CHAPTER 7.

WORKING WITHIN THE RHETORICAL CONSTRAINTS: RENOVATION AND RESISTANCE IN A FIRST-YEAR WRITING PROGRAM

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First-Year Writing (FYW) occupies a marginalized position at the intersection of various ideological and administrative systems in the academy. That FYW is generally required for all students paradoxically undercuts its disciplinary significance (Crowley, 1998; Strickland, 2011), thereby contributing to the marginalized positioning of composition studies in English departments and in the university. Relatedly, the course is the epitomic representative of the adjunctification of the university, with most sections taught by contingent faculty, some with little training or experience in composition (Crowley, 1998; Hanson & de los Reyes, 2019; Kahn, 2013).

In light of these intersecting systems, as well as the inequitable origins of FYW (Crowley, 1998), it is all too common for writing curricula to work *against* what we know about composition instruction, often in ways that marginalize already-marginalized students (Inoue, 2014, 2016). Consider, for example, that, historically and nationally, students who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) and multilingual learners have been and still are disproportionately placed into developmental courses (Naynaha, 2016), largely because what is perceived as "writing failure [that] stems from irreconcilable differences between expectations of White, middle-class literacies in school and the raced, cultured, classed, and gendered home literacies that learners attempt to use in school" (Inoue, 2014, p. 331). As Siskanna Naynaha (2016) has noted: "Latinx students from a diverse range of backgrounds—from US-born and educated to longtime US residents to newly arrived immigrants; from first-generation to Gen 1.5 to 3rd- and 4th-generation Latinxs—are commonly placed in 'remedial' or 'developmental' writing courses despite the fact that . . . such courses may be unnecessary" (p. 199).

This chapter uses critical systems thinking (Melzer, 2013) to explore how writing program administrators (WPAs) at a Hispanic-serving campus within a

large public university system used systemwide mandated revision as an opportunity to redesign its FYW program to align with contemporary composition theory. The chapter explores how, despite expectations that this revision would renew the campus's mission to provide access and equitable education, the new program was constrained by the same structures and ideologies that defined the old program. I examine, through anecdotal and empirical data, how intersecting networks of structures and stakeholders on the campus served, simultaneously and paradoxically, as barriers to and opportunities for equitable program redesign; describe how faculty worked within and across formal and informal networks to effect change; explore the limitations of programmatic change without institutional critique; and offer strategies for rhetoric and composition program administrators and teachers in other institutions to work through programmatic change while honoring the needs of our students and our disciplinary expertise.[1]

A NETWORK OF RHETORICAL CONSTRAINTS

Writing program administrators "answer to multiple groups, and those groups often have conflicting goals" (Miller-Cochran, 2018, p. 108). To examine the systems at play in writing program (re)design, I draw upon the metaphor of architecture, which Bryna Siegel Finer and Jamie White-Farnham (2017) have relied upon to highlight how various writing programs are built, and the conceptual framework of Critical Systems Thinking, which Dan Melzer (2013) has suggested is key to the creation of campus-wide writing programs.

The architecture metaphor, Finer and White-Farnham explained, "highlights the material, logistical, and rhetorical elements of a writing program" and "allows us to imagine these constituent parts of a writing program as its foundation, beams, posts, scaffolding—the institutional structures that, alongside its people, anchor a program to the ground and keep it standing" (2017, p. 4). Finer and White-Farnham identified the following parts: education, experience, and expertise of the WPA(s); conception of the program; population served; funding sources; staffing and day-to-day operations; assessment protocols; internal marketing and public relations; supportive technologies; related research and scholarship; unique pedagogical and/or administrative features; primary program documents; and soft skills like relationship-building, time management, and managing expectations (2017, pp. 9-17).

Though Finer and White-Farnham do not address systems thinking directly, their metaphor considers the system of the program and its relation to a broader

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1   This information is readily available through the university website and all names are pseudonyms.

educational bureaucracy. Systems thinking may be of use to WPAs seeking to re-design writing programs for it can "make the daunting task of changing an entire system more manageable because it emphasizes locating points of leverage where even small changes will affect the entire system" (Melzer, 2013, p. 76). In this view, the identification of architectural elements can be seen as a systems think-ing process of sorts by which WPAs can explore "how structures and processes relate to each other within the system" and how the "conceptual model that defines their ideal of the system. . . . is compared with the structures, processes, and results of the actual system" (Melzer, 2013, p. 78).

Though the metaphor of architecture allows us to visualize the parts of the finished product, it, like a traditional systems framework, may not help us trace the processes of (re)design or the social, political, and historical contexts from which the program or the larger system of which it is a part emerged. The static nature of the metaphor may be limited, given that writing programs are "ideo-logical entities" (Gunner, 2002, p. 7). Melzer (2013) has pointed out that, "his-torically in systems thinking the ideological is too often not acknowledged." In critical systems thinking (CST), however, "the interrogation of the system's ide-ologies is central and explicit" (p. 80). Thus, CST provides a useful framework for writing program (re)design, particularly when layered with a framework like writing program architecture, which exposes the concrete, material aspects of the program and the systems and networks of which it is a part. CST considers the social, political, and historical contexts of a given system, emphasizes "the exposure of inequalities and conflicts," and "works toward liberation rather than equilibrium" (Melzer, 2013, p. 80). This approach aligns with the rhetorical emphasis and critical pedagogies in writing studies.

Like writing program administration broadly, program (re)design is deeply rhetorical. Systems create constraints both practical and ideological, which "have the power to constrain decision and action" in our writing programs, even when they are less than clearly visible (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8). WPAs communicate with various audiences amid constraints that include program budgets (Fox, 2013; Miller-Cochran, 2018), hiring structures (Miller-Cochran, 2018), institutional history and campus culture (Finer & White-Farnham, 2017; Malenczyk, 2016; Melzer, 2013), sociopolitical influences on the academy (Welch, 2018), and our own identities and positionalities as WPAs (de Mueller & Ruiz, 2017; Finer & White-Farnham, 2017; Fox, 2013; Kynard, 2019; Perryman-Clark & Craig, 2019) and must often advocate simultaneously for the program, instructional faculty, and students. Fortunately, as Susan Miller-Cochran (2018) noted, "[o]ur rhetorical training prepares us well for the conflicted spaces in which we work—we know how to pay attention to context, audience, and to focus our purpose" (p. 111). That training may be especially valuable when WPAs "wish

to play a role in transforming not just a course or a department, but their entire campus writing program, as well as the ideologies that inform the program" (Melzer, 2013, p. 76).

These ideological influences generally are more insidious than overt and, therefore, they can be difficult to interrogate. Writing programs are certainly not immune to—and in many ways are prime examples of—the labor imbalances that characterize the contemporary neoliberal academy (Welch, 2018; see also Carter in this collection), for example. Most insidious perhaps is Whiteness, an "ideology that works to normalize and promote white supremacy" (Nishi et al., 2016, p. 2) through conceptions of and attitudes toward identity, morality, knowledge, language, communication, behavior, and professionalism, all of which undergird the academic systems and educational institutions in which our work is situated (Grayson, 2020; Keisch & Scott, 2015; Nishi et al., 2016). While a direct interrogation of the ideological influences of Whiteness is outside the scope of this chapter, these foundational aspects of institutional inequity it maintains are necessary to acknowledge, for the system *of* Whiteness and the systems derived *from* Whiteness intersect with everything we do.

Fortunately, as the editors of this collection wrote in the introduction, "systems and network theories offer us a new lens for problem-solving because they allow us to zoom out and into complexities within our work." Understanding Whiteness and its relative, racism, as overarching, if often unseen, systems, enables us to conceptualize the macro dimensions of a problem and the various contexts surrounding our work when we face micro-level manifestations of inequity or make attempts at local change work in our programs. As Melzer (2013) explained of his own attempts at writing program revision, "WPAs had to make our ideologies explicit." This explicit identification is an important step to prevent "charging ahead without examining and critiquing the ideologies that informed the system" (p. 86). A critical systems approach can also help WPAs make sense of resistance they may encounter in their efforts toward change, and the competing, even contradictory systems and structures that bolster such resistance.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE, LOCAL IMPACT: CAMPUS CONTEXT

This IRB-approved research was conducted at South Lake State University (a pseudonym), a commuter campus in an economically and educationally underserved suburb of a metropolitan U.S. city. The campus's emphasis on access is a byproduct of the school's history and mission to enhance higher education opportunity for traditionally underrepresented students: originally founded in the mid-twentieth century to serve the local African American community, the school has historically graduated more Black students than any other college in

the state. Now a designated Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI), the South Lake campus serves a student population that is 64% Latinx.[2]

In 2017, the public university system, via statewide mandates, eliminated developmental English courses and the use of placement testing for FYW and limited the FYW requirement to one semester of instruction. Though informed by research about developmental education (see Bailey, 2009), these changes disproportionately affected the students and faculty at South Lake. Approximately 80 percent of incoming South Lake students each year (double the state average) were placed in development writing, one or two courses for which students incurred fees but received no college credit. South Lake was tasked with revising placement structures and eliminating three of five required writing courses, a move that would have ripple effects across the university, from the general education program and the English major requirements to the job security of the many part-time faculty who relied financially on the five-course sequence. Through collaboration and with limited funding from the larger state university system, WPAs redesigned the FYW program to both better reflect contemporary composition theory and pedagogy and to establish a programmatic ethos that aligned with the university's mission of access and equity.

The composition program was revised using what Melzer (2015) called the Advanced Writing Framework (AWF): while many schools assume one semester of required writing instruction to be the norm, the AWF positions the stretch model, in which the FYW requirement is taught over two semesters, as the standard. The single semester option, in which the same curriculum as the stretch model is taught at a more rapid pace, is labeled "Accelerated." Melzer has argued that the AWF "acknowledges that *most* students . . . will need more than one semester of composition to succeed" and is more equitable, for it "disrupts the discourse of remediation while retaining support for underserved students" (2015, p. 83).

I joined South Lake immediately following the program revision, not long before two thousand incoming students would experience the curriculum for the first time. I found that, unlike more "heavily scripted" standardized curricula, there were no required assignments, "grading rubrics, semester schedules" or "assigned texts" (Cox, 2018, p. A6). In fact, the curriculum was standardized only in the sense that common program learning outcomes were designed and adopted. As well, faculty professional development (FPD) was mandated (though compensated) to acquaint FYW instructors with the new standards. My review of South Lake's new FYW program materials revealed a sound, non-prescriptive curriculum and clear outcomes that emphasized genre awareness, rhetorical flexibility, and transfer (Wardle, 2007; Yancey et al., 2014).

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2   This information is readily available through the university website.

The program, however, met considerable resistance. That first semester, I watched FPD workshops devolve into complaint sessions. Department and committee meetings alternated between outwardly contentious and silently saturated with passive aggression. Though some tried to put on a brave face for their new colleague, most faculty members I spoke to were, like the faculty members Genesea M. Carter has described in her chapter, "exhausted, resentful, and applying to other jobs." How had we gotten here?

I would later learn more through personal experience about the ways Whiteness, professionalism, and collegiality were weaponized in all departmental spaces (Grayson, 2022), including but not limited to the writing program. At the time, however, I was mostly struck by what I saw as two competing ideologies, each of which positioned a different vulnerable population as its priority: the program revisions were designed with student success and more ethical disciplinary practices in mind, systems of beliefs and ideas that positioned students and disciplinarity as central concerns. Some WPAs, however, along with the non-tenure-track faculty members (NTTF) who taught the bulk of FYW classes, were motivated by concerns about job security and classroom autonomy that positioned NTTF as a priority. I undertook this research in part to understand why these ideologies and concerns, which I saw as symbiotic and intersecting, seemed to stand in direct opposition at South Lake.

To understand how individuals experienced the program revision and its aftermath, I conducted structured, semi-structured, and open interviews with ten tenured, tenure-track, and NTTF faculty members, including both WPAs involved in the revision and teachers of FYW courses. The reticence and hostility of many instructors with regards to the programmatic changes and the faculty involved with them, however, made formal interviews less than ideal at times. Therefore, I also engaged in casual conversations with faculty members. I reviewed official program documents and anonymous assessment surveys completed by the NTTF who teach FYW courses at South Lake State University.

INTERSECTING NETWORKS OF RENOVATION AND RESISTANCE

Though perspectives on the new curriculum varied considerably, some patterns emerged. I found that, to comply with mandates and ensure the success of the program, faculty members worked within and across three intersecting networks: formal, informal, and invisible networks.

Many interviewees expressed that they had been relieved by the mandates. Daphne, a former department chair and literature scholar who had taught composition for eight years, long had wanted to revise the program. Prior to the

revision, there had been little oversight of composition instruction; as a result, curricula and instructional practice varied dramatically from one classroom to the next. There was no assessment, and lecturer evaluation was a "a pro forma process" that was "dated and problematic."[3]

Other interviewees expressed similar sentiments. Mark, a professor of composition, rhetoric, and cultural studies, admitted that FYW instruction had been "haphazard and higgledy-piggledy. There was more freedom, but a freedom by default. Some people were doing terrible work and taking advantage of that, like trying to teach a literature class in a comp class." Suzanne, a British literature scholar, explained that "'composition program' was a misnomer. It was not a program at all, just a bunch of courses listed under the English department . . . It was a comp program in name only." Not formally trained in composition, Suzanne did not feel confident critiquing the program. Then untenured, she was also concerned about retaliation, having been warned early on that "people here hold grudges."

FORMAL NETWORKS OF RENOVATION

State universities had a year to comply with the mandates and a lump sum of funds to aid the transition. (None of the participants could provide an exact figure for that lump sum.) At South Lake, a task force, which Daphne chaired, was formed. Other members included Mark; Henry, a tenured professor of rhetoric and composition who became composition director following the revision; the writing across the curriculum (WAC) coordinator; a literature professor who previously had served as composition director; the department chair; the director of the university's embedded tutor program; and the college's associate dean. Daphne, who had "grown frustrated with the lack of meaningful conversation around writing, zero professional development, faculty doing the same things, many of which were detrimental to students," formed a network of support with the new WAC coordinator: "Finally, there was someone with the disciplinary knowledge to give names to what I saw. I personally wasn't equipped to take up that battle . . . My instincts were confirmed by somebody else."

Henry said he had lobbied against the adoption of a shared assignment across FYW classes, a move for which the WAC coordinator advocated. Otherwise, he found the collaboration to be "relatively seamless," though short notice and ambiguity in the mandates led the task force to spend time "trying to figure out exactly what we could and could not do to comply."

Mark thought the formal networks that established and supported the task force presented obstacles. He'd had concerns about the previous program, but

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3   All names are pseudonyms.

he wasn't entirely comfortable with the new program either. Mark thought the rhetorical emphasis quickly became a "battering ram" that pushed aside other visions of composition. He added: "Ideally, there should be spaces in a rhetorical approach for creativity and disruption." He admitted that he didn't voice his frustration: "I saw the inevitability of it all and I didn't find it worth it in terms of stress. Was I ready to take on this lonely fight? Could I secure enough allies? The budget, the chancellor, the provost all supported it."

Mark's comments bring to mind the thought processes Carter has identified in her chapter as a "natural reaction for WPAs working within the scarcity and competitive mindset of the neoliberal university supersystem—a system that prizes self-denial, emotional exploitation, workaholism, people-pleasing, and codependency." Among these are thoughts such as "But I cannot say no," "There is nothing that can be done," "The Provost says I must," and "I don't want to make waves."

Systems-level change requires structures "composed of numerous actors in the system" who interact with "other high-leverage components of the system" to "gain better leverage within the bureaucratic system" (Melzer, 2013, p. 92). Those who have the most leverage in a writing program, however, are not necessarily those involved with its day-to-day operations. Most participants noted that the taskforce excluded more faculty members than it included, and all participants noted that there was no sense of working with people impacted as a whole. Notably excluded were the NTTF who taught FYW.

Adjunct faculty rarely are afforded such opportunities, the result of the academic labor system and how our field constructs labor identities. As Gina Hanson and Chloe de los Reyes (2019), both NTTF, have pointed out, adjunct faculty are rarely identified as compositionists, even when composition is their area of expertise. There is instead a hierarchy of labor identity in which

> one rank theorizes practices and training for the other rank, who is somehow supposed to enact those practices without the capacity to theorize themselves. In other words, this two-tier distinction constructs us as composition workers (in need of training and skill development) rather than composition thinkers (capable of contributing to the field and our individual composition programs). (p. A9)

As a result, NTTF often "feel removed from the discipline, despite their expertise in the classroom" (Fedukovich & Hall, 2016, p. A4). In this way, we see how labor systems intersect with systems of disciplinary knowledge production and ideologies that subsequently shape work within writing programs.

Despite—or perhaps because of—its reputation as a "teaching subject" (Harris, 1997), the field has sought to establish composition as an autonomous

academic discipline with a body of knowledge and ways of knowing distinct from English and literature. Since "adjuncts are constructed as the workers and not the thinkers, they become something our field wants to distance itself from" (Hanson & de los Reyes, 2019, p. A9). Adjuncts are positioned as workers outside of the knowledge production of our discipline, a broader systemic dynamic that was reflected in the configuration of the South Lake task force. A critical systems approach enables one to speculate that including NTTF on the task force might have helped in "defining an alternative model of the system" rather than reinforcing the labor dynamic already in place (Melzer, 2013, p. 84). Instead, the task force replicated the same labor inequities to which NTTF had grown sadly accustomed. As one NTTF put it: "If you are not in the inner circle, you have no sway regarding anything." For some NTTF at South Lake, being excluded wasn't jarring because it wasn't unusual. Layla, a NTTF who graduated from the department's literature MA program, remarked: "I can't be bothered being angry about it. That's how it's always been. It doesn't even surprise me anymore."

In the WPA Henry's view, the state's timeline contributed to a less than equitable task force structure. He admitted: "We could, *should* have had more time for adjunct participation in the process, rather than having to work quickly and essentially present them with program changes as a fait accompli, with an implementation date of immediately."

Following the redesign, a NTTF representative was elected to serve on the composition committee that assisted the composition director with oversight of the program. In the year of implementation, the university also supported three FPD sessions per semester to familiarize those teaching FYW with foundational concepts of the curriculum. These sessions emphasized teaching genre (Devitt, 2009), providing feedback on writing (Haswell, 1983; Lindemann, 2001), assets-based practices for working with multilingual learners and Generation 1.5 students (Nielsen, 2014), and, at my urging, considerations of instructor positionality (Taylor et al., 2000).

Two-thirds of respondents to the NTTF survey distributed after the fall semester praised these formal networks of support, noting the following:

- "Marvelous support! Best we've had in decades."
- "The training sessions and ensuing conversations have been terrific."
- "Semester meetings were enlightening and imaginative."
- "[Henry] was consistently helpful when I reached out."
- "I feel completely comfortable asking questions and seeking advice."

Institutional problems, however, contributed to what multiple participants called the "low morale" of NTTF. All FYW instructors were supposed to receive stipends for attendance at FPD sessions, but stipends for fall weren't processed

until halfway through spring. Though FYW courses were supposed to be capped at 17, a figure already larger than the CCCC recommendation of 15, an enrollment surge resulted in caps of 20 in both fall and spring. The curriculum included a stretch model, for which students should have had the same instructor during fall and spring, but, due to course assignment procedures outlined in the collective bargaining agreement (CBA), many instructors who taught in fall were not rehired in spring. Henry suggested that this "drop-off was *profoundly* greater than it would have been with a little more foresight."

In what can be dismissively conceptualized as oversights or a series of unfortunate events, we see how the various macro systems at and beyond South Lake contributed to the micro problem of instructor morale in the local context of the writing program. University enrollments, staffing procedures, and payroll processing problems are not discrete concerns but "components of the system" and evidence of the conceptual models that undergird it. As Melzer (2013) noted, "conceptual models dictate the way the system operates, but at the same time the way the system is structured reinforces the conceptual models" (p. 78). In this way, even the lack of foresight Henry noted is part of a system of thinking and doing that devalues foresight and, arguably, is, at best, ambivalent toward outcomes like high course caps and instructor drop off, which foresight might have prevented.

Participants attributed many challenges to the lack of support received from Mott Hall, the metonymic catchall assigned to upper administrators with offices in the so-named building at the north end of campus. Of Mott Hall, Daphne said, "In theory the support is there. But in practice, where is the support?" Pointing to a pattern of upper-level administrators leaving the campus after only a year or two, Suzanne noted, "there's no consistency or accountability . . . When we need help, we're left kind of on our own." At the time of implementation, South Lake's President, Provost, Vice Provost, Vice President of Faculty Affairs, and Dean of Undergraduate Studies had all been in their positions for less than a year.

Participants also felt that the occasional cross-campus conferences hosted by the state university system were largely ineffective because they weren't intended for WPAs but also for deans, admissions and retention specialists, and student support services staff, resulting in what Henry called a "rhetorical problem" of audience. He was also struck by the differences between the writing programs on other campuses and the one at South Lake: "Other campuses either a) previously had many less students deemed 'developmental' than we had here or b) were already well along in using models such as stretch." Most participants believed that South Lake should have received more funding to aid in the redesign.

In keeping with its mission to provide access to higher education, South Lake was, at the time of the program rollout, the only non-impacted campus,

guaranteeing admission to those who were officially accepted by the state university but turned away from other campuses. Admission, however, does not guarantee access or equity, particularly when the campus is not "student-ready" (McNair et al., 2016), and participants noted that the campus lacked financial or spatial resources to support the growing student population. As Willa, a NTTF who graduated from the department's BA and MA programs, discovered, "students don't see this as a real college." Of course, when the bodies in the classroom aren't valued, the instructors who work with them aren't valued either.

INFORMAL NETWORKS OF RESISTANCE

Curricular revision comes with labor. For NTTF who teach multiple courses on numerous campuses, updating a syllabus or redesigning a curriculum may demand time they really don't have. For NTTF, programmatic change is also a reminder that decisions are out of their control and that they are viewed as "contingent," or, worse, "disposable" (Fox, 2013). Many NTTF do not voice their concerns, if they have them, for fear that, if they make waves, they will not be offered classes in the future or that their contracts, if they have them, will no longer be renewed (Cox, 2018).

A different dynamic was observed at South Lake, where NTTF were vocal and persistent. One fall FPD meeting was derailed by an instructor (trained outside the field of writing studies) who insisted that teaching rhetoric was a disservice to "these students," who needed "basic skills training." When WPAs pointed out how basic skills models perpetuate the marginalization of already marginalized students, the instructor walked out. Another instructor walked out in the middle of a discussion of multiple Englishes. "Those who were vocal tended to get attention," Daphne said, "and the friction and negative feelings they shared set the stage for a rough implementation."

In ideal conditions, "faculty do not operate as independent contractors but develop expertise and judgment in collaboration with others and apply those talents to common goals" (Penrose, 2012, p. 120). That NTTF had been excluded from early on made it difficult for NTTF to see themselves as part of the community later. As Anicca Cox (2018) found, "feelings of being undervalued or misplaced in the institution often correlated with a perceived lack of autonomy in teaching practices" (p. A7). In other words, even when the curriculum is not standardized and instructors *do* have autonomy over how they implement broad learning outcomes, as was the case at South Lake, NTTF may feel like they do not.

The diverse traditions and bodies of knowledge that make up the "continually expanding and evolving knowledge base" of composition studies attest to the

richness of our discipline, but those whose primary engagement with the field is via a tenuous position in the labor system may not recognize this: "a contingent faculty member moving from one writing curriculum to another may instead see the goals, and thus the knowledge base, of the profession as haphazard and idiosyncratic. Faculty who see the profession's knowledge base as idiosyncratic are not likely to see their own knowledge validated" (Penrose, 2012, p. 114). If professional identity is intrinsically connected to autonomy and expertise, curricular revision may threaten not only the employment of NTTF but also their professional identities as writing teachers.

By spring, a deep fissure had formed between the tenured and tenure-track faculty involved in WPA work and the NTTF teaching in the program. Interviewees reported participating in or overhearing "private conversations" about the program that involved "denigration of individuals" and "implicit bias" against students. Communication in the South Lake writing program operated in accordance with what Pamela Grossman et al. (2001) called "pseudocommunity," a dynamic wherein a group of individuals pretend they are already a community without ever establishing shared norms or values. In pseudocommunity, which "pivots on the suppression of conflict," group interactions are governed by "the tacit understanding that it is against the rules to challenge others or press too hard for clarification" (Grossman et al., 2001, p. 962). In keeping with these norms, most conversations about the program revision were private, conducted between individuals rather than openly among the entire faculty affected by it. In the absence of open conversation or a critical consideration of how all faculty members operated within and as parts of the various systems at work at South Lake, both responsibility and blame fell on individuals. Daphne explained: "As a former chair, I had greater credibility with many people . . . but this divided us."

Some WPAs feel torn between their institutional roles and their ideological orientations. As Fox (2013) has asked: "[H]ow can someone . . . who wants to be in solidarity with labor and working class negotiate a simultaneous identity as a 'manager'" (p. A5)? Henry, for example, negotiated this conflict by working toward the continued employment of NTTF, regardless of their pedagogical effectiveness. How equitable is an emphasis on academic freedom and instructor autonomy if it supports faculty at the expense of students?

Program assessment in the year following the revisions demonstrated that, despite the emphasis on rhetorical awareness, FYW sections on the South Lake campus were still taught using a wide variety of outdated theoretical models and pedagogical approaches, including current-traditional rhetoric, literary criticism, and models that Mary Lea and Brian Street (1998) have called *study skills* (emphases on grammar, surface features, and discrete skills) and *academic socialization* (emphasis on a singular discourse of higher education). These approaches

have been discredited in contemporary composition scholarship due to their ineffectiveness (Lea & Street, 1998) and their rootedness in White cultural hegemony (Inoue, 2016), which is especially problematic given that most students at South Lake are from historically underserved and underrepresented racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Alongside the curriculum, WPAs also revised and formalized NTTF evaluation processes. That year, three NTTF were not recommended for reappointment, including the instructor who pushed for so-called "basic skills." Though her teaching was out of alignment with program goals and contemporary best practices, that the most vocal opponent of the curriculum was recommended for nonrenewal highlights the dangers NTTF experience when trying to assert autonomy as instructors. Negative evaluations resulted in fear and resentment among already disgruntled instructors.

This particular instructor filed a successful grievance against the department and resumed teaching the following year. On paper, she had fulfilled her contractual obligation to teach the courses she had been assigned to teach. Nowhere in the CBA is it stated that NTTF must be teaching equitably or effectively, that their work must align with contemporary composition theory, or that they must not harbor deficit attitudes toward students. The FPD offered during the rollout at South Lake, which was meant to help NTTF engage with contemporary disciplinary perspectives, was deemed to be in violation of the CBA due to its mandatory nature. Though the defining characteristic of a NTTF position is contingency, many NTTF at South Lake had long histories with the program. The CBA ensures that NTTF who teach in six consecutive semesters receive contracts, which is a considerable labor victory in a neoliberal academic system. While these contracts help retain teachers who are effective, they also interfere with the removal of those who are not. To point, one NTTF who was nonrenewed following numerous consecutive warnings in previous reviews was retained for almost three years thereafter, finishing out his contract.

Until 2017, in the program's forty-year history, there had been little FPD and no program assessment. Though high failure and attrition rates hinted toward the FYW program's ineffectiveness, there had been no investment in ensuring that students were receiving equitable, up-to-date writing instruction. Despite the increased formality of the revised evaluation process, Daphne said that there was still "not any concerted effort to publicly confront those who insist upon ideas that have largely been discredited. Some of it is probably faculty burnout—or just not giving a shit." Of the continued resistance and resentment of NTTF, she lamented: "We are reaping what we sow."

This dynamic frustrated those NTTF who possessed disciplinary expertise and supported the new curriculum. Because of the diverse training

and experiences of NTTF, adjunct faculty members who have disciplinary training and are active in the field often find themselves working alongside "last-minute hires with little to no vetting," including instructors who "know nothing about composition at all" (Hanson & de los Reyes, 2019, p. A6). By the end of the year, Michael, who had a doctorate in composition and rhetoric, had resigned as the lecturer representative due to "resistant posturing and toxic attitudes" among fellow NTTF. In his letter of resignation, he explained: "I refuse to represent to the committee ongoing challenges to the revised curriculum. I find the curriculum to be disciplinarily sound, thoughtful, and well-suited to our students' needs . . . I cannot in good faith represent pervasive positions and attitudes that I find intellectually vacant or morally abhorrent."

Michael's frustration may have been compounded by his committee position. As Casie Fedukovich and Megan Hall (2016) pointed out, "[T]here are potential relational challenges created when a non-tenure-track faculty member works closely with program administrators" (p. A8). Some NTTF thought Michael was getting "special treatment," but, due to policies preventing NTTF from participating in discussion and evaluation of other NTTF, Michael was often asked to leave the room during official meetings. Though the position ought to have encouraged "cross-tier collaboration" (Fedukovich & Hall, 2016), the existing system reinforced professional distinctions.

DISCUSSION: INVISIBLE NETWORKS

Most participants believe the program is on the right track. Henry said he was "proud of the progress that we've made in bringing the comp program here into the 21st century." For Daphne, working on the program revision taught her "to advocate for certain positions against the status quo, damning the consequences in some cases." Suzanne was cautious, noting that she was "still waiting to come out on the other end." Willa was resigned: "I'll just keep doing what I'm doing until they tell me to stop doing it and do something else," she said.

Resignation appears to be the result of department and campus culture, insidious and influential networks that lie beneath the formal and informal networks of renovation and resistance identified by participants. Stuart McDougal (2010) argued "[e]ven in times of great change, a department exists within three contexts: that of its own culture and history, that of the culture and history of the college or university, and that of the culture and history of the profession" (p. 360). The influence of these contexts was evident at South Lake. The department's laissez faire approach to hiring and evaluation resulted in a cadre of NTTF with little to no disciplinary expertise, yet the WPA

demonstrated little interest in calling out unsound approaches to writing instruction. The university's history of serving a predominantly transfer population from the local two-year colleges resulted in limited resources for first-year students. There were limited resources for FPD. Perhaps most problematic were the ideological underpinnings that perpetuated deficit approaches to instruction and assessment.

Looking at the revision through a critical systems lens, we see that even with the new curriculum, the deficit approach, undergirded by ideology and long-standing practice, was particularly difficult to shake. Though Melzer (2015) claimed the advanced writing framework (AWF) "disrupts the discourse of remediation while retaining support for underserved students" (p. 83), I suggest, and as was clear during the transition at South Lake State University, this is not as simple a solution as we might wish it to be. In his analysis of discourse surrounding the Early Start program, a 2012 effort by the California State University to curb remediation, Melzer noted that the language used in policies, press releases, news reports, and statements from WPAs and instructors perpetuated the same discourse of remediation that has, for generations, defined basic writing initiatives. It is arguable that Melzer too replicates the same semantic structures he claims to disrupt. When making the argument that assigning the single semester course the "accelerated" label, thereby framing the stretch option as the norm, Melzer explained: "most students need more than a single semester of focused, integrated reading and writing instruction by a composition specialist to help prepare for the complexities of academic literacies" (2015, p. 95). True though this may be, Melzer's use of words and phrases like "need" and "help prepare" perpetuate the dominant deficit-model discourse that, as he admits, has "remained virtually unchanged" over time (2015, p. 90).

Paradoxically, then, Melzer's own use of this language is further evidence that his assertion is correct: despite good intentions—"and sometimes *because* of those good intentions—the discourse of remediation and basic skills remains dominant," and "we unintentionally replicate the dominant discourse of the Remedial Writing Framework even as we argue against it" (2015, p. 86, p. 101). The AWF changes the language but not the hierarchical structure of required college writing courses, and it doesn't change the racist assumptions (White) faculty and administrators hold of BIPOC students. It merely replaces one set of hierarchical terms for another, somewhat less problematic yet hierarchical set. At least that's what happened at South Lake.

Failure and withdrawal rates in FYW remained high, despite the program revision. Because the new curriculum was not implemented more equitably *inside the classroom*, the deficit model prevailed. To point, here are a few comments from the NTTF survey:

- "I found students pretty unprepared for the rigor of the class. Their knowledge of English, and particularly basic grammar, was very dismal."
- "And as with the last ten years of students few knew citation or were open to learning it until they realized they would fail without its proper use."
- "The students that I am seeing this school year are woefully underprepared. Their level of competence is even lower than what I have seen in the past, and they appear to have no desire to perform even the most simple of tasks."
- "No, students aren't ready. At all. And that's for the already watered down standards."

Henry acknowledged that there were "voices of nostalgia for the good old days of wild irresponsibility" when instructors with limited disciplinary knowledge had autonomy over the curriculum, but the euphemistic nature of his statement minimizes the implications and outcomes of such irresponsibility. For many instructors, the new curriculum merely cemented their views of students as remedial. Thus, while South Lake is built around a model of access and opportunity, FYW instruction on the campus has functioned and continues to function as a gatekeeper to student success, echoing historical national trends, particularly for students of underrepresented racial formations (Crowley, 1998; Inoue, 2014, 2016; Naynaha, 2016).

Fewer than half of Black and Latinx students who enroll in four-year colleges graduate within a six-year period (Tate, 2017). While the non-credit-bearing developmental courses BIPOC are disproportionately placed into historically have contributed to low graduation rates, so too do the racist assumptions about language that undergird the teaching of academic discourse. As Asao Inoue (2016) reminded us, "no matter what antiracist motives a teacher or WPA may have . . . we all work within conditions and systems that have branded some language as less communicative, less articulate, subjective and in subjection to the dominant white discourse" (pp. 141-142). The commonplace argument (taken up by those at South Lake who argued for "basic skills education") that the role of FYW is to teach all students the language practices of the academy is flawed because access in a racist system is about more than discourse: "You can earn the keys to the kingdom, but if no one gives you access to the lock at the front gate, those keys are useless" (Inoue, 2016, p. 142).

That most instructors and WPAs, particularly on the tenure track, historically have been and still are White compounds this problem. BIPOC teachers and WPAs may be more cognizant of the racialized aspects of language and writing instruction but are often "ignored or aggressively silenced by white colleagues"

(García de Mueller & Ruiz, 2017, p. 30). At South Lake, those NTTF who identified as BIPOC were generally more amenable to the new curriculum than those who identified as White. However, because they also tended to be newer to the profession, most lacked the contractual protections offered by the CBA, which privileges seniority.

One of Henry's goals following the program revision was "to stabilize the corps of adjuncts." Henry's allegiance to faculty is honorable but short-sighted, if it doesn't consider how staffing and scheduling procedures work within the larger systems of the university and the discipline. One of writing studies' most noted labor activist scholars, Seth Kahn (2013), has pointed out that "failing to hire and evaluate contingent faculty rigorously, carefully, and supportively" is actually one of the "ways that senior faculty contribute to contingent labor exploitation" (p. A13). Hiring and evaluation practices must be "ethical and meaningful": while WPAs must prioritize the hiring and support of qualified instructors, "if we make it a priority *not* to retain faculty who aren't doing the job well simply because they're convenient then we can go a long way toward addressing the darker, deeper underbelly" of the adjunctification of composition (Kahn, 2013, p. A15), one defined as much by assumptions about FYW and who is qualified to teach writing as it is by the institutional labor hierarchies that perpetuate our discipline's continued marginalization.

RENEWAL: WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AS RHETORICAL INQUIRY

Since I conducted this research, we have made additional programmatic changes to better support both students and instructors, including updating an upper-division writing course that hadn't been reviewed in two decades and developing yearlong faculty learning communities toward antiracist writing instruction and writing across the disciplines. These initiatives are promising, but much work remains.

The department culture at South Lake was described as "toxic" by multiple participants, who cited "ad hominem attacks" against women WPAs; a drastic imbalance in service workload requirements between men and women on the tenure track; "microaggressions" toward BIPOC; "mansplaining" and other discursive methods of silencing women faculty members; "White savior" attitudes; and a general "anti-intellectual" devaluing of disciplinary expertise in composition and rhetoric. I have written elsewhere about my own experiences trying to do antiracist work within these contexts (Grayson, 2022). Until these deeper cultural and ideological problems in the program are addressed, WPAs' best efforts will be insufficient to challenge the deficit orientation that prevails in

the FYW program. Attempts to effect change via WPA work are limited if they focus "on the classroom without adequately theorizing the institution," for such approaches perpetuate a "trickle-up theory of change that pins political hopes on the enlightened, active individual" (Porter et al., 2000, p. 617).

As we know, WPAs cannot go it alone. Yet change work is often relegated to the individual, a dynamic that both obscures and in fact illuminates the broader institutional systems in operation. That antiracist work, for example, is often relegated to individual efforts and subjected to neoliberal box-checking tendencies (Dugan, 2021) is indicative of an institutional system rooted in Whiteness (Tate & Page, 2018) and the broader social, political, and ideological supersystems of which all educational institutions are a part (Keisch & Scott, 2015; Shenhav-Goldberg & Kopstein, 2020). After all, as I have explained elsewhere in this collection, "institutions exist in order to, well, exist. That's the only way they have power. Thus, initiatives that focus on individuals rather than systems generally are implemented in lieu of broader structural changes."

We are not immune to these dynamics as WPAs. Too often, as the editors of this collection have noted in the introduction, "rhetoric and composition administrators do not approach higher educational supersystems as a series of internetworked systems and networks." I would add that, if WPAs are not looking beyond the walls of the siloes in which they operate, it is because those walls have been erected to keep the silo operating in isolation. In other words, our isolation is itself evidence of the workings of the ideological and institutional networks and systems at play beyond the more immediate levels of our writing program's architecture. Critical systems thinking better enables us to examine these systems, the multiple, even competing, roles we play within them, and how we can use our positionality to effect change.

Many WPAs resist rather than embrace the managerial aspects of their work (Fox, 2013). As Donna Strickland (2011) has said, "If we are to truly work for the material benefit of administrators, teachers, and students alike," we must acknowledge and take advantage of the administrative roles we play in the systems of our institutions, especially during times of change (p. 122). Partly because many see administrative structures as emblematic of academia's increasing neoliberalization, programmatic change is likely to be viewed with skepticism, irritation, and resistance, especially when mandated (Melzer, 2013; Welch, 2018). Often, we equate resistance with activism—yet resistance that doesn't account for how our own resistance perpetuates inequity cannot be considered activism. Though justified in resentment of a system that devalues our contributions, resisting contemporary theory and pedagogy as an act of resistance against the institution misses the mark. Activism ideally moves us toward change, but a reactionary resistance to pedagogical change on the sole grounds that it *is* change hurts foremost the students we teach.

Instead, if we acknowledge that institutions are rhetorically and systematically constructed and, therefore, "can be rewritten . . . through rhetorical action," we can employ institutional critique as a "rhetorical methodology that will lead to change and restructuring" (Porter et al., 2000, pp. 610, 613). Our institutional critique must be informed by our understanding of the various systems and networks in which our labor is situated on both macro and micro levels, from the local architecture of the program, the funding structures of the university, and the formal and informal networks of communication among program faculty to the historical conception of our discipline and our writing programs and the ideological systems that undergird all of contemporary education.

To better account for these various, intersecting systems, we might examine how our institutions are configured spatially and push for office layouts, access to shared department areas, and webpage design and navigation that reflect the systems we wish to create in our writing programs. We might consider how information about the writing program is disseminated to participants within the system. If there are differences between the narratives provided to administrators, presented in department meetings, and conveyed in outward-facing materials like webpages or student brochures, we might explore why those stories differ and how they function rhetorically. For example, we might consider what beliefs about audience inform the telling of those stories and what messages those various stories—and the very existence of variation—tell the actors within the system. To effect change, we must know how the institution operates, what it values, which parts of the system function as constraints, and which parts are vulnerable to influence.

Carter noted in her chapter "one of the best ways to resist assimilation by the neoliberalism university system is to change our mindset about what we 'can' and 'cannot' do" and suggests that WPAs "focus their attention on their own agency." With this call in mind, and in keeping with the approach of institutional critique, I suggest we recognize the limitations and affordances of our work in context and cultivate an agentive relationship to our environment. This is especially important for those whose positions are precarious: only by examining the situation and the multiple forces working within and upon it can we identify opportunities for transformation through discursive action. When facing programmatic challenges, we must draw upon our rhetorical training and do the following.

Recognize contexts. What traditions, beliefs, and ideologies sustain the program? How do those traditions and ideologies sustain inequity? These questions require we approach institutional critique as ethnographers. We should take advantage of our emic positions as actors within the system and our experience as researchers by recording what we know about the program, seeking out answers

to what we don't know, observing our daily interactions with other actors in the system, and reflecting upon what we learn. This interrogation of context is integral to understanding the rhetorical situations we face.

Identify audiences. Who has a stake here? Who are the various actors involved? A high-level university administrator who began her career as a compositionist or teacher educator may be more open to disciplinary perspectives than an administrator whose background is in finance. When working with the finance-oriented administrator, it may be beneficial to emphasize (and justify) the funding required.

Acknowledge constraints. What don't we have access to? What don't we know? In a college without the resources necessary for a programmatic overhaul, it may be especially important to identify the scope of a project early on. Large public universities tend to have more moving parts than can be easily accounted for, so figuring out what information and resources are needed and who has access to them may be significant.

Locate available means of persuasion. What do stakeholders want? What resources do we have? Where are the "fissures and the points of leverage" (Porter et al., 2000)? A vague statement in a university policy, for example, may be a space where we can offer an interpretation that works to the benefit of our program. An administrator tasked with ensuring the campus complies with a statewide order may be eager to ensure change happens and may have some leverage in the supersystem of the university than we do, thereby becoming an important point of contact.

Seize kairotic opportunities, like mandated revisions, to convey significant messages. When change is required, we are forced to consider the work we are doing and, ideally, imagine how we might do it better. While some stakeholders will resist critical reflection and become more resolute in their current practices, others will be more open. Our work, then, is to initiate change not by pushing back against the resolute but by developing the attitudes and belief systems of those who are listening, those who can, as members of the same system, ultimately help to disseminate that message. Institutional change, when it happens, is a long process. If we want change to be deeper than surface-level fixes, if we want to move beyond mere reform toward an institutional revolution of sorts, we must begin with the foundations: the culture and ideology that sustain the system. By laying the first stones of a new foundation, we can begin to build a new system in which change is inevitable.

Perhaps by using rhetorical tools we already have, we will feel less powerless in the face of programmatic change and administrative mandates that seem out of our control. This approach does make us complicit in the neoliberalization of higher education. Instead, by exploring the real-world situations and in which

we are, variously and sometimes simultaneously, rhetors, actors, audiences, and change-makers, we afford ourselves kairotic opportunities to practice what we preach in the FYW classroom. Put simply, looking at challenges as rhetorical situations brings us closer to the frameworks that define our discipline.

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