

## **Reform as Access, Reform as Exclusion: Making Space for Critical Approaches to the Neoliberal Moment**

Kirsten Higgins & Anthony Warnke

---

This essay offers a critical framework for engaging with basic writing at the two-year college. By intersecting access-oriented initiatives within the progressive tradition of basic writing scholarship with neoliberal, corporate-sponsored initiatives, the article stakes out a pragmatic space for values-driven change to calcified developmental education structures.

---

### **Doubling Down on the Neoliberal Community College**

According to Joseph Schumpeter, capitalism depends on an evolving cycle of “creative destruction,” “the incessant product and process innovation mechanism by which new production units replace outdated ones” (Caballero 1). The term implies that the failures and busts of the free market ultimately generate improved goods and services. Modifying Schumpeter’s language, we would argue that in the aftermath of the most recent recession—economic destruction on a massive scale—the American community college has seen a creative *reconstruction*. This reconstruction has reanimated an economic narrative of community colleges (while, often secondarily, emphasizing improved mechanisms for ensuring access and increasing equity). Recent political discourse privileges the vocational function of the community college, positioning it as a social institution that can bring back middle-class jobs and restore economic mobility. Scholars have noted how this economic framing of the community college has existed for decades, even as part of its origin, but has gained traction and visibility during the expansion of globalization (Ayers; Levin; Saunders). However, during and after the Great Recession, the community college has been even more intensively cited for its economic potential. With neoliberal capitalism’s focus on maximizing efficiency as well as the individual’s market value,

Basic Writing exists as both a targeted structure as well as a structure of renewed promise and second chances.

In neoliberal logic, as Wendy Brown explains, “Human beings become market actors and nothing but, every field of activity is seen as a market, and every entity (whether public or private, whether person, business, or state) is governed as a firm.... Above all, it casts people as human capital who must constantly tend to their own present and future value” (Brown). The neoliberal narrative posits a community college whose urgently needed economic promise cannot be achieved if the institution is not refashioned for the neoliberal moment. This narrative suggests the college must respond to the need for efficiency-oriented “pathways” for a new wave of worker-students. Reformers, in response, target developmental reading and writing programs as barriers to this neoliberal transformation.

Positioning the community college as needing reforms—to developmental education, to advising, to “the cafeteria-model” of courses (see *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges* by Bailey et al. for explanation of this critique)—to meet its socio-economic obligation has facilitated widespread corporate investment in these reinventions. Ironically, the current remaking of the American community college, despite its engagement with the classic narratives of social mobility and individual motivation, depends on the urgently framed austerity narrative of the post-Recession reconstruction of the American economy. Community colleges should be able to do more with fewer resources. Even though economic values are linked to liberal values of mobility and equity, the subjects hailed and constituted in this narrative ecology must respond to their roles as market actors above all, must “tend to their own present and future value” (Brown). This narrative highlights adaptability, continuous (self-) improvement, and lifelong learning as the “new normal” values that mint the other side of the austerity coin. Many

institutions have divested from “the whole student” as an inefficient concept that works against maximizing student value. For a more extended, robust discussion of neoliberalism’s influence on open-access colleges, we highly recommend Patrick Sullivan’s *Economic Inequality, Neoliberalism, and the American Community College* (see review of Sullivan’s book in this issue).

As our analysis above indicates, we have deep reservations about some reformers’ constructs of higher education and related consequences for basic writing. We want to critique current community colleges that work within a kind of market logic and risk marginalizing students while leaving other equity systems, such as labor equity, untroubled. However, we first want to describe how these reforms have, in fact, provided some space for meaningful, but complicated, work in terms of composition at the community college.

### **Reform as Access**

Through one frame, reforms, no matter their impetus, have reinvigorated the fundamental principle of access that two-year colleges represent. By studying and challenging deeply embedded assumptions and practices, this framing suggests that large-scale changes can promote the equitable success of two-year college students. For example, efforts such as replacing high-stakes placement exams with multiple measures have provided more accurate, and humanizing, opportunities for students to place into college-level courses. At many colleges, decontextualized, high-stakes standardized tests have been deemphasized or eliminated altogether. A variety of actors has initiated and supported these efforts. These include state legislators; the corporately underwritten Community College Resource Center out of Columbia University; scholars who initiated work on Directed Self-Placement (Royer and Gilles; Inoue; Toth); and statements from disciplinary organizations such as the TYCA White Paper on

Placement. Together, these reform initiators have taken up the call of creating more robust access for the underserved, particularly low-income students and students of color, including multiple measures for placement and increased student agency in the placement process.

These intersections of disciplinary, political, and neoliberal actors have intensified at the larger level of reforming developmental education programs. On the neoliberal—and arguably most influential—side, non-profit driven research has informed the allocation of (closely managed and assessed) resources by the Gates Foundation, among others, to developmental reform efforts. Projects such as the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) out of the Community College of Baltimore County typify the work that foundations often fund. Originating in Peter Adams’ scholarship in the *Journal of Basic Writing*, which argues for the “mainstreaming” of developmental writers, ALP has replaced pre-requisite approaches to developmental education with co-requisite approaches (Adams). Citing the success of these co-requisite structures, states such as Florida, Connecticut, and Tennessee have mandated the elimination of pre-requisite developmental education structures. This combination of scholarly influenced redesigns, non-profit resources, and governmental policy give credence to a story of how “converging interests,” which we will elaborate on below, can result in large-scale changes that promote access and equity (Lamos).

### **Reform as Exclusion**

In contrast, one might use a different frame for the current moment. In the 1990s, states began chipping away at developmental education offerings by prohibiting public four-year colleges from providing basic writing courses and developmental education. See the University of Minnesota’s infamous dismantling of the General College as a stark example (Higbee et al.; Otte and Mlynarczyk). As public four-year colleges have increased their selectivity and reduced

resources that expand access, the two-year college has provided spaces and programs for those students who need additional time, support, and resources. In this narrative, the two-year college has resisted cutting out those students who simply cannot, upon admission, succeed in college-level courses. As Marilyn Sternglass has suggested, these colleges have offered space in the belief that, “given enough time and support, students who had initially been placed in basic writing could succeed in the academy and beyond” (qtd. in Otte and Mlynarczyk 36). Hunter Boylan et al. write,

It is almost as if policymakers and leaders believe that, if remediation was eliminated or reformed, the barriers to college completion would be removed. Furthermore, they have confused remediation with developmental education and implemented policies to eliminate or reduce developmental education as well as remediation. As a result, some strong developmental programs that have contributed to student success and completion have been eliminated because of the perception that remediation and developmental education are synonymous. (4)

Boylan et al.’s insights point to cautionary tales such as reform in Florida, where students who cannot succeed in co-requisite models are forced to go to off-site literacy centers. These centers effectively remove them from the college population and cut off access to the social ties and resources of a college campus. With the removal of these students, administrators and legislators in Florida may point to higher retention numbers that obscure who’s being left out altogether. A recent article in *Inside Higher Ed* notes that “a new report by Florida State University’s Center for Postsecondary Success found a decline in the percentage of administrators who think the law that lifted the mandate on remediation is working,” with 39% agreeing or strongly agreeing in 2017, down from 74% in 2015 (Smith).

Despite some administrators' shifting views of the very systems wherein the reforms have become mandates, the beat marches on. As another example, CUNY, where the open-access movement began, is no longer offering open admissions for applicants to senior colleges (see Barbara Gleason's "Remediation Phase-Out at CUNY: The 'Equity versus Excellence' Controversy"). These current reform efforts are cause for worry about increased cuts. As scholars warned in the mainstreaming debates, restructuring can disenfranchise the very students we are trying to help when we "move the margins" outside of one of the few public spaces where all kinds of learners can gain access to resources and space. During the 1990s debate, Sharon Crowley put her finger on a cruel paradox: the very mechanisms instituted to ensure "adequate support for 'new students' were painting those students and the programs that served them as targets. The cuts had begun, spurred by recessionary economies and calls for higher standards" (qtd. in Otte and Mlynarczyk 68). Even when the reforms are successful, there can be a substantial problem of mismatching students to reforms. As Boylan et al. note, "There is no effort made to see that the neediest students get the best instruction or the most support. This must change to attain the objectives of the college completion agenda" (16). Pushes towards "selectivity" and expedient college readiness dismiss these resources and spaces as inefficient. Terms like "acceleration" contrast themselves to values such as slowness, carefulness, and multidimensionality, and they may even implicitly contradict the idea that our educational structures are built to serve the whole student.

Boylan's advocacy of the T.I.D.E.S. model, with its discussion of students' needs framed in progressive yet implicitly market-oriented terms, fails to challenge deficit-oriented approaches to students from underserved communities. Having always-already acceded to austerity framing and emphasizing the completion agenda as the metric by which progress is measured, these

approaches also reflect neoliberal logic. Progressive work distinguishes itself from market-oriented models of “remediation” as well as models that call themselves “developmental education,” because, we argue, they both rely on framing that finds students in need of assimilation into institutions of higher education and the broader market economy.

In addition to these pushes towards expediency, little attention has been paid to the effect on labor conditions that accompany these changes. When adjunct faculty are mentioned in these reform efforts, for example in *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges*, even in the context of a larger conversation that pushes to “[include part-time faculty] in the college’s collaborative inquiry process,” the current push rarely gives currency to the lived, complex experiences and material conditions of students and faculty. Bailey et al. urge reformers to consider how better integrating adjunct faculty can make them “willing to advise students and conduct office hours even without additional pay” (169). We believe the social justice validity of doing progressive work requires moving outside of market-oriented metrics that fixate on outcomes rather than engaging with the laborers whose work makes the achievement of those outcomes possible. Often, that work is encoded in dialogue about the relationship between labor and the desired outcomes; thus, that work is unaccounted for in what counts as large-scale success. As Sue Doe, Maria Maisto, and Janelle Adsit suggest in their analysis of contingent faculty activism, the ends orientation of such work is philosophically misaligned with its ethos. They write,

Measuring success by a limited set of predetermined outcomes can cause activists to overlook important work that is not readily measurable and to be dismissive of unexpected variations on success. Wary of the pervasive, market-driven language of

productivity, we therefore argue that effective advocacy is not necessarily contained in large-scale attainments but in the small changes that are characteristic of the slow and plodding work of culture change. (Doe, Maisto, and Adsit 214)

Constructs that disadvantage underserved student populations rely on the same neoliberal logic that simultaneously disempowers, even disembodies, the adjunct laborers whose work forms the bedrock of the actual measurable gains. Whether for reformers or those wary of reform, labor conditions are rarely addressed.

### **Critical Reform Positioning**

Recently, we have attempted to flesh out a position towards these reforms that neither rejects them wholesale nor adopts them without caution. What we call critical reform (Warnke and Higgins) attempts to stake out a “thirdspace” to improve on our practices and problematize the status quo (Soja and Chouinard). We do not seek to occupy this space to throw up our hands and simply triangulate. Instead, we seek to act out of the spirit of “post-hegemonic” action—which Jeanne Gunner describes as action that works from assemblages and spaces *within* what we’re trying to resist. In other words, we are suspicious of the rhetoric of crisis that neoliberal forces offer to justify their intervention. As Deborah Mutnick points out, “Since the turn of the century, policymakers, corporations, and neoliberal think tanks have aggressively and transparently pushed an agenda to transform US education by creating a ‘crisis’ to provide and profit from solutions to it” (41).

One can easily read a similar acceptance of crisis in the reform efforts we describe. The two-year college is in crisis, especially as it concerns training America’s workforce. The Great Recession merely brought to the fore how poorly these colleges were serving students. “Equity” and “access” only need to be committed to as far as they serve ends that are profitable for the



college and justifiable in terms of economic return for non-profit organizations such as Complete College America, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), among others.

To be sure, the types of reforms we advocate, which we call critical reform, are limited in scope in terms of their impact on macroeconomic structures. We want to be pragmatic within a robust, consistent framework of equity and justice while acknowledging the messiness, contradictions, and unintended consequences reform initiatives can reinforce from the macroeconomic forces of systemic poverty, racism, and labor dispossession.

Through critical reform, we are engaging with inescapably neoliberal-driven initiatives and priorities while we are resisting the austerity and market logic within these initiatives. As Shari Stenberg argues, “Austerity’s ideological consequences determine who and what is deemed valuable, who and what counts as ‘good investment’” (191). While we hope to find common ground in improving equitable practices and expanding access, we also hope to cultivate and repurpose (Stenberg) these initiatives to make space wherein progressive traditions of Basic Writing inform our processes and practices.

We believe there are ways to implement reforms that honor the ethos of the best basic writing scholarly traditions—those, for example, that problematize the stigma of basic writer and seek to dismantle hierarchies that perpetuate marginalization (Horner and Lu; Bartholomae). In doing this work, we believe we can follow in the footsteps of Steve Lamos, who describes the program at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in his book, *Interests and Opportunities: Race, Racism, and University Writing Instruction in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Lamos frames his work in terms of Derrick Bell’s concept of “interest convergence.” Framed this way, presenting students as “at risk” could be used to expand access for students of color, garner appropriate resources for them, and hold space to support them. Yet, at Urbana-Champaign,

through a variety of changes in administration and faculty, some structures were reappropriated to raise barriers that stymied students of color (Lamos). Even careful, watchful work with critical reform cannot necessarily prevent this. But the model of converging and diverging interests, and the institutional barriers quietly created at various stages in the process, could practically serve as an analogy or even guide for basic writing's reform in the two-year college. Our own adaptability, flexibility, and unwavering commitment to students—as well as our willingness to engage the logic of neoliberalism in that we are continually able to adapt and remake structures—is the best tool we have.

Reform is necessary though fraught. For as much as we abhor neoliberal logic and its convenient appropriation of values such as equity, with little extension of such values to labor, we also do not subscribe to a narrative nostalgic for days of yore where two-year colleges existed outside of a capitalist logic. Some narratives might believe that the two-year college exists, despite all odds, as a bastion of equity, a social equalizer that educates some of the most marginal members of society. In many ways, two-year colleges seem almost to have antibodies to neoliberalism written into their DNA.

Yet we argue that the history is more complicated. Like many tales of nostalgia, the best possible light occludes the more complicated histories that have established the institutions we protect dearly. Capitalist logic has long infected two-year colleges. As Burton Clark theorized in 1960, community colleges can act as a sorting mechanism that reserves higher education for those who can excel and shifts the blame for failure onto the individual student. Like much of capitalism, this rhetoric of meritocracy has mapped onto racial and socioeconomic divisions. Developmental education, at its most regressive, has reflected such divisions, facilitating an internalization of failure that would keep those most marginal in education out of the mainstream

— or, at least, create a barrier that they would have to surmount to indicate their belonging. We must acknowledge, as Kevin Dougherty lays out, that “as a consequence of its diverse origins, the community college is a hybrid institution, combining many different and often contradictory purposes. It is a doorway to educational opportunity, a vendor of vocational training, a protector of university selectivity, and a defender of state higher education budgets” (8). These critiques of the capitalist origins of community colleges map onto critiques of basic writing and composition. These critiques suggest that — under the guise of democratization — composition courses, in fact, replicate stratification (Shor). The two-year college and basic writing have never existed outside of power, nor have they romantically and uncomplicatedly served entirely as “Democracy’s College” (Boggs).

### **A Critical Reform Professional Development Project: The Accelerated Learning Institute**

The above questions, tensions, and challenges catalyzed our creation of a weeklong professional development activity in support of accelerated learning and basic writing scholarship. Utilizing the circumscribed agency, we have within a neoliberal capitalist system of higher education, we developed a professional development institute to negotiate and discuss pressures, such as those enforcing outcomes. We also refused to ignore hard questions about our basic reading and writing program. Yet we were wary of falling into the patterns of professional development opportunities offered in house that unthinkingly enforce neoliberal demands. In our experience, professional development opportunities often emphasized concrete “deliverables” and completion of accountability-framed tasks. Often, these demands discounted scholarship, story making, and critical dialogue as valuable artifacts. We repurposed the labor of rethinking our program into a collaborative exchange around the scholarship and histories regarding the purpose of the community college and of basic writing (Stenberg).

In a similar spirit of resisting neoliberal pressures, professional development workshops typically have a thin veneer of professionalism that gilds troubling hierarchies. We brand them as “opportunities” to “develop,” and they are billed as resume builders that will hopefully lead to that elusive full-time, tenure-track “opportunity.” To flip the script and make visible the fraught labor conditions at our college, especially for adjunct faculty, we framed the conversations and experiences as well as their engagement with the scholarship *as* the work, as the labor, rather than emphasizing a product-oriented or training-centered approach. In our experience, a typical professional development opportunity asks adjunct faculty members to be constantly “operating to enhance their competitive positioning and capitalist value” (Brown 155) while deemphasizing their intellectual and affective contributions to the field and the institution. In professional development, administrators and full-time, tenured faculty facilitate and call for the production of certain predetermined deliverables—syllabi, assignments aligned with outcomes, Canvas materials, etc. Attendees, largely adjunct faculty, produce these deliverables to demonstrate their good faith efforts.

Along with avoiding the above practices, we tried to use the institute’s pay structure to acknowledge material realities. We attempted to compensate attendees fairly and more than they were typically paid for such work. We eventually, though not easily, secured funding by refusing to hold the workshop if attendees were not going to be adequately compensated. To make the institute conform to the tellability standards of our institutional narratives (Adler-Kassner), we knew we had to title the institute in a way that gave it institutional recognition and value, leading to “The Acceleration Institute.” While we attempted to create a more equitable model of doing professional development, this small intervention in no way solved the larger institutional labor issues.

Below, we lay out some of the main themes, questions, and readings that guided our institute. We also briefly offer some of our observations from our experience. We hope that others will use, adapt, and improve on a framework for professional development that sees tensions as generative, invites hard conversations about larger forces bearing down on our work, and sees competing stories as a site of critical exchange among professionals, one where dialogue, however indeterminate, is a deliverable.

Although we sought to reconvene this institute for a second time, the then-vice president and dean viewed the institute as necessary only to “train” people to teach the ALP track. Rather than seeing continuous space and time, as well as conversation among intellectual partners in this work, as central to teaching well, the administration, purse strings in view, writes a narrow narrative of need. We hoped that participants would find the space, time, and sense of agency to speak openly about their views and practices, and to reflect on the changes to our college and discipline. We feel that we succeeded in that to a degree. In our institute, participants spoke more than facilitators. Participants engaged with scholarship and story—and their voices and contributions to the multiple stories created the institute’s reason for being.

Frankly, we think that participating in the creation of lively campus culture that values academic and affective contributions by adjunct and full-time faculty as well as students, staff, and community members is a much larger goal than a one-off institute can achieve. We offer this work as one example—a microcosm for a larger shift in the values and practices we attach to professional development opportunities on our campuses. The fraught context of the increasingly neoliberal landscape of higher education, particularly at the two-year college, shapes professional engagement on many levels. If anything, those seeking to do critical reform can hold space and put their shoulders to the wheel to leverage any mechanism available to

make sure that the held space is funded and recognized as contributing to the larger vision and values of the institutions.

### **Guiding Principles and Activities:**

#### **Guiding Principle 1: Develop Personal Understandings of the Community College Mission and Faculty Identities**

##### Goal, Day 1:

Explore how faculty members understood their professional identities in relation to their understanding of the function of the community college. Rather than beginning right away with the theory and research, we wanted to validate instructors' complex and rich teaching backgrounds and philosophies. We wanted to use faculty backgrounds to begin engaging with larger questions about the purpose of the community college.

##### Writing Prompt to Initiate Discussion:

1. Why do you teach?
2. Why do you teach at the community college?
3. From your point of view, why do we have community colleges (and other open-access institutions)?
4. How do your "whys" from above inform your curricular and pedagogical choices?

#### **Guiding Principle 2: Engage and Critically Respond to Foundational Scholarship about the Purposes of Community Colleges and Developmental Education**

##### Goal, Day 2:

Begin synthesizing scholarship, especially in the critical tradition, that questions why community colleges exist and how remediation/developmental education/basic writing can both reproduce inequities as well as promote access and justice.

Readings:

1. Ira Shor "Our Apartheid"
2. Karen Greenberg's "A Response To Ira Shor's 'Our Apartheid: Writing Instruction and Inequality'"
3. Mike Rose "Colleges Need to Re-Mediate Remediation"
4. Burton Clark "The 'Cooling Out' Function in Higher Education"

Writing Activity (in Thinking Journal):

1. According to today's readings, what are the controversies and critiques regarding "basic writing"--and this includes reading ("developmental," "pre-college," "remedial")?
2. What are the controversies and critiques regarding open-access institutions in general?
3. What are the conversations & critiques regarding practices in the writing classroom with relation to language difference?
4. What practices, both classroom and institutional, are these readings challenging?
5. What do we do with the critiques Shor and others have offered? Pedagogically? Curricularly? Institutionally?
6. What are the consequences, positive and negative, of employing certain definitions of basic writers or basic writing or college-level writers, etc.?
7. What are you thinking at this point? What are you learning? What questions are coming up for you?
8. What tensions or challenges are coming up for you?

Group Activity:

1. Find 3-4 passages from among the readings that represent distinct takes on their arguments. Among these, at least one passage should be a concept that's new to you or challenges something you believe. Copy and paste (or use the snipping tool!) to share the 3-4 passages to the group Google doc. Write a quick note as to why you've chosen these passages.
2. Share in your small group. Which passages did you select, what makes them significant, etc.? What productive differences did you notice among people's selections of passages and the ideas they expressed regarding why they've chosen those passages?

**Guiding Principle 3: Reflect on Institutional Change to Practices in Relation to Scholarship and Institutional and Economic Pressures**

Goal, Day 3:

Take a closer look at some of the on-the-ground changes to developmental education that have been implemented. Begin asking how these changes reflect or complicate the scholarship from both strands (BW and foundation funders).

Readings:

1. Klausman et al.'s "TYCA White Paper on Writing Placement Reform"
2. Jagers et al.'s "What We Know about Accelerated Developmental Education"
3. Hassel et al.'s TYCA White Paper on Developmental Reform
4. Judith Scott-Clayton's "Do High Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success?"



Writing Activity (in Thinking Journal):

1. How does the way that we define “basic writers” impact your work, both in terms of your practices and in terms of your engagement with the institution? What gaps are you finding or what do you think is being left out of these conversations based on your experience?
2. How do Tuesday’s readings relate to the discussion about defining basic writers? What relationships are you seeing between the teachers-scholars’ work and the structural decision making?
3. Imagine that our authors, Shor, Greenberg, Rose, Clark, and others, got together with the educational measurement folks from CCRC, etc. What would they say to each other? How do the concepts from Monday relate to the reforms and concrete practices from Tuesday’s readings? Try to be specific (e.g., x idea from Shor reflects y practice in the TYCA White Paper on Dev. Ed. reform).
4. What would you add to the conversation?

Group Activity:

Divide into 4 groups:

1. Placement group
2. ALP group
3. Stretch and Studio Group
4. State-Directed Mainstreaming—Tennessee, Florida: state-mandated changes

Explore one of the models or strategies for developmental reform. Learn what you can about it and create a brief, informal presentation. Please create a visual artifact to share.

1. What is the impetus behind your model/reform strategy?
2. What is the history of your model/reform strategy? How has it been developed?
3. In the nuts and bolts, how does the model work?
4. What are key terms that pertain to your topic area?
5. How does the reform strategy ameliorate underplacement of students and lengthy pipeline or leaky pipeline retention problems? Who benefits from the model or reform?
6. Are there any student populations who might be put in jeopardy by the model? What or who is being left out of consideration?
7. What questions do you still have about the reform strategy? What would you still like to know?

#### **Guiding Principle 4: Reflect on Own Practices in Relation to Scholarship and Institutional Changes, and Design or Redesign Activity or Assignment**

##### Goal, Days 4-5:

After having a closer look at some of the on-the-ground changes to developmental education that have been implemented, begin asking how one's own practices as a BW and "gatekeeper" English instructor in the two-year college may be reconsidered and revised in light of critical scholarship we've explored. Create or creatively revise one activity or assignment so that it reflects a changing view of theory and practice.

##### Group Activity:

1. Share your revised (or in-process) activity or assignment with colleagues. Explain what inspired your changes. Describe how this piece reflects the scholarly inquiry we have been undertaking this week.

2. Discuss how/if your activity or assignment will be embedded in larger changes within your course. What are the ways in which you're rethinking your course responses to what we've read about this week?

## Reflections and Lingering Questions

The following reflections document the successes and limitations we experienced facilitating the professional development above. We hope they are instructive and creatively and critically repurposed.

### Successes:

1. The institute created precedent at our college and within our department for using institutional resources to support engagement with scholarship and dialogue as the key products or deliverables of professional development work.
2. Professional development opportunities could be re-envisioned as a site in which critical dialogue shapes the action to be taken instead of requiring the acceptance and replication of preexisting frameworks (as in Quality Matters or similar). Debate, dissent, and critical dialogue created frames for engagement.
3. The institute's design drew attention to the connection between the work on the ground (of classroom practice as well as structural reform) as connected, and as always part of, a larger national scholarly conversation as well as part of the larger labor concerns.

### Limitations:

1. Bringing this work to life required intensive efforts by two full-time, tenured faculty members who are former WPAs backed by a particularly inventive, determined department chair. The amount of institutional heft required to see this through our

college's labyrinthine, highly politicized funding systems essentially excludes the possibility for even long-standing adjunct faculty members to co-create such an institute.

2. The brief time frame of an institute doesn't necessarily allow for longer-term collaboration and development. The excitement generated in the institute could not be sustained over the school year due to material constraints such as lack of available compensation and time during a busy school year.
3. In some ways, our institution's larger lag in terms of developing an academic culture with robust support for professional development and scholarship means a chasm often appears between full-time faculty—who have enough travel funding available to engage at least with regional conferences such as TYCA-PNW—and adjunct faculty whose funding is even more constrained. Thus, adjunct faculty are often less connected to professional networks and scholarly activities; and in the institute, find themselves positioned as less knowledgeable even in the face of attempts to challenge hierarchies.
4. We wish we had been better able to address, both in terms of open discussion and in terms of compensation, the potentially destabilizing impacts of program reforms. Inherently, full-time faculty can limit or carefully control their exposure to the unintended consequences of structural changes while adjunct faculty usually cannot. For example, offering ALP at our institution has whittled down the number of developmental reading and writing courses, with the potential to disrupt adjunct faculty members' pay, scheduling, and stability. Full-time faculty are better insulated to roll with structural, programmatic changes.
5. Noblesse-oblige underlies fully funded professional development opportunities; that is, opportunities are arduously created by full-time faculty and made available to adjunct

faculty. Adjunct faculty at our institution are mostly aware that any work full-time faculty have put in to create opportunities like this come at great cost to their own time and career advancement. This fact manages adjuncts into a role of smiling compliance and praise. Critical dialogue that could inform us of our missteps is mostly absent from the feedback we've received and, as we mentioned above, there doesn't seem to be the institutional will to structure opportunities so that they may be reasonably led by adjuncts.

6. On a related note, compensation and release time are sorely lacking for full-time faculty. Bailey et al. blithely note that "faculty and staff who are leading" activities that they refer to as "repurposed" professional development "will need to devote much more time to these activities. For faculty who lead such work, departments should consider reducing their teaching loads" (165). In the context of our underfunded institutions and our then-vice president of instruction's hostility to reassignment time, this point reads as sardonic. We were denied release time but allotted \$500 each to research, create, and lead the institute, which was held during summer break. This compensation figure comes out to about \$14 per hour for us to lead the institute.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, the institute's successes, we believe, outweigh its limitations. We are proud of the way that we facilitated critical dialogue and bridged theoretical and on-the-ground concerns. But like any practice, the philosophy and intentions rarely live up to the lived experience. Larger systemic limitations, such as faculty compensation and the entrenched academic culture, cannot be changed through one initiative. However, the participants in this professional development opportunity helped us re-develop our own approaches to this work,

both in terms of our scholarship and effecting change on the ground. As a result, we can use this institute as a springboard for remodeling future professional development activities. In the future, we hope that this institute's successes can influence larger institutional powers' decisions to properly fund and support critical, academically informed projects.

### Works Cited

- Adams, Peter Dow. "ALP FAQs." *Basic Writing e-Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2016.
- Adams, Peter Dow et al. "The Accelerated Learning Program: Throwing Open the Gates." *Journal of Basic Writing* vol. 28, no. 2, 2009, pp. 50-69.
- Adler-Kassner, Linda. *The Activist WPA: Changing Stories about Writing and Writers*. Utah State University Press, 2008.
- Ayers, David Franklin. "Neoliberal Ideology in Community College Mission Statements: A Critical Discourse Analysis." *The Review of Higher Education*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2005, pp. 527-549.
- Bailey, Thomas R., et al. *Redesigning America's Community Colleges*. Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Bartholomae, David. "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1993, pp. 4-21.
- Boggs, George R. "The Evolution of the Community College in America: Democracy's Colleges." *Community College Journal*, vol. 82, no. 4, 2012, pp. 36-39.
- Boylan, Hunter R. "Targeted Intervention for Developmental Education Students (T.I.D.E.S.)" *Journal of Developmental Education*, vol. 32, no. 3, Spring 2009, pp. 14-23.

- Boylan, Hunter R. et al. *College Completion: Focus on the Finish Line*. National Center for Developmental Education, 2017, <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/college-completion.pdf>.
- Brown, Wendy. "Booked #3: What Exactly Is Neoliberalism?" by Timothy Shenk. *Dissent*, 2 Apr. 2015, [www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/booked-3-what-exactly-is-neoliberalism-wendy-brown-undoing-the-demos](http://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/booked-3-what-exactly-is-neoliberalism-wendy-brown-undoing-the-demos).
- Caballero, Ricardo J. "Creative Destruction." *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*. Edited by Steven N. Durlauf and Lawrence E. Blume, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, <https://economics.mit.edu/files/1785>.
- Clark, Burton R. "The 'Cooling-Out' Function in Higher Education." *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 65, no. 6, 1960, pp. 569-576.
- Crowley, Sharon. "Response to Edward M. White's 'The Importance of Placement and Basic Studies.'" *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 15., no. 1, 1996, pp. 88-91.
- Doe, Sue, et al. "What Works and What Counts: Valuing the Affective in Non-Tenure-Track Advocacy." *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*, edited by Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, and Amy Lynch-Binieck, UP of Colorado, pp. 213-234.
- Dougherty, Kevin J. *The Contradictory College: The Conflicting Origins, Impacts, and Futures of the Community College*. SUNY Press, 1994.
- Gleason, Barbara. "Remediation Phase-out at CUNY: The 'Equity versus Excellence' Controversy." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2000, pp. 488-491.
- Greenberg, Karen. "A Response to Ira Shor's 'Our Apartheid: Writing Instruction and

- Inequality” *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1997, pp. 90-94.
- Gunner, Jeanne. "What Happens When Ideological Narratives Lose Their Force?" *Composition in the Age of Austerity*. Edited by Tony Scott and Nancy Welch. Utah State UP, 2016, pp. 149-161.
- Hassel, Holly, et al. "TYCA White Paper on Developmental Education Reforms." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2015, pp. 227-243. ProQuest, <https://ezproxy.greenriver.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.greenriver.edu/docview/1662361962?accountid=1558>.
- Higbee, Jeanne L., et al. "Diversity and the Postsecondary Experience." *Center for Research on Developmental Education and Urban Literacy*, University of Minnesota, 2007.
- Horner, Bruce, et al. "Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach." *College English*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2011, pp. 303-321.
- Inoue, Asao B. "Self-Assessment as Programmatic Center: The First Year Writing Program and Its Assessment at California State University, Fresno." *Composition Forum*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2009.
- Jaggars, Shanna S., Nikki Edgecombe, and Georgia W. Stacey. "What We Know About Accelerated Developmental Education." *Community College Research Center*, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2014.
- Klausman, Jeff, et al. "TYCA White Paper on Writing Placement Reform." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2016, pp. 135-157.
- Lamos, Steve. *Interests and Opportunities: Race, Racism, and University Writing Instruction in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2011.
- Levin, John S. "The Business Culture of the Community College: Students as Consumers;



- Students as Commodities." *Arenas of Entrepreneurship: Where Nonprofit and For-Profit Institutions Compete*, special issue of *New Directions for Higher Education*, vol. 129, 2005, pp. 11-26.
- Lu, Min-Zhan, and Bruce Horner. "Introduction: Translingual Work." *College English*, vol. 78, no. 3, 2016, pp. 207-218. ProQuest, <https://ezproxy.greenriver.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.greenriver.edu/docview/1750722555?accountid=1558>.
- Mutnick, Deborah. "Confessions of an Assessment Fellow." *Composition in the Age of Austerity*. Edited by Tony Scott and Nancy Welch. Utah State UP, 2016, pp. 33-50.
- Otte, George, and Rebecca Mlynarczyk. *Basic Writing*. Parlor Press, 2010.
- Rose, Mike. "Colleges Need to Remediate Remediation." Commentary. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 03 August 2009. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Need-to-Mediate/47527>
- Royer, Daniel J., and Roger Gilles. "Directed Self-placement: An Attitude of Orientation." *College Composition and Communication* vol. 50, no. 1, 1998, pp. 54-70.
- Saunders, Daniel. "Neoliberal Ideology and Public Higher Education in the United States." *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, vol. 8, no.1, 2010, pp. 42-77.
- Scott-Clayton, Judith. "Do High-Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success? CCRC Working Paper No. 41." *Community College Research Center*, Columbia University (2012).
- Shor, Ira. "Our Apartheid: Writing Instruction & Inequality." *Journal of Basic Writing*, 1997, pp. 91-104.
- Smith, Ashley A. "Florida Colleges Take Hit on Remediation." *Inside Higher Ed*. 16 Jun 2017,

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/06/16/florida-colleges-take-hit-remediation-veto-cap-ba-degrees>.

Soja, Edward W., and Vera Chouinard. "Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles & Other Real & Imagined Places." *Canadian Geographer*, vol. 43, no. 2, 1999, pp. 209-212.

Stenberg, Shari J. "Beyond Marketability: Locating Teacher Agency in the Neoliberal University." *Composition in the Age of Austerity*, edited by Nancy Welch and Tony Scott, UP of Colorado, 2016, pp. 191-204.

Stenberg, Shari J. *Repurposing Composition: Feminist Interventions for a Neoliberal Age*. Utah State UP, 2015.

Sternglass, Marilyn S. *Time to Know Them: A Longitudinal Study of Writing and Learning at the College Level*. Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997.

Sullivan, Patrick. *Economic Inequality, Neoliberalism, and the American Community College*. Springer, 2017.

Toth, Christie. "Directed Self-placement at 'Democracy's Open Door': Writing Placement and Social Justice in Community Colleges." *Writing Assessment, Social Justice, and the Advancement of Opportunity*. Edited by Mya Poe, Asao B. Inoue, and Norbert Elliot, UP of Colorado, 2018, pp. 137-170.

Warnke, Anthony, and Kirsten Higgins. "A Critical Time for Reform." *Teaching English in the Two Year College*, vol. 45, no. 4, May 2018, pp. 361-384.

Welch, Nancy, and Tony Scott, eds. *Composition in the Age of Austerity*. UP of Colorado, 2016.

**Kirsten Higgins** and **Anthony Warnke** teach basic writing and first-year composition at Green River College in Auburn, Washington. As co-Writing Program Administrators, they designed an

equity-focused Accelerated Learning Program that helped to revamp their department's developmental English sequence. Their scholarship has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* as well as edited collections on autoethnography and emotional labor in writing program administration. Their article "A Critical Time for Reform: Interventions in a Precarious Landscape" was selected for the Parlor Press anthology *Best of the Rhetoric and Composition Journals 2019*.