagogy in the practicum classroom and day-to-day issues in the mentor groups. However, the various actors in the composition program confused the MA TAs because the structure of the program was nebulous to them. For instance, they found it difficult to categorize their questions neatly into “pedagogy” and “day-to-day.” Though I am sure the structure was explained, they had trouble applying it to their positions in the program.

In May 2018, when I conducted the third round of interviews, the participants were excited about their upcoming second year, which included their composition teaching assignments. However, in August, their feelings of nervous excitement turned to frustration. Aside from their writing center work, the only direct preparation that occurred before August was an hour-long overview meeting with the Director of Composition and Lisa, which happened in April. The primary formal components of the teaching preparation for TAs were fairly standard: a week of pre-semester orientation, a one-semester practicum course, and required weekly mentor groups. The primary outcome of the orientation week seemed to be developing TAs’ Introduction to College Writing (English 101) syllabus, focusing on policies. Although they were not technically using a common syllabus, at orientation, they were provided with a syllabus template and told that they must include the same four assignments and maintain approximately the same due dates. The four assignments were: a literacy narrative, argument analysis, argument construction, and a multimodal remediation. The brief orientation, coupled

with teaching concurrently with the practicum, frustrated the participants and created a sense that they were always “one step behind” (Charlie, I4) in their first semester.

The perception that they had been cheated, and might be short-shrifting their students, permeated the cohort. Lindsey, despite declaring that she “love[ed] teaching” (I4), was one of the most vocal critics of the program’s model. She represented the shared opinion that MA TAs needed more preparation prior to the week before the semester started. She called it a “trial by fire” and “setting us up for failure” (I4). Lindsey took the lack of preparation more personally and thought about it more deeply than the others; she saw it as a systemic problem. She lamented that “maybe that’s [setting us up for failure] the point in some way, but also I feel like it’s indoctrinating us into this idea of academia where it’s just like the things that I already hate about academia” (I4). Lindsey got the message, it is unclear if it is explicitly or implicitly, from other graduate students and faculty that TAs should “take your own classes, the ones you are in [as] a student, as more seriously than like your teaching” (I4). Lindsey felt that prioritizing classes over teaching responsibilities reinscribed a hierarchy of academic research over teaching, which conflicted with her background as an undergraduate student at a small liberal arts college. Again, the models Lindsey encountered came into conflict with her philosophy of teaching and education, though she had already developed a strong identity as a teacher in her first semester.

All the participants, except for Grant, complained that they were not better prepared to teach by the program or department. The majority opinion was that the teaching practicum should have been required before teaching, during the first year’s spring semester, as Jana explains: “I think [the teaching practicum] should have been taken last year and then we could have had 101 ready to go and prepared and known what we were doing before we actually got into it” (I4). The participants believed that if only the practicum content (in its same form) had

been provided to them earlier, they would have felt more control over their 101 classes.

Although they appreciated the content of the practicum and the idea of the mentor groups, they felt unsupported in their day-to-day work as instructors throughout their two semesters of teaching. Though Grant did not believe he personally needed training in advance of teaching (because he had a degree in English education), through observing the program's approach and his peers' responses, he also felt strongly that TAs should have more preparation for the classroom before the semester they are assigned as the instructor of record. Grant felt that the department fell short in its responsibilities to both TAs and first-year students.

While I believe the participants' feelings of under-preparation were valid, I disagree with them that moving the practicum to their first year would have adequately solved their issues. First, Lisa's design of the teaching practicum may have influenced their opinion. Although no singular correct way to teach a college writing practicum for TAs exists, Catherine Latterell categorizes TA preparation programs on a continuum from "practica," which provide "practical and immediate strategies" to theory seminars, which "explore historical contexts and philosophical issues related to writing instruction (10-11). Based on my one practicum class observation, the participants' descriptions, and reviewing the syllabus, Lisa's practicum course was more of a theory seminar than a practicum as Latterell describes it. While the TAs in Lisa's course sometimes discussed their classroom practices, the course's focus was to introduce the TAs to relevant debates in composition and to weigh "expert" perspectives. Paul described the course during the first few weeks of the semester: "It's been more theoretically... It's supposed to be the pedagogy and then my mentor group is supposed to be like the day-to-day 'how are you getting through class?'" (I4). Latterell notes that "these types of courses differ from practica in central ways: Although practical issues may be addressed, they concentrate on theoretical

debates and on broadly historicizing the teaching of composition” (16). Latterell recommends finding the difficult balance between theory and practice. However, while Lisa’s course may have aimed at this balance, the definitions of “theory” and “practice” became murky as the participants navigated their new teaching practices.

Although the reading selections often represented discussions of practice, frequently written for the audience of new writing teachers by prominent composition scholars, the TAs struggled to relate this content to their classrooms. The two required books were *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing* (Glenn and Goldthwaite) and *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* (Tate et al.). During the class that I observed, Lisa prompted her students to discuss and synthesize the perspectives of the week’s readings on language diversity. The conversation seemed to focus more on issues in-theory as opposed to the issues in the context of the TAs’ classrooms, though practice was not ignored outright. When I observed, during a small group discussion about approaching language differences in the classroom, Lindsey made a comment with the essence of: “These are things I already do, but where is the practical advice? I search for that every week.”<sup>16</sup> While the literacy narrative assignment had already passed by this point in the semester, the discussion of language differences could have been connected with teaching the literacy narrative genre. Instead, the class discussed how to balance so-called “academic language standards” as representatives of the institution with their recognition that inflexible language standards privilege students with already privileged backgrounds and leave behind others. It occurred to me that no one suggested inviting their first-year students into these

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<sup>16</sup> Although I include quotations from class observations, they are all approximations from my notes and not direct quotations because I did not record class observations.

conversations; therefore, they were actively “flattening” their students’ capacities for understanding writing as a complex and politically-fraught activity (see Dryer).

Because the participants did not make immediate connections to their teaching in the practicum, they categorized it as primarily “theoretical” information that they could have been provided with before teaching (except for the final unit, discussed later in this chapter). In my view, some simple adjustments to the existing course and mentor structure to better integrate theory and practice, rather than the timing, might better address immediate concerns and facilitate confidence during the first semester. If the course were taken before teaching, little in-situ support would exist outside of the PhD student-led mentor groups. Pragmatically, if the practicum were moved to the first year, it might interfere with TAs’ investment in their writing center work, which they already seemed distracted from in their final semester. An option in this context may be adding more intensive summer training, though the MA TAs at River Valley are on ten-month contracts. In their first semester of teaching, the practicum and composition program provided a strong course structure for them, which they appreciated the safety of, but they struggled to integrate their knowledge and values.

During their first semester, especially the first half, the participants performed as instructors, but they felt they were barely passing in this role. The tools that assisted them were a collection of models and templates for schedules, assignments, and activities provided to them by the composition program, practicum professor, Assistant Directors of Composition, and, in some cases, their peers. They accessed most of these models on the practicum’s Blackboard site. Their first unit was on literacy narratives, and they immediately needed schedules, lesson plans, and assignment prompts. Overall, the participants seemed to grasp the genre of the literacy narrative — both because they had all worked with students in the writing center on literacy

narratives and had all written a literacy and teaching narrative the year prior, for their writing center practicum course. They used their knowledge to borrow and adapt models for their first unit. Jana explained how she retroactively modified Lisa's schedule for the literacy narratives unit:

I found that things weren't necessarily working for my class. So, she had three drafts due and didn't give [students] very much time to read other literacy narratives. And I felt that they needed to be reading more before they started drafting. And so, I had to make changes to this [schedule], and so I was afraid that if I put everything on here right now and then kept making changes that it was gonna get confusing to them. (I4)

While Jana seemed to appreciate and need the model as a template, fairly early in the first semester, she enacted some agency over the schedule, though she worried that her changes may have confused her students. The participants' processes of adapting the materials show their use of pedagogical knowledge, either gained in previous teaching contexts, such as the writing center, or student contexts. They were not simply starting from scratch, as they felt that they were. While it was uncomfortable for them to learn a significant amount about classroom teaching pedagogy as they were doing it, it was also true that they had a cache of pedagogical knowledge that they deployed as needed. Yet they did not have many opportunities, except the interviews with me, to discuss the process of deploying this knowledge, especially the small everyday decisions they made about designing and redesigning schedules, lesson plans, and assignment designs. I will discuss more about the consequences of these writing process as new teachers in chapter five.

The way Jana discussed her modification both demonstrates her growing possession of an identity as an instructor and of making well a thought-out pedagogical decision. Similarly, early

in their semester, Jana said the practicum class debated using rubrics to grade. Jana decided she was pro-rubric because she wanted to be transparent. She customized her rubric for the literacy narrative based on the course's five categories of student learning outcomes: rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, processes, conventions, and confidence and ownership. For example, for the critical thinking aim on her rubric, she wrote: "Critical Thinking: You moved beyond simply telling the story of a specific literacy moment to reflect thoroughly on literacy and/or community." The rating options are "definitely," "sort of/almost" and "not really." She drew from a model rubric created by one of the Assistant Directors. She explained her rationale: "But I think *from my own perspective as the instructor*, it's helpful for me to have given them these five things and then being able to say 'did they hit these or not?' And so, that allows for consistency that I was worried about" (I4, emphasis added). Jana's rationale seems perfectly logical and her execution of creating a rubric for the assignment was sophisticated. While Jana may have had an advantage because she had TAed for a composition course as an undergraduate at another institution, her discussion of her rationale was not unlike the other participants, who readily provided clear pedagogical reasons for making decisions in their courses.

While the participants were appreciative overall of the structures provided, especially considering they did not have time to prepare anything new, the non-negotiable aspects of the course model (or aspects they perceived as non-negotiable) created tension with their ethos and knowledge. Lindsey acknowledged: "I don't feel complete ownership over this [syllabus], I mean I do because I'm using it, but I don't necessarily think it's the best representation of like my ethos or anything" (I4). While the participants agreed that they needed models and structure, some structures seemed to intrude on their abilities to effectively buy-in to the curriculum. Paul modified an Assistant Director's literacy narrative assignment to "be a little bit open-ended, just

because I kind of almost wanted to this to be a practice assignment because I don't really love literacy narratives" (I4). He further explained:

It's hard for me to make the connection between the literacy narrative part of the class and the rest of the class, 'cause almost the whole class is like making arguments and things are getting like a little bit more technical and a little bit more formal and a literacy narrative assignment to me is, I have trouble like finding the exact purpose [for] why I'm making everyone do this. (I4)

While Paul went along with the expectation to assign the literacy narrative, and modified it as best as he could to fit his values, he still did not give much merit to the genre or its role in the 101 course's trajectory. He explained that he developed his opinion about literacy narratives based on his experience writing one as an undergraduate and working with students in the writing center: "It's just kind of some[one] telling their story about literacy and... it's hard for me to say that they're doing that wrong because it's just like a personal subjective kind of assignment" (I4).

While some of the participants eagerly embraced the literacy narrative assignment (e.g. Steve and Jana), Charlie agreed with Paul that the literacy narrative assignment threw off the course trajectory. The course started with "expressive" writing when "the rest of the class is not really like that" (Charlie I5). The practicum course covered expressivist pedagogy (à la Peter Elbow and Donald Murray, Appendix E), but the participants did not report extensively discussing the role of a literacy narrative assignment in a course focused on argumentative writing. Charlie's and Paul's astute concerns echo Anne-Marie Hall and Christopher Minnix's criticism of the genre's role in an argument-based course. Perhaps reading about and discussing the genre of literacy narratives in the context of a first-year writing course could have helped



strengthen new TAs' understanding of why the literacy narrative is included as a required assignment. Moreover, providing TAs an alternative assignment to the literacy narrative may have also helped.

Although Grant also had reservations about the literacy narrative assignment, unlike Charlie and Paul, Grant's sense of control over his course did not seem shaken. While Charlie and Paul did not know how to compensate for the odd assignment, Grant said that he had to "internalize the value" of the literacy narrative, and he did so for the sake of his students: "Well what helped me internalize the value was that I had to do it ((laughs)), and so I like I knew that I couldn't go in there and be like 'this thing is stupid, but we're gonna do it anyway'" (I4). Grant perceived a significant degree of flexibility in the syllabus template: "Outside of having a schedule, you know that these four assignments are going to be expected, I feel like I have complete control" (I4). This sense of freedom outweighed his small quarrel with the literacy narrative assignment itself. In contrast, other participants perceived their overall agency as less: "It felt like it was—this is the sample syllabus they gave us and use this so you can plan your daily readings or whatever, but everything else is by the book, so, which is different. Lisa had basically planned the first half of the semester for us, so all the readings were already there" (Jana, I5). Jana and others were unsure which aspects of their models were suggestions and how much they could change. Grant's past experience as a teacher is likely an important factor in his different perspective on control. He recognized that sometimes teachers have to follow curricula or programmatic designs that they do not necessarily agree with or understand. Finally, Grant also approached the experience as an opportunity to try something out and learn from it, an attitude the other participants did not consider. He valued the fact that the assignment was a "low stakes" opportunity to "practice some basic paper structuring techniques" (I4). Grant's position

toward the models and structures provided to the TAs shows that experienced teachers may see opportunities for learning and agency where new teachers may feel constrained, confused, and lost.

Though they often made informed decisions, they were not always confident about those decisions and even felt lost about other aspects of their teaching, especially related to exerting authority, particularly grading. Even Jana admitted that “I’m uncomfortable with authority stuff more than anything else,” and that she “feel[s] equipped and ready to respond to writing until it comes to putting a number grade on it” (I4). Similarly, after having a lengthy discussion with Charlie about her course so far, in which she did not indicate that she was feeling uncertain, she admitted that “I feel pretty confident in my ability to give constructive responses um (pause) yeah, I don't know if there’s much else that I feel really confident about” (I4). When it came to responding to and grading writing, Lindsey was also split, “I’m just really comfortable dealing with student writing at this point, and I’m really comfortable responding to it, which is why I’m not worried about responding to student writing. It’s just like the slapping of the grade that, like, nope!” (I4). Charlie, Jana, and Lindsey all felt uncertain about aspects of pedagogy related to authority.

Prior research attributes the difficulty that TAs have with authority to toggling between being both a student and a teacher (Rankin; Dryer; Hesse; Restaino; Grouling); however, the participants’ year of writing center work may also be an important factor to consider. They felt comfortable providing response, which was the primary activity they practiced daily in the writing center, but explicitly evaluating writing was completely new to them. Exerting authority certainly exists in the writing center, but the participants (except Grant) actively worked to downplay their authority in sessions. In other words, the flexible and often covert assertions of

authority (e.g. Rollins et al.), to build mutual trust one-on-one in writing center sessions, does not transfer neatly into traditional classrooms in which, no matter how collaborative the atmosphere, it is clear who holds the authority. Much of the literature focusing transfer from writing centers to classrooms overlook this phenomenon; however, Robert Child had a similar finding when he studied teachers with prior writing center experience: “They found that their students vested them with authority that they didn’t desire” (181). The participants failed to apply a relatively complex, but already mastered, activity from the writing center, authoritative positioning, into a context that includes evaluation. Adapting a writing center ethos to a classroom is complicated, and the participants were not given frameworks to reflect on the change.

Because Lisa laid out the syllabus for them, the participants rarely needed to change major aspects of their 101 course, especially in the early part of the semester. Along with their lack of confidence in making decisions, they were uncertain when and how they were allowed or encouraged to make substantive changes to the common syllabus. One example provides a cautionary tale to show how power was often enacted as a process of filtering-down information from the nebulous composition program leadership to TAs. All the participants knew that they were required to assign the four major assignments, but they could design the assignment prompts and evaluate them as they saw fit (within the course objectives). The final major assignment was listed as “Multimodal Remediation of Paper 1, 2 or 3 ” on the syllabus template. In the practicum on the day that I observed, Lisa told the class that she did not feel strongly about the interpretation of “multimodal remediation,” so they should follow the Director of Composition’s instructions. A PhD student Assistant Director of Composition, who happened to also be observing the class for her research, piped in that a *digital* remediation was the expectation. The Assistant Director noted that “we” were “cracking down” on the multimodal

requirement this year. There followed a reasonable discussion, led by a curious Lisa, about what counted as “digital.” For instance, does an infographic count? Lisa commented she was considering assigning a poster to her students. Steve piped in to joke that Lisa had tenure, implying she did not have to worry about coloring outside the lines. From my perspective, the boundaries of the assignment requirements were not resolved on this date, though the participants reported that a discussion of the expectations for the remediation assignment came up frequently.

While at least one other participant (Charlie) had reservations about expecting students to compose in a digital medium, only Steve intentionally close to ignore the digital directive. Knowing the expectations, Steve designed his final unit (which was reviewed by Lisa) about remediation, fulfilling in his interpretation of the student learning outcomes that specified that students should “provide an understanding of the conventions of multimodal composition that comprise developing communication in the 21st century.” He assigned his students to revise their work and submit a portfolio of revised assignments 1-3 with a reflective memo. Steve explained that he received a “finger-wagging” (I5) from Lisa for not assigning a digital project. He said that she tried to take responsibility for not explaining it well enough, but he accepted the responsibility for not following the “policy:”

I didn't want to do it, so I didn't do it... I tried to express to her like why I did not want to do that... I didn't think it was helpful... Their argument, the department's argument, is like [students] will have to do something digital in the future... but I guess... that didn't make sense to me on a fundamental level. I didn't think that was true necessarily, and I don't know, especially since 102 was like about revising a research paper. It wasn't about like creating a digital assignment for the whole semester like I know that that's the final

project in almost every 102 class, so I wanted to give them another chance to revise their work instead. (I5)

Steve and I jokingly called his testing the limits of his agency in his 101 course a “rebellion” because he was so intentional about skirting the expectations. The whole experience, though seemingly a blip on the radar of the semester, left Steve with negative feelings toward the composition program because he felt that his interpretations of the student outcomes were not valued and that there was little transparency about who was creating and enforcing policies. He brought up the experience in both interviews five and six. Ultimately, however, Steve’s rebellious experience was positive for him because he was confident that he made an effective pedagogical choice for his students. He carried forward the confidence into the second semester of teaching, in which he taught Introduction to Creative Writing, where he felt that the creative writing faculty allowed him more overall agency in course design and treated him like a peer rather than a subordinate.

In contrast to their feelings that most of the daily readings in the practicum were disconnected from their day-to-day work, almost unanimously, they found the final unit of their practicum useful. The unit prepared them to design their syllabus for the next semester of teaching, their 102 courses. They felt that in 101 they lacked control over the course, even though they did have relative freedom beyond the four assignments and due dates. When I observed Jana's class, while distributing the assignment sheet, she commented to the effect that “we’re moving quickly through this unit, but that is because we only have about two weeks for it, and then we’re going to move to unit four. So everything is a little more rushed and hectic than I would like.” The opportunity to design a 102 course was welcome after a semester of following someone else’s vision. As Charlie declared, “I feel like I have a lot more control and

agency over 102... I did not feel like I had a lot of agency over 101, mostly because I didn't think I had the knowledge to have agency (I5). She may have technically had the agency in 101, but she did not feel she had the knowledge, confidence, or time to do much more than perform an approximation of the models available to her. For their 102 class, the participants embraced the agency available to them, but also integrated knowledge from teaching 101, the practicum, and prior experiences. Lindsey described the process of developing her syllabus for 102 under Lisa's guidance, the final assignment for the teaching practicum, in this way: "Having someone there being like 'this is what you should be thinking about,' and like not necessarily performing what you learned in this class, but what do you actually want your class to look like?" (I5). They appreciated their knowledge being valued while still having the safety and structure of a learning space.

The final unit seemed to adequately scaffold the TAs into developing their plans for the next semester. It gave them both support and agency, which helped the participants become more invested and confident to prepare teaching materials:

I think that's why I'm, one, actually excited about it, and, two, I feel way more comfortable going into that class every day... Again, it's not that I wasn't excited before, it's just like I feel more invested, and like, in return I think that my students are going to be more invested... It feels more collaborative, I guess is what I would say... I feel like we're actually in there working together to define and understand, rather than me being the supplier of knowledge. (Lindsey I5)

Lindsey, again, linked how her actions affect her students, but other participants also described parallels between the agency they felt in the class and the agency they were able to offer their students. Though, there was certainly a degree of stress (and work) in developing their courses.

Paul performed the tasks required for the final project, including composing a 102 syllabus, course rationale, and teaching philosophy, but he later admitted he would have accepted a ready-made course. While Jana acknowledged the stress, she felt it was a worthwhile tradeoff to have ownership “because if it fails, it’s not the university’s fault for having this kind of, you know, course... It’s my fault for planning a bad course. So there’s different anxieties involved, but I feel like it’s my course” (I5). For this group of TAs, taking control of their courses, making them their “own,” had an important impact on their positioning toward the curriculum and their students.

In developing their 102 courses, assigned readings from the final unit of the practicum proved useful. Ultimately, several developed 102 courses that drew on transfer pedagogies, which related to the final set of readings for the practicum. Although Charlie described herself as liking theory and had scholarly interests in composition and rhetoric, she felt overwhelmed with the theory in the practicum while teaching 101: “How do I design a course and be consistent because we talked about so many different theories? And I was like, ‘oh am I supposed to be doing all of these?’ Because that’s really hard” (I5). It was difficult for Charlie to integrate what she was learning in the practicum to her concurrently taught 101 class, but when it came to preparing her syllabus for the next semester, her tone changed. The required practicum reading, Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle’s “Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning ‘First-Year Composition’ as ‘Introduction to Writing Studies,’” inspired her to design her entire 102 course around writing-about-writing, seek out supplemental readings, and ask around for advice. In her course rationale, required to be submitted to Lisa, along with her 102 syllabus, she wrote:

Students will be encouraged to ask broad questions, such as: “How does writing work? How do people use writing? What are problems related to writing and reading and how can they be solved?” before forming their own, more specific, research questions about a writing topic (Downs and Wardle, “Teaching” 283). Similar to Downs and Wardle, my goal is to combat the misconceptions that “academic writing is generally universal” and that writing is a basic and transferable set of skills (279).

In her course documents (syllabus and research paper prompt), she did not include much detail about “writing-about-writing”; however, when I observed her 102 class, she and her students made astute comments and connections related to writing-about-writing as it connected to the assigned reading from *They Say/I Say* (Graff and Birkenstein). For example, in a discussion about authority and using “I” in writing, Charlie's students had strong and differing opinions. Charlie shared that, as a graduate student, she feels less authority over teaching than a professor. A student made the point that feelings of authority also depended on genre. Charlie’s response to the assigned readings in the practicum had a significant influence on how she moved forward with developing her pedagogy for 102 and how she positioned herself in her teaching philosophy, which she submitted with her PhD applications.

Grant and Jana also stated that the practicum's unit on preparing for 102, a research-focused composition course, completely changed their approach to their courses. Grant explained:

We read several pieces and had several discussions about writing in the disciplines and writing across curriculums... And while there are definitely hesitations, I had on it, you know, I also saw that that could be beneficial for [students] in the sense that if they were



gonna go into sociology, then the only reason they needed to know MLA was for my class. (I5)

Grant further clarified that his “hesitations” had more to do with his own “comfort zone of pedagogy” (I5) than the pedagogies themselves. The writing in the disciplines and across the curriculum readings convinced a rhetoric and argument-loving Grant that he should and could do more in his English 102 class than prepare his students to write “standard” thesis-driven essays, which had become familiar to him through teaching high school English. When Jana read in the transfer literature about the tentativeness of transfer from first-year composition to other courses, she began to reflect on her experience in the writing center and 101:

My [101] students are from every discipline, but the humanities, it seems like, so I tried to think about writing center sessions and the kinds of like stuff that I saw most often, like assignments regardless of discipline. And I was like: It doesn't matter what discipline they were in. They were writing annotated bib[liographies]. They were writing literature reviews. They had to do research proposals. (I5)

Jana synthesized her decisions in developing her 102 syllabus with the readings from her teaching practicum and her experience in the writing center. She ultimately chose to assign genres that she has actually seen in disciplines across the university. Although the other participants did not explicitly make connections between their 102 course decisions, 101 teaching, and writing center experience, their prior writing center experience likely helped convince them that engaging students in their interests and disciplines was a worthwhile pursuit. Like Jana mentioned, in writing centers, tutors engage with students and writing from across the disciplines at a university — there is likely no other place that current or future teachers would be able to view actual writing in progress (as opposed to idealized or described) by students at

the university, students that represent the same profile as their first-year writing students. While Irene Clark has argued that TAs learn about writing process in the writing center, no scholarship has yet to make a connection between writing centers and TAs' uptake of genres, pedagogies of transfer, and/or bringing writing in the disciplines to first-year writing. Chapter five discusses this idea of genre uptake in the context of the participants' writing.

### **Socialization with Peers and Mentors**

In their first year, the participants talked at great length about their cohort's role in helping them adapt to "graduate school," which included both their TAship and coursework. In their second year, interactions with their cohort were sporadic, especially in their final semester when they were not taking a practicum or participating in any formal professional development. Physical space was also a factor in the isolation. They were allowed to choose between two office spaces in two buildings, and they spent much less time in either of those offices compared to the approximately twenty hours a week they spent in the writing center the year prior. As a result, they only saw members of their cohort in the practicum course meetings, mentor groups, classes, and the optional "meet-ups" that I organized. Yet even though their communication with their cohort was few and far between, the sense of solidarity remained, as Jana reflected: "I still feel like... I talk more about my teaching with my cohort than I do [with anyone else]... I think it's maybe been made worse with the addition of the [new offices], so there's no one central meeting place any more. Half of the people are in the basement and half of the people are in the [other building] and everything is kind of fragmented... so I very rarely see anyone anymore" (16). Even though Jana did not see or speak to her cohort peers often because of the two office spaces, the interactions she had with them were memorable.

For those, like Paul and Steve, who thrived on social engagement in their first year, the change from the first to the second year was a bit of a shock, though they eventually got used to being on their own. Early in his third semester, Paul lamented: “I wish I could interact with them [my cohort] more. I really do. I see them in those little desks or carrels or whatever they’re called, and whoever I see in there like if my office hours happen to overlap with them” (I4). Steve explained that “they’re a few people in my cohort that I saw every single day in the writing center, that I see once a week and say a dozen words to and that’s it. So it’s been weird to not have that kind of fall back that was already in place, but I know that if I did need it, I could still fall back on a few of them at least” (I5). The participants noticed the loss of their day-to-day peer support structure in their second year and missed the frequent informal interactions with peers and mentors.

While they still felt solidarity with their cohort, despite not seeing them, and they did have occasional productive one-on-one conversations, some tensions arose as they began to develop opinions about classroom pedagogy. I do not want to exaggerate the level of tension within the cohort, but, on an individual level, some participants expressed frustration and alienation from their cohort in the second year as the MA TAs took control of their individual classrooms instead of being a representative of the writing center. For example, Lindsey felt that a few of her cohort members prioritized their graduate courses to the detriment of teaching: “I’m just like ‘why are you doing this [in your classroom]? It doesn't make sense at all or in any way.’ And it comes down to them not taking teaching as like their even one of their main priorities because they’re more concerned about like their [graduate] classes and like what they’re doing” (I4). This is another example of Lindsey’s personal philosophy of education coming into conflict with certain institutional values and practices, but at this moment it is her cohort peers creating

the wedge. While Lindsey remained fairly confident, Steve's interactions with his peers shook his confidence. He felt like he had more to learn about teaching writing than his cohort members, whom he perceived as more easily fitting in with a "rhetoric and composition" orientation to teaching first-year writing, as opposed to his as a creative writer (discussed more in chapter six). He felt that they were performing confidence and had knowledge of composition and teaching that he had not acquired:

I just maybe I just don't feel like I'm smart enough to be teaching students English 101. So it's not even them necessarily. It's just my own background. I feel like I'm learning along with the students, which is not a bad thing, but it doesn't feel like that's the mood with my other peers maybe. They already have this knowledge, so it's more easy to them, but for me, I'm having to learn as I go a little bit. (I4)

While Steve seemed to be the only one who felt this strongly about the members of his cohort, whom he once felt close with, others expressed a similar feeling, that there was not much opportunity to talk as candidly as they had done in their first year.

They were supposed to use the mentor groups, which were led by the three PhD students appointed as Assistant Directors of Composition, to talk freely. Except for Paul, the participants had neutral to negative attitudes about the mentor groups. They did not start the semester with negative attitudes, but as the semester went on, most began to resent their weekly hour-long meetings. Jana described the difference between the purpose and execution of her group:

Instead of going in and having it be a place of reflection and a place of kind of growth and of process, it was like a place where we went and s[a]t down and were given an assignment to do for an hour... So it was something, it was another obligation instead of

an opportunity to kind of process what was going on in the classroom, which is how I envisioned those mentor groups going. (I6)

Like Steve, she rejected the space and people that made her feel lesser and where she felt performance was all that counted. Although not all of the participants felt as strongly or analyzed the situation as keenly as Jana, the general sense was that the groups were a waste of their time. They felt that the Assistant Directors did not facilitate them appropriately and treated their fellow TAs, including several PhD students, as subordinates instead of peers. Another issue with the mentor group structure was that the TAs' access to support for day-to-day questions was limited to these weekly meetings. Charlie contrasted her mentor group meetings with the helpfulness of those she had relatively more contact with, her peers: "We had those groups that we met with last semester. That wasn't very like helpful ... I mean the biggest support has been like asking people... like in our, in my cohort 'oh you know, what are you doing in class? And like how's that working?'" (I6). She went on to also name two recent MA graduates who became her acquaintances because they were teaching composition part-time. While the Assistant Directors held office hours for the TAs, their offices were on a separate floor (and sometimes building) from the office spaces available to their mentees. The participants lacked access to mentors when they had questions — so they got used to asking whoever was around them in the office space or made do without advice.

This lack of connection with their assigned mentors led them to reflect at the end of the second year that they were not adequately supported in their teaching from WPAs. In comparing her first and second years in the program, Charlie noted that:

We were really supported in the writing center... We met with people and that was useful, like [the writing center PhD student Assistant Directors] and there was always you

and Evan to ask questions... I don't really feel like we have that kind of support for teaching. But maybe I'm wrong and maybe we're supposed to, and I don't know. (I6)

Charlie questioned if she has herself to blame for feeling unsupported in her teaching. She could not see the mentors available to her, so she assumed that they were not there. Paul expressed a similar perspective, wondering if it was he who should have done more to engage: "I probably had as many teaching resources as I did whenever I was in the writing center, but I don't think I made as much use of them... This semester like I don't think I've talked to any of the [Assistant Directors] one time" (I6). These perspectives underscore the importance of visibility and accessibility to WPA mentors. The lack of institutional, departmental, and programmatic transparency also factored into this lack of visibility. Steve explained that he was entirely confused about the structure of the composition program. In his mind, it was tangled up with the English graduate programs, graduate school, and the English department itself. He claimed he would not recognize the composition director if he saw her: "I don't know who my boss is. I don't know who to go to for help. The person who teaches [the practicum] is not the composition director... Everyone's telling me different things" (I6). In other words, the participants felt like the program and department lacked transparency in how it ran, which led them to feel a growing sense of distance from the support structures that existed, primarily the Assistant Directors of Composition, in their final semester.

### **What's on the Back Burner?: Negotiating Time as a TA**

While they were figuring out how to teach writing, it should go without saying that the participants were also taking their courses required for the MA degree. New teachers and graduate students have to make decisions about how to spend their time. For instructors, there are no defined time or energy boundaries, as there are in many writing centers. It is also logical

that new teachers need more time to devote to effective teaching than experienced teachers.

Therefore, teaching two sections of a course such as Introduction to College Writing (101) for a new TA is likely much more demanding than for an experienced TA or faculty member. Figuring out how to balance their time was a difficult process, especially when they had no frame of reference for how long a task, such as commenting on papers or grading, might take them.

Though Lindsey thought that some of her cohort members slacked off on their teaching in favor of their courses, in this study, only Charlie mentioned that she consciously prioritized other concerns over teaching, especially in the first semester of teaching. While she ostensibly shared the same future professional goal as Lindsey, to become a college writing teacher, she spent much of her time in her third semester on her course work and applying to PhD programs to ensure that she could continue on her career path. Charlie felt guilt and regret that she did not devote more time to her students. In her final semester, she did not have the additional burden of PhD applications, and, upon learning that she was accepted to PhD programs, she was more motivated to focus on her teaching: “I already got into a PhD program, and I’m making teaching more of a priority so I can grow in that area, and also so that I commit to my students enough” (15). In contrast, some of the other participants pushed aside their own classes and MA expectations in favor of teaching. In looking back on her first-semester teaching, Jana divulged that “I... was not focusing on my own classes very much at all. I was doing things at the last minute... I... devoted a lot more of my balance to teaching. And this semester I feel like I’ve had to balance them a little differently and kind of restructure where my priorities are just to make sure that I’m giving myself the space” (16). While Jana felt like she had to devote more time to teaching when she was brand new, she had more ability to adjust after just one semester.

Like Jana, Lindsey pushed aside her student responsibilities in favor of her teaching responsibilities in her first semester. She changed her topic and scope of her Culminating Project (CP), which she had been planning since her first semester, to allow her more time for teaching her two sections of 101. In her second semester, instead of teaching two classes, she was reassigned to the writing center for ten hours a week in place of one course section. While she was unhappy about the decision (she wanted more classroom teaching experience), the reason for it (a tenured professor's upper-level course did not fill), its timing (right before the start of the semester), and how the department communicated it (with an email), this arrangement seemed to allow her more time to devote to her CP and teaching, even though she was required to be on campus more often to work in the writing center. In her final semester, Lindsey put her energy into her CP, a project in which she was heavily invested: "My own [graduate] classes definitely took a back burner... Which is kind of sad, but my CP definitely took most of my focus, with teaching being like a really close second" (I6). Like Jana, after her first semester of teaching, she felt like she had more control over where and how to use her time. She could put a course on the "back burner," if she wanted, and not feel guilty or panicked about it. The participants were also in the final semester of their program, so graduation felt like reality instead of a far-off goal. The result was less stress about time management.

### **Classroom Teaching Practices**

Although there were many examples of the participants implementing interesting or exciting teaching practices, I selected examples for this section that parallel with their work in the writing center. Specifically, similar to their valuing of developing relationships in the writing center, they valued developing relationships with their students and encouraging student agency. The extended one-on-one interactions that are common in writing center work did not exist in



their classrooms of twenty-two to twenty-six students. Grant's 102 syllabus represents the tone that the participants seemed to want to set: "Finally, I am always willing to work with you. Our relationship will be based on trust and mutual respect. My job is to guide your learning, but you are responsible for it. If you need something in your education, discuss it with me. Please don't hesitate to speak with me for any reason regarding this class." Yet the rest of the participants struggled with articulating such a stance and enacting it in their classrooms, especially in their 101 classes, which were, again, heavily dependent on Lisa's model syllabus, which favored a strict authoritarian ethos. As Paul said early in his first semester, "I would definitely like to get to know my students more than I have. And I think I need to be more conscious about doing that" (I4). They discovered that building relationships in classrooms as a teacher was different than as a non-evaluative writing consultant.

One way that the participants tried to form relationships was through small talk at the beginning of classes, paralleling the small talk at the beginning of writing center consultations. Steve commented that "I try to talk to my students every day before class about what's going on with their lives... Most of them are in the same calculus class, so that's been dominating their life a lot" (I4). Indeed, when I observed his class, Steve had a short amount of genuine banter with a few students. One student shared about being busy with the university choir. Several other participants also greeted their students by asking how they are doing, such as Jana's "good morning. How are you guys?", but many times these questions seemed superficial, even if they were genuine. It seemed clear to me in the fourth round of interviews that the participants were not exactly sure what relationships with their students should be like.

They also seemed to think that building relationships depended on a particular approach to authority and ethos: they should be lenient with students who ask but perform as fairly strict.

This idea originated in the week of pre-semester training. Several participants reported that Lisa and the Assistant Directors of Composition urged, the women, in particular, to assert their authority early and strongly. While preparing their syllabi, Charlie felt singled out as a “pushover,” though upon recollection she was not certain that she was actually singled out, or if she just assumed that Lisa was speaking directly to her: “I heard [Lisa say] ‘pushover,’ so I’m not sure if that’s right. I think what was said ‘if you are a, if you know you’re a bit of a pushover, and you know that you’re kind of a people-pleaser and you don’t stand your ground, set a stricter policy and then revise it later’” (I4). Charlie was aware that her embodied self, a young, petite, white woman, carried with it the struggle for authority in a college classroom (Bartlett; Payne). Several participants described getting the sense that a strict ethos was an expectation for their approach to classroom policies, such as attendance and late work, so it seemed that while the advice may have been gendered, targeting the young women, many of the participants, including the men, felt it was directed toward them too.

However, Charlie did not want to come across as a strict authoritarian because it went against her beliefs about facilitating a supportive classroom space. When I asked Charlie to describe her relationships with her students, she said: “I think it’s been mostly positive? I think I have a more casual manner of speaking, but I’m still trying to be like professional, so I’m trying to like strike a balance between those things” (I4). When I observed her 101 classroom, I was surprised by her casual and off-the-cuff demeanor. She seemed to be constantly making off-topic side comments, which distracted the class. For instance, while giving directions for a small group activity, she suddenly said, “I like your costume” to a student (it was around Halloween). After he replied, “thanks,” she commented that “they moved trick-or-treating to tonight,” furthering the off-topic distraction. Yet, to her credit, I noted that when the students were on task, they

seemed engaged with the tasks and her. I was surprised when a student asked for access to the projector screen at their table to better facilitate a group activity.

In hindsight, I also take responsibility for not discussing my concerns with Charlie after the observation. While the interviews were often a space of co-interpretation (Newkirk 13), in which I brought up concerns, especially in our discussions of their writing center sessions, it was more difficult for me to bring up classroom teaching issues than writing center issues. The reasons for this were numerous: I felt I had less knowledge of the expectations for new teachers, I did not want to hurt the participants' fragile egos, and I was likely too focused on gathering data instead of putting the participants' needs first. If I had been correctly adhering to Newkirk's principles for ethical qualitative research, I would have followed the "the responsibility of intervention," in which the researcher works with the teacher to deal with problems identified. I should have met (or tried to meet) with Charlie to discuss my concerns about her distracting habits in the classroom, because when I went back to observe her 102 course, I noted the same mannerisms. In the second semester of observations, after I reflected on the first semester, I gave the participants the option to meet with me afterward, which created a new space outside of the interviews (which happened several weeks after the observations), for a conversation. Only two participants took me up on this offer.

Like Charlie, Paul pointed out that "there's definitely a little bit of conflict between my personality and how I wanna come off to my students, *and how I think I need to come off to my students*. Because I tend to be so laid back, but I feel like being super, super laid back with my students is going to encourage them to like not try in my class" (I4, emphasis added). Because of such tension between their internal sense of ethos and their performed ethos, several of the participants described problems within the first two weeks of their first semester of teaching, in

which they had to decide whether or not to be lenient or to enforce their strict syllabus policies. Jana described a situation, in which a student, who had been absent and not communicated with her at all, surfaced and submitted a paper, claiming he was sick.: “But... he hadn’t turned in any of his drafts, ‘cause that was due last week. He hadn’t done the peer reviews. So now I’m like ‘what do I do with this paper that he handed me?’” (I4). Other participants simply ignored “their” strict policies, like Lindsey: “So this [late work policy] sounds like super strict... on my syllabus, but I’m not, I’ve not been super strict in enforcing that so far, ‘cause a lot of them have issues with Blackboard and stuff like that, so I’ve kinda let those things go, but I’m gonna be more strict moving forward” (I4). While most of the participants learned how to better balance policies with practices in their second semester, Jana continued to have trouble creating boundaries, in which she had, again, created strict policies that she could not implement: “I make myself more available than I probably should over email. I answer emails at kind of odd times. I have bad boundary issues, but I think they feel like if they email me, they’re gonna get a response pretty quickly” (I6).

Despite what the participants seemed to believe about the role of their personality and friendliness, from my outsider perspective, as neither the student nor the instructor in these situations, it was their willingness to talk to students individually during class time and to be clear and empathetic in their feedback that likely contributed to meaningful connections and boosted their respectability. These actions showed that they recognized the students individually and were willing to listen to them. For instance, when I observed Jana's 101 and 102 classes, she made a point to circulate the room and talk to students while they worked in small groups. She spent so much time talking to students that she did not make it to speak to all students before the end of class, but, in her 102 class, several students stayed late to talk with her. In Lindsey’s 102

class, she circulated the room for a significant amount of time, often prompting the students with “writing center-like” (her words) questions, such as “What’s your goal in doing...?” The participants seemed to draw on their practices as writing consultants when they responded to students one-on-one.

While commenting styles will be discussed more broadly in the next chapter, I do want to point out how two participants used their comments on student papers to address students empathetically and as individuals. In commenting on papers in Paul’s first semester, his commenting style stood out as distinctly different than the other participants’ overall approaches. Several other participants used an in-text commenting style that favored correction and simply referring students back to parts of the assignment they were not fulfilling (e.g. follow MLA style, create a stronger argument). Instead, Paul's endnote comments, while formulaic, seemed to generously read his students’ writing, validate it, and carefully critique it. For example, the entirety of his comment to a student follows:

I think you make pretty interesting use of sources here— you kind of put them in conversation with each other, using Riley to show that even though Wagner found that teens use social media a ton, that’s not necessarily a problem. That’s a really clever way to use sources. I also appreciate that you’re willing to disagree with Saxbe, and you give me a pretty good reason to listen to you over her, since you point out that her article is just based on opinion. I will say that there probably is real research that contradicts your point, but there is also more research out there that would agree with you— the truth is, there are just a lot of pros and cons to social media, hence why it is such a controversial topic. I would have appreciated you giving us a more comprehensive look at the research

that has been done on the topic, but that would probably take more than three pages, so it's understandable.

Overall, I'm not sure that you entirely convince me that social media has no negative impact on socialization. You basically just have one study backing you, when probably thousands of studies have been done on the subject. Nonetheless, you make some smart moves with your use of research here, so good work!

Paul carefully summarizes aspects of the student's writing, being sure to praise but also pointing out flaws. Although the participants struggled to find which practices matched their values as a teacher, at times their teaching seemed to be on point. In their second semester, several of the participants commenting practices relaxed from being corrective to engaging with the students' work. Even though Steve was teaching Introduction to Creative Writing in his fourth semester, his work toward relationship-building was evident in his commenting style (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Excerpt of Steve's Feedback

THANK YOU FOR SUBMITTING YOUR PLAY FOR WORKSHOP. YOU'VE CALLED YOURSELF A HOPELESS ROMANTIC BEFORE, AND THAT IS CERTAINLY STILL APPARENT HERE, BUT I THINK THE REAL CONFLICT HERE IS THE ONE THAT JAMES IS SPOUTING OFF ABOUT: AN UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE, AND A DESIRE TO DO WHAT WE FEEL IS BEST FOR OURSELVES IN THE FACE OF THAT UNCERTAINTY. THIS IS THE CONFLICT THAT APPEARS THE MOST SALIENT TO BOTH OF THESE CHARACTERS, MOSTLY BECAUSE THE CONFLICT WITH ... WHEN QUICKLY -- HE FINDS THE BOY,

*Figure 2* Transcription: Thank you for submitting your play for workshop. You've called yourself a hopeless romantic before, and that is certainly still apparent here, but I think the real conflict here is the one that James is spouting off about: an uncertainty about the future, and a desire to do what we feel is best for ourselves in the face of that uncertainty. This is the conflict that appears the most salient to both of the characters, mostly because....

Steve's issues with authority and expertise were still present in his interviews in his fourth semester, but he committed himself to his creative writing students, and that included writing extensive (if sometimes illegible) comments on their papers, doing a careful reading of their draft, in this case, a ten-minute play.

Although the participants did not completely resist the professionalization offered by the composition program, they expressed significant frustration toward several aspects of it that they felt were not immediately useful or that demeaned them. Their complaints centered on the timing of the practicum, the perceived lack of accessibility to resources, and their treatment by their assigned PhD student mentors. Despite their grievances, they actively, and often thoughtfully, used the tools available to them, particularly model syllabi and assignments, and adapted them, using their knowledge and experiences gained in the writing center and as a student. Their use of models and the tension with their ethos will be further discussed in the next chapter in terms of writing pedagogical genres. One key finding of this chapter is that new teachers (and programs) need structures, scaffolding, and models; yet paradoxically, feelings of ownership and control seemed to positively correspond with the participants' confidence and investment in teaching their courses. When given the space to develop their course, they were both open to the new pedagogies while at the same time connecting them to their prior knowledge developed in other pedagogical contexts such as high schools and writing centers. An area of future research might be studying how writing programs can balance structure with autonomy for TAs because the perception of agency under the exact same conditions differed between the participant, Grant, who had significant teaching experience and the rest of the participants.

Much of the peer and professional support structure that the participants had in their first year was undone the second year. They saw their cohort and officially assigned mentors

infrequently because of the office space design. Instead of offering them an opportunity to vent and honestly receive advice, the mentor groups reinscribed a power structure of PhD student over MA students. As a result, the participants lacked informal spaces and opportunities, other than this research project, to more authentically reflect upon their development. However, at least some of them seemed to crave opportunities to reflect, which easily brought them back to their interviews with me as our rapport and relationship grew from the first to second year. Jana felt like they had reflective energy without an outlet other than the interviews: “It’s that, and we also have been sitting on so much stuff, like so much is changing and happening, and we need to have that kind of way to talk about it” (I4). Lindsey explained that the interviews “made me reflect a lot in ways. I’m a pretty reflective person in general honestly, but like I think it’s given me opportunity to voice that reflection and you have been like an impetus to think about it in a different way than I probably would have” (I6). Several also expressed more interest in talking with me informally and off the research project record in the second year. Therefore, an ongoing challenge for writing programs is to create safe spaces for TAs to express their victories, doubts, and frustrations without the fear of judgment or surveillance.

One of the areas that the participants struggled to understand were practical ways to build relationships with their students while maintaining a sense of authority and control of the classroom. The composition program suggested that they perform a strict authoritarian ethos, but the participants had experience building rapport and effectively teaching through more of a peer ethos. The sense that they should perform a strict ethos often contradicted their inclinations to create an atmosphere of support and trust in their classrooms. Similar to how they latched on to specific practicum readings that lent to synthesizing with their prior experiences (those that



focused on transfer), WPAs may take more care to understand the positioning of TAs as students and new teachers, rather than new teachers who need to perform as experienced teachers.

The professionalization as writing teachers that they took away from the program translated fairly directly for them into their next moves as adult professionals. As they prepared to graduate, in the sixth round of interviews, I took note of their plans moving forward. Jana's, Lindsey's, Charlie's, Grant's, and Steve's immediate next steps all included teaching-related jobs. Jana secured a position as a de-facto assistant writing center director at her BA alma mater. Lindsey was applying to assistant writing center positions and accepted a job as a part-time composition instructor at River Valley. She wanted to eventually secure a full-time lectureship as a composition instructor. Grant was applying to private high school teaching jobs. Only Charlie ultimately applied for PhD programs. She was accepted to a PhD program in rhetoric and composition with a TAship, where she was most looking forward to further developing as a teacher: "I feel strongly that like what I want to do is be a teacher more so than a scholar. Like I feel like for me the scholarship is something that I have to do in order to be a teacher" (I6). Steve enrolled in a local MFA program with the plan to teach composition part-time at River Valley. In contrast with the others, Paul decided he preferred to step away from teaching, knowing that full-time opportunities for someone with his credentials were limited in the local area. He instead leaned into his knowledge and credentials for writing: "I'll probably look some into more like writing-heavy jobs... I'm somewhat interested in learning technical writing and doing some kind of publishing work. I don't know how realistic it is to get a job in those fields right now... In terms of what I'm looking for in a job, definitely something that allows me to use like my communication skills" (I6).

I do not want to argue that the participants in my study completed a linear transition from writing consultant to first-year composition teacher or that their skills, practices, and identities moved into an upward trajectory of teaching from novice to expert. But what is clear by following their trajectory through two years in their TAsip, is their dedication to learning about teaching and their attempts at reflection on their identities and practices. These dispositions, sporadically assisted by the resources of the program and their peers, helped move them forward in their growth as a teacher, which was one of their stated goals as they began the program. By the end of their program, they had more confidence in themselves as teachers. Moreover, they identified the TAsip as being the most valuable part of the MA degree for them. Both Jana and Paul expressed similar realizations:

Getting a GTAsip was ... contingent on [me going to graduate school], so, I don't know what it would be like to do it [without the teaching and writing center work]. I would still have the opportunity to kind of develop my academic and professional interests, but it wouldn't be so tightly connected to the actual work that I'm doing and I'm getting paid to do... That's something I'd never thought about because graduate school was always tied into professional development work for me. (Jana I6)

At the beginning of the program, they expressed a desire to teach. Many decided to attend the program only because of the financial assistance of the TAsip, but they also wanted the teaching experience. As they ended the program, they acknowledged similarly that, although some of their courses were enlightening, it was the teaching experience that they felt would carry forward in their lives.

## CHAPTER V

## DEVELOPMENT AS WRITERS

*Grant: As a [high school and undergraduate] student I never did a good job of following the writing process... I'd write the final draft first, and, if they needed a first draft, then I'd come back through and mess something up. I just didn't want to mess with it. 'Cause I felt like the final draft was already what I wanted to say. And, so, that's changed as I got into graduate studies and went through the process of... writing a conference paper, which I had never done before, writing a lit review, which I had never done before. And having to sort of go and talk to other consultants and give it to other people and see how things were working, or not really, forced me to look at my writing in a different way. (Interview 6)*

Before graduate school, Grant easily composed for his courses, but he was simply pretending to go through a writing process that included drafting and revision. When he entered graduate school, he immediately encountered new genres, higher expectations, and a pedagogical environment in the writing center that concentrated on feedback during the writing process. In general, the other participants had similar realizations about how and why their writing processes changed during their MA. In addition to the influence of teaching writing on their writing habits and knowledge, learning to write as an English graduate student influenced their teaching practices. The concurrent processes of teaching writing and learning to write as a graduate student created parallels with learning and performing academic genres and approaching writing as a social process.

While chapters three and four covered the participants' overall development as teachers, their identities, practices, and skills, this chapter provides a closer look at the participants' development as writers in their graduate student and teaching contexts. Although this chapter

builds on several of the themes and moments previously discussed, such as the cohort's influence, the writing center's environment, and new teachers' use of templates for pedagogical genres, a key new concept is the discussion of genre as it applies to the participants' writing for their graduate classes and classroom teaching. The first of three sections analyzes the uptake and practice of academic genres they encountered.<sup>17</sup> The second section discusses their development of pedagogical genres. Finally, the third section explores the interrelated changes in the participants' writing processes for their writing and teaching. It includes the significance of both the writing center's focus on feedback and revision and graduate courses that allowed for discovery and exploration.

Though research on graduate student writing is spread across fields, such as writing studies, second language writing, and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and most concentrated in contexts outside the United States,<sup>18</sup> researchers have observed that graduate faculty do not typically explicitly teach or model writing processes, disciplinary conventions, or academic genres (Casanave and Hubbard; Khost et al.; Russell 16-17; Paré et al.; Sullivan, "Writing"). As Leonard Cassuto puts it, "most graduate students are treated like weeds most of the time. We let them take root in the educational backyard and live on whatever rain may fall. Some of them thrive, to be sure — weeds can be hardy. But not all of them fare as well as they might, and many of them wither for want of cultivation" (16). Faculty often assume that graduate

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<sup>17</sup> Although several participants took creative writing courses, this section does not discuss creative writing. Grant observed that creative and academic writing are "two different beasts totally," (13), and I agree with him that the learning and performance of academic and creative genres are different. However, I found enough similarities between the participants' descriptions of academic and creative writing processes to include creative writing reflections in the final section of this chapter.

<sup>18</sup> Examples of important research conducted outside the U.S. include: Casanave, Belcher, Lee and Danby, Fujioka, Paré, Salter-Dvorak, and Tardy, *Building*.

students who have been accepted to their programs already possess the “writing abilities” needed to succeed (e.g. Salter-Dvorak). However, faculty definitions of “writing abilities” may fail to account for the full range of “knowledge domains” needed to write for disciplinary audiences (Beaufort, “Developmental”). Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) scholarship poses that learning to successfully write as an expert, or as a member of an academic discourse community, is a process that occurs over several years and is often incremental (e.g. Thaiss and Zawacki; Carter).

For instance, although Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki’s WAC research observed a three-stage process of undergraduates learning to write “within a disciplinary framework,” not all undergraduates in their study reached their third stage (139). In the third stage, a writer understands disciplinary writing as “coherence within diversity” and possesses “a sense of his or her place within the disciplinary enterprise” (139). Writers reached the third stage through practicing writing a “variety of assignments” for several “committed teachers” and successfully “analyzing the goals, methods, and genres of the discipline” (140). Learning to write as an insider is a process that needs sustained guidance and reflection; even undergraduates who have been prepared as disciplinary writers still need ongoing support. This contradiction— that graduate writing is not taught explicitly, but that learning to write as a member of a discipline is an ongoing and complex process— has led to lamentations and actions by writing studies and related disciplines for more attention to teaching writing in U.S. and international English-language graduate programs (Brooks-Giles et al.; Micciche and Carr; Rose and McClafferty; Simpson et al.). To bring together international conversations about graduate student writing pedagogy across disciplines, the Consortium on Graduate Communication formed an

interdisciplinary and international organization with a focus on sharing “resources, pedagogy, research, curricula, and program models for graduate communication.”

While it is important to understand that “socialization” (e.g. Gardner) or “enculturation” (e.g. Berkenkotter et al.) into an academic discipline develops with the careful guidance of insiders, studies of graduate student writers illustrate a more nuanced picture of their writing development than recent literature focused on pedagogy infers. Because this pedagogy-focused scholarship tends to favor the experiences of PhD students (e.g. Autry and Carter; Brooks-Giles et al.; Cotterall; Aitchison and Paré; Lawrence and Zawacki), especially those writing dissertations, it builds on an idealized image of graduate student development, which begins with a novice graduate student who gradually masters writing conventions and becomes enmeshed in their discipline (e.g. Berkenkotter et al.). Many late-stage PhD students certainly have this particular goal, which leads to completing programs, publishing, and obtaining academic jobs. However, research that has closely studied graduate students at different stages of master’s and doctoral programs, through ethnographic, autoethnographic and case study methods, shows that graduate students may resist or reframe, either consciously or unconsciously, explicit and implicit efforts of disciplinary enculturation (e.g. Casanave, *Writing*; Casanave, “Local”; Casanave and Li; Leki et al. 39-41; Prior, *Writing*; Prior, “Tracing Authoritative”; Riazi; Salter-Dvorak).

Specifically, studies of graduate students outside the U.S. reveal tensions among their sense agency, culture, identities, and disciplinary (and departmental) conventions. Much like research on genre, which indicates genres are “dynamic” (Bawarshi and Reiff 78) and “innovative” (Tardy, *Beyond*), research with EAP graduate students suggests that writers who do not simply follow conventions lock-step, especially those who persist to degree, may

contribute to local departmental changes, which may eventually have bigger impacts in a discipline (Leki 39-40). Though this research has primarily been case studies in second language contexts, Mary Jane Curry also argues that dividing graduate students into the categories of English first-language and English learners disservices both students and researchers “from considering deeper and more important issues of disciplinary enculturation and academic identity formation that graduate students undergo, and the role of academic writing in this trajectory” (78). This chapter and chapter six, while studying master’s-level students who speak English as a first language, shows how their learning to write academic and pedagogical genres occurs (chapter five’s focus) even as they selectively accept, reject, resist, or are ambivalent to becoming scholars in the disciplines in which they are writing and working (chapter six’s focus). Both chapters highlight how their other roles and identities, especially their developing teacher identities and practices, intersect with their development as writers and scholars.

### **Student Genres, Academic Genres**

The primary academic genres that the participants encountered in their coursework are typical of graduate programs in humanities disciplines: conference papers, conference presentations, proposals, literature reviews, seminar papers, and journal articles (see Swales, *Research* 20). These four written and one speech genre create an academic “genre set,” which John Swales defines as a grouping of connected genres that build linearly into the privileged genre in a discipline (*Research*; see also Devitt). In this context, the genre set included a progression of humanities research writing that, except for a proposal assignment, primarily privileged textual analysis and theoretical explorations above empirical research. Through their coursework, the participants experienced a replicated “genre system,” or interrelated genres that

interact with each other in specific settings” (Bazerman 97), which ideally prepared them for futures as humanities researchers expected to write academic articles and monographs.

Particularly in their first semester, the participants encountered three compounded issues of genre: methods, discipline, and motivation. As noted, graduate faculty typically expect students to either already know how to produce “graduate-level writing” and situate themselves disciplinarily, or to figure it out based on their “common sense” and prior knowledge (Russell 17). As new graduate students, though the participants had some “antecedent genre knowledge” (Reiff and Bawarshi 321) from their undergraduate experiences, several lacked any concrete sense of their disciplinary or methodological orientation. In response to the expectations-without-instruction pedagogical model in several courses, the participants identified genre models across related disciplines in their writing center consultations. Although the genres that they were expected to teach as first-year writing instructors did not always parallel the genres they were expected to write in their graduate English classes, the proposal assignment encountered in the writing center practicum course assisted several of the participants in teaching research genres in their final semester. Later, as classroom writing teachers, several valued explicit genre instruction and breaking down the writing process into research genres.

### **Conference Papers and Presentations**

When participants started their first semester, they named the conference paper as a new and important genre. Although Jana, Charlie, Steve, and Lindsey had presented at conferences as undergraduates, there was a sense that they would need to tackle the conference presentation to *be* a graduate student. Their Introduction to English Studies class in their first semester, which scaffolded the creation of a conference paper and oral presentation, immediately validated that expectation. The assignment had several parts, requiring the participants to practice engaging in



a “genre network” (Swales, *Research* 21) for academic conferences. First, students selected a Call for Papers and wrote a proposal to submit to their professor. Toward the end of the semester, they presented orally to their class and submitted a written text to their professor as the final draft. Between the oral presentation and submitting the written text, they peer-reviewed one another’s drafts. In Paul’s first interview, he described his early impression of the course: It “is basically just like Academia 101... This is kind of what’s going to be expected of you if you want to go present at a conference or get... something published in a journal or something along those lines.” Paul was already aware of and accepting of the privileged genre set in humanities disciplines. Although the participants were frustrated with certain aspects of their Introduction to English Studies course, primarily its focus on “keywords” and narrow disciplinary scope (both of which will be discussed in the next chapter), concerning their development as writers, they generally looked back on the class favorably. They felt conference presentations were an important genre to master as a graduate student, and the course helped demystify the genres surrounding academic conferences. Paul described the assignment as “fairly impactful” (I6), and Lindsey said it was a “professionalized experience” (I2). In sum, the participants entered their first semester expecting that conference presentations would be a key genre as a gateway to the MA in English, and they were glad to have an opportunity to perform it.

Even though the participants appreciated the opportunity to write the genres surrounding an academic conference, several encountered problems with context, purpose, and audience. Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, citing Aviva Freedman, point out that “when a genre is abstracted from its context of use and taught explicitly in the context of a classroom, or when a genre from one disciplinary or public context is simulated in another context, say, a classroom, the genre has been severed from its semiotic environment, and the pairing of the explicated or

simulated genre” (87). In other words, presenting at an actual conference and developing a conference presentation and paper for a graduate seminar are not the same, and context cannot be replicated. Jana recalled struggling the most with how to write her conference proposal, both because the genre was completely new, and the professor seemed to have unstated expectations. Additionally, Lindsey’s prior experience recognized that the requirement to submit a written paper “was problematic for me because you don’t really do that at writing center conferences, you don’t read a paper, you know?” (I2). Having presented at a writing center conference before, the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, she knew that not all disciplines expect presenters to read or submit a polished text. For her conference paper, she simply modified a version of a research proposal she was writing concurrently for her writing center practicum course. (The participants assured me that submitting a similar paper from another class was encouraged.) Aware of the disciplinary differences and practical needs of the instructor, though Lindsey was a bit frustrated, she did not struggle in the class. Her prior experience with conference presentations in her discipline of interest helped her pass easily through the Introduction to English Studies gate.

To compensate for the lack of content (other than the keywords) in Introduction to English Studies, students had to draw the content, theory, and methods from outside the class to develop their conference papers and presentations. Like Lindsey, Paul and Charlie simply pulled (or duplicated, in Charlie’s case) material— objects of study and theories— from a concurrently taken graduate course. Steve, Grant, and Jana wrote about interests honed elsewhere. Grant wrote a rhetorical analysis of the constitutive rhetoric of advertising to diverse audiences, a topic that he grew interested in through writing an advertisement analysis as an undergraduate and later teaching rhetorical analysis to high school students. Although the paper was entirely new,

he discovered constitutive rhetoric in his concurrently taken Spatial Rhetorics course. Jana received high praise for her comparison of Buddhist symbolism in the television show *Twin Peaks* and the novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*, texts she read outside of academic contexts, but analyzed using a close reading comparison method honed as an undergraduate English major.

While the other participants navigated the tricky rhetorical situation of writing in a new genre, which was displaced from its context, by relying on safe disciplinary territory, Steve did not adequately adapt prior knowledge in his conference paper. He had previously presented at an undergraduate conference, but, in Introduction to English Studies, he did not produce a literary analysis that fit the professor's expectation:

I did feel like the things that I wrote about in my paper the professor did not enjoy those things on a personal level, so I did not get proper feedback from her because of that, because she might have seen my interests as something that was not worth her time... The comments, they weren't helpful...I don't know, they didn't feel like they were working toward like the content of the paper. They were they almost just felt like I don't like this I'm going to give you like menial comments about it. (I2)

While Steve perceived the reason for the disconnect between his writing and his professor's feedback as her personal preferences, after reviewing Steve's proposal and conference paper, I concluded that Steve's lack of experience in writing a close reading literary analysis was likely the bigger issue. Building from both his experiences in creative writing classes and interest in disability studies, Steve selected three American short stories to analyze, written by different authors in different time periods that depicted characters with auditory or visual disabilities. His proposal, which received a "C," argued that their change in depicting characters with disabilities over time corresponded with acceptance of persons with disabilities and the establishment of the

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The professor commented that he focused on the topic too generally and lacked citations for disability scholarship in fiction. She expressed concern that his thesis was unprovable. As an undergraduate major in film with minors in creative writing and American Sign Language, Steve likely previously wrote analyses of literary texts, but he was confused by the feedback to narrow his topic and sharpen his argument, likely because he was both unpracticed in the values of close reading and unfamiliar with literary scholarship.

Because he could not decode why his professor, who has her specialization in literature, urged him to reconsider his argument, Steve's response to her feedback was to double down on his thesis about change over time and write more defensively about his knowledge of disabilities and short stories. His thesis states:

But with the aforementioned shift towards a stronger self-identity for those with audio-visual disabilities, contemporary short American fiction has shifted, too, although this literary shift is heavily dependent on the time of the literature's release, previous depictions of similar characters, and, most importantly, authorial identity. By examining three short stories, we can trace *an admittedly small sample* to see how depictions of characters with audio-visual disabilities has changed, and we can determine that positive depictions of these characters are supportive and essential. (emphasis added)

Steve noticed that there were differences in the three stories' depictions of characters with disabilities, and he wanted to make an argument about this observation (He mentions the ADA in the first sentence of the paper.). While his professor commented on the impossibility of making an argument about change over time with three randomly chosen stories, more helpful questions for Steve might have been: Why do you want to make such an argument? In which contexts might this argument be relevant? While the professor focused on arguability as if it were an

a contextual concept, I see confusion in terms of disciplinary audience, which becomes clear in Steve's conclusion:

Representation is vitally important in all mediums including literature, and I beckon all writers to do their research before creating a character with an audio-visual disability and to think about identity formation and how the realistic depiction of a character unlike themselves is supportive, paramount, and possible.

Instead of speaking to literary scholars about literature, he is speaking to creative writers about the delicacy of representing persons with disabilities in an accurate and positive light and the dangers of not doing so. Yet Steve did not identify his purpose or audience at the beginning of his paper. Again, Steve has never practiced the conventions of writing about literature as a traditional "English major." Though he stated at the beginning of the program that he was open to learning anything in the MA program, his background was in writing creative fiction and analyzing literature, television, and film as examples of creative genres and stylistic choices. Steve was not the only participant with the issue of not knowing how to make an argument that "counts" for a real or imagined audience, but his writing likely stood out to the professor as not fitting her expectations because he lacked prior experiences to prepare him for writing about literature. Steve's negative experience in Introduction to English Studies left a deep impression on his trajectory in the program, which will be explored in more depth in the next chapter.

After the first semester, further mastering the conference presentation genre or pursuing academic conference participation flickered out as an interest or priority. For instance, during his first semester, Grant grappled with the notion of continuing to a PhD. Presenting at a conference for him represented an opportunity to test if he had the aptitude, fit in, and, most importantly, liked it: "I just had finished a writing a kind of a practice conference paper for [Introduction to

English Studies]... maybe the way to find out if I want to be, if I want to go on to get my PhD, is to try to present at a conference and at least attempt to publish a paper... if both those processes, more importantly, were joyful for me, then that's maybe how I need to handle that" decision (I2). Yet Grant did not attempt to present at a conference, ultimately deciding without this "test" that he did not want to proceed with the PhD. Jana also recalled her earlier zeal for conference papers: "I guess maybe the only thing that I had hoped for that I haven't done, and that's my fault, is like trying to write anything that I could publish or give conference presentations on. Because I anticipated that that would be a bigger part of grad, like the pressure to [do] that, would be more in grad school than I've noticed it's has been" (I6). During her first year, Lindsey applied for and was accepted at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (again), which was held in the fall of her second year. She had originally planned on presenting on the same topic, non-traditional students in the writing center, which she wrote about for her Introduction to English Studies conference paper, writing center practicum course, and planned to continue writing about for her Culminating Project (CP). She ultimately did not attend for a couple of reasons. First, the cost was prohibitive. Second, she also had not started the primary research that she had planned because she had prioritized teaching in her third semester instead of her CP (chapter four). Charlie, the only participant who applied to PhD programs, was also the only participant who presented at a conference during her MA. The participants who were not planning to go into PhDs quickly lost motivation to engage in conferences.

### **Literature Reviews and Proposals**

While the participants were encountering the conference paper genre in their Introduction to English Studies course in their first semester, they were simultaneously enrolled in the writing center practicum. As discussed in chapter three, the practicum worked to educate the MA TA

cohort to be writing center consultants, introducing them to key concepts of writing center and composition theory. An additional major takeaway was introducing the participants to the interrelated genres of research proposals and literature reviews. For the final assignment, they chose an aspect of writing centers and created a research proposal. Several of them referred to the assignment as simply the “lit review,” showing that the newness of this academic genre (and a component of other genres) stood out to them. Grant explained: “I had never written a lit review before Evan’s class, and so I was really thankful that I had the opportunity to do that” (I2). In their first semester, the participants had heightened awareness about the new genres expected of them as graduate students; they did not seem to show this type of hyper-awareness throughout their career.<sup>19</sup> In contrast with the social and disciplinary context of Introduction to English Studies, writing a research proposal in the writing center practicum seemed to provide a more straightforward disciplinary context.

In the Introduction to English Studies conference proposals, which hypothetically should have been aimed at a specific and real audience for their selected conference, they actually were not clearly aiming at any audience except their class and professor. Alternatively, their writing center research proposals position them as “insiders” who are speaking to an audience of writing center or higher education professionals, situating their ideas within existing conversations. For the proposal, they were required to write about writing centers, but several were able to connect their topic to potential scholarly interests. For instance, Steve proposed a study to determine

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<sup>19</sup> There are several explanations for this reduction of awareness. First, working in the writing center, where genre is always a central concern, may have prompted them to reflect more on the genres they encountered in their courses. Second, as they gradually internalized the expectations, they may have been less aware of them (a phenomenon often observed of experts). Finally, as suggested in chapter three, the second year’s focus on teaching took up much of their time and energy and their classes became less important.

whether or not creative writers benefited from multiple appointments with a mentor consultant throughout a semester. Several participants indicated their insider status through objectively building on common knowledge of writing center theory and practices, showing their awareness of key issues and situations (Jana, Charlie, Paul). However, Steve effectively used his first-hand knowledge, experience, and ethos to situate a problem:

At the end of my first semester of WC work, I have only worked with creative writing one time—a single student brought in a short story. There is a hesitancy to bring creative writing into a space of such vulnerability, as a writing center inherently is, and I understand that. As a creative writer myself, I know it is daunting, sometimes scary, and often taxing to expect someone with little background on your work to fully understand the scope of your projects; getting a layperson in the WC to read your work is almost like the first day of a creative writing workshop over and over again...There continues to be certain stigmas around writing centers and their purpose: sometimes it is only viewed as an editing service, or a place to go when we need our sentences fine-tuned, or, at worst, a place for remedial writing.

By beginning his proposal this way, Steve can succinctly describe a problem in the local context that is worth addressing through research. He also has unique insights into an issue that writing center researchers (like myself), who do not write creatively, may not be aware of. By comparing the participants' performance on the two assignments, it seems that practicum courses have an opportunity to go beyond educating graduate students to think and perform as teachers or consultants. Through assigning research genres related to primary research, practicums can also scaffold TAs in adjusting to graduate school genre expectations by providing a disciplinary context in which TAs can practice writing in a genre for a specific audience. Although this



sounds similar to typical graduate seminars, a key difference is that the participants' community of practice (Lave and Wenger) in the writing center provides them another dimension of disciplinary knowledge.

### **Seminar Papers and Journal Articles**

The primary genre that the participants wrote after their first semester was the seminar paper. Granted, some courses did offer other options, such as multiple short papers, mid-term and final written exams, and hypothetical course syllabi. Peter H. Khost et al. define the genre of the "seminar paper" in their critique of the graduate seminar for PhD students:

[The] seminar paper asks students to demonstrate their learning by writing an argument that imitates the kinds of scholarship they have read. The conventional graduate seminar values a limited number of professional activities: research, interpretation, and the potential for published contributions to extant scholarly conversations. However, the seminar often fails to make its goals explicit or its methods transferable. (20-21)

The seminar paper assignment, unlike a conference presentation, which has a parallel "real-world genre," is more like a "mutt genre" (Wardle, "Mutt). "Mutt genres," observed in Wardle's study of first-year composition assignments, "mimic genres that mediate activities in other activity systems, but" within the classroom context "their purposes and audiences are vague or even contradictory" (774). Several participants first encountered the seminar paper in the Rhetoric of Race in Medieval England course in their second semester.<sup>20</sup> In support of Khost et al.'s claim about the failure of graduate courses to make the genre explicit, the participants described seminar papers as simply "long" papers — longer versions of papers they had written as

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<sup>20</sup> Rhetoric of Race in Medieval England counted as their pre-1700 literature course requirement.

undergraduates with perhaps higher expectations for secondary sources and of coming up with a new perspective. The Rhetoric of Race paper assignment was almost shocking to them, though they certainly expected “long” papers in graduate school: “I had no idea how it was going to get done. It was such a big paper. It was the longest paper I’ve had to write *like that*... I completely was just like, I don’t know, it was, it was different than everything that I’ve written before” (Jana I3, emphasis added). Unlike the proposal and conference presentation, the seminar paper remained unnamed and ubiquitous. It was disconnected from its supposed “real world” counterpart of the academic journal article, and Jana even concludes that it did not seem to build on her prior experiences.

The participants did not describe much direct instruction in the seminar paper in courses; however, their work in the writing center often provided them genre models from across other disciplines. Both Paul and Steve commented on the usefulness of reading others’ writing, particularly graduate students’. Paul observed that graduate students in music wrote genres “that were kind of similar to the kind of thing we might do,” giving him “a much better idea of how to like set up an argument, like, using research with your little like lit review and everything” (I2). Similarly, Steve noticed how other writers approached structure: “I’ve taken a lot from just talk that I’ve had with people about structure. So, structure with academic writing as well as creative writing you want to make it come across in a logical way” (I2). In other words, the writing center in their first year provided them a space to read and respond to genres, including graduate genres, which clearly had the potential to impact their understanding of genres within English and other disciplines.

Though they improved their ability to write seminar papers during their MA, the purpose of these “long papers” in an academic genre system, other than performing as a graduate student,

seemed unclear to them. In reflecting on what Paul learned so far in his MA, he referred to the courses Rhetoric of Race, from his second semester, and Native American Studies, from the third semester: “I’ve become a lot more comfortable writing longer pieces. It’s still not something I’m used to, but I had to write about twenty-page papers for both of those and that wasn’t really something I’d ever done before... And it’s not just about writing lots of words, but it’s also about staying focused that amount of time” (15). Although the goal of seminar papers is to ideally prepare students to publish journal articles, Paul knew at this point that he did not plan to pursue a PhD and become an academic. Yet he still felt that “staying focused,” in his writing was a transferable skill.

Uniquely, Charlie, whose focus on the PhD remained unshaken, talked the most about using journal articles as her models for her seminar paper writing:

[Two classes] gave me a really good idea [of] ‘this is how you take theory and try to connect it to something,’ which seems to be a pretty consistent pattern in rhetoric and composition journals, that you have a grounding theory and a real-life application and a like ‘why does this matter?’ Not that everything has to be that formulaic. (15)

While Charlie did not seem to have been specifically instructed in the genre of the “rhetoric and composition” journal article or seminar paper, she dissected the models for clues to the genre she was trying to emulate. Yet those with experience with “rhetoric and composition journals” might be quick to note that the genre pattern that Charlie discovered in her models is not necessarily consistent throughout the broad spectrum of fields. Christine Casanave discovered that “local factors,” i.e. departmental contexts, “undercut the compelling but sometimes overly simplified notion of disciplinary socialization” (“Local” 86). Charlie’s limited exposure to non-theoretical composition scholarship—the classes she referred to were special topic courses in rhetoric and

composition theory— gave her somewhat of a skewed impression of the field that she was energetically trying to join. The influence of local context on disciplinary identity development will be further explored in the next chapter.

In the second year of the program, to fulfill a requirement for their degree, all English MA students must write a Culminating Project (CP) or thesis. The CP is shorter (journal article-length) than a master's thesis, and all the participants in this study chose the CP. The purpose of the CP is to scaffold MA students further toward composing a journal article by asking them to work with a professor to revise a paper previously written for their course using the submission guidelines of a specific journal. Before writing the CP, students must write a short prospectus, which includes a literature review, summary of proposed revisions, identification of an appropriate journal, and justification for the journal's selection. Overall, in terms of learning the genre of a journal article, the process of the CP seemed to successfully scaffold the participants' understanding of the differences between seminar papers and journal articles and allow them to think about their writing more rhetorically— meaningful arguments for real audiences. Later in this chapter, I discuss how the CP contributed to some of the participants' changes in writing processes. Chapter six extensively details the participants' CP development.

### **Teaching of Research Genres**

As Charlie's understanding implies, the participants' courses predominantly focused on theory and application or textual analysis. There were no courses in qualitative or quantitative research methods, though the seminar *Toward a Cultural History of Authorship* required archival research. Nevertheless, the stock description of the English 102 class, the course the participants taught in their final semester, implies a broader definition of "research" than their graduate courses emphasized:

English 102 focuses on creating and answering questions through research and writing using academic sources, both primary and secondary. A student in English 102 should expect to: develop and answer research questions; articulate a position relative to others on a topic; address audiences inside and outside the academic community; and compose, revise, and edit multiple assignments...including at least one extended research project.

In other words, the 102 class asks first-year students to consider similar research questions, genres, and processes as the participants underwent in their research proposals for the writing center practicum and their CPs.

When the participants designed their 102 classes, several pulled on experiences with research genres as graduate students and writing consultants. As mentioned in chapter four, Jana was particularly adamant about the influence of writing center consulting on her choice of assignment genres for her 102 class. She wrote in her 102 syllabus rationale that, to reach the course's goals, she would focus on

building skills through genres that I know from my time in writing centers they will see again regardless of discipline: primary research, research proposals, annotated bibliographies, and literature reviews. These genres are fairly specific and, in certain ways, are less bound to the complexities of disciplinarity, which is to say that, in my experience, an annotated bibliography looks largely the same in chemistry as it does in psychology as it does in literature—the kinds of sources may be different, but the conventions of the genre stay the same.

Although Jana “like(s) writing about literature more than [she] like(s) doing anything,” and she “just really like(s) close reading and digging into texts” (I2), she chose to teach genres based on the common ones she noticed appearing across disciplines in the writing center with both

undergraduate and graduate writers. Other participants also deliberately broke down the primary research project for the 102 course into smaller research genres, but, unlike Jana, they did not reflect on this decision in their syllabus rationale. Lindsey seemed to have internalized the research genre system by the time she prepared her 102 syllabus. When I asked what she was learning about writing at the end of her second semester, she responded: “I think a lot of it is genre stuff... like writing a literature review and research proposal in [the writing center practicum] was something I had never done before” (I2). In Lindsey’s 102 syllabus rationale, she focused on her selection of pop culture as a context for the class, valuing of students’ outside of academia literacies, and new media, but in her syllabus, she still broke down the final research assignment into research genres (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Lindsey’s 102 Final Project

<p><i>Final Project (40%)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Proposal (5%)</u>: 2 pages identifying your topic, research questions, primary source material, etc.</li> <li>▪ <u>Annotated Bibliography (5%)</u>: 4-6 sources, summarized and critiqued in writing and in visual format (Prezi, infographic, etc.)</li> <li>▪ <u>Literature Review (5%)</u>: 3 pages synthesizing your source material</li> <li>▪ <u>Researched Argument Essay (20%)</u>: 8-10 pages of formal, argumentative writing based on primary and secondary sources [the three drafts are worth 2% each while the final draft is worth 12%]</li> <li>▪ <u>Presentation (5%)</u>: 5-minute presentation with visual aid on your final project</li> </ul>
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Both Jana and Lindsey purposefully broke down the research process for their 102 class' final project into research genres that paralleled their student and writing consultant experiences with primary research.

Although they wrote annotated bibliographies, literature reviews, and proposals after the writing center practicum, Charlie also cited the experience of writing the research proposal in the writing center practicum as a particularly useful experience. Doing so gave her enough knowledge and confidence about the genre to teach it to her students:

I'd never written a research proposal before [the writing center practicum], and like right now I'm teaching research proposals... I think it's really good that I had the chance to write one because I know what to tell students about the genre conventions... I probably wouldn't have known that that was like a step even... so my course sequence is: research proposal, annotated bibliography, literature review, and then the final paper... I definitely wouldn't have done that course sequence if I hadn't experienced having to write those things. (15)

By the time the participants taught research writing in their final semester, they had many experiences with research genres to draw upon. Charlie's first experience with the proposal genre, where she was expected to write a significant literature review, was influential to her understanding of how to break down primary and secondary research processes with genres.

Grant and Paul opted to create assignments for 102 that were not reified research genres. In their 102 syllabus rationales, they both wrote about how they were drawn to the research on transfer, student engagement with course material, and the pitfalls of "the" first-year composition research paper. Paul begins his 102 syllabus rationale by citing Richard Larson's 1982 *College English* article: "Larson's article was useful because he put a lot of my feelings about research

papers into words: It misrepresents research as being nothing but reading books (and in our age online articles, more likely), and the form of the research paper is not necessarily transferable to other disciplines.” Paul created two major assignments for 102, both “research papers.” First, in his “Researching a Discipline” writing assignment, Paul “fram(es) it more as a chance for them to learn about a field in which they are interested in majoring” (syllabus rationale). While Paul was solidly interested in studying literature, he seemed to easily recognize, like Jana, that other disciplines had other research processes. His choices also seem to target his own unaddressed disciplinary needs as a graduate student.

Grant was taken with articles that pointed out that the research paper was a performance of academic values rather than meaningful learning or transferable research skills (he cited Howard and Jamieson and Larson.). Although Grant created four assignments, all with the purposes of scaffolding meaningful learning and useful skills, he seemed unsure how to balance emphasizing what he called “academic structures” and exploratory writing. For instance, his first assignment asks “students to create a researched argument regarding their interests in music in some way. He explained that “while this is perhaps too close to the ‘empty performance’ of research writing, I intend to use this process as a foundation for the whole semester to teach the “structures” of research writing” (syllabus rationale). Though Grant recognized and wanted to work against the notion of static academic genres, he felt the need to continue to teach a structure as if it were transferable. Moreover, although Grant himself recognized these tensions, he seemed to feel compelled to teach the same structures that he was used to teaching and that he wrote for the majority of his classes. Grant also built in an annotated bibliography and literature review into his second assignment, “Subject Matter Expert,” in which he assigned students unfamiliar topics to research. As discussed later in this chapter, Grant noticed differences



between his writing process (heavily driven by personal interest in a topic) and his choice to assign topics to his students, but, in these assignments, he grappled with reconciling the differences in undergraduate and graduate student writing and expectations. Grant's final project assignment will be analyzed later in this chapter.

### **Pedagogical Genres**

In addition to learning to write genres as graduate students, the participants also produced new (to them) genres as teachers. "Pedagogical genres" include syllabi, assignment prompts, teaching philosophies, teaching portfolios, responses to student writing, and lesson plans (see Dryer; Franke; Grouling; Neaderhiser, "Conceiving"; Neaderhiser, "Hidden"). Although the genres that the participants were expected to produce in their courses as MA English students were certainly "new" to some degree, they had past experience writing and even providing (primarily oral) feedback to student genres. They had much less experience producing or critiquing pedagogical genres before beginning to teach in the classroom. Much of the research on pedagogical genres focuses on individual genres such as the assignment prompt (e.g. Clark, "A Genre"; Dirk), syllabus (e.g. Baecker; Afros and Schryer), or response to writing (e.g. Summer), not on how new teachers learn to shift from consumers to producers of pedagogical genres. One exception is David Franke's research on syllabi, assignment prompts, and reflections on teaching portfolios of experienced composition instructors. Franke suggests a strong interconnection between a writing program's teaching community and the teaching genres produced: "The products of a local teaching community... are valuable not only when they speak to issues of moment for the larger disciplinary research community... They are most valuable when they are deliberately employed to *produce* a local community of teacher-scholars" (159). Yet experienced teachers, especially those in a program with a strong sense of community, have

time to reflect on the rhetorical situation and use-value of their pedagogical genres. In contrast, TAs simply lack time, perspective, and in the case of this research study, a sense of a local teaching community.

Studies of English or writing TAs describe how student genre systems (and writing processes) impact new teacher genre systems, but the tensions that this research has uncovered have not been fully resolved. Dryer was one of the first to employ genre to discover that TAs' anxieties about academic writing conventions uncritically "resurfaced" (425), morphed into a "curiously flattened" response to their students (431). Dryer suggests that unreflectively taking on the role of the teacher, through writing pedagogical genres, such as comments to students, compels TAs to forget their complex relationships with student genres. Building on Dryer, Grouling argues that TAs bring resistance and frustration into the practicum course when the practicum positions them as graduate students through assigning difficult theoretical texts and requiring the submission of pedagogical genres, such as syllabi and assignment prompts. Dryer and Grouling both believe that the practicum can be a space to resolve such tensions through careful positioning of the TA as both new teacher and graduate student. Dryer argues that the practicum should "deroutinize the practices such [pedagogical] genres make commonsensical, transparent, or otherwise beneath notice" (442). Dryer calls for practicums and training for TAs to focus on genre, paying closer attention to teacher positioning and rhetoric in texts such as emails to students, syllabi, responses to student writing, and assignment prompts. Grouling argues that the practicum course should work to help TAs make "meaningful connections... between their dual roles." Both Dryer and Grouling call for practicums that deal head-on with tensions embedded in the TAs' role through attention to composing pedagogical genres.

This section includes description and analysis of the participants' composing of pedagogical genres— course syllabi, assignment prompts, peer review lesson plans, teaching philosophies, and written feedback to students.<sup>21</sup> As discussed in chapter four, the participants relied heavily on program-provided templates for their syllabi, lesson plans, assignment prompts, and schedules. The templates proved necessary; they tried to select and modify templates that most closely resembled their knowledge and beliefs, but they noticed, often retroactively, that there were disconnections between their textual ethos and in-person intentions. Chapter four argued that when the participants felt in control of their courses, they also felt more confident in their courses. Building on those ideas, this section first explores the effects of the uncritical use of templates for pedagogical genres such as syllabi and assignment prompts. If templates are used, this section demonstrates a need for open discussions of teacher ethos and a purposeful variety of templates that allow for a spectrum of teacher ethos, especially in cases where TAs are moving from a writing center to classrooms. While the participants struggled with syllabi policies that projected unquestioned authority, several more easily embraced peer response and peer review activities. Finally, this section considers the participants' written feedback to students, which suggests that the participants may have positively built on their previous experience responding in the writing center context.

### **Ethos in Syllabi and Assignment Prompts**

The participants experienced pressure to quickly produce pedagogical genres so that they could start using them in their course. All started with a model for their 101 syllabi; a model syllabus was available for download from the program's website. It included every detail

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<sup>21</sup> I did not collect the pedagogical genres composed in the writing center, such as written summaries of sessions and asynchronous feedback used in online writing centers, though these genres are worthy of study.

necessary for the syllabus, except for the instructor's name and contact information. The participants seemed at best hesitant to change and at worst unsure of which sections they could modify this polished and professional document. As an outsider, it was also not clear to me which sections instructors must include verbatim and which may be modified. For example, I know that the learning outcomes are required to include verbatim, but the "general overview of required work" is less clear. While, to a certain degree, the nature of the syllabus genre is that it is an exercise in authority that instructors categorically "reserve the right to make changes to at any time," the participants seemed to feel that their syllabus was disconnected from the courses they taught and themselves.

As mentioned in chapter four, the participants were encouraged to be strict and authoritative in their policies and overall ethos. The hasty decisions that the participants made about policies in the orientation week, when they were expected to create their syllabi, had some negative consequences for them later. They were sometimes actively working against themselves, the uncertain person performing as strict, who wrote the syllabus, and their present self, who was experiencing the consequences in real-time. While all instructors likely do, they seemed to have particular trouble with late work and attendance policies, two sections for which they had been encouraged to develop unique, but strict, policies. Regarding her "well-intended" attendance policy, Jana immediately ran into problems: "I'm balancing that need to be like administrative and tough and teach these kids accountability with the fact that they're babies, and they email me and they're like 'my alarm didn't go off' or 'my car broke down'... What's real? What do I excuse?" (I4). Jana's policies came into conflict with her value of understanding student behavior and motivation for actions. Though working with students in the role of a peer or near-peer writing consultant over the past several years, she realized that a strict authoritarian

ethos did not match her values. Often, the participants simply responded to this disconnect by ignoring their policies: “The late work sounds super strict on my syllabus, but I’m not, I’ve not been super strict in enforcing that so far. ‘Cause a lot of them have issues with Blackboard and stuff like that, so I’ve kinda let those things go, but I’m gonna be more strict moving forward” (Lindsey, I4). Like Jana, Lindsey’s empathetic instincts seem to outweigh her strict policies, though she feels guilty about it. Unlike student genres, which have individual consequences in terms of grades and passing courses, the pedagogical genres have consequences that impact entire groups.

The pragmatic need to produce pedagogical genres for immediate use in the classroom often outweighed concerns such as defining their ethos as an instructor. Stephen Neaderhiser argues that “pedagogical genres serve rhetorical functions both in and outside of the classroom, not only for students but for other audiences as well, as a representation of teacherly identity—the expression of a teacher’s pedagogical experience and expertise, values and objectives, expectations and authority” (“Hidden”). However, the participants focused on the practical “use-value” of pedagogical genres for themselves and their students and overlooked their rhetorical role in the course. Anis Bawarshi, citing Thomas O. Beebee, points out that “genres... embody texts with use-value” (349). In short, in reference to creating his first assignment prompt, Paul was “just happy to have something to give them” (I4), his students. He focused so much on the assignment prompt’s genre’s function to call upon writing that he overlooked its rhetorical function. In fact, most did not initially consider how using templates would affect their ethos. When I asked Paul how it affected his ethos to use two modified assignments created by two different people, he responded:

That's an interesting question. I guess I never thought about it that way. I mean, I think I tried to make sure that they were using the same language at least that we were using in class, but I feel like I'd have to think more about what my voice as an instructor is... This one does come across as maybe a little more impersonal than this. But really my voice as an instructor is probably a lot more laid back than either one of these assignments. (I4)

It is not necessarily negative that Paul wanted to lean on the voices of more experienced instructors, but what seems problematic is that he had not considered the repercussions on the tone of his class because of his rhetorical choices. Neaderhiser cautions that “while the use of a pre-made form can help ease an initiate into a new genre... It can also obstruct a teacher's ability to represent his or her own pedagogical identity, since the apparent functionality of the replicated genre can mask the identity stakes at play for the individual teacher” (“Hidden”). The pressure to produce and perform genres often created tensions that played out explicitly, as in Jana's and Lindsey's cases, or silently festered behind the scenes, as in Paul's case. Either way, there was a sense that the participants were not fully in control of their pedagogical genres, and thus their classes (chapter four).

### **Peer Review and the Value of Peer Response**

A new pedagogical genre that the participants seemed more prepared to adapt and construct were lesson plans for in-class peer reviews. While collectively the participants accepted peer review as part of their courses, several not only included it but worked hard to make it work. Both Lindsey and Jana exemplified similar stances toward peer review: It was a key component of the course, and the purpose was not sentence editing: “It was really important to me that we learn, or they learn, to think about peer review as something that could be more constructive than copy editing” (Jana I4). Jana's experience as an undergraduate TA and in a

writing center likely gave her a frame of reference for what productive peer response looks like and allowed her to feel comfortable experimenting with the form, which she explains that she tried two ways, one with written feedback and one with oral feedback. Though neither was perfect, she reflected:

I think maybe even the one that they did aloud seemed to work better because it was less like looking through the paper in isolation, so when they were reading it aloud and the whole group was responding, then they could be like “oh yeah I agree with that, but I also think you could do this,” and so it allowed for a little more collaboration. (I4)

Jana was persistent in making peer review work without being nervous or scared that it was not going well, likely because she has worked for years responding to student writing as a peer.

It is not surprising that Jana and Lindsey had strong convictions and complex thoughts about peer review. As I will discuss later, most of the participants had positive experiences with peer responses to their writing, but Lindsey and Jana both showed the most consistent interest and investment in writing center pedagogies as they arrived in the MA program, throughout the program, and even as they graduated and moved into professional roles. Yet even Steve, who did not consider himself necessarily passionate about writing centers, still expressed value for peer response in his writing classrooms. For example, to prepare Steve’s 101 students for peer review of their literacy narratives, although it was not in his original plans, he had the idea to share his literacy narrative as a model, which he had written as the first assignment for the writing center’s practicum:

I wanted to take it a little slower and show them another example of a literacy narrative that did not fit our class literacy narrative prompt but was one that was still kind of a work-in-progress. And I think that was humbling for me, that I gave them time to

workshop my own piece and kind of talk about it and the misgiving that they might have about it, or how it wasn't necessarily fitting to how we had talked about as a literacy narrative and the characteristics of one. (I4)

This is another moment in which Steve draws on his values as a creative writer. By seeing himself as a writer with writing always in progress, he realized that he might have something to contribute to his students. In addition, Steve noted the vulnerability of such an action, essentially outing himself as a student. Both the writing center and his creative writing workshops instilled a value of peer response. As he moved into his second semester (he taught creative writing instead of 102), he insisted on the central role of workshopping in the class: "I'm hoping they're gonna be receptive to the other students' feedback. 'Cause I remember in my intro. to creative writing class... I don't remember how much credence I gave my fellow students" (I5).

I traced Lindsey's strong valuing of peer review through her discussions of her 101 class, 102 syllabus, 102 rationale, my 102 observation, and her teaching philosophy. Of her 101 class, she stated: "A lot of them hate peer review, like they came in hating peer review, so that's why I've been really concerned about making sure it works for everybody because they have such horrible experiences" (I4). After trying several structures for peer review in her 101 class, in her 102 class, Lindsey organized "group conferences," which were a hybrid of peer review and instructor conferences. Her 102 syllabus defines them: "Group conferences will take place during the normal class meeting time and will act as group workshops during which you will receive more time and attention to your work than may be possible during normal workshops." When I observed her class, she was organizing and preparing for the group workshops for the upcoming week. She divided the students into small groups, arranged for them to exchange drafts using Blackboard, and instructed them to comment on group members' drafts before their



group conference. The students then would attend class only one day the following week for their groups' conference. Lindsey's teaching philosophy, written at the end of her third semester, reinforced her value of peer response:

Peer workshops play a prevalent role in my writing courses as I believe they are one of the best ways to facilitate hands-on learning experiences in which students are learning from each other. *These workshops are framed very much like writing center consultations in which students are asked to read the full draft before responding in any way.*

(emphasis added)

Peer review was not something Lindsey was simply performing, but something that she had thought deeply about and expressed as part of her professional identity.

Although Lindsey, Jana, and Steve made connections between peer review and their values of peer response in other contexts, Charlie did not readily connect classroom peer review genres and her writing center work. Instead, when she first started teaching, she thought back to her own experiences with in-class peer review: "I've never gotten a lot out of peer workshopping in a classroom setting. So, I am uncertain about that. I'm uncertain about how to lead that I'm uncertain about how to encourage people to peer workshop effectively" (14). Although Charlie did not discuss this perspective extensively, she seemed frustrated that this genre was expected of her as a teacher when she did not value it. Yet Charlie seemed to have changed her beliefs by the time she developed her 102 materials. Charlie's writing-about-writing theme (Downs and Wardle) for the course, and perhaps the additional research she did to prepare for it, allowed her to see peer review in a new light. She also used the writing-about-writing focus to lead her students to a similar conclusion, which she explains in her 102 syllabus rationale:

During week three, the class will prep for week four peer reviews by examining research proposal genre conventions and by reading Nancy S[o]mmers's "Responding to Student Writing." My goal in assigning the S[o]mmers piece is to emphasize the importance of effective, meaningful, insightful, and respectful personal and peer review. I want it to be clear to students that "writing process activities are not *exercises*... but practical steps that actually accomplish writing work" (Dethier 55).

Charlie's reversal of opinion is quite striking. She may have noticed the prevalence of peer review in composition studies' literature in her composition practicum, but also in the readings, she did on her own to prepare to teach the writing-about-writing themed 102 course. Since Charlie saw herself entering the field, she would have had an incentive to try to see the value in peer review. In sum, writing center work may influence valuing and executing peer review, especially for those TAs who are invested in writing center pedagogy. However, TAs cannot simply accept templates for pedagogical genres as they are "given." They need to find ways to connect the genres to their values, identities and/or prior learning experiences, or there is a risk of wholesale rejection.

### **Written Feedback to Students**

The final pedagogical genre discussed in this chapter is the participants' responses to student writing. While commenting on student papers is a genre, it is considered an "occluded" one (Swales, "Occluded"). Written occluded genres "operate to support and validate the manufacture of knowledge," but "they are rarely part of the public record"; therefore, "newcomers to a field, such as graduate students... may have particular difficulties in matching the expectations of their targeted audiences" (46). Although instructor response to student writing has a large body of research (e.g. Anson; Connors and Lunsford; Ferris; Mathison-Fife

and O'Neill; Sommers; Straub; Phelps, "Cyrano"; Phelps, "Surprised"; Zebroski, "A Hero"), studies on response have gradually become more isolated and less generalizable as they unravel the complexity of response situations (Haswell, "The Complexities"; Rysdam and Johnson-Shull). Regardless, Dana Ferris's recent study summarizes best practices in composing response, based on prior research: focus first on higher-order and then on lower-order concerns; provide specific constructive feedback and positive reinforcement; facilitate writer agency; mark patterns of error instead of all; consider minimal marking of errors (not correcting but indicating); and use modeling, scaffolding, and accountability to help students benefit from peer response and teacher-student conferences (8). Yet written response does not exist in isolation of other teaching practices; Ferris' best practices also include activities that support written responses: provide feedback on multiple drafts-in-progress; give opportunities for peer and instructor feedback; and conduct individual conferences (8). Not much research exists on new writing instructors' actual practices or on the impact of moving from the response context of the writing center to the writing classroom. While examining response practices constituted a small part of my study, it is clear that studying new teacher response practices' movement from the writing center to the classroom is an area ripe for future research.

I coded comment types across two sets of feedback from each participant. I collected papers from participants at the same time of the semester. The first semester the participants were teaching the same assignment (assignment three: argument construction) and the second semester they were teaching different assignments. Using a random number generator, I selected five papers from each participant's first semester and five from the second. Even with downsizing the sample size, the dataset was complicated and messy, so I chose to represent the results from this aspect of data analysis as a table to summarize the range of response practices

and changes from semester to semester (Table 5). Four factors—purpose, medium, mode, and context—contributed to a messy data set and methodological issues that I did not anticipate, but that nevertheless further conversations about the complexity of studying response practices.

1. Purpose: The first time I requested a set of comments, from the 101 classes, I asked participants to send me a set of paper comments on “in-progress” drafts, as opposed to comments with graded drafts. My goal here was to study the participants’ approaches to facilitative rather than evaluative comments. All except Lindsey sent in-progress drafts. Lindsey prioritized giving her students both feedback and grades before Thanksgiving break to allow them to revise the graded paper instead of providing everyone in-progress feedback on a draft. Recognizing this complication and that some participants may conduct conferences instead of written comments on in-progress drafts, I did not specify “final” or “in-progress” comments for the 102 paper set.
2. Medium: I wanted my data to accurately represent how the participant would comment if they were not part of a research study; therefore, I did not specify that they all needed to use a commenting medium that would be easy for me to collect and read, such as Microsoft Word embedded comments. The mediums they used included: Microsoft Word, Blackboard, and handwritten. The handwritten comments were difficult to read and the Blackboard comments, once exported to PDF, did not replicate how students experienced the comments when viewed in Blackboard.
3. Mode: As expected, the participants used a variety of in-text comments, tracked changes, and endnotes. In terms of counting individual comments, it was easy to classify in-text comments as, for example, “correction” or “reader response,” but the endnotes were more difficult when they responded to the draft more holistically.

4. Context: As researchers have noted (e.g. Huot; Straub and Lunsford; Zebroski, “A Hero”), context is difficult to account for in studying comments. I had access to information about the course and instructor, but I did not have full access to the ongoing dialogue between the participants and their students. As Prior notes, response research needs to “ask how response is situated in interpersonal and institutional contexts” (“Tracing Authoritative” 320). Although instructor response is a text that is fairly easy to collect and read, analysis is challenging. Without knowing the history of the instructor’s comments in class or past comments on student writing, much may be invisible to an objective outsider reading a teacher’s comments. I learned more about the context of their comments in interview five in which I asked them about their philosophy and process for commenting and had them talk through an example set of comments that I brought to the interview.

Table 5: Frequency of Comment Types

<b>Comment type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example (Participant, Course)</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>102*</b>
Corrections	Marking or changing the student's writing; marking sentence-level issues.	Delete the phrase "I believe" to create a stronger statement (Charlie 101).	79	58
Positive reinforcement	Stating what the writer did well or praising the writer. Could also be a positive symbol like a check or a smile.	I like that you sum up the themes of the conversation here (Lindsey 102).	47	67
Reader response	Calling attention to audience or the instructor as audience.	Nice. I'm on board with this. If you handle it well, even the most diehard fanboy might be persuaded (Grant 101).	53	34
Dictating/ directive	Telling students what to do, but not how to do it.	You need to explain the claims that you make (Charlie 101).	40	29
Corrective suggestion	Correcting framed as a suggestion. Language used includes: perhaps, you may need, be careful not to, consider, maybe just, you might, I would, I think, it would be good to, and be careful with.	"Scenario" might be a better word here (Steve 101).	28	24
Directive reader response	Calling attention to audience or the instructor as audience with the addition of a directive.	I think your point that children are effected by divorce is really smart, but are you sure that it leads to them hating men? I mean, maybe it does, but that's the kind of thing you need to back up with some research or something, because I'm not going to just take your word for that kind of a claim (Paul 101).	11	18

Table 5: Frequency of Comment Types, Continued

<b>Comment type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example (Participant, Course)</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>102*</b>
Defer to assignment	Bringing attention to an aspect of the assignment that the student is not following.	This is a great start to your essay. However, you should have at least 3 pages of writing. This draft does not meet the criteria for this assignment. You still need to name counter arguments and respond to them as well. Also, make sure to use MLA format (Charlie 101).	17	5
Justification of grade	Pointing out a lack in the students' writing with the primary purpose as justification of the grade.	Your thesis could be clearer. It doesn't express your point of view in a direct way (Lindsey 101).	10	10
Facilitate/ Scaffold	Asking questions to move them into the next step in their process.	Can you explain the incentives/disincentives? Does that mean fruit is 30% less expensive? (Jana 102).	4	13
Genre	Redirecting to the genre's key features.	So, this is a solid intro, but we need to shift gears, since I'm asking for an argumentative paper. Basically, you just need to use this opportunity to present some kind of argument and supporting points. They can be simple, but they still need to be included in this intro (Paul 102).	0	16
Total			289	274

\* Steve taught English 202, Introduction to Creative Writing

I did not impose a pre-existing schema of commenting on the dataset. With an acknowledgment of my knowledge of response research, I used a grounded theory approach. Overall, out of the seventeen different types of responses I identified, they tended to use the same ten types of comments, and there were slight changes from first to second semester in their comments taken as a group (Table 5). Notably, there were less straightforward corrections and simply deferring to the assignment instructions in the second semester. This could be because the participants were more practiced in commenting and felt more ownership over their assignments (and courses) in the second semester (chapter four). There was also more positive reinforcement, scaffolding, and focusing on genre in the second semester. As discussed, the participants seemed more interested in teaching research genres in their second semester after they had more experience with research genres. Finally, the overall variety of commenting types demonstrates the range of strategies that the participants drew upon, though they were using correction and, often a passive use of authority with corrective suggestions, they also made heavy use of positive reinforcement and reader response, two strategies they practiced in the writing center context.

### **Writing and Research Processes**

The last section of this chapter discusses changes in the participants' declarative and procedural knowledge about writing and research processes for academic purposes. The participants' presence and participation in the writing center, pedagogies used in their graduate courses, and the connections they made while learning to teach writing and learning to write as graduate students, invited them to change their dispositions, attitudes, and practices. In other words, they were learning about teaching writing in their practicums for their teaching roles in the writing center and classroom, but they were also practicing writing in their courses and reflecting on the connections in interviews for this study. These interrelated contexts at times



created learning pathways in which the participants made procedural knowledge declarative. First, the participants recognized writing as more collaborative and social than they had conceived of it before graduate school. Second, they recognized the role of investment in the subject matter. Both lessons contributed to descriptions of their writing process as slowing down to allow for deeper inquiry and feedback from trusted readers. Their realizations about writing and research shaped their teaching practices. Yet when they aimed to emulate their learning experiences with their students, they encountered differences in context that they did not always anticipate.

### **Response, Feedback, and Role-Taking**

In the first semester, when the participants were physically situated in the writing center with their cohort, they began relying on peers for writing feedback and validation. The shared office space afforded them opportunities to collaborate informally, as Jana recalled: “I think sometimes someone will be like ‘hey can someone look at this’ and they’ll just pass a laptop around, and we’ll just all look at it together” (I2). Though Paul believed that moments such as these were “not like serious feedback” (I2), the lack of perceived seriousness or formality might be why these interactions were effective. They were genuine. Informal conversations also led the cohort members to formally request writing help. They scheduled appointments with one another in the writing center. This is not something that only happened once or twice; it was widely practiced, beginning in the first semester. Charlie explained why, as a writer, she decided to schedule an appointment with Steve for feedback on her conference presentation for Introduction to English Studies:

I... get a lot of feedback from like informal things, but... if I read this out loud to someone in the writing center, they can give me feedback and tell me. Especially, it’s

really helpful that they all know what the assignment is and are doing it themselves. So Steve, you know, gave me some ‘oh I would really like to hear about this when you present this in class’ and ‘I think that this part is really strong, and you should expand on that’ and...it was a good like prompt for me to get going on the paper. (I2)

Charlie’s description both parallels and diverges from a “typical” writing center session. She opened by explaining that reading aloud will open up her writing for feedback. Yet she then pointed to a key difference between a typical writing center appointment and appointments between classmates. In Charlie and Steve’s appointment, both were familiar with the assignment and course; therefore, in Charlie’s view, Steve took on a role closer to a “writing fellow” or a classmate during peer review.<sup>22</sup>

The participants in the role of the “writer” in informal and formal feedback moments undoubtedly received useful feedback to apply to their writing. Yet the participants in the role of the “consultant” also learned about writing processes and genres. Grant said that being “on either side” of these peer consultations was both a “camaraderie thing” and showed him “some examples of other writing that are not publish[ed] and academic and clear and polished, but, you know, they’re still in process too” (I2). Writing teachers who value teaching writing as a social and interpersonal activity may pitch classroom peer review as an opportunity for dialogue between writers-in-process and critical readers (Paton 291). However, often classroom peer review, in both undergraduate and graduate courses, falls short in fulfilling this goal. The participants’ descriptions of feedback among their cohort demonstrate that they were learning the

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<sup>22</sup> Writing “fellows” are course-embedded tutors, so unlike “generalist” writing consultants, they have more knowledge of the specific expectations for a professor and course.

value of peer response, and, more importantly, grasping the “threshold concept” of “writing as a social and rhetorical activity” (Adler-Kassner and Wardle).

More broadly, when the participants acted as consultants to writers similar to themselves, and they reflected on these similarities, they had procedural and declarative realizations about their writing practices. For instance, Charlie, Jana, and Lindsey described moments in which they recognized that they should take their advice: “I see things in people’s papers that I’m like ‘oh maybe like that’s not the way you should do that.’ And then I realize that I’m doing that as well. So, reflecting on other people’s work kind of makes me self-reflective” (Charlie I2). Jana once suggested that a writer try a reverse outline, but she then realized that “I don’t reverse outline in my own writing... maybe I should try that and see if it actually is something helpful” (I2). When the participants approached others’ writing processes as changeable and shapeable, they sometimes saw their writing habits as similarly malleable. In their research on the identity development of new teachers, Ji Hong et al. point to the importance of unifying the inevitable multiple roles or “I-positions” inhabited by new teachers (e.g. parent and teacher or teacher and mentor) in developing a professional identity. Hong et al. argue that experiences of “disequilibrium,” or conflict among I-positions, reflection, and reunification are “essential for developmental progress, especially when they are accompanied by deliberate reflections and agency” (86). When the participants acted as consultants, providing feedback to writers in similar situations as themselves, they had opportunities to make connections across two “I-positions.” Though there is a seemingly small conflict in the identities of “graduate consultant” and “graduate writer,” there are much larger conflicts between the roles of “teacher” and “student,” that TAs often have trouble combining (Dryer; Grouling). The participant realizations demonstrate that there are opportunities in the writing center context for TAs to create

associations between their student and teacher selves, opportunities that may be more difficult to make in classroom contexts.

Moreover, the potential connections made go beyond nuggets of writing advice or models of genre (as discussed earlier in this chapter). As Jana took on the role of a consultant to graduate student writers across disciplines, she learned a powerful affective lesson. Working with other graduate students

helped me kind of deal with that like insecure imposter syndrome-y kind of feeling... I'm looking at their writing and I think their writing is so strong and they're sitting beside me going "this is terrible. And I've never done this before, and I don't know what a literature review is" or whatever. It helps me kind of realize that we all feel the same way, right?

(13)

Although the opportunity to have meaningful social and intellectual interactions with other graduate students across the disciplines is rare in academia, it happens daily in many writing centers. Such interactions may facilitate much-needed agency in graduate student writers that is hard to come by in other academic contexts that are often performative. Bronwyn T. Williams argues that

knowledge of genre conventions and audience expectations, while helping graduate students' sense of agency, does not completely change their liminal position of being half student/half scholar. They are still expected to position themselves as peers with the audience of professors— except when they're expected to behave like students with much to learn. That such distinctions rely on unspoken cultural conventions creates an ongoing anxiety for graduate students that erodes agency in reading and writing. (114)

In their study of nine writing tutors (including undergraduates, graduate students, and professionals), Kelsey Hixton-Bowles and Roger Powell found “fairly high levels of self-efficacy in writing and tutoring” and a correlation between writing and tutoring self-efficacy. Graduate students, regardless of discipline, have unique struggles to position themselves and write with agency. While the support of a programmatic cohort and mentors within a department is valuable to create communities of practice and likely bolster confidence and agency, conversing with a variety of writers can have the affective impact that Jana discovered. She not only got to read graduate student writing in progress, but she listened to their thoughts and feelings. She also, I assume, practiced empathizing, which may have encouraged her to internalize such positive talk about writing.

The participants not only sought out feedback from their cohort in the writing center but when they reflected on how their writing processes had changed overall in the MA program, the role of feedback from a variety of readers was significant. Charlie observed that she was “more open to advice than I was in undergrad” (I6). Several participants expressed similar sentiments, but Grant aptly described his change in perspective (mentioned in several interviews):

I’ve taken a different perspective on revision... I’m much more comfortable like not having something fully fleshed out before I let someone read it. If I’m having major problems with a draft that I need to kind of go back and reorganize, I’m more comfortable with that, and I think before I was less comfortable with it, and I wanted to, even if I was having it criticized, I wanted it to be pretty polished already. And so now I think I have less of a motivation to do that, and I can start getting help in the middle of it.

(I3)

In addition to recalling feedback in the writing center, Grant and Charlie attributed their new openness to revision and feedback to interactions with peers and faculty members in other contexts. Similarly, in-class creative writing workshops were important for Grant and Steve. Grant wrote in his portfolio cover letter for a creative writing course that “the draw for me in creative writing courses is always having a group of people dedicated to the craft, who all become trusted readers. I like hearing criticisms even when people are finding problems or concerns with my work.” Steve, too, appreciated the workshops, but in his portfolio letter, he points out that reading others’ works-in-progress can boost confidence and encourage risk-taking: “I’ve been wanting to make the leap into non-fiction for a while now, but it wasn’t until the success that my classmate... had with his own non-fiction that I was encouraged to try.” Through reading his classmates’ writing, and, importantly, listening to the feedback that others gave that writing, Steve decided to experiment and try writing in a new genre. Though the creative writing workshops were formal expectations for the course, Grant and Steve sincerely valued the value of feedback from their peers, or, as Grant describes them, “trusted readers.”

The qualities that the participants valued in writing center feedback— trusted peers, genuinely interested readers, and helpful advice— they also valued in their in-class peer reviews in graduate courses. In the third semester, several of the participants experienced a positive in-class peer review in the *Toward a Cultural History of Authorship* seminar. The peer review was organized as small groups, and the professor also participated. They reported that the professor asked helpful questions and was kind and supportive of their works-in-progress. Grant was happy with the experience and likened it to a creative writing workshop: It “worked very much like a creative writing workshop... and then [I] had some really good valuable feedback in order to focus on those revisions” (I5). However, in a few instances, the participants did not consider

formal class-wide peer review as positive. In their Introduction to English Studies class, the professor organized a peer review workshop, which everyone participated in, but the cohort still exchanged feedback in the writing center through formal and informal means. Also, Charlie felt “weird” about her peer review in a course that included undergraduate students: “You could just hear all of the like senior undergraduate students being like ‘this is terrible’” (I3). In these examples, the participants did not value the structure, timing, or others’ perspectives, which led them to reject the peer review process in those classes. Moreover, as discussed earlier, even though the participants had mostly positive experiences with peer response in the writing center and their classes, not all, in turn, valued it for the same reasons in their 101 and 102 classes.

### **Motivation and Engagement with Research Topics**

As the participants encountered challenging writing assignments as graduate students, they adjusted their writing processes, rethinking tactics that had sufficed when they were undergraduate writers. In addition to accepting feedback as a useful and normal component of the writing process, they became invested in their research topics. When they felt connected to a writing topic, they approached it as a process of inquiry: “I’ve become more cognizant of it, like developing ideas over a longer period of time, rather than being like ‘well this is what I want to do’” (Lindsey I5). Lindsey also drafted more, even when it was not required for a class! Generally, the participants’ investment in a project encouraged them to take more time on a project than they may have done as an undergraduate.

In digging deeper to understand the contexts that facilitated such an investment, across participants and interviews, they cited assignments and courses that gave them flexibility. In terms of learning genre conventions, as argued earlier in this chapter, the writing center practicum, *Rhetoric of Race in Medieval England*, and Introduction to English Studies courses

were important. However, when the participants were less worried about performing genre, their writing processes became more inquiry-based. Two courses, in particular, allowed participants to explore their interests through the lens of the course: Spatial Rhetorics, taken by Grant, Lindsey, and Charlie during the first semester, considered an elective, and Toward a Cultural History of Authorship, taken by Steve, Grant, Lindsey, and Jana in their third semester, fulfilling the 1700-1900 literature course requirement. In Toward a Cultural History of Authorship, the seminar paper required archival research and did not limit topics to nineteenth-century texts. Lindsey, who had a solid interest in composition studies, recalled her excitement at being able to connect a tangential interest (outside of composition) to a writing assignment for a literature course: “I was super excited when *Barracoon* came out... when we were doing slave narratives [in class], I thought about *Barracoon* and realized that Zora Neale Hurston was doing different things with like authorship and identity” (I5). Although Lindsey would have not taken the course had she not needed to fulfill a requirement, she was able and excited to write a paper that connected to her interests. Moreover, she saw her writing process for the graduate course as a useful model for her students. When I observed her 101 course, she modeled a process of narrowing a topic, using her *Barracoon* paper as an example. She was writing it concurrently with her first semester of teaching. Several of the participants also recalled similar discovery processes in the authorship course, so it must have succeeded in facilitating a diversity of student interests through the lens of authorship in the nineteenth century.

Although Grant, Lindsey, and Charlie took Spatial Rhetorics in their first semester, the writing they accomplished in the course resonated with them well after the course concluded. Because the course focused on, well, spatial rhetoric, they rhetorically analyzed spaces. In their final papers, they each chose a public space that had a personal connection to their life and



identity and wrote about how these spaces physically changed over time and audiences' responses. Lindsey wrote about a truck stop where she often did her homework as an undergraduate. Charlie chose Naradreamland, an abandoned theme park in Japan that she had visited while studying abroad, the same topic she wrote about for the Introduction to English Studies' and Pop Culture Association's presentations. Grant selected an abandoned amphitheater on property he owned near his home that had always sparked his curiosity. Writing about topics they felt personally connected to, while they worked to analyze them as scholars, slowed down their processes. Grant worked uncharacteristically (to this point) hard on his paper: "I put a boatload of research into that. I spent hours and hours outside of class. It was my own interest because it sort of generated a question in me" (I3). Grant looked through newspaper archives, deeds, and conducted personal interviews for historical information about his amphitheater. Soon after finishing the paper, Grant realized:

[The paper] was a change where I recognized...a difference between what I'd done with my undergrad and what I was doing now... It allowed me to... see... something like what I think you're doing and then what I think that you know a professor would do... that it's based a lot more on, not a lot more, almost entirely, [on] intrinsic motivation. (I2)

Grant's investment in his topic allowed him to begin to conceptualize what conducting a large research project with primary research would be like as an advanced graduate student or professor of rhetoric. In his first semester, Grant was mulling over pursuing a PhD in rhetoric and composition. In doing so, similar to Charlie's careful observation of the genre of journal articles (discussed earlier), he was seeking out models for the research processes of faculty and advanced graduate students. In the final interview, Grant said he volunteered to participate in my

research project because he “was trying to be helpful... that’s all” (I6), but I also suspect that his initial curiosity about doctoral-level research may have been a factor.

It was important to Grant, Charlie, and Lindsey that they felt explicitly invited to write about places that were related to their identities. At this point in their first semester, they had little sense of a scholarly identity, or even a lack of scholarly identity, but they successfully and willingly integrated prior knowledge with new knowledge from the course. Notably, Lindsey felt that the writing she did for Spatial Rhetorics validated her knowledge, identity, and interests. Lindsey, who pulled all-nighters studying at a truck stop while in college and whose father is a truck driver, said her Spatial Rhetorics paper stood out to her more than the others she wrote her first semester because she “got to write a paper about truck stops ((laughs)).” She continued: “That’s one of my favorite things to do academia-wise is to bring in random things that I’m a nerd about and make them academic. So, I think that that’s my favorite kind of research and favorite topic I did this semester” (I2). Although the other two papers Lindsey wrote in her first semester (the conference paper and proposal), were about writing centers, her stated scholarly interest, the “truck stop paper,” resonated with her as she took her first steps in the world of graduate studies.

In contrast, though Grant felt intrinsically motivated and “energetic” (I3) during the writing process for his Spatial Rhetorics paper, he felt that his writing was not as polished in it as his Introduction to English Studies conference paper. He thought the Spatial Rhetorics paper was too personal and favored historicizing the amphitheater more than theorizing it. His introduction includes significant historical background and description before hinting at the purpose of the paper and not quite providing an argument:

It is this structure, and its changed spatial rhetoric, that I intend to focus my argument on, as it provides a microcosmic example of an important space left to decay. This example is one of many on the property, but also an often familiar one in the larger world: spaces that were once meaningful have lost their meaning, built as vibrant spaces but demoted into mere places.

In sum, the opportunity to write about a topic that one has previous knowledge about, but not necessarily in an academic context, provided Charlie, Lindsey, and Grant a space to explore the theories they read. When participants were writing about topics in which they had the flexibility to choose something meaningful to them, their descriptions of their writing processes moved from the mindset that they simply needed to get it done to get a good grade to a process closer to authentic inquiry.

### **Transfer to Teaching First-Year Composition**

The participants developed new understandings of writing and research processes through engaging with their peers and writing about topics that interested them. While I have previously discussed the participants' approaches and dispositions to peer review, this section focuses on how they worked to make their courses conducive for student engagement. Grant, after recalling the writing projects in which he got to write about a "genuine interest," tried to transfer that openness to his 102 class: "I do want to give them that guidance, but also that flexibility and... hopefully support them on... 'I don't know what to write about' to 'here's something that I never thought I'd invest myself in so much'" (15). While Grant recognized that students need to come to topics on their terms, he saw himself as a guide. Similarly, Lindsey wanted to appeal to her students' interests, so she chose pop culture, one of her interests, as the theme for her 102 class. As she mentioned in her first semester, one of her "favorite things to do academia-wise is to

bring in random things that I'm a nerd about and make them academic" (I2). She wrote in her 102 syllabus rationale that:

My own learning experiences, as well as my semester of teaching 101, have influenced my focus on popular culture and social issues within the composition classroom. I encourage students to bring their interests— especially those that may not be considered academic— into the classroom and their writing. Allowing students to work with texts of various types encourages them to be innovative and create new knowledge that uniquely represents them as individuals.

From my class observations, it seems like generally both Lindsey and Grant were fairly successful in engaging their students with these approaches. When I observed Lindsey's class, her students were preparing their methods section for their research paper. Lindsey's students seemed engaged in their topics, such as gender roles in *The Office*, LGBTQ representation in *Glee*, and Beyoncé's brand of feminism. However, as Lindsey and I informally discussed after the observation, I noticed as she responded to student questions that her insistence on flexibility and student self-direction sometimes led to confusion in terms of genre.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, when developing Grant's assignments for 102, he seemed to oscillate between prioritizing what he called "academic structures" and exploratory writing. While some of his earlier 102 assignment prompts reflected a tension between his beliefs about content and structures, the assignment prompt for the final project, "Assignment 3: Personal Research Project" better negotiated the flexibility he valued in his graduate classes:

For this assignment, you are to begin with a topic entirely of your choosing, create a research plan, conduct primary and secondary research surrounding it, and then present your findings to your academic community. This assignment is designed with vast

flexibility—your project will look very different from anyone else’s, including the final product. By the end of this project, you will generate several common elements: a research proposal, primary research planning, a final product, a reflection, and a presentation.

When I visited Grant’s class, he was discussing the project component in which students chose a medium and genre. Examples included a letter, PowerPoint presentation, or a Public Service Announcement, whichever medium made logical sense for students’ topics. While his students chose diverse topics ranging from NBA teams and city economics to virtual reality in the classroom, they found it difficult to choose a medium and genre. As Grant circulated the classroom asking students to share their topics and chosen final products, most of them stated they intended to create a PowerPoint presentation as their final product. Grant repeated several times that a PowerPoint would not be the best choice for all topics. So, while Grant was trying to recreate feelings of genuine motivation for his 102 students, it did not transfer exactly as he had hoped.

Although Grant and Lindsey were relatively successful in appealing to their students’ interests, though that meant perhaps setting aside questions of genre, other participants decided that they needed to have different standards for topic selection for first-year students. When one of Charlie’s students wrote sexist opinions in a paper for Charlie’s 101 course, she attributed her openness to topics to the flourishing of his hateful speech. Allowing students complete freedom of topics was, “oh gosh it was a crazy, crazy bad decision. I was like ‘this is a stupid decision!’” (15). One of her reasons for selecting writing-about-writing as a theme for her 102 course was to create some parameters in terms of topics: “I think that so far focusing the content on writing [in 102] has been really helpful in getting students to think about writing as a legitimate study-able

field of knowledge” (15). For Charlie, setting limits on student topics was necessary; first-year students could not be treated like graduate students. Similarly, several participants quickly “banned” topics in their 101 class and discussed in-class the banning of topics. Steve started out the 101 class that I observed by announcing the “off-limits” topics: abortion, marijuana, Trump’s twitter, gun control, animal testing, and why one religion is better than another. Ironically, his justification was that by working in the writing center, he saw too many of the same papers on these topics, that he “struggled” to see where students could develop a fresh opinion. While the participants saw flexibility and openness as useful in engaging students, they did not always know how to scaffold such experiences with first-year students.

### **Confluences between Teaching Writing and Composing as Graduate Writers**

As this chapter moves toward its conclusion, it forwards two complex examples to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the participants’ developing writing and teaching processes. In the *Toward a Cultural History of Authorship* class, students were required to conduct archival research, which was a new research method for many of the students enrolled. Jana recalled appreciation for an assignment that “made me research in new ways.” She continued: “Cause I know how to write about literature and write about stuff, but... we had to dig into archives, and I had never done any kind of archival research before... I think anything that kind of challenges me and makes me try something, other than what I’ve been doing for six years in college classes, is what’s been most helpful” (15). Grant had a similar relationship with his research project for the authorship class. He discussed (as this chapter did previously) his appreciation for revision and peer feedback for his paper. But he also expressed that writing the paper while taking the composition practicum revealed new insights about how to teach research writing:

The emphasis at the end of the semester [in the composition practicum] of looking at research and kind of making me think about how that process works and then coupling that with [the] authorship class where I wrote a huge paper on the [U.S.] census. Those two things together, I think, taught me a whole lot about the right way to research and doing that well and not thinking of it just as a task that had to be done, but instead, using it as like a form of building epistemology. And that's been helpful for me from a student standpoint, but also from a teaching standpoint, because I was able to better convey that, and have a clearer idea of what I wanted them to do because I had gone through it myself.

(16)

Ironically, though Grant thought that he should have been excused from the composition practicum because he was already qualified to teach high school, he experienced concrete insights about writing and research through learning about teaching writing while being a graduate student. When I pointed out to Grant that he had been teaching research for several years already to high school students, it caught him off guard. He said, quite frankly, that he had previously simply been performing the concept of research as a conversation and process for his students, though he did not fully internalize that belief for himself:

I think I had always been told and I had always heard that, you know, research was so that we could learn things, you know build knowledge. And I don't think that was any shock to me when I discovered that for myself. It was more that it was just an epiphany, that, yes, that's actually how it works, and it's not just lip service. (16)

While Grant had taught research writing and primary and secondary research, it was not until he actually went through a challenging process of inquiry and discovery for himself, multiple times,

in his MA courses, alongside pedagogical discussions of how to facilitate the process for students, that he was able to understand what primary research looks and feels like.

Lindsey also reflected on her evolution as a writer over the two years as it intersected with working in the writing center, teaching, and fulfilling the MA requirements. Beginning the MA, she felt relatively strong in her writing and writing process and writing center teaching practices:

I had practiced in a certain way for so long that like I felt comfortable, and I could explain it within like not super academic context if that makes sense, like I was able to pull metaphors and analogies from like other things, but when it came to like discussing like things as like rhetorical choices, I don't think that I... framed it in like "this is a rhetorical move for these reasons." (I6)

Lindsey admitted not that she was purposefully unreflective in her writing and writing center work, but that her growth had potentially stagnated because she had gotten into habits that worked fairly well in both her writing and consulting. She goes on to talk about the influence of teaching on her writing and her Culminating Project (CP):

But I think that teaching, one, drew my attention to that, and I also honestly think writing my CP drew my attention to like this is a more systematic like underlying foundation of writing that I'm doing, but maybe haven't paid attention to before, and now I have a different vocabulary in which I describe it, and I think that came from teaching 101 last semester and I was much more conscious of that in writing my CP. (I6)

The next chapter will more fully explore the participants' CPs and look at the relationship between the CP and the participants' development as scholars. For now, what is important is that Lindsey's development as a writer and as a teacher created a symbiotic relationship as she was



teaching concepts and learning a “different vocabulary,” through reflecting on the learning outcomes for 101 and 102. In turn, she paid closer attention to how she enacted the concepts through the process of working with her CP advisor.

This chapter began by exploring the participants’ encounters with English academic genres. For instance, writing conference papers demonstrated that, to pass as writers of the new genre, participants had to double back on knowledge and genres learned previously as undergraduates (genres and content) or concurrently in other classes (content and theories). Overall, the process of performing genre and decoding expectations from faculty sometimes outweighed exploration, learning, and the exigence to create arguments for disciplinary audiences. When the participants set out to teach research genres in their final semester, many of them drew reflectively and purposefully on their learning and their experiences with genre across disciplines in the writing center. The second section, which analyzed their approaches to pedagogical genres, first suggested that while templates are practical and often necessary, TAs forget to consider ethos, and the repercussions reverberate throughout their course. An analysis of approaches to peer review and commenting suggests possibilities for positive transfer from the writing center to the classroom. Finally, the third section teased out the participants’ new understandings of “the” writing process. Through teaching writing and learning to write as graduate students, they began to see writing as more social and as dependent on the writer’s genuine motivation to ask and answer new questions.

Though sparse, research on the pedagogical needs of graduate students tends to call for quality interactions with disciplinary faculty (e.g. Gardner; Paré et al.) and graduate pedagogy that provides models and opportunities for exploration (e.g. Rose and McClafferty). Researchers and teachers argue that graduate students need explicit models that are most effective when

provided by disciplinary insiders. One important finding of this chapter is that although the participants in my study reported few meaningful interactions between themselves and faculty, their two teaching contexts, including the practicums, provided them useful models of both genres and processes. Of particular note is the influence of the interdisciplinary nature of writing center consultations and the impact of role acquisition (of teacher, of consultant) on the participant's writing practices. Moreover, of interest to those who study TA or new teacher development was how the participants created pathways, and which pathways they created or ignored, between the writing expectations in their graduate courses and their teaching.

## CHAPTER VI

## DEVELOPMENT AS SCHOLARS IN ENGLISH STUDIES

*Cassie: If you had to start the program over, what would you do different? It can be classes or teaching or whatever.*

*Jana: If I had to start over—*

*Cassie: You don't have to start over ((laughs)).*

*Jana: Thank goodness. I probably would have taken a little more rhet/comp stuff. Just because it turns out that I'm going into writing center stuff. And I'm gonna have the opportunity to continue to teach. I would have liked more specific like composition theory stuff too. And I feel like all I took was lit, because that's something, you know, that I'm still super interested in, and that I love, and I love being in those classes and doing that work. But I don't know how, if I'm not going into a PhD program, and I'm not going into a field where I'm going to be writing about literature anymore, then that coursework seems a little pointless. (Interview 6)*

At the beginning of this project, I posed the broad research question “What teacherly, scholarly, and/or professional identities develop for TAs in a traditional MA English program?” Chapters three and four addressed the participants’ development as teachers, which aligns with the professional identity they adopted while in the program. Although this chapter addresses the question of scholarly development, it does not respond to the question in the same way that I assumed at the onset. I imagined a linear progression from disciplinary novices to feelings of belonging and identification. Though the participants changed the articulations of their scholarly interests throughout the program, their development was not linear, nor were they, as a whole, at the end of the program, significantly closer to identifying as a “scholar.” Table 2 in chapter two and the narrative profiles in chapter three introduced the participants by naming their primary

identified scholarly interests. Three participants identified rhetoric and composition generally—Charlie, Lindsey, and Grant. Steve identified creative writing. Paul and Jana identified literature. Though these broad categories and direct articulations are useful, this chapter analyzes and questions the concept of “scholarly development” and compares individual experiences of scholarly development with peers, the MA curriculum, TA training, and disciplines within “English studies.”

My role as a researcher and interpreter of their experiences, discussed in chapter two, was most pronounced when the study approached questions of scholarly development. Chapters three, four, and five dealt with questions of teacher and writer development, two topics that were consciously on the participants’ minds and that came up in their everyday conversations. In other words, I did not have to prompt them to discuss their successes, struggles, or questions regarding learning to teach or write. Though the interviews prompted deeper thinking, they reified routine reflections on teaching and writing. In contrast, their development as scholars was not a topic frequently on their minds. When I asked them in the interviews about their sense of scholarly development, I intervened more intrusively in their metacognitive reflection. In addition, because the participants were less aware or concerned about their scholarly development, in this chapter, I make more inferences. I base these inferences on the evidence in my data set, particularly paying attention to how the participants’ individual articulations changed over time, the commonalities and variations across all participants, and their enactments of disciplinarity in writing and teaching.

Even though the participants did develop as writers of academic and pedagogical genres (chapter five), this chapter shows that writer development was not synonymous with scholarly development. Although both their self-reflections on and an analysis of their writing indicate that

they learned to better perform a scholarly ethos, the interviews indicated that their writing represented more of a performance of adopting identities rather than their actual, more complicated, relationship with a scholarly identity. Their writing was a production of identities developed through the context of a curriculum that put significant limitations on the identities they could potentially develop. As this chapter builds on familiar moments and concepts from previous chapters, it highlights the participants' relationships to disciplinary identities through shared experiences in the program. After reviewing relevant scholarship about graduate student development and the role of the MA in English studies, this chapter is organized chronologically around four pivotal courses or degree requirements: the courses Introduction to English Studies, Contemporary Theories, and the teaching practicum, and the degree requirement of the Culminating Project (CP).

As pointed out in the introduction to chapter five, one thread of research on graduate students shows them resisting or reframing explicit and implicit efforts of disciplinary enculturation (e.g. Casanave, "Local"; Casanave, *Writing*; Casanave and Li; Leki et al. 39-41; Riazi; Salter-Dvorak; Prior, *Writing*; Prior, "Tracing Authoritative"). Christine Casanave's use of a game metaphor for academic writing highlights both dimensions of performance and convention in graduate student writing (*Writing*). Her research further argues for the study of academic writing as situated in local settings, rather than simply as a relationship to a nebulous "disciplinary community" ("Local"). She found that, for "multicultural" and "multilinguistic" first-year doctoral students in her study, "local factors undercut the compelling but sometimes overly simplified notion of disciplinary socialization and contribute to a view of disciplinary writing as highly complex, interactive, and locally situated, and therefore not fully predictable" ("Local" 86). Although this research demonstrates the complexities and barriers to socialization

as situated in local contexts, and thus the varied ways students become and see (or do not become and see) themselves as active participants in disciplinary conversations, the implications for such a view of writing and disciplinary enculturation have yet to be fully explored within writing studies.

Catherine Prendergast aptly describes the danger for writing studies' tendency to conflate disciplinary enculturation with graduate writer development through a critique of the oft-cited 1988 Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Akerman case study of "Nate," a PhD student in Carnegie Mellon's PhD in rhetoric program. Aligning her argument with Prior ("Tracing Authoritative"), she posits that developing as a writer, one who is performing a disciplinary identity, is not the same as developing a scholarly identity. She points to Prior, who "asserts a distinction between being a member of a discipline and acting as one, and this distinction between being and acting is an inherent if not overt one in most poststructuralist thought" (48). She goes on to quote Prior, and I will too because his assertion is so vital to my argument in this chapter: "One-way stories of assimilation into the center of a community and equally stereotyped tales of resistance belie the complexity of enculturation as practices situated within local relationships and contexts" (Prior, "Tracing Authoritative" 320; Prendergast 49). Building on Casanave, Prendergast, and Prior, this chapter describes how the local context, including a traditional MA English curriculum along with the participants' significant commitment and interest in teaching, shaped their understanding of themselves as situated within their disciplines. While it shows their developmental trajectories, it does not analyze their development through the lens of a particular theory of enculturation or "joining" of a scholarly field (e.g. Thornton and Nardi; Weidman et al.). To situate the local context, I next overview relevant conversations about defining "English studies," and the role of the MA degree in English.

Although there is a shift in viewpoints today, traditionally English departments and professional organizations, such as the MLA and ADE, understand the MA in English as preparation for a PhD in English (Strain and Potter, “The Twain”). The curriculum of so-called “traditional” MA programs often centers around training students to become advanced scholars in a facet of English studies, but, quite often, curricula are literature-heavy (ADE Ad Hoc). Theoretically, then, MA English programs focus on the knowledge and skills needed for advanced study and eventual careers as faculty in English departments. Today’s “English” includes literary studies, digital humanities, English education, film, cultural studies, rhetoric, composition, creative writing, and professional writing. Following such logic, graduate students move from novices at the beginning of an MA to experts at the end of a PhD. The conclusion of an MA would represent an early- to mid-point in this development.

The program at my research site seems to generally follow national trends of a “traditional” program as outlined by the ADE Ad Hoc Committee on the Master’s Degree.<sup>23</sup> Although literature and critical theory courses dominate the curriculum and course catalog, the program’s stated aims are broader. The course catalog lists two goals: The first is to gain “advanced knowledge” of literary traditions, and the second is to write a thesis or culminating project in the students’ selected area among literature, creative writing, and rhetoric and composition. The website indicates that the MA degree prepares students for advanced degrees— a PhD in literature or rhetoric and composition or an MFA in creative writing, and that graduates also work in business and industry. However, as described in the previous chapter, in

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<sup>23</sup> According to the 2013 ADE report, the four most common required courses for MA English degrees nationally are research methods, literary theory, American literature, and British literature (23).

practice, the curriculum privileged research genres that aimed to prepare MA students for careers as humanities academics.

Critiques of this “traditional” concept of the MA in English point to several issues. First, literary studies typically occupies a larger stake in traditional curricula than any other discipline. Although the study of literature has dominated English departments, at least since the mid-twentieth century (McComiskey 17), demand for teachers and researchers of composition and creative writing has grown in the past several decades (Kramnick). Although the “other” disciplines are often acknowledged through “tracks” or “emphases,” faculty and students must confront the slipperiness of the signifier of “English studies” (see Elbow, *What*; Graff; McComiskey). Literature, rhetoric and composition, and creative writing (the English MA emphases at my research site) do not necessarily share essential connections; the umbrella of these disciplines within “English studies” is a historical and often political construct that privileges literature as the primary lens for English studies (McComiskey). Complicating matters, today’s students in MA programs have a variety of goals and career trajectories; obtaining a PhD is only one of many (ADE Ad Hoc). Finally, the tenure-track job market for humanities has bottomed out and continues to worsen (Kramnick; Pettit), though the production of PhDs in English has not slowed significantly (Patel). Relatedly, production of MAs (and PhDs) in English contributes to a large cadre of willing part-time faculty. Scholars such as Strain and Potter (“The Twain”) and authors in the collection *Degree of Change* (Strain and Potter) call for changes to MA English curriculum based on actual student experiences and job market realities. However, few, if any, research studies focus on MA students’ experiences, goals, and



uptakes of the traditional English MA curriculum.<sup>24</sup> As this chapter outlines the participants' scholarly development within the local context, it relates their local experiences to the nebulous, but ever-present, "English studies."

### **Desire to Learn**

As chapters three and four established, one of the primary reasons that the participants enrolled in English graduate study was for teaching experience, though they also articulated scholarly interests cultivated primarily in their undergraduate programs (see Table 2). In each interview, I frequently received a range of responses from the same participant regarding his or her scholarly interests, depending on how I approached the topic. The articulations seemed to change if we were discussing their interests generally, or if I asked specific questions about "disciplinary identification." In the first interview, the participants exhibited resistance or ambivalence to "declaring" a disciplinary interest and instead favored an open stance toward the program's offerings. Paul's first interview provides a case-in-point. When I asked him "at this point, do you identify yourself with a certain discipline within English studies?" (with a hastily added clarification), a question I asked each participant in every interview, the exchange went as follows (and is how I extracted his interests for Table 2).

Cassie: ... So, at this point, do you identify yourself with a certain discipline within English studies? Are you focused on literature or rhet/comp or something else?

Paul: More literature.

Cassie: More literature.

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<sup>24</sup> While several studies on TAs cited in chapters one, three, and four include perspectives of MA students, often the goals of MA students are not investigated. Erika Wright's article, which includes her first-hand experience, is an exception. There are also research studies that look at master's students' writing and research processes in other disciplines. Finally, both Salter-Dvorak and Tardy (*Building*) include discussions of master's students.

Paul: I mean I kind of feel like a freshman again, where I don't really know what I'm doing. That's what I'm thinking, yes, literature.

Cassie: Are there any other terms or fields beyond just literature that you're— you feel connected with or you identify with?

Paul: That I feel connected with? I don't know. I'm thinking about going into like African American fiction. I've had a little bit of that in the past, and I'm taking a class kind of related to that now. So, it's just something I'm thinking of going into, but I wouldn't say I feel really strongly connected with any field. I should mention this isn't exactly related, but I was also a psychology major. I was a double major, so I still feel a little bit connected with that as well. But I didn't like it as much ((laughs)).

While Paul's response does not have a strong degree of performance, and the way I posed the question was somewhat leading, he still seems to feel compelled to give me a more specific answer than "I'm not sure." However, it seems clear that he would prefer not to have to declare a specialization, even among the "big" categories of literature, rhet/comp, and creative writing. Later in his interview, Paul stated: "I think like my, the idea right now is I just need to expose myself to as much as I possibly can so I can better figure out like what I'm most interested in" (I1). Other participants expressed similar eagerness at discovering something new, rather than entering with a set goal of disciplinary specialization. Like Paul, Jana said she would likely study literature, but was also interested in composition, emphasizing that "I just I think that there's a lot that I don't know, having a pretty limited um undergraduate experience" (I1). After teaching high school for several years, Grant "felt like I needed to shift that focus and get started again" (I1). The participants' open and exploratory state of mind as they began the MA contradicts a common assumption of graduate students as already possessing a preferred specialization.

Significantly, the participants did not perceive such a disposition as antithetical to the MA program's structure or goals. For instance, in the first interview, when I posed the same question of identity within English studies question to Steve, I had presumed, and told him so as a preface to the question, that since he had already mentioned his creative writing interests during the interview, that he planned to emphasize in creative writing. Yet his response changed when I asked the question directly: "So I'd like to think that I could do all three. I mean I like literature, a lot. Obviously, you're not going to read my [literacy and teaching narrative] essay, but I spent a lot of time talking about Stephen King and Raymond Carver and John Steinbeck" (I1). Although Steve did not possess an educational background in literary studies, he felt that he would be able to obtain an advanced degree in it because he was admitted to the program (remember, he has a film degree with minors in creative writing and ASL). Although most of the participants did not take a perspective as extreme as Steve's, they did not seem to recognize the real limitations of the curriculum to allow them to explore within English studies: They were limited to three electives after accounting for the teaching practicums and required courses.

### **Introducing English Studies**

In theory, an "Introduction to English Studies" course (previously discussed in chapter five in the context of the conference presentation assignment) would seem to fit the needs of this student population perfectly. However, instead of allowing the participants to map their range of interests or learn about the range of possibilities within the boundaries and dimensions within English studies, the course further distanced and confused several of them about "English studies," and where and if their interests were located within it. From my observation in the class, analysis of the syllabus, and the participants' reactions, the main issue seemed to be that the instructor, an English professor with a specialization in literature, approached the course as a

seasoned literature professor might: She used close reading as a method and, to some degree, operated on a tacit assumption of literary studies as the center of English studies. While such an approach seems reasonable, considering the professor's background and interests, the course lacked transparency about its specific angle, though some students caught on. Jana claimed that the professor "taught it as a literature class basically. Like, it was all 'here's how this relates to literature'" (I2). Further, the participants with undergraduate majors in English (Jana, Lindsey, and Paul) previously learned to perform the work of some aspect of the field (e.g. literary analysis), but they likely had little opportunity to study or question the scope and history of English studies. The participants who did not come from English major backgrounds (Steve, Charlie, and Grant) simply had to operate under the course's logic and parameters, even though the literary studies angle did not fit with their interests in creative writing, writing studies, and rhetoric, respectively. In general, then, the contradiction between the course's purported goals, its assigned texts, and assignments frustrated both groups of participants for different reasons.

Although the conference presentation was the final assignment for the class, the primary reading assignments and seminar discussions were "keywords" texts in literature, cultural studies, and writing studies.<sup>25</sup> A tacit assumption seemed to be that students would understand how these keyword texts related to their current and future scholarship in literature, rhetoric and composition, and creative writing. I am not sure that the professor explained that (I assume) the texts were chosen because they represented interdisciplinary approaches to keywords, which appear across some scholarship in English studies. None of the books included English,

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<sup>25</sup> The assigned course texts were: *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (Burgett and Hendler), *Keywords in Writing Studies* (Heilker and Vandenberg), *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender* (Stimpson and Herdt), and *A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (R. Williams).

literature, literary studies, rhetoric, composition, or creative writing in their titles. Creative writing seemed to have the least representation in the text selection. The book titles centered on culture and identity, except for *Keywords in Writing Studies* (Heilker and Vandenberg). Although the close reading approach seemed aimed at revealing similarities and differences in disciplines, even if the participants recognized the purpose of the readings, which they all did not, such fine-grained nuances were lost on the first-year MAs. After the course was over, Steve determined that the main part of the course was “reading keywords,” but he questioned, “but with what goal?... Is this going to be helpful for my conference paper? Is this something that we have to include in the conference paper? But we didn’t” (I2). While certain keyword discussions were interesting, they did not help them understand “English studies” or forward their interests and disciplinary identities. It seemed like they were given a detailed map of city blocks, but they knew little about the city and country where they were located. They needed other maps, an atlas. As Steve indicates, the participants could not always articulate exactly why they were frustrated with the course. They could describe what they were doing and that they saw it as not useful, but they could not always pinpoint why or what might be more helpful.

The types of writing assignments for Introduction to English Studies were the instructor’s idea of practical preparation in genres for English graduate students. The second assignment, to select a journal, read all of the 2016 issues, and respond to them, helped to introduce students to the genres of an academic journal and current conversations in an area of interest. However, this was a minor part of the course. As discussed in chapter five, the most significant writing assignment for the course, and the aspect of the course that the participants felt had the highest stakes, was the conference presentation. The participants were eager to learn how to do it and stated that it was useful, overall, in terms of their writing development in the program. Yet, as

argued in chapter five, all grappled with audience and positioning within English studies. While the professor approached the course as a practical way to introduce graduate students to English studies, its tacit assumptions added up. Composing a conference presentation became an empty signifier of graduate student production.

As demonstrated in chapter five, most of the participants satisfied the professor's expectations for a conference presentation by drawing on prior or concurrent knowledge to perform a graduate student genre. The participants who were successful, or who did not mention struggling with their conference paper, submitted a version of a paper written for a concurrently taken course (Charlie and Lindsey), pulled from the content of a concurrently taken course (Paul), or were previously well-versed in the conventions of rhetorical or literary analysis (Jana and Grant). This backtracking was at odds with their original eagerness to explore possibilities in the program. By the second and third interviews, several of the participants began to gently back away from their openness to learn more about the variety of English studies and turn toward familiar topics or methods, which reinforces Strain and Potter's observation that "while disciplinary specialization is one of the fundamental (and expected) outcomes of graduate study in any field, it may also be the case that such early specialization at the MA level preemptively limits students' exposure to the richness that characterizes English" (140). Although the participants felt that they could perform both genres and a degree of specialization, it is not necessarily how they imagined the MA.

For instance, Jana reflected at the end of her first semester that "I came in and I was like 'I don't know if I'm going to kind of be, continue to be, a literature person, or if I can make that shift to rhet/comp because I know that we have a PhD program here. And so, I was trying to figure out if that's a shift that I thought that I was interested in making, but right at this point I

don't feel like it's my thing" (I2). Jana had little opportunity in her first semester, other than her writing center practicum, to explore facets of rhetoric and composition. When I asked her how she decided this, she explained that the decision was more feeling than rational, though she pointed to informal contact with MA and PhD students, who identify as rhetoric and composition-focused, as influencing her decision: "Just like thinking about it and talking to people who are rhet/comp people, it just it feels like my interests just aren't there. Like I'm not interested in what they're interested in necessarily. Like I don't think about writing and research the way that they do. I don't know... It's something that I feel, but I'm not sure I'm confident of this is why I feel this way" (I2). Jana simply did not think she knew enough about other fields to go about staking her identity on it; it seemed safer to move toward what she felt comfortable with.

Likewise, Charlie, Lindsey, and Grant, whose initial stated interests included rhetoric and composition, felt that, by the end of their first and second semesters, there were few opportunities to deeply engage with rhetoric or composition faculty or content. While they had been open to learning about new topics at the beginning of the program, they had also assumed that they would simultaneously have opportunities to engage with their interests. Grant, who was more interested in rhetoric than composition, noted that rhetoric classes "are just not out there" (I3). Except for Contemporary Theory in his second semester, "all my other stuff is literature," which "I know it's important, and it's sometimes enjoyable, but it's not my real interest" (I3). Charlie and Lindsey ascribed the issue to the number of required literature classes and the imperative to complete all the required courses to graduate before the two-year assistantship contract completed. Lindsey lamented that "I think with the way the program's set up, I haven't had the chance to do a lot of rhet/comp stuff, so even though that is my intended emphasis" (I3).

Charlie signed up for required literature courses that she needed, which are not offered every semester, before taking electives: “There is a seminar in rhetorics, but I like can’t take it and still get all my requirements in time. So yeah, I’m taking a literature class. I’m taking two literature classes. And [critical] theory, yeah. Which [will] definitely be new to me, especially because I’m just really more interested in rhetoric and composition” (I2). Charlie seemed disappointed that she would not take any rhetoric and composition courses in her second semester.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Steve struggled the most with Introduction to English Studies, specifically the conference presentation. His love for fiction did not outweigh his unfamiliarity with the conventions, or *topoi*, of literary analysis (see Wilder and Wolfe).<sup>26</sup> In other words, by no fault of his own, he had not previously internalized the types of arguments that count to literary scholars, and his professor was not transparent about the fact that she was teaching a course and providing feedback as a literary scholar. During the Introduction to English Studies course, Steve’s openness to learning turned into a feeling of being lost in the disciplines. Like the others, he looked back for something familiar to hold on to, but he did so even more forcefully than his peers. Introduction to English Studies “made me want to do as much creative writing as I can as opposed to, um, whatever it was” (I2). “It” seems to be the tacit assumptions of literary analysis that Steve unknowingly violated in his conference paper about characters with disabilities in contemporary American short stories. Because the course looked at the nuances between approaches to and selections of keywords, Steve did not complete his

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<sup>26</sup> In their WID study of writing in literature, Laura Wilder and Joanna Wolfe include seven *topoi* of professional literary analysis that they argue are often tacitly encouraged in undergraduate writing about literature: appearance/reality, ubiquity, paradox, paradigm, context, social justice, and mistaken critic (175).



Introduction to English Studies course with any understanding of how to either define or map the fields within English studies, specifically the ones that the program offered concentrations in:

I don't know what that [rhet/comp] means. So that's the big definition that I'm confused on. There's another student [... he] is very big into like Marxist theory and like Marxist literature. I thought because that was not fictional that that was rhet/comp, but it's not. That's lit. I was like, 'oh [he] likes rhet/comp.' And they were like, 'no, he's a lit guy, like, he likes Marxist theory and like Marxists texts. That's lit.' And I was like, 'is it?' So, I still really don't know what rhet/comp means. I think teaching? Writing? Is it like ped—? I don't know. I don't know. I never had that definition, and I feel like everyone else knows that definition and I do not. (I2)

Steve's feelings of excitement and openness at the beginning of the first semester contrasted strongly with his feelings of confusion and rejection by anything other than creative writing at the end of the first semester.

At the same moment that Steve was frustrated with Introduction to English Studies, his creative writing course in his first semester gave him the confidence to begin to embrace an identity within English studies: "I think there was room in the English major for someone like me, like someone who's more interested in pop culture and creative writing, so creat— so finding that little corner that I've sectioned off for myself has been really beneficial, and I do feel like comfortable in saying 'these are my interests' and still saying 'I'm an English major'" (I2). Steve often referred to being an MA student in English as "being an English major." While Steve did confirm his academic or scholarly identity within the program by the end of the first semester, his commitment to creative writing seemed to be spurred by his negative reaction to Introduction to English Studies.

The participants' localized experiences in their first semester, specifically related to orienting themselves in and to English disciplines in the Introduction to English Studies course reflect two larger disciplinary questions: 1) Defining "English studies," historically a difficult and politically-fraught question (e.g. Berlin; Downing et al.; Elbow; Graff; McComiskey; Ohmann; Scholes; Shumway and Dionne) and 2) MA in English programs' goals as related to the realities of today's student population. For instance, the findings of chapter five and this chapter indicate that teaching research academic genres early in a program, such as the conference paper or journal article, may encourage students to turn off their exploratory inclinations. Additionally, the underlying assumption of focusing on a conference paper as the target genre is that the course is preparing research scholars. On one hand, at this point, several of the participants (sometimes, it seemed like all of them), intended or were considering a PhD, and all were eager to learn the genre that seemed to be a hallmark of graduate work. However, by the end of the program, only one participant, Charlie, proceeded to a PhD and presented at a conference during her MA. In the MA TA cohort as a whole (my participants represented six of nine), two others proceeded to PhDs (one in humanities, one in literature).

### **Critical Theories of Interpretation**

Chapter three mentioned five participants' responses to the required course Contemporary Theories of Interpretation.<sup>27</sup> In short, although the theory course frustrated all the participants who took it (except Charlie), a final project option, to create a hypothetical undergraduate or graduate theory course syllabus, engaged several participants in imagining themselves as English faculty. Despite this outcome, the course was not conceived or

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<sup>27</sup> The course catalog describes the course as survey of contemporary theories and related interpretive practices.

implemented as a how-to-teach theory course. Instead, it was a graduate seminar focusing on close and comparative readings of critical and contemporary theories. Since there is no research methods course required or offered, this course seems to fulfill that function in the MA (see ADE Ad Hoc). Requiring a critical theory course and not a research methods course suggests that the curriculum favors methods of literary analysis and interpretation over other methods, such as archival, qualitative, and quantitative research. Drawing on the third round of interviews and Charlie's writing for *Critical Theories*, this section dives into the participants' responses to the course concerning their scholarly development.

Their frustrations with the course centered around a lack of connection with their interests and identities, and, at times, their definition of "English." Relatedly, they describe feeling like the course was a form of gatekeeping, although they did not always use the word gatekeeping. WPA scholarship has often observed TA resistance to composition theory (e.g. Bishop; Grutsch McKinney and Chiseri-Strater; Rankin; Welch), so it may be somewhat unsurprising that graduate students resisted "theory." Further, both Rankin and Grouling separately note parallels to theory outside and inside of the composition practicum. Grouling surmises that TAs "resist the theoretical discourse of graduate school at large as something antithetical to their identities." It is, again, important to uncover the reasons for graduate student resistance in local contexts. Grant's mixed feelings about the course are worth an extended discussion because they directly relate to his definition of "English" and his development as a graduate student and writing teacher.

The text selection in the theory course was a point of contention. While participants resisted, overall, the selection and difficulty of assigned texts, some believed that, as English graduate students, there were certain texts they should be familiar with. Grant thought that taking

a critical theory course helped him to be more well-rounded as an “English student” because it allowed him to “fill in some gaps” in his education (I3). He read texts that he felt he should have already been familiar with: “Holy cow! Now I can talk about Marxism and know what I’m talking about, where every other English student I knew could do that already” (I3). Although Grant’s basis for the texts all English majors should know is subjective, it was important to him to be versed in theories he heard circulating in formal and informal “English” contexts. He saw this familiarity as essential to his identity as a graduate-educated English-teacher. Other participants also mentioned the same few theorists that they were grateful to finally say they had read: Derrida, Foucault, and Marx. Although they did not necessarily have interests in the theorists’ ideas or recognize the connection between their interests and these three theorists, it seemed that they felt they were not insiders until they had read them.

Yet texts in the theory course (and others) quite often stretched beyond an invisible boundary of canonical texts for Grant. At the end of his second semester, Grant stated that the theory course “felt a little bit more like a historical survey than it did like something that I could see a direct connection to with English” (I3). At a different point in the conversation, he lamented that “English has kind of stopped being English” because he felt that the course selection heavily favored “cultural studies, not even cultural studies even, like, interpersonal studies. It feels a little more humanities than I’m aiming toward” (I3). I circled back to these comments in Grant’s final interview because it seemed to me that he was holding back in interview three. He was more forthcoming, stating that “I was very frustrated at the time with, with, the theory class. It wasn’t just the theory class... but I think the theory class really brought... out... feeling like I wasn’t getting an English degree. It felt like I was getting an SJW degree” (I6). “SJW” refers to “social justice warrior,” at the time of writing this, a pejorative

term for those perceived as overly interested in activism related to social justice and identities. Grant specifically stated that he did not have a problem with course topics such as “multilingual speakers... race... gender... and sexuality” (I6), and indeed Grant had explored issues of race in his rhetorical analyses of historical texts. His view was that, when every course included what he saw as identity or social justice issues, he felt that English professors felt an unspoken imperative to do so at the detriment to other aspects of “English:” “I felt like that was all we were talking about, and it wasn’t, we weren’t even talking about rhetoric or English or reading or writing any more” (I6). During the time of the study (and this writing), social justice and identity issues tend to be coded as Democratic or liberal-leaning, and Grant felt that specific political orientations should be left out of the classroom, even the graduate classroom. Grant indicated that these frustrations, and his feelings that his opinion was in the minority in English departments, contributed to his decision to forgo a PhD in English.

While Grant desired to be an insider to canonical English texts, he questioned their role in his goals and future. He noted that “I can’t think of a less practical thing” and clarified:

I can see myself bringing in some theory as, as a teacher, but it’s gonna be like ‘let’s move this so that we can talk about ((laughs)).’ I don’t know. Like I almost like I don’t want to talk too bad about it I guess, but like things that matter, things that like physical things or things that have some effect on the world. And so, I just always struggled with that all semester long. And sometimes I’d be like ‘that’s cool that’s a nice way of looking at that.’ Or ‘that’s something that’s useful as a way of analyzing um literature or something,’ but it just always felt up in the clouds to me. And never it was never associated well enough with the real world as I wanted it to be. (13)

In some ways, Grant's description of his frustration seems like a typical resistance of "theory" as it contrasts with "practice" because he begins by stating that the course content did not feel practical to him. However, Grant positions his resistance not just to a generic practical realm, but to what is practical for his future self "as a teacher." While he sees familiarity with certain theoretical texts as cultural capital as an English graduate student, a disconnection exists between that knowledge and identity and the use of the theories in his teacher and scholarly work.

Finally, Grant's knowledge as a writing teacher and the expectations of him as a student clashed most pointedly in the theory course. Grant felt like there was a form of gatekeeping involved in selecting texts with such difficult syntax that they were off-putting, even to someone who wanted to read and understand them: "Grad school all over is there's, there just seems to be such an intentionality of writing in obtuse ways that that doesn't seem, it seems like gatekeeping, and it seems like it's counterproductive" (I3). Grant further explained that he found it difficult to reconcile his goals as a writing teacher with the reading expectations of him as a graduate student: "My experience as a teacher, especially, has always told me to tell people, you know 'write clearly,' that above all make sure that you're clear. And there's so many things that they just felt pretentious, and they kind of like the sound of their own voice" (I3). Therefore, the theory course conflicted with the idea, rejected in much of composition scholarship, that there should be different standards for student writers and professional writers (e.g. J. Williams). While the course created value for Grant as an introduction to certain insider texts, he still recognized it as a form of gatekeeping.

Although Steve, Lindsey, and Paul did not describe as many complicated reasons for their frustrations with the course, their reasons also center on the texts themselves. When I asked Steve about some challenging experiences from the past semester, he responded:

Every single week in theory. That one came quick, right, the challenging experience? It was just so much out of my comfort zone. I had never read most of the authors. I didn't understand a lot of what they were saying, so it was always me feeling like I had to catch up because I couldn't even b.s. very well in that class. When I felt like other students could. So, it was a struggle to even like open my mouth to say, to say something that I felt was intelligent or productive in that class, so that was really rough. (I3)

Again, Steve, who did not major in English, felt that he was behind his peers in both his receptiveness to the value and purpose of the texts and his ability to understand them. Like Grant, Steve felt that the course did not apply to his scholarly or professional goals: "I didn't want to take it in the first place... I have very particular interests when it comes to theory so... three-fourths of the time I just didn't really care about what we were learning about" (I3). Paul expressed a similar complaint, that he learned that although he "doesn't hate theory as a whole," he does not "like that kind of theory that much" (I3). Unlike Grant, Steve and Paul did not feel like the course content overall (though they both cited individual theorists they were drawn to) even had a potential role in their professional or scholarly identities.

While Paul did not dwell too much on the longer-term impact of the critical theory course, both Steve and Lindsey describe feeling like the course was a form of gatekeeping between their identities, interests, and the academic world represented by the course and the instructor. When I asked Lindsey if she thought that professors assumed that MA students would all continue to a PhD, she brought in her experience in the theory course. She felt that in general her professors think that

professors and graduate students should be this one kind of person. And that's the person I don't want to be... like ((laughs)) super professional, super embedded in academia, that

is your whole life. And I think that's a lot of what academia tends to do anyway. It erases the outer parts... They expect you to write in this very specific way and I don't write in that very specific way. Like me and [the theory course's professor] clashed a lot because apparently, I'm a passive and digressive writer. (I3)

It is significant that when Lindsey thought of an example of a setting that makes her feel that there is only "one" type of PhD student or professor, she brought up the theory course. She went on to explain that "I didn't know what I was saying because I literally did not learn anything in class. So, I tend to be a little bit passive when I don't know what I'm talking about" (I3). Lindsey then struggled with two aspects of the course: one, that to be accepted she had to set aside parts of herself, and two, that even if she wanted to do that, she would run into problems comprehending the texts. Like Lindsey, Steve felt that the course was not designed for a student like him. Steve had similar reactions to the theory course as he had had the previous semester in Introduction to English Studies: "Ending the semester in [Introduction to English Studies] with that kind... eh, feedback in regards to creative writing was just— put me on the path to... what I wanted my identity to be was a creative writer first and foremost. This semester in theory [class] again, it was just like this is not really for me. This is not my thing, so I gravitate more towards the creative writing side" (I3). Steve, again, turned forcefully into his identity as a creative writer. His rejections in Introduction to English Studies and Contemporary Theories of Interpretation, which were courses that in the curriculum were not classified as either literature, rhetoric, or composition, made him construct his identity as a creative writer as a reaction to and apart from the "rest" of English studies. Steve completed his first year of the program and proceeded into his second year of teaching composition with this mindset.



In contrast with the other participants' frustration that the course did not apply to their scholarly pursuits, though Charlie was hesitant at first, she eventually perceived the course as "pragmatic and functional" for her trajectory as future rhetoric and composition PhD student (I3). Like Grant, she felt that she needed exposure to certain theorists to be an insider in academic conversations: "Theory is in so much stuff... taking theory [class] helped me to understand a lot more like who all these people are that everyone's constantly referencing... So, we talked about like Foucault and Derrida and all those people, and it was really helpful just overall. To feel like I kind of understood what was going on more" (I3). In addition, though Charlie perceived the course to be more focused on theories for literary interpretation, she thought that "it's applicable to rhet/comp, especially like Foucault, and transferable" (I3). While the other four participants opted, for their final project in Contemporary Theories, to construct a hypothetical syllabus relating to their teacherly identities (chapter three), Charlie chose instead to write a detailed research proposal. At first glance, this choice seems at odds with her passion for learning more about teaching writing. During the same interview, she described her disciplinary identity as centered in rhetoric and composition, technical writing, engineering writing, and literacies studies. However, her choice makes sense in terms of her goal to pursue a PhD in rhetoric and composition. Like the other participants, she appreciated the flexibility of the final project to allow her to connect with her interests. While the other participants used the project as an opportunity to imagine their future teaching selves, Charlie used the final project to perform a scholarly researcher identity.

Two aspects of the writing in Charlie's proposal for the theory course stand out as they relate to her scholarly identity development. First, the research proposal has nothing to do with Charlie's stated disciplinary interests in rhetoric and composition. Her research proposal

proposes applying Foucault to the role of the Associated Press in mass communication. Her thesis states: “Through an application of Foucault’s understanding of power dynamics in knowledge production, this essay will explore to what extent The Associated Press’s monopolized globalization of information dissemination serves to standardize knowledge production as a practice in promoting Western ideologies.” In the proposal, she also clearly situates the research at the “interdisciplinary position between social theory and communication studies,” aiming her hypothetical article at the interdisciplinary journal *Foucault Studies*. Therefore, instead of building on what she would like her scholarly identity to be (technical writing, engineering writing, literacy studies), for this project, Charlie uses new theoretical knowledge gained in the theory class and applies it to her prior knowledge from her experience as a journalism major. Aside from the writing center practicum, at this point, Charlie did not have any other opportunities to gain content knowledge in composition, so she instead drew on the knowledge that she did have.

Second, while her peers made the choice for their final project to be a trial of their teacher identity (chapter three), Charlie uses the opportunity to try out her academic voice and academic discourse. Though I did not ask Charlie about it during an interview, it seems logical that she used a model (possibly given to her by the instructor) and copied its section headings: title, abstract, keywords, journal statement, literature review, thesis proposal (divided into research questions, thesis, approaches, position in scholarly conversation, scope and limits), plans for future work, and bibliography. Although she had written a research proposal the semester prior, in her writing center practicum (chapter five), and the section headings give the initial sense that the proposal is polished and detailed, within the sections, Charlie sometimes struggled with the proposal genre. For instance, the abstract mostly reads like a history of the Associated Press and

does not function well as an abstract to either the proposed article or the proposal. Her first few sentences under the subheading of research questions state: “I will investigate [the] following research questions through the lens of Foucault’s writings in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as applied to an examination of The Associated Press’s historical and current role in controlling and monopolizing knowledge production. Ultimately, I argue the limited variety in news production creates a limited view of history and limited potential for future discourse.” Charlie has a heavy use of academic jargon and repetition of language throughout the proposal. The repetition is likely because she has not written the analysis that she is proposing and may have difficulty imagining the nuances in it. Though I have critiqued Charlie’s proposal, my purpose is not to illustrate that her writing or the assignment is poor or that Charlie does not fit within academic discourse. Charlie’s proposal simply represents her attempt to practice and perform an academic genre and content that are still new to her, and her topic selection shows the distance that she feels from the academic conversations that she would prefer to be a part of.

### **Beginning of Practicum Course and Teaching Composition**

Complicating chapter four’s claim that the participants reflected deeply upon and adopted practices as composition teachers, this section focuses on the participants’ scholarly development as it relates to their encounter with rhetoric and/or composition in the practicum. Although their practices and education were situated in the discipline of rhetoric and composition, the practicum created gaps between teaching practices and scholarly identity rather than joining the two. As chapter four established, although they were doing teaching work in the English department, the participants did not feel part of a local teaching community. Their experiences as composition teachers in an English department with multiple faculty and PhD student researchers of rhetoric and composition mirror one of James Zebroski’s “shortfalls” of professionalizing the writing

program at Syracuse from 1986-2001. He describes it as having a “two-tier instructor cadre” and “two-tier faculty,” essentially creating “two classes— one class that ‘produces’ in the traditional sense of teaching large numbers of students” and one class “that gets released from teaching every term and manages the value produced” (“Composition” 169). As MA TAs with a first-year composition course load of 2-2, the participants were part of the production class in the department. The composition program’s leadership (including the PhD Assistant Directors, their assigned mentors; Lisa, the practicum instructor; and the Director of Composition), were teaching reduced loads and thus part of the management class. While the participants did not feel part of the larger teaching community, they also did not feel part of a larger scholarly departmental, and therefore disciplinary, community.

The role of the composition practicum for TAs within the discipline of rhetoric and composition is surprisingly complicated, and the practicum that the participants took was an example of this tension playing out at the local level. Chapter four showed that there were disconnections between Lisa’s design of her practicum and the participants’ uptake of the course. For instance, although Lisa assigned readings from textbooks created for the audience of composition TAs or new writing teachers, the participants perceived these texts as theoretical rather than practical. The weekly course assignments and class discussions, from my class observation, also leaned more toward theoretical, likely because Lisa wanted specific questions of practice addressed in the mentor groups. While Lisa’s selection of readings was intentionally pragmatic, she also purposefully selected readings only situated in rhetoric and composition, rather than educational theory or psychology. Although general readings on educational theory could have also been useful for brand new teachers, Lisa’s choice reflects her commitment to presenting rhetoric and composition to graduate students as a legitimate knowledge-making field.

However, a narrow focus on rhetoric and composition scholarship in the practicum may backfire as it potentially increases student resistance to composition theory or seeing theory and practice as intertwined (Grouling).<sup>28</sup> Practicum instructors, especially those employing composition theory (or what is perceived as), must consider to what extent their course not only advocates for composition theory and pedagogy, but how it attempts to interpolate TAs: “The course, generally speaking, is not merely a space in which new teachers are ‘trained’ or even professionalized, but one in which they are enculturated into the cultural ideologies of composition” (Dobrin 21). By reading only texts within the field of rhetoric and composition, the course may have intended to introduce or invite TAs into the theoretical conversations of rhetoric and composition, but, as members of the producer class (Zebroski, “Composition” 169), the participants felt kept at arm’s length from being part of such conversations. They were assumed to be the practitioners who took the knowledge to apply it in their classrooms, rather than scholar-teachers (or scholar-teachers-in-training).

WPAs often advise first-semester TAs to embrace a “learn with your students as you go” mantra. For example, Shelly Reid’s “On Learning to Teach: Letter to a New TA” encourages TAs to “understand and adapt to conscious incompetence,” or the process of recognizing how much there is to learn about teaching (131). While the participants indeed described already feeling behind from the start, the course design and its socialization structures also played into the participants’ doubts and confusion about their scholarly identities and gaps in knowledge.

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<sup>28</sup> One of Grouling’s recommendations for the composition practicum is to “begin with general educational theory rather than composition theory.” She surmises that “if GTAs begin with theory that has a clear application for teaching, they may come to see theory and practice as intertwined...They may also move away from the notion, learned in other classes, that theory is content to be learned and regurgitated, either in written responses or by teaching it directly to first-year students.”

Jana confirmed that “in a lot of ways I’m learning the same vocabulary as [my students] are, ‘cause I’m not a rhetoric and composition person. And so, when in [the practicum] we start talking about, like, Lloyd Bitzer of the rhetorical situation, I’m like ‘I have no idea what that even is’” (I4). Some of Jana’s feelings of learning as she goes are related to Reid’s description of “conscious incompetence.” However, Jana blames her lack of a strong disciplinary identity in rhetoric and composition for her feelings of incompetence in specific named rhetorical concepts. Others in the course, who, according to Jana, were “rhetoric and composition people,” acted as if they knew who Bitzer was. Although Jana had worked and studied in writing centers for several years before the practicum, and she had recently taken steps to undertake her Culminating Project on a topic situated in writing center studies, the practicum managed to distance her identity and knowledge from rhetoric and composition as a discipline. Further, for Jana, and also Lindsey and Paul, all of whom had several years of experience in writing centers, the role of “rhetoric” in the practicum created a fissure between their prior knowledge and their current scholarly identities and teaching practices.

Lindsey’s experience with the rhetorical concepts in the practicum and common syllabus made her second guess how she should name and describe her scholarly identity. Before the practicum she stated that her disciplinary emphasis was “rhetoric and composition,” but the course’s use of rhetoric made her feel that she did not know enough:

I guess I’m still rhet/comp, but it’s basically just comp. Again, I don’t feel like I’ve even been educated on rhetoric. I even took a rhetoric, spatial rhetoric class. That was fun; I really liked that class. I still think about the concepts that I learned in that class, but when it comes to like foundational rhetoric, like I’m about to have to teach [my students] this,

and I'm probably going to be learning at least a little bit with them, so I guess I'm just composition. (I4)

When learning to teach composition overlapped with Lindsey's sense of her scholarly identity, it caused her to question and doubt that knowledge and identity. Lindsey seemed to feel and notice this gap— between her knowledge and the knowledge she perceives is needed for the scholarly community she would like to join— more pointedly than other participants. Comparing her feelings of being an outsider to the other participants' feelings, she presumed that “ultimately what people in the composition field think of them doesn't necessarily affect whether or not they feel competent” (I5). In her view, belonging to the field and belonging to a composition teaching community in the program were synonymous. Her unique positioning as an instructor (discussed in chapter four) and perceived lack of knowledge distanced her from the departmental rhetoric and composition community. Both Jana and Lindsey had extensively engaged with aspects of rhetoric and composition, but the practicum and its expectations for them as teachers created distance between them and the field of rhetoric and/or composition. In other words, they did not see themselves in the field of rhetoric and/or composition as the practicum represented it.

Paul also pointed to the practicum course content and peers as reinforcing his outsider status as an MA student with scholarly interests and experiences across disciplines. Though Paul enjoyed writing center work and was eager to try out teaching writing in the classroom, he maintained a scholarly interest in literature. He acknowledged that feeling uncertain as a new teacher was normal, but he felt that the 101 “class is designed, is really, to emphasize teaching rhetoric,” with which he was unfamiliar (I4). Paul's interactions with his classmates compounded the issue. When I asked Paul which aspect of “rhetoric” he felt unprepared to teach or unfamiliar with, he responded, first, by stating that he felt that there was an “expectation,” but then doubled

back to describe a conversation in his mentor group about teaching literacy narratives in which he keenly felt like an outsider:

In like [the practicum course] or in my mentor group, I hear other people, who are really, really into rhetoric, talk about like all the crazy ways that they like explain these things to their students, like with literacy for instance is a good example. I had people in there that would spend a whole day [in their 101 class] just talking about like literacy, and all the different ways you could think about literacy, and just like how there is this communal literacy, and there is individual literacy, and how these come together. And it felt like a literacy like theory session. It's like I don't know any of that ((laughs)). And I, the reason I feel a little uncertain is because everyone else seems to know so much about this stuff, and I'm just like [to my students], yeah, 'just write me something writing related.' You know, I don't feel like I'm quite on the same level. (I4)

Paul conflated “literacy theory” with rhetoric, naming his isolation as a disciplinary difference. When I asked Paul if the peers that he described were the other MAs or if they were the PhD students in the class, he clarified that they were primarily the PhD students. Though the practicum syllabus was designed for a novice composition instructor, there were embedded aspects of disciplinary knowledge that reminded MAs of their outsider status, especially when their “peers” did not share their same unfamiliarity.

Despite Charlie's declaration from the beginning of the program that she intended to pursue an emphasis in rhetoric and composition, she also did not feel invited into the scholarly conversation of composition as an MA student. She stated that she was too much of a novice to contribute, which affected her confidence in teaching and convinced her that she could not pursue composition research during her MA. As she developed materials for her PhD



applications for programs in rhetoric and composition, she composed two writing samples. Both were situated closer to rhetorical studies than composition. Neither was pedagogical in nature. Charlie said that her mentor, an assistant professor, advised her to not submit writing samples related to pedagogy. This advice was well-intentioned; he believed that he had not been accepted to some PhD programs because his writing sample was based in pedagogy. Charlie internalized this advice and decided to write about rhetoric because she felt that it was easier to find authority within rhetoric: “I want to show that I can have an authoritative voice, but I don’t feel like I deserve to have an authoritative voice about pedagogy, because I don’t have any grounding” (I5). Charlie admitted that part of her issue was time. She felt that to write about pedagogy she needed to conduct original research, but she also felt strongly that she did not have a confident voice as a writing teacher or writing pedagogy researcher.

Charlie not only privately reflected and acted on these feelings, but she also expressed her hesitancy in her 102 classroom. The day I observed, as the class discussed authorial authority and taking a stance, some students argued that anyone can take a stance, while others maintained that it was difficult as a student to feel authoritative to write about an issue. Charlie echoed the latter students. She felt “intimidated” because she believed that she did not have the authority to write about teaching, based on her limited experience. In contrast to her perception, I noted that Charlie and Grant were the most vocal MA students in the practicum class I observed. In an interview, Charlie also expressed confidence about her 102 materials in contrast with her 101 materials: “I did not feel like I had a lot of agency over 101, mostly because I didn’t think I had the knowledge to have agency” (I5). Like Jana, Lindsey, and Paul, Charlie thought that she did not have knowledge that was necessary to successfully teach the assignments required for 101. Although over the two years Charlie lacked public-facing confidence (as opposed to the

thoughtful, driven, and knowledgeable person I came to know in our one-on-one interactions), her confidence seemed the most shaken when she confronted her identity and practices as a composition teacher-scholar. Perhaps this was because there were few opportunities to grapple with the role of new teachers as emerging scholars. She maintained that her future plans included a research agenda centered on studying writing practices and pedagogy, but, in her MA, she relied on rhetorical scholarship to position herself as part of the discipline of rhetoric and composition.

In contrast with Charlie's and Lindsey's desire to be accepted and Jana's and Paul's slight ambivalence, Steve actively positioned himself as an outsider in the practicum. He thought that literature and rhetoric and composition "people" aligned themselves pedagogically, while a creative writer simply could not synthesize with their shared pedagogy: "Just because maybe I don't have the best understanding of rhet/comp, I feel like those literature people are doing things that are more similar to rhet/comp people" (I4). He described a moment in the mentor groups, in which he admitted he loved the literacy narrative assignment (he approached it as creative nonfiction), and some of his group members "just roll[ed] their eyes" because they wanted to "move on to rhetorical analysis" (I4), the second major assignment. Steve proclaimed that he was "like a creative writing fish in a big rhetoric and composition ocean, and I have to find my way" (I4). These feelings likely fed into his moment of rebellion discussed in chapter four, when he decided not to assign a digital remediation, and Lisa confronted him for not following the policy.

When Steve viewed the practicum course and 101 syllabus through the narrative of himself as a creative writing outsider, he discovered aspects of the syllabus as rooted in rhetoric and composition and thus antithetical to him. The root of Steve's frustration with the practicum

supports Grouling's observation that TAs "who are struggling in one area [of a program] bring that resistance to the other." When I asked Steve what he was not confident about concerning teaching writing, he pointed to the 101 course's Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

The definitions of things and the actual terms. So, I'm gonna get into more terminology [in my 101 class] on Thursday, talking about arguments. And I'm kind of worried about that. And and connecting it to the university's departmental objectives. Their SLOs.

'Cause I feel like a lot of those are rhet/comp based, and they're, I don't know, some of the things they want the students to do, I don't know if I want them to do that. So that's been weird too, is fitting in with those SLOs. (I4)

It seems that Steve was turned off by the SLOs that he knew were developed by faculty in a department that he did not feel welcomed his perspectives. When I asked Steve for an example of a "rhet/comp based" SLO that was incompatible with his beliefs as a creative writer, he could not think of one. When I provided him the SLOs on his syllabus to reference, he decided that he did not agree with the strong emphasis on teaching composition as multimodal. He then recalled perhaps his initial reaction to the SLOs: "The terminology they use can be alienating for people who don't understand it. There's a lot of the use of the word rhetoric for one. Some students, I found that they have not been, they don't have as strong of a background in grammar and syntax. And I don't want them to see this and just be like turned off just thinking 'I'm not good at that, so I don't want to try'" (I4). While Steve projected fear of lack of understanding on his students, my follow up questions clarified that it was also him that felt alienated by the terminology. His pedagogical response to the SLOs was quite a simple one: "I didn't go over the SLOs directly. Like I didn't go over them one-by-one on the first day that I looked at the syllabus" (I4). Steve avoided actively engaging with the "rhetoric and composition" aspects of the practicum and 101

as much as possible; his first-year MA courses contributed to his disposition toward the discipline.

Surprisingly, however, by the end of the semester, although Steve still felt that rhetoric and composition exercised power over the MA and teaching academic writing at the institution (“you know, like, this is a program that values rhet/comp more than the other two English disciplines, I think” [I5]), he began to see intersections and let go of the “chip on my shoulder” (I5). Because Steve applied for and earned a special TAship in his second year that allowed him to teach Introduction to Creative Writing instead of English 102 in his fourth semester, Lisa adjusted his final project for the course (the rest of the students created their syllabi for 102). Steve’s assignment was to create an annotated bibliography of the intersections between creative writing and composition pedagogy. He wrote in his reflection on the annotated bibliography about his feelings of alienation all semester, but also that the research process had been somewhat of a revelation for him:

Creating my syllabus for [introduction to creative writing] was my way of doing whatever the hell I wanted to do and was my freedom to steer a course in the direction that I saw best fit. Sitting down to finish my final project for [the practicum], though, I was surprised to see just how many overlaps there were with composition pedagogy, not only my [creative writing] syllabus, but in creative writing pedagogy.

When Steve wrote this reflection, he had already developed his creative writing syllabus. Still, this simple research project helped him realize (he also said in the interview) that he was hardly the only creative writer to teach composition, and that, of course, there are overlaps. Reading about his specific situation allowed him to begin to see himself positioned in the field of composition.

Unlike the other participants, Grant began the MA program with experience and identity as a professional English teacher. This prior experience and identity affected his relationship to rhetoric and composition, particularly pedagogy. He began the composition practicum semester as antagonistic. Though he already had a degree in English for secondary teachers, he had to take “pedagogy” courses (his word) as electives. He was not permitted to bypass the course. While he maintained that he enjoyed, and saw as his profession, teaching writing and rhetoric at secondary and post-secondary levels, he did not always see how the practicum courses differed from his previous training as a secondary English teacher. Though he ended up learning a great deal in the composition practicum course (chapter five), the two practicums’ collective effect on his electives frustrated him: “I feel like because those [practicums] soak up electives for the graduate program, then I end up taking more literature classes, when I don’t want literature classes. And I would have liked to have had more creative writing classes or at least more flexibility to have creative writing classes or rhetoric classes or anything else” (I6). Grant’s initial resistance to the composition practicum was related to him seeing it as using up valuable time and credit hours.

Because Grant felt confident in his ability and identity as an “English teacher,” he did not feel rejected or left out of rhetoric and composition. In contrast, at the end of the program, considering his overall focus was creative writing, he reflected: “I still feel connected to the field of rhet/comp because I still love to talk about rhetoric and love to teach it. And I actually feel like rhetoric and creative writing are pretty connected” (I6). Like Charlie, his research writing centered on rhetoric, not composition. Grant’s rhetorically-situated writing included “The Loss of Lived Space” (Spatial Rhetorics), “The Rhetorics of Diverse Advertising” (Introduction to English Studies), and “The Uncertainty of Identification: Authorship in the Census” (Theories of Authorship). Grant also had a sense of “rhetoric” and “teaching English” before his MA.

Throughout the two years, Grant's practices as a teacher changed (chapter five), but his positioning of himself never changed from identifying as a practitioner to seeing himself as a part of the scholarly conversation: "I think at the beginning of the program I would have said I'm a teacher, right now I say I'm a teacher, and I don't feel like that's changed too much. It's just the skills I have as a teacher have changed" (I6). Grant grew as a creative writer (in practice and identity) and solidified his identity as a teacher.

One moment in the practicum course captures Grant's sense of positioning in English studies:

I made some point and Lisa said 'and that, do you think that's true in education as well as in English studies?' And I was like, 'yeah, I guess it is,' I mean, I was kind of doing it from a combined perspective anyway. I didn't really separate those two. Not that I didn't know they were different worlds. It's just like those are for me, and especially for how often we talk about pedagogy, it's, they're, they're interlinked you know? (I5)

Here, Lisa positions Grant as an expert in "education," as something separate, but related to composition. Her question surprised Grant because his perspective was that he had only considered his praxis as a high school, and now college, teacher; he did not dwell on the disciplinarity of his pedagogy. Also, as an English education undergraduate and later secondary English teacher, Grant had no real exigence to consider disciplinarity. Finally, as discussed already in this chapter, the program did not succeed in facilitating an understanding of English studies, which left the participants often confused about the departmental and disciplinary similarities and differences among fields.

## Culminating Projects

The final pivotal moment is the participants' processes for their Culminating Projects (CPs). To meet their degree requirements, MA students can choose to write either a thesis or a CP; either may be critical or creative. The primary goal of the critical CP is for students to revise a paper submitted for a course with a focus on entering a scholarly conversation within a field and a specific journal (selected by the student). The creative CPs also require revision of previous work with explicit attention toward audience and publication venue. Chapter four briefly mentioned that the participants learned more about the journal article genre through writing their CPs and showed how the participants grew in their understanding of writing-as-a-process. Both critical and creative CPs ask MA students to engage with audiences, academic or literary. However, the participants each took different paths and had different reasons for writing their CP on a specific topic. This chapter describes each participants' trajectory to their CP and surmises what their process says about their sense of a scholarly self at the end of the program.

### Paul

Paul had perhaps the most linear and straightforward approach to his CP process out of all the participants. Unlike some of the others, despite Paul's change in professional goals (from PhD to no PhD), his CP topic was relatively close in proximity to his original stated interest, which was literature with a possible focus in African American fiction (I1). Like the other participants, Paul felt the number of required courses affected his options in terms of his CP topic. There were simply few options for Paul to take literature courses in areas that interested him. In his third semester, he took a graduate seminar called Native American Studies. In it, he wrote a conference paper mid-semester and revised it into a seminar paper. At the end of the third semester and beginning of his final semester, he decided to select the seminar paper to

revise further for his CP, and the course's professor agreed to work with him. He chose the paper because he felt confident in it: the "paper went pretty well" (I5). He also believed that the task of revising this particular paper for a CP would not be too challenging: "I think it'll be, I don't think it'll be too extreme to turn that into something CP worthy. 'Cause it's already about the right length and obviously there's a lot of stuff that needs work, but like I don't think it's terrible by any means and [my professor] expressed interest in working with me" (I5). Although Paul "didn't know anything about Native American Studies" at the start of the course (I5), he found himself "a little bit more interested in the subject matter" compared to other classes, and he appreciated that the professor had both clear expectations and gave the students "creative freedom" (I5), recalling chapter five's claim that MA students valued flexibility within structure. Moreover, he believed that the professor was genuinely interested in working with him. In sum, though Paul was interested in the subject matter, this was a field that he happened to encounter in his second to last semester, and his professor's pedagogical approach to it made a difference to him.

Paul's CP, prepared for hypothetical submission in the journal *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, argues for an interpretation of Yankton Sioux author Zitkala-Ša's "The Widespread Enigma Concerning Blue-Star Woman" that attends to its literary, cultural, and artistic merit, as opposed to only its historical merit. Paul argues that the text has primarily been read as a historical artifact and not a literary artifact. Paul's thesis is that:

Ultimately, "Blue-Star Woman" shows that bicultural modernization is required for Native survival and success—they need to be willing to move forward and embrace helpful ideas and resources, such as activists and modern technologies, while simultaneously refraining from assenting so much to the new that they lose identity,



culture, and tradition in the process. The story presents bicultural modernization as the only real source of hope for Native Americans in the face of bureaucracy and capitalism. Primarily a close reading of the text, Paul cites only seven sources in addition to the short story itself. Even so, he reflected that he learned quite a bit about writing a journal article through the process of writing his CP. Unlike the other participants who felt more strongly connected, or that there was more at stake for their CP product, Paul admitted that he only put about three full days' worth of work into revising his original seminar paper into his CP.

Even with his comparatively minimal effort and somewhat lukewarm interest, he learned to perform a degree of insider ethos. His professor directed him to focus on rewriting the introduction as a means of situating his argument. Paul explained that

he had me rewriting most of the first half of the paper I would say, because the whole introduction, just the order in which everything worked didn't really make any sense. I wasn't really sure how to like foreground the research that [I] had already been doing... I wasn't really sure how to like lead into the close reading-y part of my paper. The actual like analysis of the text I felt was pretty good, but I felt like I almost had to relearn how to like lead up into that. (I6)

In his CP, Paul learned to situate himself as an authority and as a scholar in the conversation surrounding Zitkala-Ša's writing and the one particular short story. Convincingly performing an insider ethos was generally lacking across the participants' conference papers in their first semester (chapter five). A few months before writing his CP, Paul claimed that "over the course of this master's program that I don't know that I can really like I don't really like feel like a lit[erature] person at this point, because I never take any lit. classes, and I don't even read that much, um, so, I definitely don't feel like I have a super strong identity, even now, just in terms

of, like, disciplinarily, if that's a word" (15). Yet after writing his CP, during his last interview, he stated that he saw himself as "primarily literature... most interested in early- to mid-twentieth century stuff." The process of writing Paul's CP affected his sense of himself, at least for a moment, as a scholar within a discipline.

### **Lindsey**

As chapter three demonstrated, Lindsey arrived in the program with the goal to emphasize in rhetoric and composition with a focus in writing centers and to continue to a PhD in rhetoric and composition, but she shifted away from a PhD in her first year. She was the only participant who started the program with a specific idea for her CP: studying nontraditional students' use of the writing center, which would have continued research she began as an undergraduate. In her first semester, Lindsey wrote her proposal for the writing center practicum on this topic. "The Age-Related Contact Zone in Writing Center Sessions" hypothesized that tutor perceptions of nontraditional students impacted session outcomes. However, as mentioned in chapter four, during her first semester of teaching, Lindsey decided not to pursue this topic for her CP because she did not have time to write an IRB proposal and conduct the primary research she intended to do (survey, interviews, and recording of writing center sessions).

Instead of the path Lindsey originally planned for her CP, she developed her CP from the final paper that she wrote for her Composing Identities course in her second semester, "Performing and Inventing Self: Navigating Higher Education as a First-Generation Student." Patricia Sullivan's chapter "Passing: A Family Dissemblance," which was an assigned reading, helped inspire Lindsey's essay topic. Sullivan's essay "outs" her working-class background, despite her efforts since college to pass as middle-class. Lindsey "loved" the chapter; it was not exactly "liberating," to her, but she said it was "comforting to say that, that's not something that

goes away” (I3). “That” is the feeling that she is hiding parts of her working-class background and identity to fit in and pass in an academic setting. Though Lindsey had planned to write about working-class literacies for the course, “whenever I read the Pat Sullivan piece and... a bunch of other stuff that week, I started thinking about angling [my course paper] more towards first-generation [students], which are kind of intertwined, you know, and hard to separate” (I3). Lindsey left her original CP idea for practical reasons, but another course tapped into her identity and interests.

When I asked the participants at the end of their first year to select a paper that they had written that best represents their “scholarly self,” Lindsey chose this one. While other participants (e.g. Grant) chose the paper that they felt represented their best attempt at an academic genre, Lindsey’s paper does not necessarily fit into a specific genre or have an academic audience in mind. Lindsey described her relationship to the paper and her scholarly self as this: “I narrativize a lot [of] my personal life... I don’t think it’s a good representation of like academic writing per se, ‘cause like it got away from me whenever I was writing it, so I guess it just kind of is me within academia more than me as an academic” (I3). The paper begins with the scene from the 1997 film *Titanic* in which the main characters, Jack and Rose, are attempting to escape the lower levels of the sinking ship. Lindsey writes, “At times, I am one of the unnamed working-class individuals banging on the gate with Jack and Rose, and other times I am the man in the uniform following the rules and playing my part.” The paper uses Lindsey’s personal experience and some research to explore the positioning of first-generation students. She then writes about the role of the personal statement genre in reinscribing “authentic” narratives about first-generation students. First-generation students, she argues, feel that they have to leave their home values and languages behind, in favor of the white/middle-class

professionalism and politeness. In contrast, “continuing generation” and middle-class students are already practiced in privileged values, such as how to ask a professor for help or how to navigate financial aid or the job search process. Although Lindsey’s Composing Identities paper did not fit into the genre of a seminar or conference paper, it helped her grapple with how the literature on first-generation students connects with her personal experiences and how the genre of the personal statement often puts first-generation students in a double-bind.

When I asked Lindsey about how purposeful she was about audience and genre in the original paper (as opposed to when she revised it for her CP), her response was: “I think it was more of me being my audience in a way, but also like this seems like a step towards something rather than like a final product” (I3). In terms of genre, she responded, “I thought about genre and I was like: ‘I am not doing what I’m supposed to be doing right now,’ that was like the thoughts I was having about genre. Halfway through it and [I] was like ‘Lindsey this is not a research paper. This is like a personal essay with research in it.’” (I3). She was aware that the paper did not “fit” into an academic genre, but she leaned into it because she felt that the paper was meaningful enough to her, her story was worth telling, and it was a potential step toward a more traditionally scholarly piece. Yet she did not know who might listen in this form at this moment. In addition to the paper not quite fitting into a genre, an aspect of the essay that struck me was that the “I” seemed to be an undergraduate. Lindsey had not internalized her graduate student positioning by the end of her section semester. She rejected both the subject position and the genres of graduate students, but her instructor, Evan, the writing center director, did not punish her for lack of conformity. According to Lindsey, he encouraged his students to be “flexible” and “talk about personal stuff” in their final papers. Such openness allowed Lindsey the “freedom” to write this particular paper.

I go into such detail about Lindsey's original paper because I believe that its exigence and her process allowed her the space she needed to, eight months later, begin revising the paper with the specific genre of a journal article in mind for her CP. In her CP, "Writing the Self: First-Generation Students, Personal Statements and Textual Authority," she strategically uses her personal experience as a student and a writing tutor as evidence. In contrast to the original, which was a composition performance of, in Lindsey's description, her "straddler" (she cites Lubrano) identity in academia, the CP analyzes the genre of personal statements for college admissions in composing identities of first-generation students and the sometimes-fraught power that writing consultants have in shaping those identities. In contrast with Paul's minimal effort, Lindsey "felt passionate" about, put "everything" into, and declared that her CP was "probably the best thing I've ever written" (16). Her effort and close work with her mentor led her to the realizations about her writing process examined in chapter five. Lindsey ended the semester planning to further revise the paper and submit it to *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*. The pride and enthusiasm Lindsey showed for this paper was almost shocking to me because nearly every other semester she confessed that she was disappointed with her writing.

Lindsey's positive and confident attitude toward her CP in the final semester also reflected her overall disposition concerning her professional and scholarly trajectory as she ended the program. Though she did not feel similarly toward the program itself, she seemed confident in her identity as a writing teacher and her burgeoning voice as a writing center scholar. Her primary interest had shifted to classroom teaching, but her teaching philosophy was infused with writing center pedagogy. She felt like she had successfully worked to integrate two parts of her teacher self during the MA: "I think that the times in which I have tried to transfer both my writing center identity and my writing center practice slash pedagogy into other parts of

my identity, specifically in classes like [the composition practicum], and things like that, there's been like some splintering, but I think that it's still stable" (I6). Lindsey's next step in her career was to search for full-time positions as an assistant writing center director, professional writing consultant, or non-tenure track composition faculty position.

### **Charlie**

Charlie's CP did not originate in a course as the program guidelines state that it should. In practice, it seems that students are permitted to write original papers for a CP as long as a professor is willing to coach them through the whole process. Steve also wrote an original text rather than revising a text. As Charlie began preparing her PhD applications in her third semester and consulting with mentors, primarily her Spatial Rhetorics professor, she decided that none of the papers that she had written for a course thus far, even revised, would be an excellent writing sample to submit with her PhD application. At that moment, her stated interests seemed to be narrowed down to technical and professional writing, with an interest in writing in engineering, but she had no coursework in those areas. Her best chance at having a quality writing sample required that she write a paper from scratch and use that paper for both her CP and her writing sample.

Though I personally advised Charlie against doing this because of the risk involved if she failed to complete the paper before the applications were due, she resolved to write the new paper because she wanted her PhD application to stand out. She had an idea for the paper early on in the third semester (applications were due by the beginning of the next semester). She nervously brought it up to me in the fourth interview, and we brainstormed together. Her kernel of an idea was "the rhetoric of college recruitment in the United States and how colleges have this rhetoric that is directed at these seventeen through nineteen-year-olds, and why they should

come to their school and how that rhetoric is not overly focused on ROI [return on investment]” (I4). I suggested that if she was interested in teaching writing, then perhaps she might look at the impact of marketing rhetoric on first-year writing courses. Charlie later explained, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, that her mentor advised her not to submit a writing sample related to composition pedagogy, and that she did not feel she could write authoritatively within composition studies. It was clear that Charlie’s main goal was to write a paper that would appeal to admissions committees: “I mean honestly my biggest goal is, I just wanna get in places right now. And I want to figure out how to do that” (I4). Additionally, either purposefully or coincidentally, she may have positioned herself to PhD programs in rhetoric and composition as a type of researcher, rather than limited to one field:

I like the idea of doing research that has more of an institutional basis or like where there are primary source documents... that can be coded or analyzed. Or where I can do interviews, surveys, meet with people, that sort of thing. As opposed to more theoretical work, not that those exist in a binary, but I definitely... want to do more hands-on research within rhetoric and composition, just because those are the texts that I find more accessible, and I enjoy reading them more and I think I would have a better ability to write texts about hands-on research as opposed to like theoretical type things. (I4)

Though Charlie’s description here is quite broad, she came to this realization as she began to rule out the “theoretical” papers that she had previously written for courses. She also began to look to models of researchers, myself one of them, using methodologies that she could imagine herself doing in her future.

Charlie accomplished gaining admission to multiple well-known PhD programs in rhetoric and composition. Her writing sample— and CP— was the rhetorical analysis of college

recruitment that she described in the fifth interview. Charlie worked closely with the professor of the Spatial Rhetorics course to develop her CP, which analyzed constitutive rhetorics at public U.S. universities. Charlie's CP argues that "through capitalism's constitutive rhetoric, Americans see free market freedom as synonymous with freedom itself. Thus, attending college becomes a necessity in securing freedom rather than a freedom in itself." She builds this argument with rhetorical theories of identification, beginning with Kenneth Burke. She parallels her argument with other scholars' analysis of how institutions "constitute their own audiences through the creation or perpetuation of a specific ideology" and then applies her argument to Texas A&M University's website. She argues that Texas A&M's rhetoric is a typical example of the use of constitutive rhetoric to convince students and parents that joining a "sub-world" of a university is a necessary step to gain access to a privileged lifestyle in the United States. Charlie situates her analysis and argument firmly in rhetorical theory and does not connect it to writing programs or composition. She selected *Rhetoric Review* as her target journal. The majority of her sources are rhetoric or communication journals. Though the paper is firmly situated in rhetorical studies, Charlie was able to showcase her ability to use a theoretical framework to consider present-day rhetoric that has real implications for students and universities. Charlie used rhetorical studies as an entryway to a composition and rhetoric PhD because she felt rhetorical studies was more accessible to her.

### **Jana**

Jana's trajectory to writing a CP focused on writing center studies was the most jarring for me. In retrospect, she had left clues along the way that, though she was passionate about literature, her next step after finishing her MA was also always on her mind. She started as comfortable studying literature and with a small curiosity about rhetoric and composition but, as



explained in the earlier section about Introduction to English Studies, she seemed to close the door on rhetoric and composition by the end of the first semester. In her third interview, she said she identified as a “feminist English major” who is “interested in gender and sexuality... Literature, not rhet/comp normally” (I3). She felt that her disciplinary identity was becoming “more focused,” but she also noticed the limitations that so many required courses had on her ability to narrow a focus. She felt that she was simply eliminating subjects she might be interested in rather than deepening her knowledge. At the end of her first year, she had decided not to continue to a PhD in literature. She hoped her next step would be working in a writing center or teaching composition. In her second year, Jana began to turn away from limiting her professional identity to literary studies, but not away from her interest in literature:

I still think that I have a specific focus in literature and a voice... that I like to use through that, but I have no intention at this point of pursuing a literature PhD. So, my other interest has always been in writing center specific pedagogy, not necessarily rhetoric and composition... I feel like the longer I go through the MA process, the less I know about that specific thing. (I4)

“That specific thing” refers to her disciplinary identity, which was the question that prompted this reflection. During the same interview, Jana revealed that her plan for her CP was to revise the proposal she wrote for the writing center practicum: “I thought about it. I want to do writing center work, and so even if didn’t go on and do [a] PhD, I think that having that research and that CP will mean more to me professionally than just a random literature paper CP would” (I4). I was genuinely shocked when she revealed her CP plan to me, mainly because she had been so adamant the first year that literature was her passion.

The paper that Jana would “revise” was her research proposal for the writing center practicum inquiring about the role of gendered “microaggressions” in writing center tutorials. As stated in chapter five, Jana was one of the participants who effectively used their “insider” status, as both a tutor and one aware of disciplinary conversations, to pose a specific question related to writing center practice. Her positioning was similar to Lindsey’s. Because she entered the MA with previous writing center experience, she may have more knowledge to draw from to apply to a research project. Her research questions seem to have been prompted by personal instances of microaggressions in the writing center. In Jana’s second interview, when I brought up the role of identity in sessions, she shared that she feels that her embodiment as a woman affects writers’ perceptions and expectations of her authority in conflicting ways: “I’ve had consultations with some men who kind of are dismissive towards that like identity aspect [gender]. And I can feel that it’s because I’m a woman and they don’t think that I can speak to their writing in the way that they need” (I2). Her awareness of her body in the space of the writing center impacted how she expected writers to respond to her: “I worry about being intimidating in terms of like size in that way. Like I don’t want people to see me come out and be like ‘look at the giant person, like she’s going to be really scary’ because people tell me that I’m intimidating a lot” (I2). Jana’s lived experiences, such as these, led her to her proposal’s topic and later her CP.

Jana recognized that writing her CP as a “revision” of her proposal for the writing center practicum meant conducting primary research: “I think [the writing center CP is] probably the more difficult option considering the other ones would have just been revising a paper that I had already written, but yeah I’m excited to get to try this because I’ve never done research like this before” (I5). Jana changed her methods proposed in her (then hypothetical) proposal, which mentions session observations and post-session interviews with female-identifying consultants,

to a post-session questionnaire about microaggressions and retrospective interviews. She also had to submit an application to River Valley's IRB. She was able to use her original proposal to build her introduction and literature review, but she had to complete her IRB application, develop her instruments, recruit participants, analyze the research, and write her data analysis, all within two semesters. Jana's CP reveals two types of microaggressions toward female-identifying consultants: "Microaggressions that stemmed from invalidations of their experience or knowledge, and those that stemmed from inappropriate comments and unwelcome flirtation" (Jana CP). She traces the knowledge-stemming microaggressions to graduate student writers, which she spends the most time breaking down in the paper. Finally, Jana's CP provides implications for tutor training, pointing out that her participants never stopped a session because of microaggressions and that consultants felt that they should somewhat ignore authority in sessions. She recommends that tutor training better address the roles of authority, gender, and age in sessions.

Jana ended her semester by securing a position as the de-facto assistant director of the writing center where she had worked as an undergraduate and preparing to submit her CP to *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*. The assistant director position had become vacant sometime in the past year, and she had her eyes and ears on it for several months, which may have also motivated her to turn her CP's focus to writing center studies. Her ties with her former director; history of excellent work as an undergraduate tutor, fellow, and TA; and now MA degree with research experience in writing center studies, likely made her an appealing candidate. When reflecting on what she learned and would take away from her CP, she had already begun to take on the identity of a writing center administrator. Her research would increase her awareness of potential issues that tutors may not speak up about:

The way the writing center is set up over there is like one big open room and my desk and my area is kind of open, so I'll be able to kind of observe. And if I see the things happening that the participants [in my study] talked about, then hopefully I can intervene in some way... So, going into a job where I get to use the stuff has been great, and I'm glad that I chose this as my project... I mean when I interviewed with the dean, he was really impressed that I had done this research, and I made sure to mention it. (I6)

Jana's CP had a fairly direct link to her next steps in her career and professional and disciplinary identity. She not only learned research and writing methods that she may potentially use again, but the impetus and results of her research had real implications for her.

Interestingly, though, Jana also graduated with less certainty about her disciplinary identity, but with more confidence in describing that feeling. She reflected that

the further along we've got, the less I feel like I have any sort of concrete identification. I'm a writing center person, who's also interested in cultural and literature studies...I'm really interested in comp theory now, so like the composition side of rhet/comp is really interesting to me...So I see myself still as someone who got into this because of this love of literature, but it's not necessarily where my path has led me to. (I6)

She called her sense of identity "hazier," but also described feeling confident in stating her interests along with "what I'm going into professionally" (I6). Essentially, it seems that since Jana had a concrete next step, she felt some freedom to be more authentic than performative in her disciplinary identity. She felt that she could be more honest because, at least for the moment, she did not have to pretend to have everything figured out.

## Grant

Like Jana, Grant began the MA with a sense that he would focus on one area, in his case rhetoric, but that he was somewhat open to another, creative writing. Though his educational background was in English for secondary teachers and his profession was a high school teacher, he seemed eager to explore his identities outside of teacher. His age (37) was “sort of what talked me out of sticking around and establishing a career as a high school teacher... I felt like I needed to shift that focus and get started again” (I1). Grant described his disciplinary identity as “broadly English, of course” with “a passion for rhetoric” (I1); when I probed, he added creative writing. Before starting the MA, he thought he would pursue a PhD in rhetoric and composition as his next step, which explains the “shift” he mentioned, but he began to rethink this goal within the first few weeks, due to the reality of the time commitment and investment in only one career trajectory. In his second interview, Grant maintained that rhetoric and composition was his focus, though he “enjoy(s) creative writing, but... I don’t know if it’s realistic to make a career out of” (I2). By Grant’s third interview, he circled back to his identity as a teacher: “I think [my identity] maybe still falls back on that idea that I still think about myself as a teacher. That, that’s like where I fit into the discipline. I would never call myself a researcher, or even, I think, a rhetorician is too strong. But a writing teacher feels real comfortable” (I3). Yet Grant had little interest in pursuing pedagogy as a CP topic. His opinion that the curriculum and courses strongly limited his ability to focus in rhetoric, along with his decision not to pursue a PhD, encouraged him to shift to creative writing: “And so, if I, if I take the two creative writing classes that are available to graduate students, and I can call myself a creative writing focus, then I’ll do that because that’s gonna be a more enjoyable CP... and I get the same degree” (I3). Like Charlie and Jana, Grant showed quite a bit of change during his first year and demonstrated that one’s sense

of professional identity and where one puts research or creative energy are not always one and the same.

Grant's CP was part of a novel that is "not exactly science fiction" and "not exactly fantasy" (portfolio letter 26 April 2018). Before his MA, he had written a short story that he began revising into a novel in his first graduate creative writing seminar, the second semester of his MA. In his first portfolio letter, his tone is that of a newly confident creative writer. He talks about his past difficulties and concerns, and his new energy and confidence: "What I've noticed since then is a maturation and confidence of voice that many of my older pieces are missing." He attributes the energy and confidence to the structure of the class (deadlines) and the feedback from "trusted readers." His identity as a creative writer, as opposed to a student or a teacher, comes through in how he talks about "my work" as he discusses the potential genre classifications of his novel. Briefly, Grant's novel's premise is that some people are continually reincarnated across human history with their memories sometimes completely intact. His narrative focuses on two souls, who are platonic soulmates, that reemerge time and again in new times and places (each chapter). Grant (re)started his novel in his first creative writing class, extended it in his second, and revised it for his CP.

Grant seemed invested in his novel. Like Lindsey, Charlie, and Jana, he worked hard on the CP, which was a revision of two chapters of the novel: "My CP was more taxing than I expected it to be. I had... a couple of chapters that I thought were in decent shape, but I knew there would be some revision and those ended up need[ing] a lot more revision" (I6). His CP advisor, who taught his second creative writing workshop, along with feedback he had received from peers in the course, assisted his revisions. However, his motivation to write the novel fueled his work: "The process of going through this revision, which I've never done this intensively

before, has shown me kind of what that process should look like, that it's not just, you know, 'this is good enough,' but, you know, let's keep working, keep working. And I think that my existing chapters deserve that kind of treatment as well" (I6) (referring to his first few chapters that he had not yet revised extensively). He hoped to finish the novel and publish it at some point. However, Grant, like Jana, by the end of the program, took a more flexible stance toward his professional and disciplinary identity, allowing it to move with his interests rather than him trying to bend toward specific categories. When I asked him about his disciplinary identity in the final interview, he responded:

That's kind of a tough question too, and maybe it's not really a tough question. It's that I still of course feel like a teacher. That's probably my core identity. I do feel a little closer to the identity of being a creative writer because I've put a lot of time and effort into the novel. I still feel connected to the field of rhet/comp because I still love to talk about rhetoric and love to teach it. And I actually feel like rhetoric and creative writing are pretty connected, so yeah, I mean teacher generally, and if I had to be more specific about that, I would say either a writing teacher or a rhetoric teacher. (I6)

Grant's experience in the MA did not lead him to where he thought it might when he started. He started shying away from his past and identity as a teacher, but through the MA, he seemed to surprise himself by gravitating toward his identity as a teacher and leaning into his creative writing interests. He planned to both pursue publishing his novel and jobs as a high school English teacher at private schools, though he said he would be open to other jobs that saw his English background as an asset.

## Steve

Steve also chose creative writing for his CP. As previously mentioned, Steve started out as open to any concentration, but quickly doubled down on creative writing as his identity and practice. Like Charlie, he opted to write a CP from scratch rather than revise a previously written piece. Steve decided to do this because he had had few opportunities, other than the two creative writing courses he took in his first year, to produce creative writing in the program. Like Charlie, he wanted to produce something specifically for a writing sample, except in Steve's case he was applying to MFA programs: "I wanted something else, something new to go into an MFA program, and maybe use it as a writing sample if I get it done in time, but if not at least like getting back into that groove of working on a deadline and like creating something from scratch" (I5). Steve's short stories often reimaged infamous historical events, horrific murders or serial killers, from the perspective of voyeurs, unsuspecting victims, or near-victims. His CP, "Astro World," is a narrative of a young couple living in Sacramento during the time of the Zodiac Killer's reign. His story explores the impact of fear, time, and place on a young couple's relationship.

Steve was accepted into a low-residency MFA program that was located in the same city as his MA (and where he grew up). His short-term goal was to complete the MFA, which will take him about a year because he received transfer credits from his MA, and to "not work in food anymore" (I6). Steve had worked on and off at Olive Garden since his undergraduate years, including during the MA. His long-term goals included becoming a creative writing professor: "I want to work like a tenure faculty job in creative writing. I want to teach creative writing. So, what is important for that is how much you've published, so I'm gonna try to publish more get like a book-length manuscript of something at least" (I6). Since he would not be getting teaching



experience in his MFA program, he reflected on how valuable his teaching experience with his TAs, especially the opportunity to teach creative writing, had been for him. He also planned to teach part-time at River Valley unless he found a full-time job; however, at the final interview, he did not seem to be actively applying to jobs. Steve realized that teaching composition would pragmatically need to play a role in, at least, his short-term professional practice, though he still pushed against incorporating it into his professional identity. When I asked him how he located himself in terms of his disciplinary identity, he responded:

((deep breath)) I still feel most at home in the creative writing department. I know that I want to be in front of the classroom now, so some of my identity has emphasis on instructing. I mean, I like, I value having that opportunity to teach 101 and 102, especially if I'm adjuncting next semester, but I don't know if I'd ever call myself a compositionist, necessarily. (I6)

Though Steve had felt frustrated with what he perceived as the dominance of rhetoric and composition during his MA, it was rhetoric and composition that he saw as giving him an entryway into pedagogy and a way to stay afloat as he pursued creative writing as his career.

This chapter demonstrates that the participants' development as scholars was not growth from novice to beginnings of enculturation in a chosen field. Though they began the MA program with notions of scholarly interests, even those with relatively specific foci had little knowledge about disciplinary conversations, methods, or theories in their target field. Through analyzing four junctures in the program, Introduction to English Studies, Critical Theories of Interpretation, the teaching practicum, and CPs, this chapter shows the participants' struggles to integrate their prior knowledge, identities, and scholarly aspirations with their faculty members'

and MA curriculum's often implicit expectations of disciplinarity. For instance, in the Introduction to English Studies course, instead of directly addressing valid questions of disciplinarity in English studies, the course grappled with theoretical questions from a literary studies lens. This confusion in terms of the differences, similarities, and power differentials across disciplines followed the participants through their courses and into classroom teaching. However, their CPs provided them opportunities to work in an extended one-on-one interaction with a faculty member to develop a journal article or creative text from (in most cases) a previously written paper. Though the participants overall did not magically formulate scholarly identities through writing their CP, the process helped them better understand disciplinary conversations and learn to perform an insider ethos.

This chapter finds strong support for Prendergast's and Prior's argument that a difference exists between enculturation into a discipline and acting as a member. Prior cautions that "one-way stories of assimilation into the center of a community and equally stereotyped tales of resistance belie the complexity of enculturation as practices situated within local relationships and contexts" (Prior, "Tracing Authoritative" 320; Prendergast 49). This chapter shows the messy middle ground between performance and scholarly identity, which do not exist in a binary. Apart from their interest and desire to join a scholarly community, local influences on the participants' scholarly identity formation included the available courses, disciplines of faculty, participants' prior knowledge, and time restrictions. Because of and despite these local contexts, the participants, to differing degrees began to act, even if momentarily, as members of a field. However, their actions and performances did not always exist in a parallel relationship to either their aspirations or their feelings of belonging.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

I opened this dissertation by placing my study in three conversations: writing centers, writing program administration, and reform of the MA degree in English. All three conversations are interested, to varying degrees, in developing students/teachers into reflective and critical learners and professionals. Based on the results of my study, my conclusion addresses the question of how well River Valley's MA in English, and by extension similar programs, meet this goal. In short, certain aspects of River Valley's program met such a goal but primarily as a result of the juxtaposition of learning experiences, not purposeful design. The program's design often conflicted with its students' professional and intellectual needs. Students' individual motivations and reflections created meaningful interconnections across their teaching and learning contexts, but the program overlooks many opportunities to create continuity and address MA students' needs as novice professionals. After briefly summarizing the study's results, detailed in previous chapters, I will expand upon this implication and make recommendations for MA program design to better address student needs.

#### **Results**

In the first year of the program, the participants identified the teaching opportunities available through the TAship as a major reason for pursuing an MA in English. In their first and second semesters, the participants' cohort, situated in the writing center as a place, provided informal learning opportunities, socialization, emotional support, and easy access to WPA mentors. The participants found ways to express and try out their future teacher pedagogies and identities in non-pedagogy focused courses, such as Contemporary Theories of Interpretation. In some courses, they encountered PhD students who presented potential models of their future

selves. In their writing center practice, they demonstrated a strong, sometimes too strong, valuing of student self-direction. Through developing relationships with writers, they became more confident in adjusting their positioning back-and-forth between expert and peer but ended their year more focused on looking ahead to teaching first-year writing than reflecting and learning from the writing center.

For the TAship in the second year, the participants taught first-year composition. Though they were eager to teach in the classroom, they quickly became frustrated with their formal pedagogy training—the Teaching College Writing practicum and mentor groups—both of which occurred in the first semester. The participants struggled to connect the content of the practicum with their day-to-day teaching work. At the same time, either they did not feel comfortable, or the timing was wrong, for them to bring substantial questions to their mentor groups. Although they grappled with how to balance an understanding and friendly ethos (practiced in the writing center) with establishing authority as a classroom teacher, they found ways to connect with students through individualized feedback and interaction, likely drawing on their past writing center work. Despite these conditions in their first semester, and though they felt that they had little agency over their 101 courses, the model syllabi, assignments, and class plans available helped them successfully teach in their first semester. Several participants thoughtfully and successfully adapted these templates to fit their ideas about pedagogy. When invited to create their materials for their 102 courses in the second semester, they felt more confident and energetic. Many embraced transfer-oriented pedagogies.

Across both years of the program, the participants wrote both academic and pedagogical genres in their courses and for the TAship. In their writing for courses outside the practicums, they were mainly expected to perform academic genres composed in the humanities, a “genre

set” (Swales, *Research 20*) beginning with a conference paper and ending with an approximation of a theoretical journal article. The participants were curious at first to learn the academic genres of the conference paper and journal article. Successfully performing these genres, however, required them to draw perhaps too heavily on prior genre and content knowledge. In doing so, they struggled to engage or imagine a real rhetorical context for their ideas or take risks by exploring new ideas. Further, except for Charlie, who maintained the goal to pursue a PhD, they generally struggled to connect academic genres to their own goals. In their approaches to pedagogical genres, the participants’ reliance on models and templates came at the cost of their not prioritizing the development of a unique teacherly ethos. Yet when they felt confident about an aspect of teaching, such as peer review or responding to writing, they relied less on templates and more on their knowledge, often trying out multiple strategies. Finally, the participants discovered several pathways between learning about writing and the writing process across teacher and student contexts. They came to several realizations about the writing process through learning about writing in the practicums, writing for courses that encouraged flexibility and exploration, and teaching research genres and practices.

In terms of their development as “scholars” throughout the program, the participants’ nascent sense of disciplinary identities clashed with the program’s obscured curricular logic and the department’s invisible disciplinary boundaries around and within “English.” Although many “traditional” MA in English programs understand one of their primary goals as preparation for a PhD, early on in the program, all the participants, except Charlie, decided they would not pursue PhDs. The majority of the courses used a literary studies lens to teach theories and methods valued in literary studies. On one hand, the participants failed to connect most of their coursework to their identities, goals, and future and consistently felt at arms-length from

disciplinary conversations, even ones they seemed to identify with or actively participate in. On the other hand, by the end of the program, nearly all of them found ways to perform an insider ethos and identified with at least one scholarly interest. The participants' scholarly development existed in the messy middle ground between performance and identity, which did not exist in a binary.

### **Key Findings and Implications**

The first of two major findings of my study is the qualitative disconnection between these students' goals and experiences and the MA program's design and values. The study participants' initial stated goals and needs included teaching experience, professionalization, exploring new facets of English studies, and making an informed decision about future graduate work. The "experienced curriculum" (Yancey qtd. in Taczak and Yancey 142), both overtly and covertly, favored literary studies' content, theory, and methods; therefore, it was a degree created for MA students as (literary) scholars-in-training. The TAship in the writing center and first-year composition classrooms, while it took up a significant amount of time, credit hours, and intellectual energy, was not well-integrated into the curriculum, beyond the practicums, as an opportunity for learning, professionalization, or connection to curricular learning. This qualitative evidence supports the quantitative finding of the 2011 ADE report, "Rethinking the Master's Degree in English for a New Century," that there is "a gap between students' aspirations and employment outcomes on the one hand and MA programs' stated goals and curricular requirements on the other" (1). The ADE report concludes that "many MA programs in English may not have thoroughly, or recently, considered how graduates use their degrees and what current or future master's students may need" (1). The program at River Valley, though valued in the end by all the participants as professionalization and credentialing, was still a

fragmented experience for them. The assistantships and practicums existed on one side, while the courses existed on the other.

Relatedly, the second major finding is that though the program design did not easily facilitate integration and sometimes resisted transfer, several participants managed to create significant and meaningful pathways across contexts for learning about teaching, writing, and research. There were several notable examples of positive transfer. Overall, the participants brought to their first-year classrooms from the writing center their value of individual constructive response to writing and relationship-building. Their work and presence in the writing center also helped them internalize (for themselves as writers) and teach (to others) complex concepts such as writing-as-a-social process, conventions of certain academic genres, and the affective needs of writers. For instance, Jana reflected on the genres she saw across the curriculum in the writing center and used that knowledge to design her English 102 curriculum. Yet at times, the program resisted integration; it sent contradictory messages. In the writing center, participants developed strategies for developing rapport and trust with students and encouraging student agency, but the teaching composition practicum strongly pushed an authoritative ethos. Ultimately, there was much remaining untapped potential for moving knowledge to and from teaching contexts to learning contexts and building transferable professional skills for students not pursuing PhDs.

The finding regarding the potential for significant and meaningful transfer across contexts helps resolve the controversy in writing center and WPA scholarship of using writing centers as classroom teacher preparation. This study concludes that the answer is not “yes, it works” or “no, it doesn’t.” Instead, the answer is the more frustrating: “It depends.” It depends on several factors: the social and pedagogical environment of the writing center, the value the

composition and graduate program places on the writing center, and an individual's motivation to incorporate aspects of writing center pedagogy into classroom practices and teacher ethos. In my study, not all of the participants uniformly transferred the same concepts. Because transfer was not explicitly encouraged, they took concepts that were the most meaningful, straightforward, or logical to them, and left others. The participants who were more interested and invested in writing center pedagogy, Jana and Lindsey, worked the hardest to build on, incorporate, and learn from it.

Conversations in writing center studies and writing program administration frequently assume that the writing center is simply a magical place for teacher preparation (e.g. Alsup et al.; Blumner; Clark; Cogie; Wallis and Jankens), but positive transfer needs help and design. While I still advocate for writing centers as potentially excellent professionalization experiences for undergraduates and graduate students, I caution that making sweeping claims about the writing center's role in classroom teacher preparation exaggerates writing centers' impact because it neglects recognition of the conditions that teachers-in-training need to develop and reflect on their multiple roles. My view underscores Reid et al.'s research on new composition TAs', which indicates that, for the first few years of teaching, they practice in an "inter-teaching mode" (34), in which they "unevenly integ[rate]" (32) pedagogical concepts from formal pedagogy education. As a result, both positive and negative transfer happen while individuals are in the midst of doing something new, and, presumably, when they are not prompted to build on prior knowledge. However, my study reveals nuances that Reid et al.'s study may have overlooked because they favored looking at the uptake of larger pedagogical concepts and not smaller moments, incidental transfer, or the crossover between TAs teaching, writing processes, and understanding of "writing." These more complicated uptakes may eventually lead to



epistemological shifts that impact writing pedagogy. All can agree that metacognitive activities and reflective practices, aimed at lifelong learning, are essential to creating connections that lead to actions, even between contexts that have similarities. As a rule, TAs must be motivated and prepared to do transfer.

### **Recommendations for MA English Programs**

Although specialized MA in English programs exist, River Valley is an example of a “traditional” or even “generalist,” MA in English, which emphasizes literary studies as a central tenet of preparation for a PhD in English.<sup>29</sup> While one limitation of this study is its small sample size and restriction to one institution, its findings, put alongside related research on the MA in English, graduate students, and composition TA professionalization, allow me to make recommendations for similar programs. This section provides recommendations for designing curricula, pedagogy, informal learning, and assessment for “traditional” MA programs that wish to begin transitioning to a program that responds to the needs of potential students while building on the existing strengths of faculty and programs, such as writing centers and composition programs. I provide several examples of how such approaches might be operationalized in River Valley’s program, which already has existing structures for practicums, required courses, and programmatic and departmental specializations in literature, rhetoric and composition, and creative writing. Though other traditional MA programs may share some of these characteristics, they will inevitably have different assistantship structures, existing core courses, and disciplinary specializations. In general, I propose shifting from the “traditional” to an exploratory curriculum

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<sup>29</sup> Some MA in English programs are more specialized or focused, such as MA in English programs that focus on professional writing (e.g. Old Dominion University) or teaching writing (e.g. Kent State’s MA in English for Teachers).

that provides flexibility, encourages integrated experiences, and includes career professionalization. I argue that the English MA can be both professionalized and humanistic; motivated graduate students will find ways to put their energy into their interests and balance their time accordingly.

Although the MA degree in English has traditionally meant preparation for a PhD, the oversaturation of humanities PhD holders, the lack of secure jobs, and the goals of incoming students create an imperative to widen the purview of MA curricula. While there is sparse specific post-graduation data on English MA graduates, from the information available, it is abundantly clear that MA programs need to prepare students for a variety of professions. Here are a few statistics. For PhD graduates of Canadian universities, it is estimated that up to 80% do not find tenure-track positions (Munro). According to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, in 2015,<sup>30</sup> the number of English Language and Literature master's degree completions was 8,364. At the same time, there were only 1,389 English Language and Literature PhD completions (American Academy of Arts and Sciences). In 2012, across institution types, 39% of introductory English courses were taught by either full-or part-time non-tenure track faculty members (American Academy of Arts and Sciences). Finally, the average debt, according to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2015-16 for English master's students was \$35,541,<sup>31</sup> which means that, although all the students in my study had funded degrees and a modest stipend through their TAship, many other MA students are taking out significant loans to pay for MA degrees, degrees likely without the professionalization of a TAship.

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<sup>30</sup> All statistics from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences are from the most recent year available.

<sup>31</sup> My calculation based on the data provided by the U.S. Department of Education.

Significantly more students seek out and complete English MA degrees than English PhDs (American Academy of Arts and Sciences), and many institutions are happy to oblige. My study shows, corroborating the evidence of the ADE's report, that the students entering so-called traditional degrees do not have a clear idea of their career goals or trajectory, though they are eager to learn more deeply as advanced English students, develop skills, and explore professional possibilities while actively contributing to a department's undergraduate teaching and graduate courses. River Valley's program could have better met these students' needs by giving them the room to explore and question instead of pushing them to nearly exclusively perform, and compartmentalize, as humanities scholars-in-training and writing teachers in a "producer class" (Zebroski, "Composition" 169). Instead, programs should aim for a more integrated experience between coursework and professional experiences that aligns curricular and extracurricular professionalization with student goals.

All MA degrees must have both intrinsic value and marketable value for graduates. Such a suggestion would put the MA in English more closely aligned with two views of MA reform. First, Peter Vandenberg and Jennifer Clary-Lemon envision the MA in writing studies as "a locus of situated, locally responsive, socially productive, problem-oriented knowledge production grounded in humanistic and liberal arts traditions—a graduate-level manifestation of the civic and professional potential that our scholarship has begun to imagine for undergraduate writing programs" (259). Therefore, they wish to connect local needs with the production of MA graduates who are socially conscious problem-solvers. More forcefully, Mark Mossman argues that traditional English MA degrees have ignored the rise of global "academic capitalism" to English disciplines' detriment. He advocates for a nation-wide shift in the MA in English toward "a structure that is less about political, cultural, and historical perspective and more about

concrete bridges that lead directly into new economic structures” (52-53). Mossman recognizes that his view may be controversial because it plays into the logic of capitalism, helping students connect skills developed in MAs with jobs and careers, but he suggests that English departments will continue to lose students if a shift is not made. I draw on these arguments through a pragmatic lens that recognizes existing programs cannot completely start from scratch— there are limitations to reconstructing degree programs, particularly related to funding for graduate faculty and teaching assistant lines.

### **Curriculum**

To begin, literary studies should not be the default center of the MA, and instead, students should be able to select from a variety of courses across disciplinary concentrations that pique their interests. Removing literature from its pedestal does not mean that no literature courses should be offered or that no one will take them. Instead, by removing requirements for faculty to teach particular courses and students to take courses within certain eras, students who are interested in literature, or who want to try out a topic, will be more engaged in the classes they choose to take. At River Valley, this would mean fewer graduate literature courses offered each semester and more courses in rhetoric, composition pedagogy, and creative writing. At another institution, fewer required literature courses might make room for professional writing or digital humanities. Ideally, the number of required courses should be kept at a minimum to allow students to take courses across the curriculum that interest them. Building on River Valley’s existing curricular structure and knowing the common courses in traditional MAs, I imagine required courses at River Valley would include a revised Introduction to English Studies, an expanded research methods course, and professionalization courses. The rest of the credits would be made up of electives with a broad focus that allows flexibility and exploration. Realistically,

institutions might need to have more required courses to ensure they fill. If that is the case, each required course should ensure that it can appeal to a range of student interests.

An Introduction to English Studies course needs to meet students where they are, be transparent about “English studies” as a set of disciplines and academic professions, and discuss a variety of career trajectories. Strain and Potter provide an excellent baseline model of what they call the “Introduction to Graduate Studies” course (“The Twain”). They imagine it as team-taught by a literature and a rhetoric and composition faculty member, addressing questions of defining “English studies” and (inter)disciplinarity “self-critique... look[ing] inward for points of common ground as well as divergence” but “attending to the everyday practice of these disciplines — practices that exhibit an integration worth deeper consideration” (145). Such a model would avoid privileging one discipline’s view of “English” over another and be transparent about the convergences and divergences across English disciplines, empowering students early in their MA degree to make decisions as they move forward. Different institutions can adjust this model depending on their MAs emphases, faculty strengths, and expressed student needs. In the case of River Valley, it is important that literature or rhetoric and composition not subsume creative writing. If one of the teaching faculty a given semester is not a creative writing faculty member, the course content would need to ensure that it covers the role of creative writing in “English.” The Introduction to English Studies course must first define boundaries, challenge them, and be transparent about various disciplinary values.

Being transparent about “English studies” as a discipline should also include discussions of careers for English MA graduates. First, all the students in my study were interested in “teaching” generically, but none knew much about the range of “teaching” careers, credentialing, higher education’s growing reliance on contingent labor, or the realities of the tenure-track job

markets for PhDs in rhetoric and composition or literature, and MFAs in creative writing. For its career preparation function, the course might begin with reading and discussing the academic job market for English MAs, PhDs, and MFAs to help set realistic expectations for full-time employment in higher education and help students set or adjust their career plans. Casie Fedukovich and Megan Hall believe the realities of the English and writing teaching job market for MAs should be included in the teaching practicum; however, if that is the case, only TAs will receive this message. Moreover, at River Valley, where TAs do not teach until their second year, many will have already decided about PhD applications before the composition practicum begins. Not discussing these realities with all students early in a program and in a formal and public place creates backchannels with half-truths and/or only gives accurate information to students who seek it out.

In addition to discussing teaching careers, the course should include career trajectories outside of teaching. How to approach such a topic is less concrete, but a starting place may be literature about “alternate academic” career paths (e.g. #Alt-academy), though this is typically aimed at PhD students. As redesigned MA programs collect information on graduates, the Introduction to English Studies course could help students make connections with local program alumni and businesses and non-profits who have hired graduates. The course may invite guest speakers with MAs in English to talk about which skills from the MA they use in their current roles. Further assistance with career planning outside of “academia” might include assisting with job market genres such as letters of inquiry for internships or job shadowing. While these three areas— English studies as a set of disciplines, teaching careers, and so-called alternate academic paths— seem like a lot to fit into one course, I imagine that some parts may be assigned to students as either small or large research projects throughout the semester. Each student can dive

into an area that interests them, and students can share with others what they have learned through their research.

Although a required research methods course might not fit at all institutions, I would suggest that institutions consider it. A research methods course at the MA level would not simply prepare students to do academic research; instead, it would prepare students to do a range of research activities that may apply in or outside academic contexts. Research should be seen as a skill that can be adapted to different contexts and not simply as knowledge-making for academic audiences. Therefore, an MA methods course would be broad in scope to include qualitative, quantitative, and archival methods. I imagine this course as more of a survey of methods than in-depth teaching of any one method. For a final project, students might select a method or methods to apply in some way— they might complete a pilot project, submit to the IRB, start a project, or simply propose a project. Collaborative projects should be welcomed. Students could be encouraged to enact research in a real context that they are already participating in, such as a community project or composition classroom. This approach creates explicit pathways like the participants in my study forged on their own. In addition, final products should not necessarily have to fit into a specific academic genre. Finally, archival methods should be included because these methods may be used in both academic and nonacademic contexts, and archives are readily accessible on college campuses. Jonathan Buehl et al. argue for archival training as professionalization for all writing studies' researchers, an argument that also fits for the context of the revised English MA: "By working in the archives, scholars learn to think methodically about texts and contexts while facing physical and temporal constraints. They practice increasingly neglected information literacy skills (such as browsing) while developing relationships with invaluable human resources" (297; for other innovative approaches to archival

pedagogy across English studies see also Enoch and VanHaitsma, Purdy, VanHaitsma, VanHaitsma and Book ). At River Valley, the research methods course should be taken in the first year to prepare as many students as possible for CP or thesis projects in the second year.

The last requirements I suggest are professionalization courses. According to “The 2012-13 Survey of Humanities Departments at Four-Year Institutions,” 98% of PhD in English programs<sup>32</sup> offered internships, but 0% required them (White et al. 30). Similarly, 70% of English PhD programs offered “occupationally-oriented” coursework or workshops, but 0% required them (White et al. 30). Required professionalization in the MA curriculum would include practicum courses and internships, but it might include other ways to build skills, such as workshops and community-based learning. In general, practicums and related disciplinary work experience should be valued in the curriculum as more than “electives.” For instance, at River Valley, the TAs were required to take their two practicums as electives. In a reimagined MA curriculum there, TAs would still be required to take two practicums, but they would be categorized as “professionalization” courses. MAs without TAships could take the practicums (with permission) and/or complete internships to earn six professionalization credit hours. Considering how the TAs in my study valued the work experience of the TAship, non-TA students should not be excluded from these opportunities. At River Valley, internships might include working in the writing or digital media centers, writing for an on-campus office, assisting in the library’s archives or the reference department, or editing the English department’s digital literary journal. Other institutions might have internships in a writing fellows program for undergraduate courses, a digital writing research center, or a local publishing house. For

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<sup>32</sup> The survey only asked for data on this factor for the English PhD and undergraduate degree, not master’s-level.



example, Jim Ridolfo et al. demonstrate that Michigan State's Writing in Digital Environments ("WIDE"), a digital humanities research center, is an excellent example of a professionalization experience for English graduate students because it teaches digital writing, research, and community outreach skills.

Ensuring that all students receive *valuable* professionalization experiences will not be easy for all institutions, but it should be a priority. For instance, at River Valley, there is not currently an English department faculty or staff person to coordinate such professionalization, so either a new person would need to be hired or someone would have to take on additional duties. Further, incorporating non-TAs into writing centers or composition programs may take some creative thinking and flexibility. It may require a restructuring of TAs, such as the total number or number of work hours (ideally reduced). It may require research and networking for sustainable paid internships on-and off-campus. At the same time, there may be positive outcomes from prioritizing and diversifying professionalization. First, restructuring TAs and creating writing center and composition program internships may alleviate some of the labor issues I found with burnout in the participants if it opens up positions to more students. Further, programs can market professionalization opportunities, which may be useful for the recruitment of a greater diversity of MA students and to incentivize students to enroll who did not receive a TAship. Regardless of the professionalization experiences offered, programs need to exercise oversight and ensure the rest of the curriculum incorporates the professionalization, so that that students are gaining skills and networking and the intuition is not simply getting cheap labor.

If these three categories of courses are filled by a program (approximately one-third of the degree), the remaining courses in the degree would ideally be designed so that they appeal to various interests of MA students, and engage them purposefully with professionalization

experiences, particularly teaching. Models from this study at River Valley included the approaches of the Toward a Cultural History of Authorship and Spatial Rhetorics courses. These courses had specific points-of-view and drew on the scholarly strengths of a faculty member, but a variety of students managed to find avenues to bring in their interests, prior knowledge, and identities, while still deeply learning. The elective courses should also weave in explicit discussions of disciplinarity, professional work, theories, and methods. As mentioned earlier, it is possible to create a curriculum with more required courses; however, each requirement needs to be evaluated so that it fits student needs and not simply faculty interests.

### **Pedagogy**

In my study, there was not a correlation between student learning in a course and their initial selection of it because of an interest area, and vice versa. A professor's approach to the course and ability to engage students with the content seemed to have more of an impact on learning than the nature of the topic itself. As mentioned, MA courses should work to provide flexibility, address questions of disciplinarity, and teach methodologies explicitly. Expanding on the notion of flexibility, this section addresses how courses might approach genre, writing processes, and integration of student and teacher (or other professional) identities and practices. Practicums should build on those concepts and draw from teaching-for-transfer curriculums and threshold concepts.

When there is an open and flexible disposition toward learning, there is less overt and covert emphasis on performing academic genres (for the sake of performance) and more emphasis on exploration and reflection. Reid ("Teaching"), writing from the perspective of composition TA education, and Micciche and Carr, writing from the perspective of writing studies graduate pedagogy, suggest that graduate student writers should be challenged within a

supportive environment. In TA practicums, Reid suggests that students should be assigned writing that is “overtly, deliberately *difficult, exploratory, and critically reflective*” so that TAs “become true learners in the field” and can understand and empathize with their first-year students (W198). Such writing can better position TAs as reflective professionals (Reid, “Teaching”). This approach does not have to be relegated to practicums; it should be reinforced in all classes across the graduate curriculum, as Micciche and Carr argue. Their graduate-level writing course’s goal is “to create space, community and rhetorical awareness/flexibility needed to brainstorm, create, and sustain a wide variety of critical projects” (478). When implemented across an MA curriculum it would allow students the support, space, and agency needed to develop projects that are useful and meaningful to them *and* allow them to reflect and understand writing processes so they can teach process. This approach assumes that those students who wish to learn academic genres will express that desire and get assistance with that goal, and students with other goals or needs will likewise work toward their goals. When students are asked to perform genres, either as students or as teachers, there should be both explicit instruction and reflection on the rhetorical situation. It is also possible to create courses more focused on academic genres for students preparing for PhD programs. There are at least two general challenges in enacting this pedagogy across an entire MA program. First, faculty will likely need to be educated and reoriented to the perspective that not all students need to perfectly perform academic genres and that exploratory writing may lay the groundwork for ideas that can be developed later in an academic genre. The second challenge, at institutions like River Valley, will be how to incorporate this pedagogy in courses that serve other populations of students—undergraduates or PhDs. Faculty will simply need to be more attuned to individual student goals and help scaffold self-direction in research projects.

Extending the study's findings that participants felt they had finished their pedagogical learning at the end of the practicums, and participants lacked explicit pathways ways to transfer writing center pedagogies into the classroom, I suggest that writing center and composition programs work together to create transfer-oriented education and training for TAs. One small step toward that goal, which I have already initiated at River Valley, is to provide first-year MA TAs in their second semester an opportunity to observe a composition course. I, as the Associate Writing Center Director, spearheaded the process and logistics. The Director of Composition provided her enthusiastic approval for the plan and recommended instructors to observe. The writing center allowed the TAs to observe and debrief with instructors during their work hours (two hours for each TA). The writing center is also taking responsibility for preparing (I created a handout with guidelines) and additional formal and informal debriefing with writing center mentors. Although this is a small step, the TAs who have already completed their observations reported feeling relief and excitement after their observation.

Toward the goal of teaching-for-transfer as a programmatic shift, both practicums should also teach-for-transfer and promote learning as a lifelong process, with the goal of encouraging TAs to connect their prior knowledge with new knowledge and model learning to teach as an ongoing professional process and practice. Building on Reid et al.'s finding that TAs retain little from their practicum, by studying how novice MA TAs frame and solve pedagogical problems, Wisniewski's study suggests that that the typical ways in which "formal pedagogy education" has been approached — "a balance between providing GTAs with practical skills and advice and helping them understand the writing theory and pedagogy grounding those skills" (Latterell 20), paralleling its approach in my study— may do little to benefit TAs beyond the immediate triage of the first semester. Both Reid et al. and Wisniewski also suggest that concepts from a teaching-

for-transfer curriculum, adapted for TAs, might better serve long-term development, which Driscoll has found promising evidence for through using teaching-for-transfer in an undergraduate tutor training course (“Building” 163.) One key aspect of teaching-for-transfer is metacognitive and reflective writing activities. While reflective practice is not a new concept for TA or writing center training (Burnham and Jackson; Reid, “Teaching”; Yancey, “Seeing Practice”), how and when to integrate prior knowledge remains complicated for TAs. In my study, the interviews I conducted served as the primary mechanism for reflection in the program. Yet the participants did reflect thoughtfully and make important connections. One question remaining with this type of TA training is: Can TAs simultaneously reflect on their roles and experience while at the same time remaining competent and responsible to the first-year students in their classrooms?

A final suggested pedagogical concept is engaging with the threshold concepts of writing in *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (Adler-Kassner and Wardle) in all practicums. Engaging with the concepts can be an opportunity for TAs to reflect upon both their and their students’/writers’ writing processes, learning experiences, and assumptions about writing. For instance, in my study at River Valley, the threshold concept of writing as a social and rhetorical activity seemed to be tacitly learned through the writing center practicum, writing center practice, and peer reviews (both as students and teachers). At River Valley, this specific threshold concept could be more purposefully utilized to make connections between teaching writing (and writing-related professions) and coursework. Regardless of the institution, having a shared text and shared purposes (teaching-for-transfer) for the two practicums can also create continuity across teacher training.

## **Informal and Incidental Learning**

Perhaps the most surprising finding of this study was how much learning occurred outside course outcomes and separate from curricular design. Adult learning theorists Victoria J. Marsick and Karen E. Watkins define “informal and incidental learning:”

Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in institutions, but it is not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. Incidental learning is defined as a byproduct of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation, or even formal learning. Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organization or it can take place despite an environment not highly conducive to learning. Incidental learning, on the other hand, almost always takes place although people are not always conscious of it. (qtd. in Marsick and Watkins 25)

This definition fits the type of learning that the participants realized through reflection during the interviews and the learning that they experienced through genuine interactions with their cohort in their first year. Although, by definition, informal and incidental learning is not designed, it can be “enhanced” (Marsick and Watkins 28) by educators, programmatic culture, space, and environment. In the context of TAsHips, programs can promote positive informal and incidental learning through creating opportunities for positive informal socialization and dialog with a range of peer, near-peer, and professional mentors. Facilitating this type of learning would be a significant challenge for online-only programs, and research in those contexts is sorely needed.

First, MA programs should facilitate both formal and informal mentorship opportunities. The participants in my study seemed most receptive and trusting of peer and professional

mentors with whom they had frequent informal access and interactions. Specifically, they discussed pedagogy, writing, and graduate student concerns in their officially designated office spaces. They felt little connection to mentors they saw infrequently, or only in formal learning spaces, and thus were less likely to discuss genuine, in-the-moment, concerns with them.

Whenever possible, programs should design and offer office spaces, study spaces, or break rooms that facilitate interactions among various actors in a writing program, including WPAs, graduate students at different levels, and full and part-time faculty. At River Valley, the composition program has already recognized the issue I identified, that the Assistant Directors of Composition had offices removed from the rest of the TAs. The new Director of Composition moved these administrators' offices to be in closer proximity to the TAs whom they mentor.

Second, as called for in the 2019 CCCC Statement of Professional Guidance for Mentoring Graduate Students, “ethical mentorship requires ongoing institutional and interpersonal efforts to move graduate students into, through, and beyond degree completion toward satisfactory job placement beyond or within the academy.” One specific aspect of this ethical mentoring that they mention is the need for mentors to know about the current academic job market and other non-academic positions and to help students prepare for a variety of careers. One way to ensure that faculty are knowledgeable is to rotate the teaching of a course such as the revised Introduction to English Studies, which would require working knowledge of career options and getting to know students. This aspect of mentorship is especially needed for MA students who should not assume that the only acceptable next step is a PhD.

### **Assessment**

While I have imagined a way to transition a traditional MA curriculum into a more professionalized and integrated program, it is important to conduct formative assessment,

especially in the first few years of implementation, to understand how students and faculty are responding to the new curriculum and what students are ultimately pursuing with their MA degrees. I recommend a check-in questionnaire (with identifiers) for students at the end of year one, anonymous program exit interviews, and surveys that are emailed to graduates every year for five years after graduation. The check-in questionnaire could address concerns that students are having in the program such as availability of classes or finding mentors and advisors, and the graduate program director (or similar position) should follow up with students over the summer to discuss issues. The exit interview would understand how students responded to the program and their next steps. The five-year surveys would track graduates to understand what they are doing with their degrees and possibly be used to connect current students with alumni.

### **Future Research**

As this dissertation has taken a fairly broad view of the data collected, it points to several directions for future projects and continued research on this data set. The first area of research would be to look more closely at the approaches and attitudes toward peer review and the responses to student writing to see if more specific conclusions can be made about the connection between writing center pedagogy and aspects of classroom pedagogy. In looking at these two areas broadly, I concluded that there was a connection. For some participants it was purposeful, but others did not create a strong connection between their approaches. In revisiting the data, I would want to take a more fine-grained approach to coding their attitudes toward feedback and their actual responses, both in the writing center and composition classrooms. If I gathered data for a future study, I would wish to consider the participants' work in the online writing center (with asynchronous tutoring) to ask how those responses relate to giving feedback as a classroom teacher.



I have already secured the six participants' permission to conduct an additional follow-up interview each year for the next five years. The purpose of these interviews will be to understand how the MA, specifically the writing and teaching experiences, have impacted participants beyond the program. I wish to understand what professional and personal roles they have found themselves in (and sought out), what they wished they would have learned in the MA, and how they are drawing on their knowledge.

### **Final Thought**

As is evident from the conclusions of chapters four and six, several of the assumptions that I made at the onset of this project were debunked by my data. Overall, my use of the term “development” for MA students created initial limitations for the project. In chapters three and four, I did not find a clear line between their development as consultants and their development as classroom teachers. In chapter six, I certainly did not find a linear progression from novice to budding scholar. It is important to realize that although this study was longitudinal, designed to track development over two years, these two years, though formative for several of the participants, are only two years out of their entire lives. A better, though much more complicated, concept is Roozen et al.'s recognition of the role of laminated identities and practices for teachers. It is my hope with following the participants for five more years that I will have a better understanding of the role of traditional English graduate education in their careers, identities, and lives.

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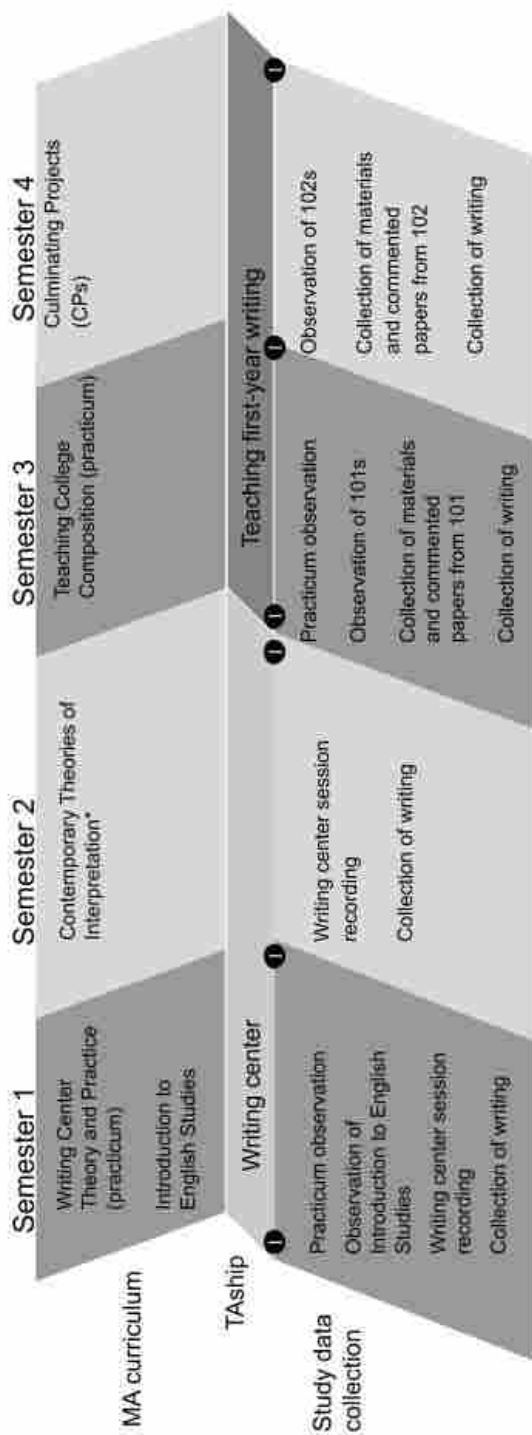
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APPENDIX A

TIMELINE

Figure 4: Timeline



I Interviews 1-6

\*Only taken by Paul, Lindsey, Grant, Steve, and Charlie

## APPENDIX B

## INTERVIEW GUIDES

**Interview 1**

Week 1 or 2 of MA in English and Writing Center, August 2017

**Introduction:** I developed these interviews questions to better understand your academic and professional background as well as your expectations for your courses and GTAship at [redacted]. I am particularly interested, throughout this study, in how you develop as a writing teacher and consultant and a new graduate student and how these two areas of development may impact one another.

**Background**

Tell me about some formative writing and reading experiences in courses that you have taken.

What professional, work, or volunteer experience do you have?

What are your past experience teaching or tutoring writing or reading?

At this point, how do you (or do you?) locate or identify yourself at this time in terms of disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary identity?

SubQ: Are there certain terms or fields that you connect yourself with?

**Motivations and Expectations**

What motivated or motivates you to pursue your MA in English?

SubQ: Why did you choose this program?

What do you hope to learn in the next two years? You can say anything that comes to mind.

SubQ: What do you hope to learn about writing as a graduate student?

SubQ: What do you hope to learn about writing as a writing teacher or consultant?

What are your short and/or long term career goals?

SubQ: How do you see your GTAship helping you reach those goals?

SubQ: How do you see your coursework helping you reach those goals?

**Observations**

In all of your experiences at as a new graduate student and GTA [redacted] so far, what have you noticed so far about teaching or learning writing that is surprising to you?

In all of your experiences at [redacted] as a new graduate student and GTA so far, what have you noticed so far about teaching or learning writing that is not surprising to you?

### **Conclusion**

Is there anything else you want to share with me in terms of what brought you here to this program or what you hope to get out of it? Or anything?

Choose a pseudonym and gender pronouns.

Are you interested in a once-a-month writing group?

## **Interview 2**

End of 1st semester or beginning of 2nd semester, December 2017 or January 2018

**Introduction:** First, thank you again for making time for this study. I am already learning from everyone and hope that it is somehow beneficial for you too. The questions I prepared today are focused on your experiences and reflections on this semester in terms of your Writing Center work, your classes, and your overall developing professional identity. I am asking general questions of everyone, but I also have specific questions for you to follow up on the interview at the beginning of the semester and the recorded writing center session that I watched.

1. Tell me about some moments from this past semester that stand out to you. Why do they stand out?

*Depending on which direction they go, either ask about WC or classes next.*

### **Writing Center**

2. *If they haven't already:* Tell me about some Writing Center moments this semester that stand out to you. Why?

3. How do you describe your approach to consultations, or your pedagogical approach? I'm thinking in terms of the Writing Center, but you can be more broad if it applies to you.

4. How do you feel about your [work?] in the writing center this semester?

5. SubQ: What aspects do you hope will transfer into teaching next year?

6. SubQ: What might not transfer or make it more difficult?



7. Do you think you are learning about writing or teaching writing through consulting? If so, how?

### **Writing Center/Diversity and Difference**

One subtopic I'm interested in is diversity and difference in the Writing Center, so I wanted to give you a heads up about that before asking the next set of questions.

8. What aspects of your identity, broadly speaking, may impact writing center sessions? You can say anything that comes to mind, but I might ask you to follow up or clarify.

*To give you an example, I would say that aspects of my own identity that might impact my teaching would be that I am white, female, able-bodied, and young(ish). I'm also "local" in that I grew up in this area so I feel like I can connect on some level with those that did too. English is my first language. Professionally, I'm very interested in teaching writing, so "meta-talk" about that comes up a lot for me. And my identity as a graduate student comes up at times.*

SubQ: What about big categories such as race, class, gender, disability, culture, age, nationality?

9. How do you think aspects of your identity or perceived difference impact writing center sessions?

10. How is your work in the writing center impacting your conceptions of identity and difference?

11. How do aspects of your writer's identities impact writing center sessions?

### **Courses**

If you haven't already: Tell me about a moment from your coursework side of things that stands out to you. Why?

12. What are you learning about writing?

### **Overall**

13. What relationships fostered by the program have been important to you this semester?

SubQ (if time): Describe your relationships with the other GTAs in the writing center.

SubQ (if time): Have you scheduled a writing center appointment with one of your peers for feedback on your writing or gotten feedback informally? If so, how did that go?

14. At this point, how do you (or do you?) locate or identify yourself at this time in terms of disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary identity?

SubQ: Are there certain terms or fields that you connect yourself with?

SubQ: How and why is your notion of professional identity developing?

### **If time:**

Which experiences from before graduate school do you feel yourself drawing on or reflecting on this year as you progress in the program?

### **Interview 3**

End of semester two, May 2018

Bring

- Computer with transcripts of WC sessions— highlight sections and
- the paper from the year that they identified

### **Classes**

Tell me about a good experience in a class this past semester.

Tell me about a challenging experience in your classes this semester.

Why did you choose this paper as the one that demonstrates your scholarly self? What does it show about you? Is there anything it doesn't show? How has your scholarly self changed or emerged?

What have you learned about writing this past year? This semester?

### **Writing Center**

Use these two sessions to tell me about your WC pedagogy. Point to some challenging aspects of these sessions. Point to some successes. How are the two sessions different? Similar? How do they show changes or even growth from first to second semester? Or not?

Tell me about working with any graduate student in the writing center this past year.

I want you to think back to [writing center practicum] last semester. Which aspects of [redacted] were useful? Do you find yourself reflecting back on any specific concepts or conversations?

Is there anything that, outside of more actual tutoring, that has helped you improve your tutoring? Is it different not taking 604 in spring?

Do you consider yourself a writing teacher, tutor, consultant, GTA, something else? How do you identify?

### **Overall**

What has been the most significant aspect of these past two semesters, for you?

What are you looking most forward to about next year?

Where do you see overlaps between your work in the writing center and your work as a student in your classes? Are they two separate parts of your grad experience or are there overlaps?

At this point, how do you (or do you?) locate or identify yourself at this time in terms of disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary identity?

SubQ: Are there certain terms or fields that you connect yourself with?

SubQ: How and why is your notion of professional identity developing?

Ask those who have mentioned PhD where they are in the decision process now?

Do any of your plans this summer relate to your professional interests?

What is motivating you to keep moving forward with your MA degree?

Ask about writing groups for next year.

### **Individual questions:**

Ask P3 about his conference and publishing pursuits

Ask the ones that talked about nondirective tutoring to define it?

## Interview 4

Week 3 or 4 of the 3rd semester, August/September 2018

**Preparation:** I asked them to bring their syllabus any any assignment prompts that they've already drafted.

### Questions

1. So I asked you to bring your syllabus and assignment prompts. Talk me through them. How and why are they constructed this way? Tell me about your course.
2. What has been most helpful in preparing you to teach English 101? And I'm thinking broadly anything at all leading up to this point.
3. What has not been helpful in preparing you?
4. Which aspects of teaching writing do you feel confident about? Why?
5. Which aspects of teaching writing do you feel unsure about? Why?
6. How has your work in the Writing Center last year impacted, either positively or negatively, your teaching or identity as a writing teacher so far? Can you think of any specific examples?
7. How would you describe your relationships with your students so far?
8. Tell me a little about your classes this semester and why you chose these classes.
9. Tell me about your interactions with your cohort this semester.
10. At this point, how do you (or do you?) locate or identify yourself at this time in terms of disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary identity?  
SubQ: Are there certain terms or fields that you connect yourself with?

## Interview 5

End of 3th semester or beginning of 4th, December 2018/January 2019

Tell me about where you are in your CP project or thesis.

Ask additional follow-up questions depending on how much I already know.

Which aspects of writing for your courses and/or CP are most useful and relevant for you so far?

Why?

Tell me about your philosophy and process for responding to student writing.

- How does this paper demonstrate that process?
- How do your students typically use your comments?

What do you think is the most important concept your students learned in 101 last semester?

How does that compare to what you prioritized in writing center sessions last year?

What role does student agency have in your teaching of 101 or 102 (or Creative Writing)?

Can you give me an example of a teaching practice?

In reflecting on your teaching from last semester to this semester, what do you want to improve upon? How do you plan to improve on that?

What were your priorities in developing your 102 class (or Creative Writing)?

How do your priorities relate to the official outcomes for 102 (or Creative Writing)?

How much control do you feel you have over your courses?

At this point, how do you (or do you?) locate or identify yourself at this time in terms of disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary identity?

SubQ: Are there certain terms or fields that you connect yourself with?

## **Interview 6**

End of 4th semester, end of program, April 2019

What has this past semester looked like for you? In other words, where has your time and energy gone? How has this semester been different from last?

**\*\* bring a pen and paper\*\*** Take a minute and write down some keywords or concepts related to your personal pedagogy. (give them a minute)

- What came to mind?
- How do you enact these concepts?
- Why do you think these came to mind first?
- (try to bring in writing center if they don't bring it up)

How have you tried to position yourself in the classroom? Are you a peer, graduate student, professor, something else? Why?

**Lindsey:** Describe the experience of switching back and forth between consultant and classroom teacher.

Ultimately, how do you, or did you, see your work in the writing center as impacting your classroom pedagogy?

- What about your teaching identity?

Over the past two years you have taught writing in the writing center and in two courses; you have also been doing graduate-level writing for your classes. Have you learned anything about writing across these experiences?

- If so, what?
- Where have and how have you learned about writing most?

Talk about your experience with support for your teaching roles of writing consultant and composition teacher while in the program.

- If given the opportunity to make changes to the GTA program, what would you keep and what would you leave?
- What would you add?

Thinking back to your classes, is there anything you wanted to learn about or take a class on that you haven't gotten the opportunity?

- If you had to start the program over, what would you do differently?

Discuss your experiences of communities while in the program.

- Which communities did you feel a part of? And when?
- Did you ever feel excluded from communities?
- What role do you think the emphases of CW, RC, and Lit have in creating communities or not?
- *What role did peers have?*
- *What role did professors or other mentors have?*

**Grant:** “I I feel like I’m a pretty evenly minded person as far as like weighing out options and and listening to people I disagree with. And what I’ve been running into and trying not to bother are are people who have assume that everybody else is just like them. And they they you know pop off with some opinion that I don’t agree with and kind of assume that everybody else agrees with them. And it’s just its not the same (pause) umm it's not the same approach I take and I’m I just that that’s really what’s kind of holding me back because I feel like I do like the work and I think I I definitely love teaching.”

*Who were you talking about?*

**Paul:** How have the two years compared in terms of your relationships with your cohort?

**Lindsey/Steve:** What happened to your friendship this past year?

At this point, how do you (or do you?) locate or identify yourself at this time in terms of disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary identity?

- Are there certain terms or fields that you connect yourself with?
- What role do you think the offered emphases of CW, RC, and Lit have in your identity?

How has your sense of identity developed over the past two years? I’m thinking in terms of scholarly, teacherly, and/or professional identities; you’re welcome to talk about any and all of these or others that come to mind.

**Lindsey:** Coming into the program, you had a strong identity as a writing consultant. How and why has that identity and perception of yourself as a writing center consultant/tutor evolved? Where do you see it going?

What’s been the most significant aspect of the MA and GTA program for you? Why?

What has frustrated you the most about the MA and GTA program?

What did you learn or gain through the process of writing your CP?

**Grant:** Where is chapter four?

Research? Why these time periods/places (Soviet, Africa 5th C, Great Deprssion)

Did critical theory play any role? I noticed Kabili referred to Eshe as “the Other”.

Gender?

**Steve-** place-based, historically situated narratives.

What’s next for you? Short and long term goals? Concrete jobs, plans lined up? How do you feel the identities you’ve developed through the MA will carry forward in your life?

**Charlie:** Tell me about the process of choosing a PhD program. What factors influenced you the most?

**Jana:** What are your thoughts on moving into an admin role after being an undergraduate consultant, fellow, TA, and graduate consultant and FYC teacher?

Ask her about her feelings about literature and decision not to pursue PhD.

“I want to do writing center work, and so even if didn't go on and do PhD, I think that having that research and that CP will mean more to me professionally than just a random literature paper CP would “ - from last September

Was the decision to do a writing center CP purely pragmatic?

**Steve:** MFA in CW.

Why did you volunteer for this project? How do you think being a part of this study has impacted your MA experience?

**If there’s time questions:**

You have earned an “English” degree— what does “English” mean to you? What do you think it signifies to others?



Talk about the interactions between being a graduate student and being an instructor and writing consultant. How do these two sides of your experience interact?

What is your interpretation of rhetoric? What expectations did you feel to teach rhetoric in 101? 102?

What do you see as the main purpose of the writing that you've done for your coursework and CP (thesis)? Looking back, which writing assignment was most impactful? Why?

### **Individual questions**

**Steve:** Ask about comfort level teaching 101 versus CW, especially the drama unit of CW. Ask why he said the film degree was a worthless degree at his reading at the celebration of student writing.

## APPENDIX C

## CODING AND ANALYSIS

Table 6: Final Code Categories and Individual Codes

Code Category and Abbreviation	Codes and Related Codes
History and background of participants (H/B)	H/B: As student H/B: Family H/B: Finances H/B: Networking H/B: Prior knowledge H/B: Proximity to home H/B: Teaching-related H/B: Transition from undergrad to graduate school H/B: Work experience
Descriptions of future (Fut)	Fut: Desire to learn Fut: Desire to teach Fut: Long term goal Fut: PhD Fut: Post MA life Fut: Rhet/Comp related Fut: Steps toward goals  Related code: <i>CON: Talking to students/recognize perspective</i>
Attitudes and characteristics of writing (WR)	WR: Audience/purpose unclear WR: Conferences (academic) WR: Connected to scholarship WR: Learning genre WR: Length of papers = difficult WR: Not connected to scholarship WR: Outsider WR: Personal experience as evidence WR: Reflections on writing development WR: Style/voice struggle  Related code: <i>ETH: Insider</i>
Off topic talk in writing center transcripts and classroom observations (OFF)	OFF: Context for writing task OFF: Identification with writer OFF: Off topic talk: other OFF: Talk about the writing center

Table 6: Final Code Categories and Individual Codes, Continued

Code Category and Abbreviation	Codes and Related Codes
Community (CO)	CO: Cohort CO: Community of program CO: Compares to peers CO: Creating podcast CO: Mentor CO: Peer response CO: PhD students and MA students CO: Reading Peers' writing
Emotions (EMO)	EMO: Burnout EMO: Confidence EMO: Doubt EMO: Emotional responses in writing center EMO: Stress EMO: Time and effort  Related code: <i>WC: Authority</i>
Connections across sites (CON)	CON: Disconnect between individual (1-1) and classroom teaching CON: Disconnect between personal and professional CON: MA course and teaching CON: New insights from writing center transcript CON: Own writing from writing center/teaching CON: Personal interests/identity CON: Rhetorical knowledge from writing center CON: Talking to students/recognize perspective CON: Writing center <-> teaching CON: Writing center/teach influence scholarly

Table 6: Final Code Categories and Individual Codes, Continued

Code Category and Abbreviation	Codes and Related Codes
Teaching tactics (TEACH)	TEACH: Advice about writing process TEACH: Checking in with writer TEACH: Correction TEACH: Corrective suggestion TEACH: Defer to assignment TEACH: Defer to authority TEACH: Dictating/directive TEACH: Directing, agenda setting TEACH: Echoing TEACH: Encouraging agency TEACH: Facilitate/scaffold TEACH: Genre TEACH: Instructor-centered TEACH: Justifying grade TEACH: Lecture TEACH: Listening TEACH: Nonexpert in content TEACH: Not listening TEACH: Offering options TEACH: Positive reinforcement TEACH: Reader response TEACH: Reader response directive TEACH: Student-centered TEACH: Translating professor TEACH: Writing center process
MA Classes and curriculum	CL: Culminating Projects CL: Creative writing CL: Curriculum is literature-heavy CL: Internship CL: Introduction to English Studies CL: MA curriculum as a whole CL: MA curriculum's limitations CL: Participation in class discussion CL: Practicums generally CL: Professor feedback CL: Composition practicum CL: Theory CL: Writing center practicum

Table 6: Final Code Categories and Individual Codes, Continued

Code Category and Abbreviation	Codes and Related Codes
Off topic talk in writing center transcripts and classroom observations (OFF)	OFF: Context for writing task OFF: Identification with writer OFF: Off topic talk: other OFF: Talk about the writing center
Perspectives of the MA degree (View of MA)	View of MA: personal growth View of MA: professional development View of MA: Rhet/comp centered View of MA: steppingstone  Related code: <i>CL: Curriculum is literature-heavy</i>
Ethos in teaching and/or writing	ETH: Ally ETH: Authoritative ETH: Compassionate ETH: Insider ETH: No control ETH: Student learner/writer  Related code: <i>WR: Outsider</i>
Views and enactments of tutor's role (TUT)	Tutor as collaborator Tutor as expert Tutor as peer
Identities (ID)	ID: Changing ID: Creative writing ID: English ID: Gender/race ID: Graduate student ID: Literature ID: Rhetoric and/or composition ID: Scholarly interests generally ID: Teacher ID: Uncertain ID: Writing center

Table 6: Final Code Categories and Individual Codes, Continued

Code Category and Abbreviation	Codes and Related Codes
Teaching Composition attitudes, descriptions, and actions (COMP)	COMP: Adapting materials COMP: Against best practice COMP: Agency COMP: Change in authority (from writing center) COMP: Classroom management COMP: Conferencing with students COMP: Content novice COMP: Daily preparation and organization COMP: Dept. support: we need earlier training COMP: Dept. support programs/mentors COMP: Description of students COMP: Feedback, descriptions of COMP: Grading values COMP: Group work COMP: New teacher COMP: Peer review COMP: Policy vs. practice COMP: Reflection in practice COMP: Relationship with curriculum COMP: Relationship with composition program COMP: Relationships with students COMP: Students' interest/motivation COMP: Technology and design COMP: Transferable COMP: Writing center and course
Descriptions and attitudes of/about the writing center (WC)	WC: As classroom teacher preparation WC: Authority WC: Developing relationships with writers WC: Efficiency in tutoring WC: Radically student-centered WC: Repeat appointments as validation/progress WC: Students want me to WC: Support WC: Tutoring or teaching as fun WC: Unreflective WC: writing center dogma tension  Related code: <i>COMP: Description of students</i>

### **Analysis of Codes**

As described in chapter two, the coding and analysis process was both linear and recursive as I collected new data, created new codes, added data segments to existing codes, and worked toward analysis using coding and memo writing. In the early stages of coding, the codes were all descriptive tags so that I could easily access data segments related to a topic and keep the analysis open. During the second and third rounds of coding, I doubled-back on the descriptive codes to create some analytical codes. Though I worried that my final coding was too descriptive (Saldaña cautions that overly descriptive codes is one of the typical errors of new coders.), the nuances of the descriptive codes were extremely useful to me. I came to realize that even if a code is descriptive, it is also necessarily analytical because it points to phenomena in the data. In this final code set, some codes are descriptive (e.g. all H/B) while others are analytical (e.g. WC: Radically student-centered). Although the descriptive codes do not reveal my analysis on the surface, they were necessary for me to isolate and access specific data sets (using Atlas.ti). In general, for the codes that were descriptive, I reviewed the data segments linked to the group or code multiple times and wrote memos about them in order to determine the patterns for analysis. For example, the H/B codes I isolated by participant in order to create an illustration of their backgrounds, which became the “Participant Profiles” in chapter three. My analysis of these profiles demonstrated the nuances across the participants but also the underlying commonalities in their reasons for choosing the MA in English. I also isolated the TEACH codes for only the commented papers in year one and year two, which revealed the ten types of comments on student papers discussed in chapter four. During the final round of coding, I also wrote a description of every code to ensure that all the data segments for that code aligned and did not duplicate another code’s work. The descriptions also include when the code appeared

during the two years of the study, if it changed over the course of the study, and which participants it primarily related to (if it did not apply to everyone). Again, throughout the process of data collection and coding, I reflected on my data and process through memoing my thoughts and reflections on the data.

Once I finalized the codes (Table 6), descriptions, and overall data chapter foci (development of teachers, writers, and scholars), I drafted maps for each of the four chapters so I could plan where I wanted to use each code in the writing, link together various codes, and avoid overlapping in the chapters. These chapter maps began with a list of sub-research questions that would be answered in each chapter and a draft of the argument of the chapter. I then created five columns. The first three columns were the types of data I would draw on (1. interviews, 2. coursework writing/graduate class observations, 3. teaching observations/ writing center recordings, 4. feedback to students). The fifth column listed the related codes. In dividing up the codes this way, I made sure to use as many as possible in the manuscript and not overlap discussions in each chapter. Although the chapter maps contained the content of the chapters, the next step was to create outlines in order to give that content a logical order. In every stage of these coding, analysis, and organization processes, I was performing data analysis, discovering new data segments that I might include for a code, and refining my understanding of the data and codes as I continually revisited parts of it.



APPENDIX D

WRITING CENTER PRACTICUM SYLLABUS

English [REDACTED] – Fall 2017

## *Writing Center Theory and Practice*

[REDACTED]  
 Phone: [REDACTED]  
 Office Hours: T-Th 1-2:30 and by appt.

Writing Center Director's Office  
 [REDACTED]

**Purpose:** This course prepares incoming GTA's to teach in the [REDACTED] Writing Center. In this course we will discuss the theoretical foundation necessary for examining pedagogical issues important to an effective writing center. We will read a variety of composition and writing center scholarship as well as discuss issues raised in weekly work in the Writing Center.

**Learning Outcomes:** Students in the class will learn:

- Approaches for conducting writing consultations with students
- The role of style and grammar instruction in the Writing Center
- Consulting strategies for ESL students
- Theories of genre and writing in the disciplines
- Issues of identity and power in Writing Center consultations
- Implications concerning digital media and Writing Center work

**Requirements:**

1. There will be several short writing assignments and one longer writing assignment in this course (more information about will follow as the semester progresses): These essays will be collected into a portfolio for the end of the semester.
  - A 5-10 page Literacy and Teaching Narrative, connecting your literacy and educational experiences with your current attitudes toward teaching writing.
  - A 5-10 page Conference Observation essay describing and reflecting on observations of other consultants' sessions.
  - A 5-10 page Conference Self-Analysis essay describing and reflecting on one or more of your own conference sessions.
  - A longer end-of-semester research essay or research project proposal that combines reflection on your Writing Center experiences with a theoretically grounded work on writing center practices and pedagogy.
2. This is a discussion-based course. It is essential that we learn from each other, and that can only happen through open, respectful conversation. So, you should come to class not only having completed the readings, but ready to talk about them in the context of your tutoring practices.

- Books:** Gillespie, Paula and Neal Lerner. 2007. *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Boston: Longman.
- Murphy, Christina and Steve Sherwood. 2011. *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Reynolds, Dudley. 2009. *One on One with Second Language Writer: A Guide for Writing Tutors, Teachers, and Consultants*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Other Course Materials in Handouts or on Blackboard

**Below lies legalistic stuff I must include.....**

**Official Policies:** If you have problems or questions about the course or my conduct of the course I hope you will come to see me immediately. If you are not satisfied with my response you should speak with the Chair of the Department.

If you have a documented disability or condition that may impair your ability to complete assignments or otherwise satisfy course criteria please talk to me immediately so that we can identify, discuss, and document any feasible instructional modifications or accommodations. You need to notify me no later than the end of the first week of the semester in which the course is offered or not later than the second week after such a disability or condition is diagnosed, whichever occurs earliest. For further information and help, contact the Disabilities Resource Center on campus.

As for issues of plagiarism in a course on teaching writing, the irony would simply drop me in my tracks. However, for the record, if you attempt to pass off the work of others as your own without attribution, you will fail the course and a report will be made to the College of Arts and Sciences and to the English Department Director of Graduate Studies.

**Attendance, Participation, and Being Nice to Others....** There is no attendance or participation policy for this course. It's graduate school, for Pete's sake; I'm assuming you want to be here, have interesting things to say, and will say them when appropriate in a way respectful of others in the seminar.

**Title IX/Clergy Act Notification**

Sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and any other nonconsensual behavior of a sexual nature) and sex discrimination violate University policies. Students experiencing such behavior may obtain **confidential** support from the [REDACTED] Counseling Center [REDACTED], and Campus Health Services [REDACTED]. To report sexual misconduct or sex discrimination, contact the Dean of Students [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] Police [REDACTED].

Disclosure to **University faculty or instructors** of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, or sex discrimination occurring on campus, in a University-sponsored program, or involving a campus visitor or University student or employee (whether current or former) is **not confidential** under Title IX. Faculty and instructors must forward such reports, including names and circumstances, to the University's Title IX officer.

For more information, see the Sexual Misconduct Resource Guide

[REDACTED]

**English [REDACTED] – Reading and Assignment Schedule****Week One – Writing Process and Writing Conference Theory**

- 8/22 – Who Are You as a Reader and Writer? Writing Processes  
 Gillespie and Lerner – Chapter 2 – “The Writing Process”  
 Sommers, Nancy. 2006. “Across the Drafts” *College Composition and Communication*. 58.2 248-257. (Blackboard)
- 8/24 – Writing Conference Theory  
 Gillespie and Lerner – Chapter 3 – “The Tutoring Process” and Chapter 4 – “Examining Expectations”  
 Murray, Donald. 2004. “Conference Teaching: The Individual Response.” *A Writer Teaches Writing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Boston: Thomson. 147-185.(Blackboard)

**Week Two – Approaches to Responding to Writing**

- 8/29 – Approaches to Responding to Writing  
 Gillespie and Lerner – Chapter 6 – “Tutoring Practice”  
 Carino, Peter. “Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring.” (Murphy and Sherwood)  
 Newkirk, Thomas. “The First Five Minutes: Setting the Agenda in a Writing Conference” (Blackboard)
- 8/31 – Genre and Teaching Writing  
 Clark, Irene. 1999. “Addressing Genre in the Writing Center.” *Writing Center Journal*. 20.1 7-32. (Blackboard).  
 Gillespie and Lerner – Chapter 7 – “Reflecting on the First Session”

**Literacy and Teaching Essay Due in Class****Week Three – Style and Grammar, Part I / Online Writing Response**

- 9/5 – Style and Grammar  
 James Williams. 2003. “Grammar and Usage.” from *Concepts in Composition*. 2003. Eds. Bamberg, et. al. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. 313-362. (Blackboard)  
 Weaver, Constance. 1996. “Toward a Perspective on Error” and “Reconceptualizing the Teaching of Grammar” in *Teaching Grammar in Context*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton Cook. (Blackboard)
- 9/7 – Online Writing Response  
 Hewett, Beth. 2010. “Practical Matters” and “First Steps for Writing Response in Online Settings.” In *The Online Writing Conference*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.(Blackboard).  
 Bell, Lisa Eastmond. “Preserving the Rhetorical Nature of Tutoring When Going Online.” (Murphy and Sherwood).

**Conference Observation Essay Due in Class****Week – Four – Multilingual and Cross-Cultural Writing Contexts**

- 9/12 – Cross-Cultural Contexts  
 Fox, Helen. 1994. “What is Ancient is Also Original” and “Helping World Majority Students

Make Sense of University Expectations.” from *Listening to the World: Cultural Issues in Academic Writing*. Urbana, IL: NCTE. (Blackboard)  
 Rafter, Ben. 2015. “Learning from Interaction.” from *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press. 40-73. (Blackboard)

9/14 – Multilingual Writers and Writing  
 Gillespie and Lerner – Chapter 9 – “Working with ESL Writers”  
 Reynolds, Dudley. 2009. *One on One with Second Language Writers*

#### **Week Five – Writing with Sources and Documentation**

9/19 – Writing with Sources  
 Harris, Joseph. 2006. “Forwarding” and “Countering” from *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press. 43-72.(Blackboard)  
 9/21 – Documentation and Citation Practices and Styles –  
 Dowdy, Diane. 1992. “Citation and Documentation Across the Curriculum.” *Constructing Rhetorical Education*. Ed. Marie Secor and Davida Charney. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. (Blackboard)  
 Mueller, Susan. 2005. “Documentation Styles and Discipline-Specific Values.” *The Writing Lab Newsletter*. 6.29. 6-9. (Blackboard)

#### **Conference Self-Analysis Essay Due in Class**

#### **Week Six – The Tutor-Student Relationship / Agency and Student Writing**

9/26 – The Persona of the Tutor  
 Thonus, Terese. 2001. “Triangulation in the Writing Center: Tutor, Tutee, and Instructor Perceptions of the Tutor’s Role.” *The Writing Center Journal*. 22.1 59-81. (Blackboard)  
 Sherwood, Steve. “Portrait of the Tutor as an Artist: Lessons No One Can Teach.” (Murphy and Sherwood).  
 Rollins, Brooke, Smith, Trixie G, Westbrook, Evelyn. 2008. “Collusion and Collaboration: Concealing Authority in the Writing Center.” (*E*)*Merging Identities*, edited by Melissa Nicolas, Fountainhead Press. 119–140. (Blackboard)  
 9/28 – Agency and Student Writing,  
 Haswell Richard and Janis Haswell. 2015. Chapters 3 and 5 from *Hospitality and Authoring: An Essay for the English Profession*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press. (Blackboard).  
 Williams, Bronwyn T. Chapter 2 “A Feeling for Literacy: Emotions and Dispositions” and Chapter 3 “We Are Our Stories: Literacy, Memory and Narrative.” in *Literacy Practices and Perceptions of Agency: Composing Identities*. London: Routledge Press. (Blackboard).  
 Gillespie and Lerner – Chapter 13 – “What if?”

#### **Week Seven – Listening and Style and Grammar Part II**

10/3 – Listening and Writing Center Response – [REDACTED] – Readings TBA

10/5 – Style and Grammar, Part II

- Kavaldo, Jesse. 2005. "Tutoring Taboo: A Reconsideration of Style in the Writing Center." In *Refiguring Prose Style: Possibilities for Writing Pedagogy*. Eds. T.R. Johnson and Tom Pace. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press. 215-225. (Blackboard).
- Micciche, Laura. 2004. "Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar" *College Composition and Communication*. 55.4 716-737 (Blackboard)
- Myers, Sharon. "Reassessing the "Proofreading Trap": ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction" (Murphy and Sherwood).

### Week Eight – Disciplinary Expertise in Teaching Writing

10/10 – Mid-Semester Break

10/12 – Disciplinary Expertise in Teaching Writing

- Dinitz, Sue and Susanmarie Harrington. 2014. "The Role of Disciplinary Expertise in Shaping Writing Tutorials." *The Writing Center Journal*. 33.2 73-95.
- Savini, Catherine. 2011. "An Alternative Approach to Bridging Disciplinary Divides." *The Writing Lab Newsletter*. 35.7. 1-5 (Blackboard).
- Summers, Sarah. 2016. Building Expertise: The Toolkit in UCLA's Graduate Writing Center. *The Writing Center Journal*, 35.2 117-145 (Blackboard)

### Week Nine – Genre and Science Writing / Disability in the Writing Center

10/17 – Genre and Writing in the Sciences

- Bawarshi, Anis and Mary Jo. Reiff. "Rhetorical Genre Studies." In *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*. West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press. 78-104. (Blackboard).
- Gopen, George and Judith Swan. 1990. "The Science of Scientific Writing." *American Scientist*. (Blackboard).
- Kallestinova, Elena D. 2011. "How to Write Your First Research Paper" *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*. 84. 181-190. (Blackboard)

10/19 – Working with Students with Disabilities – [REDACTED] – Readings TBA

### Week Ten – Issues of Identity and Power

10/24 – Issues of Identity and Power

- Payne, Michele. 1994. "Rend(er)ing Women's Authority in the Writing Classroom" in *Taking Stock: The Writing Process Movement in the '90's*. Eds. Lad Tobin and Thomas Newkirk Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook. 31-44. (Blackboard)
- Barron, Nancy and Nancy Grimm. "Addressing Racial Diversity in a Writing Center: Stories and Lessons from Two Beginners." (Murphy and Sherwood).

10/26 – Issues of Identity and Power

- Boquet, Elizabeth. 1999. "Intellectual Tug-of-War: Snapshots of Life in the Center." In L.C. Briggs & M. Woolbright (Eds.). *Stories from the Center: Connecting Narrative and Theory in the Writing Center*. Urbana: NCTE. 17-30. (Blackboard)

Sherwood, Steve. 1999. "Censoring Students, Censoring Ourselves: Constraining Conversations in the Writing Center." *Writing Center Journal*. 20.1 51-60. (Blackboard)

#### **Week Eleven – Digital Media and Writing**

10/31 - Digital Media and Writing

Lankshear, Colin, and Michele Knobel. 2007. "Sampling the "New" in New Literacies." In *A New Literacies Sampler*, Ed. Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear. London: Peter Lang. 1-24. (Blackboard)

Cope, Bill and Mary Kalantzis. 2010. "New Media, New Learning." In *Multiliteracies in Motion: Current Theory and Practice*. Edited by David R. Cole and Darren L. Pullen. London: Routledge. 87-104. (Blackboard).

11/2 – Digital Media and Writing

McKinney, Jackie Grutsch. "New Media Matters: Tutoring in the Late Age of Print." (Murphy and Sherwood.)

Archer, Arlene. 2011 "Dealing with Multimodal Assignments in Writing Centers." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 35.9-10: 10-13. (Blackboard)

Keller, Daniel. 2007. "Thinking Rhetorically." In *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers*. Edited by Cynthia Selfe. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. 49-63. (Blackboard)

#### **Week Twelve – Multilingual Writers, Part II / Plagiarism as a Pedagogical Issue**

11/7 – Working with Multilingual Writers – [REDACTED] – Readings TBA

11/9 – Plagiarism as a Pedagogical Issue

"Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism – The WPA Statement on Best Practices" (Blackboard)

Valentine, Kathryn. 2006. "Plagiarism as Literacy Practice: Recognizing and Rethinking Ethical Binaries." *College Composition and Communication* 58.1 89-109. (Blackboard)

Jamieson, Sandra. 2008. "One Size Does Not Fit All: Plagiarism Across the Curriculum." In *Pluralizing Plagiarism: Identities, Contexts, Pedagogies*. Eds. Rebecca Moore Howard and Amy Robillard. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. 77-91. (Blackboard).

#### **Week Thirteen – TBA**

11/14 – TBA

11/16 – Research Proposal Workshop and TBA

#### **Week Fourteen – Research in the Writing Center**

11/21 – Research in the Writing Center – [REDACTED] – Readings TBA

11/23 – Thanksgiving

#### **Week Fifteen – Teaching Writing and more**

11/28 – Writing Center Pedagogy and the Writing Classroom – Readings TBA

11/30 - TBA

**12/7 – Research Proposal Due by Noon**



Writing Center Theory and Practice “Readings TBA”

October 3

Bodie, Graham D., et al. 2008. "Priorities of Listening Research: Four Interrelated Initiatives." International Listening Association.

Cuny, Kimberly M., Sarah M. Wilde, and Alexandra Vizzer Stephenson. 2012. "Using Empathetic Listening to Build Client Relationships at the Center." *In Communication Center and Oral Communication Programs in Higher Education: Advantages Challenges, and New Directions*. Eunkyong Yook and Wendy Atkins Sayre, Eds. Lexington, KY: Lexington Books. 249-256.

Stewart, John, Karen Zediker, and Saksia Witteborn. 2011. "Empathic and Dialogic Listening." In *Bridges not Walls: A Book about Interpersonal Communication, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition*. John Stewart, Ed. McGraw-Hill. 225-244.

October 19

Hamel, Christine M. "Learning Disabilities in the Writing Center: Challenging our Perspectives?" *Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 26, no. 8, 2002, pp. 1-5.

Babcock, Rebecca Day. "Disabilities in the Writing Center." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2015, pp. 39-49.

November 7

Olson, Bobbi. "Rethinking Our Work with Multilingual Writers: The Ethics and Responsibility of Language Teaching in the Writing Center." *Praxis*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2013.

Wilson, Nancy Effinger. "Stocking the Bodega: Towards a New Writing Center Paradigm." *Praxis*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2012.

November 21

Driscoll, Dana Lynn, and Sherry Wynn Perdue. "Theory, Lore, and More: An Analysis of Rad Research in 'The Writing Center Journal,' 1980-2009." *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2012, pp. 11-39.

Merriam, Sharan B. "What is Qualitative Research?" *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. Jossey-Bass, 2009, pp. 3-20.

APPENDIX E  
COMPOSITION PRACTICUM SYLLABUS

## English [REDACTED]: Teaching College Composition

ENGL [REDACTED], Fall 2018

W 7 pm—9:45 pm, [REDACTED]

Professor: [REDACTED]

Office: [REDACTED]

Office hours: M, 1:30- 4 pm; W 2:30-4p; and by appt.

Office phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

### Course Description, Philosophy, and Goals

The primary goal of English [REDACTED] is to help you theorize, historicize, and reflect upon the teaching of introductory college writing in the context of your first year of said teaching (at [REDACTED]). Thus, though the course functions largely as a seminar—providing a broad overview of composition pedagogies and related practices from the inception of the process movement until present—it will focus on implications and sometimes direct applications of the historical and theoretical scholarship we read and will have other features that fit the genre of a practicum. For example, we will engage in some discussion of, toward planning for, your own classroom experiences as they are unfolding. That said, please keep in mind throughout the semester that I see the mentor groups with the ADCS as the context wherein the finer points of your pragmatic and planning work for teaching will take place and wherein you'll raise the majority of your daily teaching concerns. And that said, please keep in mind that \*your performance in mentor group has no bearing on my assessment of your performance in [REDACTED] (other than in the indirect ways that what you do there may make you a stronger seminar participant or strengthen your written work for the course).

### Student Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- become familiar with a broad overview of, and a number of canonical texts within, composition pedagogies of the last (roughly) 50 years, gaining insight into their implications for both the development of Composition Studies and for students' own development as teachers;
- demonstrate, in discussion and in writing, the ability to comprehend and synthesize, to draw connections and disconnections among and across, these pedagogical developments.

These related outcomes will be assessed through in-class discussion, weekly written responses to readings, a final statement of teaching philosophy, and a theorized rationale and syllabus for your second semester 102 course.

### Course Texts

Glenn, Cheryl, and Melissa A. Goldthwaite. *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing*. 7<sup>th</sup> edition, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014. (Hereafter, *St. Martin's*.)

Tate, Gary et al., editors. *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford UP, 2014. (Hereafter *Comp Peds*.)

Individual articles uploaded to Blackboard (Hereafter Bb.)

### Course Requirements

Participation (100 pts; 25 % of course grade)

Because this is a graduate seminar, everyone is expected to attend each and every class, to demonstrate consistent, and consistently thoughtful, engagement with course readings, and to contribute rigorously but respectfully and relatively equally to class discussion and each other's learning.

Written Responses to Readings (150 pts; 37.5 % of course grade)

You will write some form of response to the readings every week. These are directed responses, specific to each grouping of readings; I will always provide questions to prompt them, either during the class preceding the next week's readings or over e-mail (or both). Though the specifics of the prompts/responses will vary, as will their length requirement and point value (but usually 1-2 pps, single spaced, and 10-20 pts), I will (almost) always value most highly responses that reflect deep and specific immersion in and engagement with the texts (via close paraphrase and direct quotation and the like). Obviously, this valuation will change if/when I ask you for more reflective/speculative writing, which I may do in certain weeks. Unless otherwise announced, responses will be due in hard copy at the start of each seminar and serve to help to prepare you for thoughtful, rigorous participation; their content will often frame, or at least launch, our class discussions each week. All writing that you do in this course should be written in a standard 12 point font with one inch margins all around.

Statement of Teaching Philosophy (50 pts; 12.5% of course grade)

Toward the end of the term (due date W Nov 14), as one of our two culminating assignments, you will produce a statement of (your developing) teaching philosophy according to the generic conventions of those produced for the academic job market and/or applications to Ph.D. programs, and reflecting (I hope) the influence of our seminar and your semester in the classroom. More information on this assignment will follow at the appropriate time.

FTR (Follow the Reference) assignments (50 pts; 12.5% of course grade)

Though we will certainly read a number of primary (article-length) texts in this course, a significant portion of our course reading from two of our main course texts is designed to provide the *historicizing theoretical overview* of composition pedagogies mentioned in both the Goals and Outcomes sections of this syllabus above. Thus I would like to give you the opportunity to use all of the overview chapters we read as springboards to pursue, read, and share with the class primary texts introduced/contextualized therein that are of interest to you, for whatever reason. Three times during the term (see schedule), you will familiarize yourself with and "present" to the class, via a summative/descriptive/contextualizing post to a discussion thread on Blackboard, a work that is referenced in our *St. Martin's* and *Comp Peds* overview chapters that is of interest to you and that you think will be of interest to the whole class. More on the requirements of this assignment to follow . . . very soon.

Final Course Project: Theorized Rationale and Syllabus for 102 (150 pts; 37.5% of course grade)

At the end of the term (due date TBA—but during last week of classes OR Finals week), you will produce a full syllabus, including *skeleton* schedule, for your next semester 102 course, accompanied by a theorized (reflective and *researched*) rationale for your 102 course. More on this assignment will follow later in the term.

As you can see, then, there are 400 points possible in this course. 93-100% (of our 400 pts)=A; 90-92%=A-; 88-89%=B+; 83-87%=B; 80-82%=B- etc.

**Technology Policies**

I do not ever anticipate that inappropriate use of technology will be an issue in a graduate seminar. Still: phones off and away during class, please. No exceptions unless you are awaiting a call/text during an emergency situation (notify me in advance of class if this is so). How you handle readings uploaded to Bb is your business, *as long as* you are able to refer to them specifically during seminar—pointing classmates and me to particular passages and page numbers etc.

### **Obligatory Plagiarism Statement**

As graduate students teaching first year writing, I assume you are well aware of the definition of plagiarism and equally aware that plagiarism at the graduate level is a particularly egregious offense. Nonetheless, plagiarism is: representing the words or ideas of someone else as one's own in any academic exercise. If you plagiarize in this course, you will fail English [REDACTED]. I will then report you to the Dean of Student's Office which may take further action, including dismissal from the university. If you have any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism as we move through individual assignments, speak to me; there is no distinction made between intentional and unintentional plagiarism.

### **Other Policies**

#### Absences

The only acceptable number of absences from a graduate seminar that meets once/week is 0-1. If you anticipate missing more than one class, let me know immediately.

#### Extensions and Late Work

I do not grant the former or accept the latter under any circumstances (except in the case of medical or other actual emergencies, documented as such).

#### Constraints of Assignments

are constraints, and are *meant to be constraining* (page lengths/word counts/formatting requirements etc). If I ask for one page of writing, single spaced, that is what I want to read. If you exceed that limit, I don't read the work and you get no credit. All of the written work you do for this course should be in 12 point font, Times New Roman, with 1 in. margins all around. I will specify whether I want single or double spacing, depending on the assignment.

### **A Note for Students with Disabilities**

The [REDACTED] is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and require accommodation to participate in and/or complete requirements for this class, contact the Disability Resource Center ([REDACTED]) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations.

### **Title IX Clery Act Notification Statement**

Sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and any other nonconsensual behavior of a sexual nature) and sex discrimination violate University policies. Students experiencing such behavior may obtain confidential support from the [REDACTED], Counseling Center [REDACTED], and Campus Health Services ([REDACTED]). To report sexual misconduct or sex discrimination, contact the Dean of Students ([REDACTED]) or [REDACTED] Police ([REDACTED]).

Disclosure to University faculty or instructors of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, or sex discrimination occurring on campus, in a University-sponsored program, or involving a campus visitor or University student or employee (whether current or former) is not confidential under Title IX. Faculty and instructors must forward such reports, including names and circumstances, to the University's Title IX officer. For more information, see the Sexual Misconduct Resource Guide: [REDACTED]

### **A Note on Changes**

I reserve the right to alter course policies, course requirements, the relative weight thereof, and the schedule of reading and writing assignments as the semester progresses. I will always notify you in advance and in writing of any changes I make and discuss with you the thinking that led to those changes.

**English Readings Schedule**

**Week One W 8/22: Writing Philosophy, Process Pedagogy and Expressivism**

Anson, Chris. "Process Pedagogy and Its Legacy." *Comp Peds*, pp. 212-30.  
Burnham, Chris, and Rebecca Powell. "Expressive Pedagogy: Practice/Theory, Theory/Practice." *Comp Peds*, pp 111-27.

**Week Two W 8/29: Beginning Philosophy of Teaching—Persona and Authority**

Chapters 2-4, "Choices about Your Philosophy of Teaching"; "Choices about Your Teaching Persona"; "Choices about Your Authority as a Teacher." *Informed Choices: A Guide for Teachers of College Writing*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015, pp. 20-49. (Bb)  
(Note, you do not need to complete the activities in this text [unless you want to] but should use them as food for thought for possible seminar discussion.)  
Murray, Donald M. "The Teaching Craft: Telling, Listening, Revealing." *St Martins*, pp. 305-08.  
Elbow, Peter. "Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process." *College English*, vol. 45 no. 4, 1983, pp. 327-39. (Bb)

**Week Three W 9/5: Evaluating and Responding to Student Writing, and Teaching Argument (Beginnings)**

Chapter 5, "Evaluating Student Essays." *St Martin's*, pp. 125-60.  
Sommers, Nancy. "Responding to Student Writing." *St Martin's*, pp. 333-41.  
Fleming, David. "Rhetoric and Argumentation." *Comp Peds*, pp. 248-65.  
Bitzer, Lloyd F. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, vol. 1 no. 1, 1968, pp. 1-14. (Bb)

**\*Week Four W 9/12: Teaching Argument, Contd.**

Jarratt, Susan C. "Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict." *Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*, edited by Patricia Harkin and John Schilb, MLA, 1991, pp. 105-23. BB.  
Lynch, Dennis A., Diana George, and Marilyn Cooper. "Moments of Argument: Agonistic Inquiry and Confrontational Cooperation." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1997, pp. 61-85. (BB)  
\*FTR 1 DUE, posted, by 7pm.

**Week Five W 9/19: Teacher Authority (and Student Resistance) Revisited**

George, Ann. "Critical Pedagogies: Dreaming of Democracy." *Comp Peds*, pp. 77-93.  
Micchiche, Laura R. "Feminist Pedagogies." *Comp Peds*, pp. 128-45.  
Spigelman, Candace. "What Role Virtue?" *JAC* vol. 21, 2001, pp. 321-48. (Bb)  
Kopelson, Karen. "Rhetoric on the Edge of Cunning; Or, the Performance of Neutrality (Re)Considered As a Composition Pedagogy for Student Resistance." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2003, pp. 115-46. (Bb)

**Week Six W 9/26: Students' Rights to Their Own Languages**

Smitherman, Geneva. "CCCC's Role in the Struggle for Language Rights." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 50, no.3, 1999, pp. 349-76. (Bb)  
Lu, Min Zhan. "Professing Multiculturalism: The Politics of Style in the Contact Zone." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 45, no. 4, 1994, pp. 442-458. (Bb)  
Elbow, Peter. "Inviting the Mother Tongue: Beyond 'Mistakes,' 'Bad English,' and 'Wrong Language.'" *JAC*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1999, pp. 359-88. (Bb)

**Week Seven W 10/3: Linguistic Diversity, Contd.**

Chapter 15, "Choices about Teaching Diverse Students." *Informed Choices*, pp. 223-45.(Bb)

Matsuda, Paul Kei, and Matthew J. Hammill. "Second Language Writing Pedagogy." *Comp Peds*, pp. 266-82.

Leki, Itona. "Meaning and Development of Academic Literacy in a Second Language." *St Martin's*, pp. 436-448.

Matsuda, Paul Kei. "The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition." *St Martin's*, pp. 449-62.

Horner, Bruce, et al. "Opinion: Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach." *St Martin's*, pp. 463-480.

**\*Week Eight W 10/10: Differences Differently**

Kerschbaum, Stephanie. "Avoiding the Difference Fixation: Identity Categories, Markers of Difference, and the Teaching of Writing." *St Martin's*, pp. 412-435.

Alexander, Jonathan, and Jacqueline Rhodes. "Queer: An Impossible Subject for Composition." *JAC*, vol. 31, no. 1-2, 2011, pp. 177-206.

**\*Detailed schedule for 101 Unit 3, Writing Arguments, due**

**\*FTR 2 due, posted, 7pm.**

**Week Nine W 10/17: New/Multi Media and Composition Pedagogies**

Brooke, Collin Gifford. "New Media Pedagogy." *Comp Peds*, pp. 177-193.

Chapter 10, "Teaching Delivery." *St Martin's*, pp. 246-77.

Selfe, Cynthia. "Toward New Media Texts: Taking Up the Challenges of Visual Literacy." *St. Martin's*, pp. 481-506.

Wysocki, Anne Frances. "awaywithwords: On the Possibilities in Unavailable Designs." *St Martin's*, pp. 507-13.

**Week Ten W 10/24: Comp Otherwise—Community Engaged Pedagogy**

Julier, Laura, Kathleen Livingston, and Eli Goldblatt. "Community-Engaged Pedagogies." *Comp Peds*, pp. 55-76.

Cushman, Ellen. "The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 47, no.1, 1996, pp. 7-28. (Bb)

Bacon, Nora. "Building a Swan's Nest for Instruction in Rhetoric." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 51, no.4, 2000, pp. 589-609. (Bb)

Parks, Steve, and Nick Pollard. "Emergent Strategies for an Established Field: The Role of Worker Writers and Collectives in Composition and Rhetoric." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 61, no.3, 2010, pp. 476-509. (Bb)

**\*Week Eleven W 10/31: Looking Toward 102 and Comp Otherwise x2**

Moore-Howard, Rebecca and Sandra Jamieson. "Researched Writing." *Comp Peds*, pp. 231-47.

Thaiss, Chris, and Susan McLeod. "The Pedagogy of Writing in the Disciplines and Across the Curriculum." *Comp Peds*, pp. 283-300.

Larson, Richard. "The 'Research Paper' in the Writing Course: A Non-Form of Writing." *College English*, vol. 44, no. 8, 1982, pp. 811-16.

Downs, Douglas, and Elizabeth Wardle. Teaching About Writing, Writing Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning 'First Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Writing Studies.' *St Martin's*, pp. 278-304.

**\*Detailed schedule for 101 Unit 4, Remediating Arguments, due**

**\*Week Twelve T11/7: Looking Toward 102**

**\*FTR 3 due, posted, 7pm.**

Activities TBD—likely possibilities include: informal presentations of chosen FTR; workshopping statements of teaching philosophy in progress, etc.

**\*Week Thirteen T11/14: Looking Toward 102—Library Services for Teaching Researched Writing**

Visit from [REDACTED]

**Statement of Teaching Philosophy due** at the start of class; discussion

LAST CLASS! ☺

>>>*Your 102 syllabus and rationale will be due either in the last week of classes or during finals week—*  
*TBD.<<<<*



VITA  
 Cassandra Ann Book  
 Old Dominion University Department of English  
 5000 Batten Arts & Letters  
 Norfolk, VA 23529

### **Education**

Ph.D. in English, Old Dominion University, *anticipated graduation May 2020*  
 Dissertation: Students at a Crossroads: TA Development Across Pedagogical and Curricular Contexts  
 Co-Directors: Dr. Louise Weatherbee Phelps and Dr. Kevin DePew

M.A. in English, University of Louisville, 2012  
 Culminating Project: Reading los Californios: Poetry as Unity and Resistance in *El Clamor Público*  
 Project advisor: Dr. Susan Griffin

Graduate Certificate, Latin American and Latino Studies, University of Louisville, 2012

B.A., English Literature and Spanish, Butler University, 2010  
 Phi Beta Kappa, Cum Laude, English Department High Honors

### **Writing Program Administration**

Associate Director, University Writing Center, University of Louisville, August 2015-present  
 Director, Bellarmine University Writing Center, July 2012-August 2015

### **Teaching**

Bellarmino University:  
 Writing Center Theory and Practice, Fall 2012, Spring 2013, Fall 2013, Spring 2014, Spring 2015  
 Freshman Focus, Fall 2013, Fall 2014

University of Louisville:  
 Introduction to Composition, Fall 2011  
 Intermediate Composition, Spring 2012  
 Writing Consultant, Fall 2010-Spring 2011

### **Selected Publications**

VanHaitsma, Pamela, and Cassandra Book. "Digital Curation as Collaborative Archival Method in Feminist Rhetorics." *Peitho Journal*, vol. 21, issue 2, spring 2019.

Book, Cassandra. "Is This Your First Visit?: User-Experience and Writing Centers' Online Presence." *Southern Discourse in the Center*, vol. 22, issue 2, 2018.

Book, Cassandra and Michael G. Strawser. "Evolving Identities: A Case Study of a Writing Center Collaboration with a Public Speaking Course." *The Peer Review*, vol.1, issue 1, 2017.