EDITORS' COLUMN

The articles of this issue locate voice and influence for basic writers in a clearly public frame, assessing the potential of policy to shape the futures of BW students and institutions. All four contributors address the problem of basic writers' inclusion in the shared arenas of composition and academia, noting broad connections across language histories, institutional contexts, legislative policies, and civic engagements. Policy casts a wide and entangling net for us as basic writing scholars and advocates, but it is important that we see our work in line with the impulses for change on every level, from the classroom on up. Our authors each identify a different mainspring of change that has led our field to its current moment. *Understand these crucial aspects of our field's evolution*, they seem to say, to effectively shape the future's opportunities now. Considering the public broadly—linguistically, rhetorically, philosophically, logistically—we are more apt to resist ideas about our work that devitalize us and *dis*empower our students.

In our first article, "Basic Writing and the Conflict Over Language," Tom Fox offers a key meta-perspective on the history of Basic Writing as it relates to language's standardization and its exclusionary, elitist effects. Referencing David Bleich's *The Materiality of Language*, Fox maps the correspondences between a longstanding language conflict within the university—linked historically to materialism and persecution—and a recent endeavor on the part of the California State University to similarly denigrate the vernacular and negatively classify its users. Fox calls out the English Placement Test as costly and unnecessary, arising in perceived need to redress the "growing" remedial population of CSU, but which showed only a "two percent increase [in number of students] over thirteen years." Much as Bleich points to the repression of materiality as the understory of the vernacular within the university, Fox reveals the real-life, real-time effect of the EPT on students. His goal, he says, is to "add intellectual juice to our work" of decrying such formalist judgements against students' writing, exposing "injustice and untruths" about language "as a form and not an action." Fox asserts, "we are the ones who [must] articulate the conflict and explain, to say what's in plain sight."

In our second article, "Basic Writers in Composition's Public Turn: Voice and Influence in the Basic Writing Classroom," a strengthened notion of voice emerges to contrast the silences of language conflict, this time offering theoretical and practical access to basic writers' rich civic lives. Christopher Minnix addresses the exclusion of basic writers from the

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literature on public writing within comp-rhet, noting a basic writing "civic engagement gap." As Minnix argues, basic writers have civic lives and "public incomes" worthy of recognition, proving a political currency around civics already in effect. Students' agency as civic actors thrives in their awarenesses of lives apart from privilege as well as in many of their daily social media exchanges. Thus, a public writing pedagogy for basic writers might surpass typical civics curricula, including service learning, conceived narrowly as either substance or proof of engagement, and instead value basic writers' politically-attuned experiences. The literacy narrative, according to Minnix, is one such socially potent means for expanding basic writers' there-already investment in civic life.

Next, Patrick Sullivan's "'Ideas about Human Possibilities': Connecticut's PA 12-40 and Basic Writing in the Era of Neoliberalism" likewise deals with the material effects of restrictive language policy while evincing those "public incomes" of students designated as basic writers. Sullivan recounts the impact of Connecticut's legislation PA 12-40 on the students of his open admissions community college, which limited writing support to one semester of remediation and (then only) to co-requisite, embedded support in Freshman English. Instructors found these two factors chilling: sharp cut-off scores and a time-limit for demonstrating success. Sullivan's response was to lead the design and teaching of a pre-freshman, transitional "boot camp," ENG 9000, for the first students put at risk under the new legislation, effectively decompressing the high-stakes environment of that one-course remedial opportunity. Sullivan shares that these were hardworking students, deeply impacted by the material realities that such restrictive agendas set in motion. Following, the centerpiece of Sullivan's article is the voices of students themselves—their stories in their words—followed by an insightful finding of materialist themes that perfused these students' lives. The standpoint from which Sullivan asks us to view our relationship to our work is another powerful mainspring: "Stories have power," Sullivan quotes historian Tony Holt, "The power to change things. . . our collective memory is what provides the starting points for understanding our contemporary world."

Finally, in our fourth article, "Remedial, Basic, Advanced: Evolving Frameworks for First-Year Composition at the California State University," Dan Melzer returns the focus to California to help us again see language as endemic to the borders that define our field, tracing the influence of terms inseparable from its history. As yet another mainspring, the language of remediation has shaped how we and our publics conceive of basic writing,

foundationally. But as our understandings of student literacies and language politics have grown, we might welcome new conceptions of our work, re-terming/ refiguring it, in the interest of deep systemic change. Melzer takes on the evolution of frameworks around pre-freshman and freshman writing in the California State University, reminding us of the mission of access that must prevail beyond the discursive shorthands that simply label, not liberate. Progressing from "remedial" to "basic" to "advanced," he supports CSU's recent refiguring of writing instruction to move beyond the "discoursal limits" of Basic Writing's past and present.

At this time, when numerous forces seek to determine the substance of basic writing discourse for constrictive impact, affecting policy within and beyond our institutions, we are especially pleased to present the work of these scholars so intent on resounding the voices and influences we most need to hear.

—**Hope Parisi** and **Cheryl C. Smith**