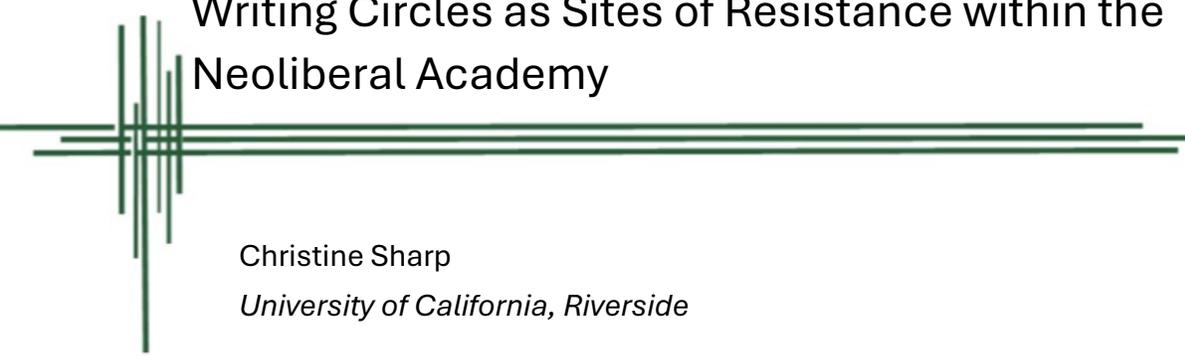


Staffing the Writing Circle: Inclusive Staff and Faculty Writing Circles as Sites of Resistance within the Neoliberal Academy



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Abstract

In this article, we explore the potential for writing circles that include staff and faculty to serve as sites of resisting the neoliberal university. We discuss the design, contexts, objectives, and outcomes of the inclusive writing circle we founded at our institution, drawing from existing scholarship and qualitative participant data to situate the circle as a complex space capable of both fostering academic productivity and resisting the academy's pressure to produce. Ultimately, we encourage other WPAs to consider how writing circles might be used to re-imagine the academy's neoliberal hierarchies and foster community-as-resistance.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37514/ALR-J/>

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As the editors and contributors to the recently-published *Faculty Writing Support: Emerging Research from Rhetoric and Composition Studies* remind us, “Faculty writers, particularly those who do not fit the traditional faculty writing model, are struggling and need support” (8). Our article explores an intervention that centered the writing needs of a broad range of educators: for career staff, lecturers, and non-ladder rank faculty, our “writing circle” intervention enabled these educators to communicate in community through lightly structured, regularly scheduled writing sessions.¹ Based on the findings we gathered from our pilot writing circles program, we posit that educator-facing writing circles provide writing centers and writing programs with both a crucial opportunity to remain relevant in the neoliberal academy and a tool with which to resist neoliberalist tendencies that have historically valued production over community, labor over relationship.

Because colleges and universities depend on labor from highly-credentialed experts in both non-ladder rank faculty and career staff positions, they are, theoretically, sites that offer avenues of professionalization for diversely-situated scholars. These avenues include directing specialized campus centers, administrating academic units, and holding teaching-focused positions. Though these positions rely on the kind of expertise and ongoing professional and scholarly development that is fostered through research writing, universities often fail to offer institutional support to forward that requisite research and professional development for professionals outside ladder-rank positions. While many factors, including austerity and the adjunctification of the profession, contribute to a lack of institutional support, one dominant reason for this dynamic may be the presumption that certain fields and positions matter more than others due to the disparate funding streams that emerge through Carnegie research activity designations. Another consideration may be the relative difficulty institutions have in tracking publications by non-ladder-rank faculty since those works may not count towards promotion.

¹ Throughout our piece, we refer to the frequently convoluted terminology surrounding differences between educator ranks. This tangled languaging around academic rank so ensnared us, both in crafting our materials for our writing circle and in drafting this article, that we created a glossary of terms (included here in our appendix). In writing, we were often reminded that, because we navigate a system that functions in large part based on the existence of ranks, it is difficult to find a rhetoric of positionality that can exist outside of that system. One goal of our writing circle is to highlight how arbitrary these distinctions can be as a means of dismantling them.

An additional contributing factor may be the widespread practice of scholars working in university positions that do not formally include research as part of their job loading.

Among other concerns, this lack of institutional support for diversely-positioned researchers can lead to a pervasive devaluation of scholars and scholarship produced outside of the ladder rank. Indeed, as the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS) is situated within the neoliberal institution, we as a discipline share responsibility for perpetuating these practices. Previous studies on writing and labor have focused primarily on the ladder rank faculty experience, likely as a consequence both of institutional funding constraints as well as historical discourse patterns that privilege ladder rank faculty experiences over those of our career staff colleagues.² Much scholarship and professional framing from within RWS reflects the complex dynamic of trying to combat systemic inequalities from within the neoliberal institution. The Conference on College Communication and Communication website, for example, offers a position statement on “Working Conditions for Non-Tenure Track Writing Faculty” that recommends “access to professional development and scholarly resources.” However, the specific types of support enumerated—while inclusive of valuable resources for professional development such as funding for travel, eligibility for graduate courses, and opportunities for grant funding without tenured faculty sponsorship—make little reference to supporting non-ladder rank writing faculty scholarship. Further, the CCCC’s position statement on “Scholarship in Rhetoric, Writing, and Composition” states that “traditionally, rhetoric, writing, and composition faculty have held tenured faculty positions” and notes that scholars in institution-wide writing centers and WAC programs are frequently appointed “with a tenure home in an academic department.” Though these tenuring practices would doubtless be appreciated, framing the roles only in terms of tenured positions does not represent the reality of the many writing center directors and writing program administrators (WPA) working in non-tenurable or career staff positions. Similarly, the CWPA’s “Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration” statement omits career staff who administer writing programs altogether. Such statements represent the field’s narrow focus on ladder rank faculty experience at the expense of scholars in non-ladder rank faculty and career staff positions.

Thus the pressures of the neoliberal institution obscure opportunities for transformation even within writing studies, allowing the labor-intensive experiences of directing a writing center or writing program, or teaching as non-ladder rank faculty within these contexts, to limit scholarly production from these researchers. At the same time, as Taft et al. argue, because some “writing studies research has argued for the importance of writing support for a variety of faculty and students, including contingent faculty...writing studies may be particularly well equipped to...[provide] the kind of writing support our field has called for” compared to other

² The neoliberal institution supports the production of certain types of scholarship over others: ladder rank faculty scholarship over non-ladder rank, permanent faculty scholarship over contingent faculty scholarship, and faculty scholarship over staff scholarship. As we discuss later in this article, we all navigate neoliberal institutions that attach differentials of value to constructed hierarchical positions, including within our discipline of Rhetoric and Writing Studies.

fields (44). Taft et al. identify an opportunity, then, for writing studies scholars to reconsider whom to include in scholarly writing groups. With these exigencies in mind, our article considers shared writing circles for faculty and staff as a way to engage “the intersections of labor precarity and academic publication, a pivotal location where...identities as professionals and workers intersect,” positioning the labor of professional staff and non-ladder rank faculty as entry points for highlighting unseen and undervalued labor (Lynch-Binieck and Cox 676). By centering the needs of these populations, writing centers and their allies can uplift the writing-related needs of teaching faculty and career staff, thereby disrupting part of the institutional apparatus of the neoliberal university.

Efforts have been made in writing center scholarship to expand on the positionalities and stories of professional writing center staff, non-Senate and non-ladder rank faculty, professional staff, and student tutors (Clark-Oates and Cahill 111–126; Giaimo and Lawson 3–5; Herb and Gardner 1–6; Sabo et al. 54–68. Increasingly, too, emerging scholarship centers examples of faculty writing groups that aim to support ladder rank faculty (Alexander and Shaver 58–86; Atchinson and Guerin 3–17; Cuthbert et al. 137–49; Dwyer et al. 129–144; Haas 78–111; Rifenburg and Johnston 239–254; Taft, Babcock and Vis 43–61.) However, when non-ladder rank faculty or career staff members are referenced in this scholarship, it is often at the margins. If mentioned at all, these scholars may be named as populations that merit attention, but which do not fully materialize as worthy of deeper exploration by the very scholarship that purports to make marginalized experiences of WPAs visible.

Perhaps it is, in part, owing to such oversight—in our own scholarly community and at our institutions—that career staff retain a sense of allegiance to evaluative principles that do not officially apply to their job roles; namely, the irresistible pressure to publish. Many of us maintain a strong commitment to scholarly output despite the impediments that exist in an environment of “unchecked whiteness” that otherwise presume we lack value in our institutions (Micciche and Guy 139). “Publication is political, classed, raced, able-bodied, and gendered” we must remember. “Who gets to publish, the authority they are given once they publish, and all the possible voices that are left out of the scholarly conversation are critical to how our field makes knowledge, retains members, and ultimately works with writers” (Martini 66).³ Ultimately, because “academic workers who do not publish are seen by some TT faculty as second-class professionals...many [academic workers] continue to publish when it is not required [because] the academic machine has convinced some that to abandon research is to embrace a second-class professional identity” (Lynch-Binieck and Cox 679). It seems clear, then, that the omission of professional staff in the broader narrative of scholarly activity and support for writing scholars in our field reinscribe and lend credence to neoliberalist discourse in our institutions. If this is so, how might we embrace this opportunity to advance our

³ While we do not have the space, here, to delve more deeply into the myriad ways social identities - race, gender, ability, class, sexual identity, faith, and the like - impact us as scholars, it is important to acknowledge that interventions such as our own can assist in surfacing how systemic oppression not only exists within our institutions of higher ed but are often perpetuated within and amongst privileged members of the institution - such as faculty - as a means of retaining, reinscribing, and embracing power.

collective resistance by centering the strengths and needs of professional staff at our institutions? As sociologist Allan Johnson reminds us, we all participate in social systems and, as such, can make decisions—and take actions—that either change or perpetuate those social systems (26).⁴ Those of us who serve as WPAs could, perhaps, be more aware of how the pressures that our neoliberalist academic systems exert upon us lead us to perpetuate, albeit unintentionally, the neoliberal logics within our very field.

With these caveats in mind, we hope to build upon the important work undertaken by our colleagues by examining writing communities—or, as we call them, writing circles—as “third spaces” (Oldenberg 21-36) where otherwise marginalized educators can find community and advocate for their contributions to field-specific knowledge as advancing the mission and values of their home institutions. In other words, we consider writing circles as a means of highlighting the intellectual labor of professional staff members and teaching faculty as both worthy of attention and as a vital tool for navigating, or even transforming, neoliberalist institutions of higher education. In naming our spaces as circles, we hope to highlight a non-hierarchical framework for the reconceiving of academic labor. What follows is our preliminary foray into this unexplored terrain in our local writing ecosystem. We have found that writing centers, in collaboration with campus partners such as undergraduate writing programs, can re-center the professional writer’s identity, expand the scope of participation within our services, and foreground writing as a collective experience that transcends institutional hierarchies.

Neoliberal “Situations”

The three co-authors of this article navigate a dynamic ecosystem with our social identities as well as our professional identities serving as compasses that guide our travels. As part of the work that writing centers and writing programs can undertake to resist neoliberalism in the academy, we want to acknowledge our own identities as informing our efforts, here, in our local context. Indeed, acknowledging “[w]riting [as] both a cognitive and an embodied act” through our own self-identification and positionality is an essential first step towards making visible the rhetoric of neoliberalism that haunts even our own field and impacts us all (Monty 41, 42).

Taking the lead from scholars such as Laura R. Micciche and Batsheva Guy who center feminist, Marxist, and critical race theory within their explorations of faculty writing support in historically white institutions (HWI), we want to describe how each of us experiences a complex sense of embodiedness at our institution. It is worth noting that our university has been granted an Asian American Native American and Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) designation and is currently categorized as an “emerging HSI.” While our institution has achieved the 25 percent threshold for Hispanic/Latino/a-identified student enrollment, our “African-American” student enrollment remains low—currently situated at 3.6

⁴ Writing center studies scholar Randall Monty echoes Johnson when he implores writing center administrators “to recognize how writing centers are culpable in perpetuating myths of [neoliberalism]” as the first step in resisting neoliberalist ways (40).

percent of our total undergraduate student population. Approximately 17 percent of our undergraduate population identifies as “white.” Our “staff” composition parallels that of our undergraduate population: nearly 30 percent of staff identify as “Hispanic/Latino/a” and 4.7 percent identify as “African-American.” Approximately one-third of all staff identify as “white.” In comparison, our faculty (or “academic personnel”) composition hovers around 8.7 percent Hispanic/Latino/a-identified and 2.4 percent “African-American” identified while the majority of “academic personnel”—61 percent, specifically—identify as “white.”⁵ In other words, we continue to navigate historically white spaces at our institution.

Chrissy: I am currently positioned as a career staff, full-time writing center administrator. My doctoral degree in English affords me a modicum of privilege within higher education; however, my identity as a first-generation Latina and the label of “professional staff” has illuminated how higher education is a historically exclusive and hierarchical enterprise. Having a robust scholarship agenda—including publications in my area of specialization (eighteenth-century studies) along with those related to faculty development, writing pedagogy, and learning with AI—has never formally been used to evaluate my performance; however, I have maintained my connection to the professions through regular conference participation and occasional publications. Sustaining the energy needed to undertake these endeavors, however, has been challenging due to the outsized administrative workload I manage and consequent minimal value afforded to my scholarly efforts. What one of my colleagues recently described as the “grunt work” of administrative positions primarily occupies my work day.

Nicole: I am currently situated as an Associate Teaching Professor, which is a tenured, non-ladder rank Senate Faculty position distinct from ladder rank lines at our institution. At other institutions, I have also worked in contingent lines, a non-ladder rank line outside the university’s tenure structure, and a ladder-rank line at a university without a tenure structure. As a white person in academia, I have been invited to hold administrative positions, often over my equally-or -more qualified colleagues of color, especially in Historically White Institutions (HWIs). My current appointment as an Associate Director in one of our eight undergraduate writing programs also means that a substantial portion of my work is administrative. Scholarship is one method for demonstrating a necessary component for my promotion, professional development, but it is not required since research is not part of my academic loading. Teaching and, especially, administrative work occupy the bulk of my time.

Betty: I am currently positioned as a career staff, full-time writing center administrator. I am a first-generation college student with a doctoral degree in comparative literature that gives me some privilege in certain academic and professional circles. My doctoral journey first introduced me to the “publish or perish” demands of the professoriate as writers, researchers, and instructors. Now, as an Associate Director of the Writing Center, I see beyond those publishing demands towards the barriers to meet those demands such as teaching loads, administrative work, and accessibility to resources. I’ve worked towards being an independent

⁵ See: <https://ir.ucsd.edu/stats/undergrad/undergrad-demogr.html> and <https://ir.ucsd.edu/stats/undergrad/undergrad-demogr.html>

scholar that advances her scholarship in writing center studies and literature studies, works administratively at the writing center, and holds an adjunct position at a different university teaching online courses.

In these roles, then, we worked collectively to understand where opportunities existed to advance our writing community. However, our efforts emerged around the same time that budget cuts roiled our flagship state school system. These cuts directly impacted our efforts and necessitated a better understanding of the institutional forces that both created and sustained value systems related to writing and publishing. Consider, for instance, a recent communication to the academic affairs community on our campus that opened with a reference to “our current budgetary situation.”⁶ It was a stunning example of the “neoliberal rhetorics” Nancy Welch expertly surfaced in her CWPA 2018 plenary address and her co-written book *Composition in the Age of Austerity*. Welch identifies that these neoliberal rhetorics “operate...above all through obfuscation” and use “the fuzzy rhetorical games of *la langue de coton*, or woollen rhetoric” to apply market-based decision-making to public education (108). A “situation” distributes and dilutes the sense of responsibility for a socio-economic and socio-political crisis in higher education and, in local contexts, across the entirety of the university populace. “Situation” works as neoliberal rhetorical code for “equality”—rather than, say, “equity”—a business-speak approach to justifying the apparatus through which fiscal (read: political) decisions drive principals of education that should be grounded in field-specific expertise and scholarship. A “situation,” too, represents the kind of “rhetoric that trains us to see problems and their solutions in free market terms” and which serves the neoliberalist ends of institutions of higher education (Welch 105). And, as Welch reminds us, we must “[f]irst, understand that the scarcities we’re facing are manufactured” and furthermore serve as symptoms of decision-making that has been grounded in market logic dating back to, at least, the 1970s (107).

While the neoliberalization of higher education in the United States is a topic that has been heavily canvassed in our field, a working definition for this phenomenon can be useful for contextualizing our local efforts to resist the dominant force that shapes our institutions.⁷ The “managed university,” with its hallmarks of “‘marketisation, competitiveness, and standardisation’ (Gaiamo and Lawson 9; 87)” - has emerged as a direct result of broader neoliberalist forces (Rifenburg and Johnston 251, following Mulya). When universities are managed through “neoliberal logics” as if they were private corporations, the following trends

⁶ *Academic Affairs Newsletter*. May 1st, 2025. University newsletter, unpublished manuscript.

⁷ As Nancy Welch has convincingly - and repeatedly - argued, the broader socio-political forces of neoliberalism play an outsized role in shaping institutions of higher education. Broadly speaking, “Neoliberalism is what has largely emerged as a global consensus that recurring crises in capital accumulation can be solved and corporate profitability restored through labor casualization, deregulation, reducing or eliminating social supports, and privatizing formerly public institutions and resources, including education, so as to reduce the cost of doing business and create new markets for doing business” (104). Given this dynamic, it is no wonder that societal changes are inextricably linked to upheavals in higher education: “Neoliberalization is a way to describe the changes we are seeing in higher education that have had their analogues in virtually every sector of society [materializing as] a change toward privatization and the economization of public services” (Welch & Scott 7).

materialize: an increase in managerial authority and concurrent decline in “academic professional autonomy”; the application of free market reasoning, with a particular emphasis upon “return on investment” thinking, to institution-wide decision-making; a students-as-customers mindset; a reframing of academic research as mere entrepreneurial effort to secure external grants; and an emphasis upon quantitative rationales, rather than “qualitative consequences for learning and the profession,” for decision-making and resource allocation (Gaiamo 10, Monty 37, Welch 105, Welch and Scott 8). Our fellow writing center colleagues acknowledge that neoliberal forces increasingly drive writing center decision-making, making it difficult to resist such forces; simultaneously, writing centers may be optimally situated to construct a bulwark against “neoliberal impositions” (Monty 37). However, the great irony of perceiving writing centers as invaluable sites for student learning—staffed by experts in the field of writing studies—is that, during times of financial distress, writing centers become targets for cuts; the rhetoric of perceived “value added” turns against student service sites and focuses, instead, on interventions and support for faculty. During times of plenty, WPAs can lean into their (albeit often imposed) identity as thought leaders in writing to launch writing services for faculty. In doing so, and because such an intervention serves the needs of those positioned near the apex of the higher ed hierarchy, writing centers can protect themselves from threats to their existence. In other words, service to faculty can be wielded as a shield against “neoliberal impositions” and can save writing centers and their staff from destruction. But at what cost? By capitulating to the perception that attention to faculty brings institutional security are we not also undermining the foundations of our centers’ missions and values? How do we, situated in the institutional borderlands of writing centers and writing programs, collectively navigate this treacherous terrain? How do we create defensible spaces in and from a contradictory positionality?

One response to that question has been to reinforce the crucial place of compositionists and our area-specific research within institutions of higher education, particularly given the unique labor conditions under which many of us struggle. We have been “making do in institutional borderlands” as we navigate the variations on administrative or hybrid positions typically tasked with delivering writing instruction at our universities. In such positions, moreover, as “contingent teachers or administrators” or “faculty on the margins... or as staff for extra-departmental entities” we also navigate “chronically underfunded introductory writing programs” which exacerbate the tenuous nature of our relationships to our scholarship (Welch & Scott 5). Importantly, scholarship exploring the vexed and vexing intersection between serving in administrative and research positions acknowledges that the very work which might best illustrate the unseen, undervalued labor we undertake collectively—the selfsame research that makes such labor visible—is often marginalized so that we might instead perform administrative tasks to document value, thereby ensuring continuity of services and making less precarious our very positions. Such scholarship has pointed to the “challenge of keeping up a research agenda while performing the overwhelming, and often low status, work of administering a writing program” (Söderlund and Wells 86) against the prevailing headwinds of neoliberalist energies. Yet those same spaces enforce evaluative standards that presume research and publications are the dominant manner of proving one’s relevance within our disciplines. As such, writing studies scholars have attempted to leverage the discourse of

scholarship and research to our advantage; the 2019 CWPA statement, for instance, “clearly positions writing program administration as scholarly, a positioning that many WPAs must explicitly make to their colleagues who see their work as mere management or service” (Söderlund and Wells 88).⁸ In other words, the most effective means of resisting “neoliberalist impositions” explored by our field thus far involves working collectively to recognize “how WPA work challenges research productivity” and to protect resources that enable us to engage in such scholarship (Söderlund and Wells 82). Yet most of our scholarly energy is—of necessity, given the systems we navigate—devoted to upholding the distinction between administrative writing and research-based writing with an emphasis upon demanding attention for the former. As with most of our efforts, these are fraught dynamics and the experience of locating a path of resistance can feel contradictory in nature.

For instance, convening writing collectives to advance scholarly achievement in faculty cohorts is one method of resistance that has recently drawn the attention of writing studies scholars. The collaborative nature of “Faculty writing groups... [makes them] a tool for dismantling neoliberal imperatives such as speed and competition” (Rifenburg and Johnston 240). Yet the impact and consequent “value added” of such groups must be tracked, cataloged, and documented in terms of participant numbers and, crucially, scholarly products, thereby reinforcing our reliance upon neoliberalist logics as a means of establishing value. Moreover, the pressure to emphasize contributions to scholarly pedigree as represented by publications in reputable outlets so as to justify the existence of such writing groups effectually plays into the neoliberalist handbook by tacitly embracing “productivity” as a marker of academic value.⁹ Indeed, RWS scholarship itself has consistently elided the contributions of WPAs, both faculty and staff, who occupy far more vulnerable positions in the neoliberalist institution.¹⁰ We are, admittedly, in a double bind. Because the neoliberal institution supports the production of certain types of scholarship over others—ladder rank faculty scholarship over non-ladder rank, permanent faculty scholarship over contingent faculty scholarship, faculty scholarship over staff scholarship—these hierarchies may well lead scholars in RWS to focus on ladder-rank faculty support, or even faculty support more generally, over supporting other forms of scholarship or effort. Doing so is a means of self-preservation for our field; that is, if WPAs and RWS scholars need to publish to maintain their positions within the university, they will likely opt to focus on the areas that the university supports most, namely ladder rank faculty. These pressures can contribute to scholarship that foregrounds the support of ladder rank

⁸ See CWPA Statement “Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration.” (2019). https://wpacouncil.org/aws/CWPA/pt/sd/news_article/242849/PARENT/layout_details/false

⁹ On the contrary, resistant acts could, instead, push back against the compressed timelines for publication that weighs heavily on many of us. To intentionally slow down this process is, in other words, a form of resistance as Rifenburg and Johnston suggest: “[W]e see speed as central to how the free market infringes on higher education. Thus, slowing down is a deliberate act designed to counter neoliberal impulses and an act that profoundly shapes writerly identity” (252).

¹⁰ See Wells, Jaclyn, Lars Söderlund, and Christine Tulley (Eds.). *Faculty Writing Support: Emerging Research from Rhetoric and Composition Studies* (2025) and Geller, Anne Ellen, and Michele Eodice. *Working with Faculty Writers* (2013).

faculty (Alexander and Shaver 58-86, Geller and Eodice 1-18, Rifenberg and Johnson 239-254, Wells et al. 3-13).. Even the titles of these scholarly works reinforce this paradox: *Working with Faculty Writers*, for example, explicitly names *faculty* as the writers worth “working with,” potentially reinforcing an exclusionary dynamic in the field that, again in response to the pressures of the neoliberal institution, ends up replicating and reinscribing those same neoliberal pressures. We hope to highlight this area as one potential space for the radical transformation of RWS. In dubbing our program the “Writing Circle for Staff and Teaching Faculty,” for instance, we took care to name explicitly teaching faculty, including non-ladder rank faculty as well as lecturers, as an area of support. We also placed staff before faculty to help challenge academic hierarchies. At the same time, we acknowledge the many other workshops and seminars we have held for educators on our campus where we have been explicitly instructed to center faculty in the event titles and to exclude staff.

One major takeaway from deploying our staff and faculty writing circle is that we are now cognizant that such structures offer the potential for resistance against the neoliberalist structures which form the bedrock of the academy. We also want to acknowledge that, slowly, our colleagues are becoming aware/conscious of terms of such radical possibilities for socioeconomic class transformation at our institutions and are taking the lead with their scholarship and praxis at their own institutions. Particularly encouraging is the scholarship of Micciche and Guy, who acknowledged in their recent study that, while their writing circles originally targeted faculty (by which we assume they are describing research faculty), the next iteration of their program will intentionally “[seek] out faculty participants from across varied disciplines and ranks and [include] university staff who also engage in academic writing—like our colleagues in student affairs” (Micciche and Guy 252, emphasis ours). We are hopeful that more scholarship of this kind will inspire members of our field to pursue programmatic transformation that includes career staff. Given our own social positionalities within our local institutional context, we attempted to make headway in this important work by imagining what radical outcomes might be achieved by integrating career staff into our writing circles from the beginning of the program. There are also specialized—we can go so far as to call them unique—aspects to our institutional ecosystem that made this decision a much more pragmatic approach to take. We describe these contexts below and we also offer suggestions for how our writing circles might be adapted for other institutional contexts.

Local Contexts

Our university, an R1 institution, features eight interconnected undergraduate colleges, each with their own academic approach, mission, and thematic concerns, into which students enroll for their general education requirements and writing requirements. These colleges are also “Living and Learning Communities” designed to help undergraduates experience a sense of belonging through residence halls and living communities attuned to their academic year and social identities. The college writing programs are the main site of introduction to writing and to expectations for navigating the landscape of higher education for undergraduate students. The writing programs employ a mix of educators, as each site considers their local needs and values and aligns their curriculum and hiring with those local contexts. They draw from a heterogeneous community of educators including those represented by unions (graduate

student teaching assistants and non-tenure-track lecturers) and the academic senate (teaching professors and ladder-rank faculty, both eligible for tenure) to educate our undergraduate students. Historical factors including the Covid-19 pandemic, recurring budget cuts in the state of California, and enhanced pay and benefits secured by our graduate student employee union have prompted these programs to shift away from graduate student employment and towards professional writing educators as the primary means of staffing educator lines.

Additionally, in 2023, the university's Executive Vice Chancellor agreed to convert formerly professional staff lines in the colleges to tenurable, non-ladder rank teaching professor lines. These positions had traditionally lacked academic senate representation and were staffed by individuals who frequently managed both heavy administrative and teaching loads. As a result of this university-wide conversion, associate directors of the colleges are now senate faculty: they have voting rights and benefits associated with holding tenure-track lines in the schools. These positions, importantly, primarily consider teaching excellence during the tenure review process. While there is an expectation that teaching professors will remain active in their academic fields, or "maintain currency in the profession and pedagogy," their positions do not have a formal research expectation built into the tenure and promotion process. However, these positions still value publication and public-facing scholarship and fall into the pattern of what as what Lynch-Binieck and Cox identify as including "stealth requirements...while they do not overtly require scholarship...materially, a lack of publication can have substantial consequences" (678). Though the stealth requirements of these job roles could, on the one hand, create confusion for individuals serving in these roles, we considered how such flexibility could enable more radical inclusion tactics for our writing circles. If, in other words, there were some stealth requirements in these newly-converted roles for us to leverage the need for writing support that would advance our writing program colleagues' research goals, we could also use that momentum to add career staff to our writing circles. Further, due to the conversion of staff lines to faculty lines, our local context nuances our understanding of the often arbitrary distinctions between staff and faculty in the academy.

Rationale

The inspiration for establishing a writing circle for staff and non-ladder rank faculty in our specific university context arose from a shared need for supported research writing time that Betty and Nicole noticed while discussing our scholarly backgrounds. In a remarkable coincidence, we realized that, in addition to our roles in the campus writing ecosystem, we both earned PhDs in literature with a focus on contemporary detective fiction. After discovering this shared scholarly interest, we began supporting each other in working on essays for an edited collection. Quickly, we each remarked on how challenging it was to make space for scholarship in our respective positions, Betty as professional staff and Nicole as non-ladder-rank faculty. Though we both have a strong desire to continue to contribute to scholarship in our shared field, neither of us has research time allocated in our job cards.

Wondering how many other staff and faculty across the university found themselves in the same position led to the germ of the idea for the writing circles. Rifenburg and Johnston articulate a desire to design writing groups in support of "faculty participants from across varied disciplines and ranks and including university staff who also engage in academic

writing” as a strategy to combat the exploitative and extractive practices of the neoliberal university (252). Our writing circle, intentionally functioning as a third space by bringing together non-tenure track (NTT) faculty and career staff, aimed to displace not only the “neoliberal imperatives” of the university at large but also the expectations surrounding whose scholarship counts as productive within a neoliberal framework.

Our professional experiences and backgrounds led us to believe that we were the right people to launch the writing circle. As directors of the university’s writing center, Chrissy and Betty have a wealth of experience facilitating writing workshops for faculty and graduate students across the university.¹¹ Previously, during her tenure as a writing center director at a small liberal arts college, Chrissy contributed to campuswide efforts to launch and sustain faculty writing retreats. As a former director of first-year writing at another institution, Nicole had the opportunity to observe her colleagues in rhetoric and composition start a focused writing circle with specific goals (Alexander and Shaver 58–86). The cross-section of our experiences, along with our current professional positions and scholarly needs, inspired us to pilot a writing circle that would help foster a community of collaboration and support between academic units that are not often paired despite this shared need. Shaver and Alexander write that “RWS scholars can use their disciplinary expertise to address a range of other institutional and systemic challenges” (58). We tested this claim by using our backgrounds to design a shared writing circle using best practices from RWS to support writers from across a range of disciplines.

In designating the scope of the writing circles, we strove to include those researchers whose scholarly labor is not traditionally valued by the university: professional staff, contingent faculty, and non-ladder-rank faculty. We observed that the hierarchical systems embedded in the neoliberal university work to silo these groups despite their shared credentials and closely related scholarly interests, as in the case of Nicole and Betty. At our institution, as with many others, with faculty and staff categorized into (frequently arbitrary) tiers, tensions and divisions can exist between colleagues. By inviting these three groups of researchers into community with one another, we sought to support writing-related needs while elevating frequently unseen labor.

We also hoped to make a case for the ongoing utility of the writing center as a vital support to staff and faculty, as well as graduate and undergraduate students. Remembering that “writing centers have historically served people from groups that the neoliberal academy has traditionally overlooked, underrepresented, and taken physical advantage of,” we wanted to support faculty and staff in a way that would both illustrate the broad reach of the writing center and destabilize hierarchies between academic ranks (Monty 42). From Nicole’s perspective as a WPA in an undergraduate writing program, collaborating with the writing center while holding a shared space for faculty in the writing programs irrespective of academic rank offered an opportunity to cross multiple deleterious barriers simultaneously. Chrissy and

¹¹ See our chapter “Contingency and Care: Reimagining Graduate Student Labor Through Writing Center Work” in this collection for more information about our graduate writing services.

Betty were able to provide a model for creating communities of practice and writing support for the various kinds of needs that writers encounter based on the writing retreats and smaller writing groups they already facilitate throughout the academic year. It is worth noting that campus leaders were not as sanguine about including staff and teaching faculty in our writing circle as we were. At one point, for instance, we were told that ladder-rank faculty needed to be included in order to defend the resources devoted to this work; in another instance, we were asked to pause submission on a proposal for funding the writing circle until more data emerged from our pilot.

Planning Process

In launching our writing circle, we decided to begin with a small pilot during a summer session to gauge interest. As facilitators we considered the timing to be ideal because our own academic responsibilities were slightly lessened and we had the bandwidth to launch a pilot. We created an interest form to consider the needs of those interested in participating, as we also wanted to gauge how high participation might be as we planned logistics. We reached out to our campus networks, contacting as many career staff, non-ladder rank, and non-Senate faculty as we knew and invited them to share the invitation widely. Based on survey responses and conversations, we decided to hold weekly meetings of two-hour blocks where participants could join us as their schedules allowed. Because we were hoping to include faculty with higher teaching loads, we scheduled blocks of writing time on alternating days (i.e., Monday, Wednesday, Friday; Tuesday, Thursday) and around campus course schedule times to increase potential availability across a range of teaching schedules. We also planned for a hybrid format of virtual and in person meetings. The in-person meetings would be held in a conference room at the university's writing center since it was the most centralized location for our participants coming from various distances across our campus.

Our vision for the writing circle meetings was to offer light facilitation to our colleagues to foster community and support, so we began each session with a check-in focused on intention-setting and accountability requests. For writing circle meetings, we considered various types of facilitations, including short workshops, guided discussions, and even peer-review sessions before deciding to ask our participants what they preferred to prioritize. Most indicated writing time without facilitated sessions, while others also wanted to consider a short time for check-ins. We decided to do five-minute check-ins at the beginning of each hour-long session and a final check-in at the end of the two-hour block. Participants were enthusiastic to learn about the types of writing projects from their colleagues; they wanted the shared community to discuss their writing experiences and ask for accountability during our writing time together. Writing circle meetings were held consistently through the next three quarters in this manner.

Examples of our facilitation included guided discussion on the value of setting writing intentions rather than writing goals and the utility of writing journals to keep track of ideas, tasks, and progress. During our goal-setting and accountability request time, we worked to build community by commiserating around the challenges we were facing and crowdsourcing solutions as well as offering encouragement. We used an OWL webcam to facilitate the discussion with participants in the Zoom space. The check-ins, which bookended each session,

offered structure and support to our participants. Because our participants had a range of demands on their time, we structured our sessions as two-hour blocks twice a week with participants having the option to attend one or both based on the needs of their schedules. We continued these options, including hybrid modalities and protected blocks of time with a drop-in option, throughout our next three iterations (fall 2024, winter 2025, and spring 2025).

Writing Circle SU24 to WI25 Impact

Assessment planning and development came from our shared interest in filling a gap for our teaching faculty and career staff colleagues. Nicole, situated in the undergraduate writing program, provided insights into the lack of support for teaching faculty and lecturers who wanted to produce scholarship but who lacked sufficient resources and protected writing time. On the other hand, Betty and Chrissy, from their vantage point within our campus writing center, collaborated with staff who were either working on scholarship, enrolled in graduate or certification programs, or pursuing administrative writing tasks to advance their careers and who also needed the protected time to develop their writing projects. Our assessment plan was to learn about the impact that the writing circles could have on the progress of writing projects, the range of writing projects typically pursued, and how the writing circles contributed to the career advancement of our participants. Our initial assessment included an interest form followed by formative and summative assessment tools such as intake questionnaires and exit questionnaires, distributed throughout the course of the pilot. Our current data was collected between summer 2024 and winter 2025; our spring 2025 writing circle cohorts were still meeting as we wrote this piece.

The initial interest form assisted us in developing the logistics and content focus of our meetings. It also allowed us to examine projected versus actual attendance. We had noticed high interest but low turnout in graduate writing retreats and workshops, so we wanted to keep this dynamic in mind with this population as well. The interest form asked about meeting times, professional development aspirations, and other interests participants might have in the writing circle. We received a total of 28 participant responses and, through word-of-mouth, added an additional 24 participants to our roster for a total of 52 prospective participants. Of those respondents, 28 identified as teaching professors, 14 were career staff, nine were Unit 18 Lecturers, and one serves as a college provost.¹² Of these broad categories of participants, teaching faculty and lecturers were affiliated with the undergraduate writing program, school of biological sciences, and school of social sciences. Staff were affiliated with various units and resource centers at our campus. The 28 original interest form responses indicated that participants were interested in working on articles (nine), manuscripts (seven), dissertation chapters (two), and conference papers (two). Participants were also asked to identify the type of support they needed in their writing: community (seven), writing support (six), accountability (six), space, accountability, snacks (3), and time/space (2). We learned that dedicated time and space, both physical and virtual, were desired. In terms of seasonal interest,

¹² Please see the Glossary in our Appendix for additional definitions on these academic titles.

we reasoned that summer would be an ideal temporal launch point: during these months we might have a better chance of increasing participation and creating a core cohort of participants. Hosting hybrid writing sessions would enable us to include those outside of our local area and provide more inclusive options for career staff navigating the demands of a 12-month work cycle.

Writing Circle Questionnaires and Data

The methodology for our pilot program review has included an aggregate analysis of all three quarterly intake surveys, exit surveys, and attendance tracking. Attendance tracking, wherein we also attempted to capture professional unit affiliation and modality, was conducted manually. The intake survey asked participants questions about their goals and intentions in joining the writing circles. Exit survey data was collected for summer 2024 participants and via a combined questionnaire for fall 2024 and winter 2025 quarters. We had a total of 28 responses to our quarterly intake questionnaires and 15 quarterly exit surveys, from which we identified 15 teaching faculty, 11 career staff, and one “other” response.¹³ Our response rates for questionnaires hover around 36 percent, which is similar to the response rates we see in undergraduate services.

Impact Data

Our impact & utilization instruments captured a total range of 189-193 engagements for the three quarters.¹⁴ Our participant cohort averaged ten attendees per fall and winter quarter with a highest turnout of 13 attendees. Our summer cohort averaged about eight attendees. Throughout the quarters we had 26 unique attendees and 18 repeating attendees. We have learned that engagement follows seasonal and weekly patterns; it is higher earlier in the quarter and at the start of each week. We reason that these patterns are due to the workload variations for our participant populations; teaching faculty are able to protect writing time more readily before the pressures to close the quarter descend. Likewise, career staff may be more likely to protect writing time early in the week, before weekly work demands overtake their calendars. Interestingly, engagement levels were higher for in-person meetings. Perhaps this is because we targeted educator and career staff populations, who tend to spend concentrated time working on campus. We also found that most attendees were faculty, which makes sense given the pressure to publish resulting from the aforementioned conversion of staff lines to tenurable faculty lines in our writing programs. The elements that lower the bar for participation, and therefore improve engagement rates, include “meeting frequency” and “meeting modality.”

¹³ In our Summer 24 exit survey we had 5 respondents that we could not identify as Teaching Faculty or Career Staff. Our forthcoming assessment efforts will include options for more nuanced responses in terms of professional positionality so that we might better understand our colleagues’ writerly needs.

¹⁴ This information was primarily gathered from our attendance data, of which we have two sets. This data has a +/- 4 margin of error. It is worth noting that we modified our survey questions slightly from one quarter to the next, hence our analysis here is presented based on quarterly results rather than as an aggregate for one academic year.

We distributed our preliminary interest form at the start of summer 2024 to survey interest in the writing circle pilot. The summer 2024 interest form captured about 30 participants' interest in the writing circles who were asked what type of support they would need. Responses indicated several key themes, including time, space, writing support, community, feedback, accountability, snacks, and being unsure. We qualitatively coded their responses based on recommendations for motivating factors we found in scholarship around faculty writing programs.¹⁵ From these varied responses, we aggregated the data into major categories indicating that within responses these were the popular themes of interest in the writing circles: community (23.3 percent), writing support (20 percent), and accountability (20 percent) as predominant drivers behind participation.¹⁶ We therefore extrapolated that our writing circles should aim to foster a sense of belonging and community for participants, enhance professional growth and career advancement opportunities, and provide opportunities for progress on writing in the form of improved writing skills and proficiency.

During the academic year, we conducted intake and exit surveys to track the general impact writing circles had on participants' writing projects within the areas of belonging, professional advancement, and writing progress. Our impact data for the academic year demonstrates that the initial themes of interest for participants changed: dedicated time, space, and accountability emerged as important, though fewer participants expressed the need for community. These original themes were identified predominantly by those participants who expressed interest in the program (n=30) compared to the smaller cohort actively engaged in our program, which averaged about 8 participants per quarter. We find it curious that the theme of "community" did not receive more initial interest and wonder whether this may have to do with the fact that academic writers navigate a value system that has socialized them to focus on more concrete objectives related to their research instead of the community-enriched practices which enable them to produce such work.¹⁷ Given this phenomenon, we wonder whether one mode of future resistance to neoliberal attitudes might include using writing circles to integrate discussions or activities that generate a sense of community, much like what we already incorporate into our separate writing retreat program.

The aggregate responses to our fall and winter writing circle surveys indicated that articles (26 percent), manuscripts (22 percent), and creative writing (22 percent) predominated in terms of writing projects pursued during writing circle sessions.¹⁸ Quarterly survey questions asked participants to indicate challenges in their writing, areas of support, and what they hoped for

¹⁵ See especially Geller, Eodice and Wells, Söderlund, and Tulley.

¹⁶ See appendix table 1

¹⁷ Sensibilities that prioritize individual practice rather than community and collaboration can be found in our writing retreat data as well. According to one attendee for our separate writing retreat program, the retreat experience "[C]onfirmed what I've always known - that contrary to what seemed to be an important guiding principle of the retreat, I work best on my own and it was sometimes distracting to be around other people if they were talking or just too close." Such a perspective aligns with the neoliberalist and white-supremacist philosophies that permeate our hyper-individualistic institutions. Writing Centers often contend with - and attempt to resist - such attitudes.

¹⁸ See appendix table 2

in the circles. Regular assessments indicated that participants' aspirations throughout the academic year tracked with our intake survey data: responses indicated a desire for regular writing time (30 percent), accountability (20 percent), time (20 percent), and space (16.67 percent) during their writing circle sessions.¹⁹ When we asked participants how these writing projects would contribute to their professional and personal goals, top responses included scholarship (37 percent) and publishing for career advancement (21 percent).²⁰ This last data point underscores the pressures to publish that the neoliberal institution exerts on faculty and staff, whose labor ostensibly resides outside of the publishing imperative.

In terms of participation rates and engagement, our exit survey data indicated that just over half of our participants were able to attend sessions more than three times. Factors influencing participants' return included the availability of hybrid participation options, scheduling, campus location and, when available, snacks. Responses also indicate that participants respond positively to our balance of facilitation with writing time. The data strongly suggests that brief check-ins, prompts to engage in goal and intention-setting, and reminders to take breaks help participants progress with their writing. Ultimately, the majority of participants shared that they had made progress on their writing projects (67 percent), while several started a new project (17 percent) or finished an existing project (17 percent). A sense of making progress, in other words, seems to be key in creating enduring, engaged cohorts of writers, no matter their positionality at our institution.

Qualitative Data

One major finding of our qualitative data is that non-ladder rank faculty and professional staff used our writing circle to carve out dedicated time and space for writing from positions that are not loaded for research. One source of inspiration for our writing circle, Shaver and Alexander's article, suggests that protected time and space for scholars to compose serve as a significant motivator for participants. Shaver and Alexander find that "[a] shared space also allowed pilot participants to be more protective of their writing time" (72) and our own qualitative data affirms this finding. One participant noted that "It's so helpful to have blocked off writing time," while another commented that "I really appreciated the dedicated space and time—I have tried to create this for myself in the past but I too easily don't keep the time guarded for writing specifically. This helped me do that." More typically, though, our participants juxtaposed the benefits of the dedicated time and space against the demands of their teaching and administrative responsibilities.

Many participants' comments reflect their desire to build writing time into their schedules when research is not an expectation of their job responsibilities. One participant commented that having weekly sessions helped with "commit[ting] to regular writing instead of always letting teaching and service stuff dominate my work time." Another indicated appreciation for "having a dedicated time and space to write with just enough social pressure to prevent me

¹⁹ See appendix table 3

²⁰ See appendix table 4

from skipping it in favor of other work demands (teaching/admin).” The encroachment of teaching and service on research time are familiar concerns for ladder-rank faculty too, of course, even with research as a major factor in their promotions.

Our participants’ qualitative feedback positioned this need for time and space as distinct based on their positions within the academy in two significant ways. The first was through an acknowledgement that some participants are working within career staff or non-ladder rank faculty roles through circumstance rather than preference. A participant noted an interest in writing circle participation because “I’m still interested in a TT position, so I’d need the publication.” This comment highlights one way that the neoliberal university instantiates hierarchies: scholars who accept non-ladder rank positions find it difficult to transition to tenure-track roles without publishing, but their roles do not offer the dedicated time for research that publication requires, limiting the possibilities for professional movement. Another participant’s comment highlighted that these restrictions can occur at multiple stages within the university, writing, “I took a leave of absence from my PhD program when I was ABD, so finishing my dissertation would allow me to finally finish my degree, and will hopefully diversify my career options in higher ed admin.” Regardless of whether the career goals are to continue in a career staff administrative capacity or to transition to a ladder-rank faculty role, our participants highlighted the need for scholarly writing (dissertation, publications) as a crucial component that necessitates the dedicated time and space for writing that their current positions do not provide.

Another significant finding was that the writing circles offered participants a means of pushback against a neoliberal system that, by devaluing their scholarly contributions, minimizes their identities as writers. One participant highlighted the tension of being trained as a scholar while working in a non-research position: “It is so hard for me to prioritize writing projects in my professional role... even seeing the writing circle in my calendar reminds me of this being a part of my life!” For this participant, the writing circle offered a space to “prioritize writing projects” as “a part of my life” in a way that the “professional role” cannot. Another participant alluded to the transgressive possibilities of carving out writing time from within a role that does not require it by calling out the “reserved time to write with ‘permission’ to shut off email, zoom/teams chat” the writing circles afforded. This comment frames the “email, zoom/teams chat” as a constant, inescapable presence in the workplace; the writing circle, then, seems to be a site that offers an opportunity for resistance to neoliberal expectations of productivity by fostering “‘permission’” to “shut off” that constant demand, albeit temporarily. It is possible that such “permission,” because it is sanctioned by and cloistered within a university entity, i.e. the university writing center, helps participants feel safer to express resistance than the otherwise panoptic surroundings of our university space, where work takes place in full view of the broader academic community. Our participant’s comments indicate the ways in which the writing circle may contravene the neoliberal university’s project, as participants make space for parts of their research interests beyond mere administrative objectives that simultaneously advance the overall mission of the university, though these pursuits may not (yet) be valued by the institution.

General Summary of Findings

After three cycles of data collection, we learned that our writing circle can accommodate both a cohort of regular participants as well as drop-in writers. Our hybrid modality of in-person and virtual space has allowed us to offer both accountability and flexibility and our standing schedule has helped participants prioritize writing time. Our participants valued light facilitation at the beginning and end of the scheduled meetings as well as the opportunity to build community with other writers who value scholarship and professionalization, regardless of the ways in which the university promotes these goals. Regardless of whether the circles are framed as sites of resistance against the neoliberal apparatus, they can function complex spaces that simultaneously affirm and reject the demands of the institution.

Implications and Recommendations

Before there were writing circles, there were “faculty writing retreats,” facilitated by our writing center director and funded by our partners in the Center for Faculty Diversity and Inclusion. The popularity and increasing demand of these retreats enabled our writing center to advocate for the faculty-staff writing circles we have now hosted for several years. The principles of our faculty writing retreat persist in our writing circles and leave us with much to consider. For instance, at the start of each faculty writing retreat facilitated by our writing center director, participants are asked to consider the following statement: “we are all writers.” It is an intentionally provocative assertion, prompting participants in the retreats and, now, in our writing circles to interrogate their own relationship to writing and confront, in some cases, their shared identities as writers with others, such as career staff and students, who are positioned elsewhere on our institutional hierarchy of value.²¹ The collective “we” in the statement serves as the cornerstone for the retreat experience: writing happens in community, writers exist as part of a community, and writers exist and matter across the institution. It is, given our surroundings, a radical concept and, yet, we have noted that the very title of the “faculty writing retreat” undermines the sense of equity and connection espoused by this statement. We have come to realize that the titles of our programming can illuminate the exclusive (rather than inclusive) nature of such experiences. In other words, the implication in the retreat title is that such experiences reinscribe the traditional, hierarchical distribution of value, which has historically centered “faculty” at the expense of career staff.

In our writing circles, then, we have subsequently, and intentionally, attempted to signal that a collective of scholars—the “we” for whom writing programs serve and of which we are all a part—should include career staff for whom writing serves as a means of advancing their own personal goals alongside those of the university’s. Based on our experience with staff-faculty writing circles, we are calling for a paradigm shift in writing program administration.

²¹ These retreats are hosted and resourced by our colleagues in the Center for Faculty Diversity and Inclusion. As such, the title of these events leverages the academic honorific “faculty” as both an acknowledgement of the office that supports these events and as a tacit reminder that faculty-facing services are appropriate sites for university resourcing. To date, we have not been able to include non-ladder faculty in our invitations to participate.

We take our cue colleagues like Evelyn Welch, who calls us to “[cultivate] as much as possible the spaces of solidarity and democracy where people really can come together for genuine exchange” (110). Writing centers especially must expand their “praxes to incorporate a broader range of identities, theories, and people... to resist the deleterious effects of neoliberalism” (Monty 44). Yet in both cases these scholars were not primarily imagining career staff in their calls to action. This is, ultimately, the most significant evidence we have of the “deleterious effects of neoliberalism”: that the socio-economic dividers that have been made invisible on a national scale by neoliberalism have always been part of the foundation of the academy. Since the inception of tenure, ladder-rank faculty have been situated as a privileged category of laborer in the university setting. Professional staff have been categorized as expendable.²² As with other socio-economic hierarchies that depend upon identities constructed upon the notion of difference and distance, writing program administrators are optimally positioned to disrupt, resist, and transform. We have models from our colleagues who have advanced the theory and praxis of anti-racist pedagogy in our institutions, and we should adapt those disruptive approaches and apply them within our own spheres of influence.

Herein lies the truly transformative potential of initiatives such as our own: to reimagine the academy as dependent not solely upon ladder-rank faculty labor but, equally, upon the labor, including the creative laboring behind public discourse, of all. What might such a radical reimagining look like in your local contexts? What transformations might unfold if we, as a field, began to upend the hierarchical value system by which we regard even our own scholarly and administrative undertakings? At our institution, for instance, this might involve expanding the definition of “primary investigator” to include staff members whose expertise—whether grounded in advanced degrees or traditional disciplinary discourse or not—would add value to the institution. Our institution’s writing programs do not rely on contingent faculty labor thanks to union protections for our Unit 18 lecturers, but of course many universities do depend on contingent faculty labor; we would, therefore, encourage our colleagues at those institutions to consider how our model might be adapted to support this faculty population as well. We might also consider the divide between academic and student affairs, which is only exacerbated by the privilege afforded to traditional academic faculty and staff. We are interested in exploring how writing circles might be a way to build coalition with our colleagues to become partners in further disrupting academic hierarchies.

In terms of writing circle outputs, we acknowledge that it remains problematic to focus on scholarly productivity as a primary measure of success, and that we may fall into the same traps of replicating neoliberalist perceptions of value. At the same time, we think it is imperative to ask how the importance of career staff writers can be framed as advancing a university’s values and vision in much the same way the research and writing of tenure-track

²² Unfortunately, during the editing process and before publication, one of our co-authors learned this all too well when she was laid off from her position due to budget cuts to the UC system. In a neoliberalist institutional setting, budget “situations” drive the machinery of higher ed to sacrifice staff who support student success rather than consider other approaches to address budget shortfalls. This dynamic is fertile ground for additional exploration, which the co-authors anticipate surfacing further in a forthcoming publication.

faculty is celebrated. What might it look like to measure the labor of writing that does or does not get accomplished by non-ladder rank faculty and staff? We want to raise the questions of what assessment and communication strategies we can implement to draw attention to the equal importance and labor of non-ladder rank faculty and staff writers in the academy. Overall, we are hopeful that our writing circle, and others like it, can contribute to a re-imagining of the neoliberal hierarchies constructed in the academy to privilege ladder-rank faculty scholarship above other forms of academic labor, and we are hopeful that the re-situations which can arise from such transformation will provoke and protect a sense of broader community within our institutions.

Appendix

Summer 2024 Intake Survey

6/6/25, 3:48 PM

Qualtrics Survey Software

General Information

Dear CSFT Writing Circle Participants,
thank you for joining us on our soft start for SS2 2024. We kindly ask that you fill out our brief questionnaire to capture your interests and needs during our writing time together. Thank you!

Full (lived) Name

Please share with us your pronouns.

Preferred Email for Writing Circle Communications

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UC San Diego Affiliation:

- UC San Diego Career Staff
- UC San Diego Teaching Faculty
- Other

Writing Circle In-Take Questionnaire

This reflection section asks about your writing project during SS2 for us to better understand the needs of the group and what resources we can provide.

During our SS2 Writing Circle, please describe what type of writing project you plan to work on (1-2 sentences).

What inspired you to work on this writing project?

How does this writing project advance your professional and personal goals?

Where are you excited to make some progress in this writing project?

What are you hoping for at our Writing Circles?

Writing Reflection

Please take some time to consider your writing practices, goals, and intentions. We kindly ask that you share with us your experiences to better understand the needs of the group and resources we can provide.

Do you feel comfortable with your current writing process?

- Definitely not
- Probably not
- Might or might not
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

What are some of the challenges that you experience when embarking on writing project? (Feel free to use your current writing project as an example).

What strategies or tools have assisted you in addressing some of the challenges of writing?

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What do you feel is an area of need in your writing process? (please rank in order of importance for you).

- Dedicated Time
- Dedicated Space
- Developing habits for your writing process
- Understanding the writing process
- Community of Writers
- Writing tools and assistance (grammar, editing, organization, etc)
- Other
- Application of the Writing Process

if you indicated other, please explain below:

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What joys or "Ah-ha"! moments have you experienced thus far in your writing?

What aspects of writing remain interesting, inspiring, or provocative?

Anything else you would like to share with us?

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Spring 2025 Exit Survey (Instrument Also Used for Fall 2024 and Winter 2025)

Default Question Block

Thank you for participating in our CSTF Writing Circles. We'd appreciate your feedback to improve and gather impact data for our services.

UC San Diego Affiliaton

- UC San Diego Career Staff
- UC San Diego Teaching Faculty
- Other

Exit Questionnaire

The following questions pertain to your experience and writing progress in Spring 2025 quarter:

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Please select about how many writing circle meetings you have been able to attend in SP25 quarter.

- Once
- Twice
- Three times
- More than three times

For spring quarter, please select if you feel that you:

- Made progress on your writing project
- Completed a writing project
- Started a writing project

Please reflect back on the progress that you have made and share with us about your experience. How did you feel about this progress?

The following questions ask you to reflect back on this AY year (SU24 to SP25) and your experiences in all the writing circles. Please fill this out even you only attended one session; we welcome your feedback.

Please select the quarters you have been able to participate in the writing circles. (Even if you came once, that counts!)

- Summer 2024
- Fall 2024
- Winter 2025
- Spring 2025

Please share with us what writing projects you have been able to complete and/or progress to final drafts during your participation with the writing circles AY2024-2025:

What has been the impact on your professionalization and/or career this year with the progress you have made in your writing projects at the writing circles SU24-SP25?

How do you feel about your writing before and after participating in the writing circles this academic year?

Would you like us to contact you for summer 2025 session 2 writing circles? If so, what is the best way to contact you in the summer?

Please share with us any feedback about your experience in the Writing Circles thus far (fall and winter). Is there

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anything you would like share with us about your experience?

Table 1

In a few sentences, please tell us about the type of writing and communications support you would need in the fall.

Type of Support	
Time, Space	6.70%
Writing Support	20%
Space, Community	6.70%
Space	3.30%
Feedback	3.30%
Accountability	20%
Space, Accountability	3.30%
Community	23.30%
Space, Accountability, Snacks	10%
Unsure	3.30%

Table 2

Please describe what type of writing project you plan to work on (1-2 sentences).

Article	26.10%
Manuscript	21.70%
Creative Writing	21.70%
Conference	8.70%
Other	17.40%

Table 3

What are you hoping for at our Writing Circles?

Regular Writing	30.00%
Space	16.67%
Accountability	20.00%
Time	20.00%
Community	6.67%
Writing Support	6.67%

Table 4

How does this writing project advance your professional and personal goals?

Publishing for career advancement	20.90%
Scholarship and Pedagogy	16.70%
Scholarship	37.5%
Publish	8.30%
Other (goal planning, writing strategies)	16.70%

Table 5

If you participated in the fall or winter, please select if you feel that you:

Made progress on your writing project	66.67%
Started a writing project	16.67%
Completed a writing project	16.67%

Glossary

Throughout the article, we refer to different staff and faculty by certain institution-specific titles and some general titles that may have different meanings in different university systems. Here is a glossary of some terms we use:

Career Staff: University staff with graduate degrees, including PhDs.

Ladder Rank Faculty: Tenured/tenure track Academic Senate Faculty on a research track who are promoted on a research-based “ladder rank” system: assistant professor, associate professor, professor.

Lecturers: Synonymous with Unit 18 lecturers (see below).

Non-Ladder Rank Faculty: Tenured/tenure track Academic Senate Faculty on a teaching track who are promoted on a teaching excellence system: assistant teaching professor, associate teaching professor, teaching professor. Also called teaching professors.

Professional Staff: Synonymous with career staff (see above).

Senate Faculty: All faculty, both ladder rank and non-ladder rank, represented by the Academic Senate rather than an external union.

Teaching Assistants: Graduate student employees represented by a union.

Teaching Professors: Tenured/tenure track Senate Faculty on a teaching track who are promoted on a teaching excellence system: assistant teaching professor, associate teaching professor, teaching professor. Also called non-ladder rank faculty.

Unit 18 Lecturers: These are full-time teachers with benefits, not contingent faculty. They are not eligible for tenure, but they are eligible for continuing status after they teach at the university for 18 quarters (hence the name Unit 18 lecturers). They are represented by a union rather than by the Academic Senate.

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