Forming Adult Educators: The CCNY MA in Language and Literacy

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ABSTRACT: This essay provides a profile of an interdisciplinary master's program whose curriculum supports current and future adult educators seeking employment opportunities in higher education, adult literacy education, adult English language instruction, writing centers, and secondary education. A faculty administrator and five former graduate students collectively present an overview of the master's program while also providing experience-based narratives on program participation. Curricula for two graduate courses—a basic writing graduate course and a course focused on teaching adult writers--are profiled and then commented on by former students who reflect on the roles these courses played in their educational lives and professional futures.

KEYWORDS: adult learning; adult literacy education; basic writing; college composition; English language learners; first-year writing; graduate education

> In a profession in which almost every professor of note has published a textbook. . . [Mina Shaughnessy] never did; her writings. . . were always addressed to teachers and administrators. She chose this audience because of her conviction that educators were the ones to be educated.
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> —Robert Lyons, "Mina Shaughnessy," 1985

In the wake of the City University of New York's widely publicized effort to democratize higher education in the early 1970s, The City College of New York (CCNY) English Department enrolled thousands of "Open Admissions students," developed a sequence of three basic writing courses, hired numerous basic writing instructors, and created a highly innovative writing center. An additional, though lesser known, development was a newly established graduate program designed to offer professional support for college

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teachers of remedial, first-year, and advanced writing courses as well as for secondary and elementary education teachers. This essay focuses on that graduate program's evolution and its current goal of preparing individuals for careers in fields of adult literacy education, college writing and reading, English language learning, writing centers, and secondary education. Curricula for two teaching-focused graduate courses are described, together with reflective commentaries on course participation and professional outcomes by former graduate students. In presenting this overview, we aim to show how one interdisciplinary graduate program with a social justice orientation can lead to multiple career pathways and provide meaningful employment opportunities for MA graduates.

Antecedents: 1975–2003

Begun in 1974-1975 as an MA in Teaching College English, the CCNY English Department's teaching-focused master's program is an important legacy of pioneering work in basic writing teaching and program development that flourished between 1970 and 1975 and remained active for years to come, despite a city-wide financial crisis that compromised CUNY college budgets. Mina Shaughnessy and many of her colleagues, not just at The City College of New York but all across CUNY, paved the way for developing innovative forms of graduate education for college writing instructors. Two years before the new MA in Teaching College English was established, Shaughnessy taught a special topics graduate course, ENGL 1750 The Teaching of Col-

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lege Composition. With four hours of weekly class attendance, substantial reading assignments, and required class observations, ENGL 1750 blended a practicum with a seminar. Among the many assigned authors were Gary Tate and Edward Corbett (*Teaching Freshman Composition*), Albert Kitzhaber (*Themes, Therapy and Composition*), K. Patricia Cross (*Beyond the Open Door: New Students to Higher Education*), and Francis Christensen (*Notes toward a New Rhetoric*). Guest speakers included Janet Emig, Kenneth Bruffee, Sarah D'Eloia, Pat Laurence, Ross Alexander, Louise Roberts, and Donna Morgan. Within two years, ENGL 1750 had evolved into two separate courses that were required for the new MA in Teaching College English: ENGL 1750 Introduction to the Teaching of Basic Writing and Literature and ENGL 1751 Supervised Team Teaching.

Because Shaughnessy was appointed Dean of Instructional Resources in 1975, she was not available to participate in the graduate program after it was established in AY 1974-1975. And although many other dedicated and talented CUNY basic writing teachers may not have taught graduate courses, their experimental teaching, textbooks, research and revolutionary thinking about higher education's goals and possibilities tilled the soil for various forms of graduate education that lay ahead.

The English Department's teaching-focused MA is also the legacy of Marilyn Sternglass, who was hired in 1985 to provide leadership for the graduate program. During her first semester at CCNY, Sternglass proposed renaming the program MA in Language and Literacy in order to spotlight two conceptual fields (language and literacy) needed by teachers following multiple career pathways. The program's title change aimed to emphasize *a conceptual foundation for a curriculum that would allow graduate students to pursue different professional pathways rather than one specific career.*

In fall 1985, Sternglass joined forces with CCNY education professor Cynthia O'Nore to develop two closely aligned master's programs, the School of Education MA in English Education with a Specialization in Language and Literacy, and the English Department MA in English with a Specialization in Language and Literacy—an alliance that would last well into the 1990s. Sternglass and O'Nore presented *one document with course distributions for two distinct but closely aligned programs* for discussion in the November 1985 English Department meeting. The proposal included course distributions for (1) an MA in English with a Specialization in Language and Literacy and an optional TESOL concentration and (2) an MA in English Education with a Specialization in Language and Literacy (Sternglass, *Proposal*; O'Nore, *Proposal*). The proposed master's programs were unanimously approved by a

vote of the English Department faculty (*English Department Meeting Minutes,* November 21, 1985). The School of Education MA program and the English Department MA program offered a shared curricula that provided all graduate students with *a deep bench of faculty* and *a wide array of course options* from both the English Department and the School of Education.

For the English Department MA in Language and Literacy, Sternglass proposed that the MA's original requirement of 39 credits be reduced to 33 credits and that every student satisfy a foreign language requirement in order to bring the MA in Language and Literacy in line with two other English Department master's programs, an MA in English (Literature) and an MA in Creative Writing. And in a major departure from the 1975 MA in Teaching College English curriculum (which required 18 credits in literature or humanities), the newly proposed MA in Language and Literacy required no literature credits; instead, students were offered the opportunity to enroll in literature courses for elective credits. Sternglass's November 1985 proposal for the new MA in English with Specialization in Language and Literacy describes a curriculum with four 3-credit courses in the areas of language, reading, writing, and cognition; nine 3-credit language courses; nine 3-credit elective courses; and a project in lieu of a thesis (3 credits) (Sternglass, *Proposal)*.

The proposal approved by English faculty in November 1985 was slightly revised before an official course distribution appeared in CCNY graduate bulletins; a required 3-credit thesis replaced the 3-credit project. The resulting curriculum is described in an undated standard letter that Sternglass routinely sent to prospective graduate students (Sternglass, Letter) (Figure 1). A similar letter was sent to prospective students by MA Director Fred Reynolds between 1995 and 2000 (Reynolds, Letter).

The courses are presented and classified somewhat differently in official CCNY graduate bulletins but remain a close match to the curriculum described in Sternglass's proposal and her letter. The earliest relevant graduate bulletin available in the CCNY Cohen Library Archives Department is the bulletin for 1991-1993. From 1991 until 2000, the MA curriculum described in graduate bulletins remained stable (Figure 2).

Courses focused on teaching English language learners were available but not required unless a student opted for a TESOL concentration. For students who chose the TESOL concentration, a 3-credit TESOL Methods course and one additional 3-credit language course replaced the six elective credits available for all other students. Jerome (Jerry) Farnett chose a TESOL concentration for his graduate course work in the MA in Language and Literacy between 1998 and 2000. His course selections are listed in Figure 3.

Curriculum Summary **MA in English with a Specialization in Language and Literacy** **MA Director Marilyn Sternglass**		
Required Core Courses		**12 Credits**
Language	ENGL 1760 Introduction to Language Study	3 Credits
Reading	EDEL 72718 Reading from a Psycholinguistic Perspective or EDSC 72712 Reading and Writing Instruction in Secondary Schools	3 Credits
Writing	ENGL 1750 Writing: Theory and Practice	3 Credits
Cognition	EDFN 70702 Psychology of Learning and Teaching or Psychology U738 Cognitive Psychology or EDSC 75770 Language and Learning	3 Credits
Language Area Courses		**9 Credits**
Elective Credits		**9 Credits**
Thesis		**3 Credits**

Figure 1. Summary of MA in Language and Literacy curriculum as described in a standard letter sent to prospective graduate students by Marilyn Sternglass from late 1980s until 1995.

Jerry's course selections provide an excellent illustration of how the Language and Literacy MA combined courses in applied linguistics, TESOL, composition, and literacy. Not long after earning his MA, Jerry was appointed Evening Program Coordinator at Onondaga Community College, a position that he still holds today.

While the MA in Language and Literacy was gaining steam under Sternglass's leadership in the late 1980s, a newly established CCNY English as a Second Language Department offered courses for a growing student population of multilingual students who had begun entering the college in

MA in Language and Literacy Curriculum
Summary of Course Requirements
The City College of New York
Liberal Arts Graduate Bulletin 1991-1993

A minimum of 33 graduate credits with the following distribution:

Required Core Courses Intro to Teaching Basic Writing and Literature (3 credits) Supervised Team Teaching (3 credits) Intro to Language Studies (3 credits) Thesis Research (3 credits)	**12 Credits**
Education Courses Course options included reading, writing, teaching and learning psychological development, and language and learning.	**6 Credits**
Language Courses	**9 Credits**
Other Electives	**6 Credits**

Figure 2. Summary of courses listed for the MA in Language and Literacy appearing in the CCNY Graduate Bulletin for 1991–1993 (pages 54 and 55).

greater numbers as a result of CUNY's 1970 Open Admissions policy. Undergraduate English language learners could enroll in spoken English classes and also in academic reading and writing courses that substituted for the English Department's Basic Writing 1 and Basic Writing 2 courses. Four ESL Department faculty contributed substantially to the English Department MA in Language and Literacy as course instructors and thesis mentors: Nancy Lay, Susan Weil, Elizabeth Rorschach, and Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly.

Between 1986 and 1995, the MA in Language and Literacy curriculum continuously evolved and the program gained a stronger foothold as more students enrolled in courses. One distinguishing feature of the newly designed MA was an interdisciplinary curriculum that combined composition and rhetoric, literacy studies, and TESOL. A second important aspect of the program was the MA's alliance with a new and fast-growing ESL department: full-time faculty specializing in TESOL regularly taught graduate courses for the English Department's MA in Language and Literacy. And a third distinctive feature was the institutionalized linking of a School of Education MA in

Example of a Graduate Student's Courses for English Department MA in Language & Literacy with TESOL Concentration

- ENGL B5000 Introduction to Teaching Writing and Literature (3 credits)
- ENGL B5500 TESOL Methods (3 credits)
- ENGL B6100 Sociolinguistics (3 credits)
- EDUC 70001 Language and Learning (3 credits)
- ENGL B5400 TESOL Materials and Testing (3 credits)
- ENGL B6400 Theories and Models of Literacy (3 credits)
- ENGL B8400 Writing Research (3 credits)
- ENGL B5100 Supervised Team Teaching (3 credits)
- ENGL B5300 Examining Your Own Reading and Writing Processes (3 credits)
- ENGL B5200 Thesis (3 credits)
- ENGL B8003 Independent Study (3 credits)
- ENGL B8001 Independent Study (1 credit)

Figure 3. Courses listed on Jerome Farnett's CCNY graduate transcript (1998-2000) for completion of the English Department MA in Language and Literacy.

English Education with a Specialization in Language and Literacy and the Humanities Division's MA in English with a Specialization in Language and Literacy. Graduate students registered in both programs enrolled in so many courses together that they often became well acquainted with each other and with faculty teaching courses for both master's programs.

During her ten years at CCNY, Sternglass very effectively strengthened the MA in Language and Literacy by contributing to the hiring of new faculty specializing in TESOL and in composition studies. In the late 1980s, Sternglass participated in hiring new full-time TESOL faculty and during the early 1990s, Sternglass participated in hiring four new composition faculty who all taught courses for the MA in Language and Literacy: Barbara Gleason, Mary Soliday, Patricia Radecki, and Fred Reynolds. During these years, Sternglass also developed the MA curriculum by offering pilot courses, officially proposing new courses, and updating existing course titles. For example, ENGL 1760 English Syntax became Introduction to Language Studies, and ENGL 1750 Introduction to Teaching Basic Writing and Literature became Writing Theory and Practice. Among the new courses added were *Theories*

and Models of Literacy, *Contrastive Written Language*, *TESOL Methods*, *TESOL Materials and Testing,* and *Examining Your Own Reading and Writing Processes*. And from 1985 to 2000, every registered English Department MA student wrote a 3-credit thesis. The variety of topics chosen by students can be seen in the following examples of thesis titles:

- A Project of English Writing Program for Chinese College Students
- Grammar: Yes or No?
- A Case Study: Learning Strategies for the Self-Empowerment of Student Writers
- The Rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Its Educational Implications for Composition Pedagogy
- The Queens English: The Forms and Functions of Gaylect
- A Case Study of a Basic Writer
- Holding the Book: A Literacy Narrative

As thesis writers, graduate students pursued topics that reflected their interdisciplinary course work and their own particular interests.

By offering a curriculum that attracted teachers of adult literacy, adult English language learning, secondary education, and college English, the new Language and Literacy MA was highly unusual in 1985 and that remains true today. Composition and rhetoric master's degrees and TESOL master's degrees tend to be distinct programs with little overlap. And in the 1980s as well as the 1990s, very few adult education master's programs even existed. That is no longer true today: adult education-focused master's programs are now abundantly available. For example, an innovative, adult-oriented public college developed initially for working adult undergraduates, Empire State College, SUNY, has established an entirely online MA in Adult Learning, "designed for students who work with adults in various settings" ("Master of Arts in Adult Learning"). Occasionally, and often for scheduling reasons, a graduate student will enroll in a graduate course offered by Empire State College's MA in Adult Learning and then transfer the credits to City College for fulfillment of the MA in Language and Literacy degree requirements.

When I began teaching CCNY graduate courses in the early 1990s, I made it a point to talk with numerous MA in Language and Literacy graduate students in order to learn about their educational histories, professional experiences and goals, and current interests. The graduate student who made the most lasting and meaningful impression on me was Anita Caref. Anita was searching for a master's degree that would support her growing

professional involvement in teaching adult literacy in New York City. Anita possessed a very clearly defined professional goal: she planned to devote her entire professional life to educating adults who enrolled in "adult literacy education." From Anita, I learned that "adult literacy education" included Adult Basic Education (ABE), adult English language instruction, preparing adult learners for GED test-taking, and workplace literacy education for adults. Anita also informed me that in New York City adult literacy education was (and still is) primarily offered by five categories of providers: educational institutions (high schools and colleges), public libraries, unions, community-based organizations, and prisons. My crash course in adult literacy education included a visit to the Brooklyn College Adult Literacy Education Program, which Anita administered in the mid-1990s. Meeting students and their teachers while also observing the program's physical space with desks, offices, classrooms, and informational flyers posted on doors and walls made the entire project of adult literacy education seem far more real and compelling to me. Although I had very recently earned a PhD focusing on composition and rhetoric at the University of Southern California, I knew very little about "adult literacy education" —about adult education providers and their financial challenges, adult literacy teachers, or the social and economic realities that led individuals to seek out these programs.

Because Anita had been so definite about her professional orientation and so helpful to me as a newly hired assistant professor, I reached out to Anita while I was preparing to write this essay for *JBW*. Upon receiving my invitation to contribute to this project, Anita graciously agreed to comment in writing on her experiences with searching for a graduate program and participating in the MA in Language and Literacy. Here is an excerpt from Anita's written commentary:

> I was already working as an adult literacy teacher at the Brooklyn College Adult Literacy Program when I began searching for a graduate program that would expand my options and qualify me to find full-time work in the field. I had begun my career as an elementary school teacher and loved it. But when my own children were small, I was looking for a way to work in education part-time, and fell into adult education. My first class was a Level 1 ESL class in a church basement in Flatbush, and even though my students spoke barely a word of English, I relished the opportunity to be around adults for a few precious hours each week. That experience, coupled with teaching an adult basic education class in an elementary school in

East New York a few years later, convinced me to make a lifelong commitment to adult literacy.

I began working in adult education in 1985 with no theoretical or practical training. Although I learned a great deal on the job, it would have been much better for my early students (and myself) if I had had the opportunity to take courses specifically geared to teaching adults. Realizing that adult literacy teaching was highly complex and challenging, I sought a graduate program that presented best practices for teaching adult literacy and approaches to integrating social studies and science learning into literacy courses.

It was John Garvey (formerly of Academic Affairs at CUNY) who recommended the Language and Literacy MA at CCNY. While not designed specifically for adult literacy practitioners, the Language and Literacy MA sounded like the best option for me in New York City. Having already read Mina P. Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, I was trying to incorporate her methods in my classes and felt excited by the prospect of participating in a program that carried on her legacy. I found the courses to be engaging and relevant to my work, and the methodology employed by the professors was learner-centered and required that students actively engage with the texts we read and wrote and also with one another. I eagerly embraced both the subject matter and the methods employed by the professors. It was in these classes that I was encouraged to research the connections between reading and writing, and those insights have continued to inform my work as a teacher, curriculum writer, and professional development facilitator to this day. (Caref)

While completing her MA, Anita was already administering CUNY's Brooklyn College Adult Literacy Program. She would later go on to administer "five additional adult education and family literacy programs (in college, community, and union-based settings), all located in Midwestern states" (Caref). In recent years, Anita has been developing curricula and providing professional development opportunities for adult education instructors as a full-time Adult Education Specialist in Language Arts and Reading for Chicago Community Colleges.

Anita Caref was among several MA in Language and Literacy graduate students who were actively developing professional careers as adult educators during the 1990s. These graduate students called attention to an ongoing process of professionalizing the field of adult literacy education and a need to integrate research on adult learning and best practices for teaching adults into the Language and Literacy MA curriculum. The need for an increased focus on adult literacy education was apparent to Marilyn Sternglass, who advised me to develop this dimension of the program during our informal discussions about the MA's future. Even though she was no longer living in New York City after her retirement in 1995, we talked frequently about our scholarship, my teaching, and the MA in Language and Literacy when we met at conferences or when she would visit New York City. After the MA program stopped offering any courses in Fall 2000, I consulted Marilyn several times regarding my efforts to re-open the MA program.

A New Emphasis on Graduate Education for Adult Educators

In 2003, a program reset occurred in part because the Consortium for Worker Education—a union-based provider of adult education throughout New York City—provided financial and political support to restart the MA in Language and Literacy after a three-year hiatus in which no classes were offered due to increased class size requirements and related enrollment issues. As a result of my direct request for program support, Consortium for Worker Education Executive Director Joe McDermott wrote a memorandum outlining specific forms of support that he would provide for the MA in Language and Literacy. The three primary forms of support that Joe offered were (1) a fund of $30,000 that would be available during a three-year time span for part-time and full-time Consortium instructors who enrolled in adult literacy education courses (at CUNY tuition rates); (2) classroom space at the Consortium site (275 Seventh Ave., New York, NY), which offered the convenience of a central Manhattan location as well as opportunities to learn about adult literacy courses being offered at the Consortium for Worker Education; (3) access to all New York City union members for MA program student recruitment (McDermott). Equally important was something not mentioned in the memorandum: the political advice that I received from Consortium consultant Dr. Irwin Polishook, a recently retired Lehman College professor who had long served as CUNY's faculty and staff union president.

As CUNY's union president, Irwin had developed strong expertise at negotiating agreements within the City University of New York—expertise

that he generously shared with me (in 2002, 2003 and 2004) as I attempted to construct a persuasive case for restarting the MA in Language and Literacy. The most important lesson that I learned from Irwin was that sensitive or highly consequential negotiations should always take place in face-to-face conversations, not via phone conversations or email communications. On one occasion, when Irwin wanted to talk with specific CCNY administrators about MA program reinstatement, he invited several individuals to meet Joe McDermott at the Consortium for Worker Education. Present at that meeting were Alfred Posamentier, Dean of the CCNY School of Education, James Watts, Dean of the CCNY Humanities Division, Marilyn Sternglass, CCNY Professor Emeritus, Joe McDermott, Executive Director of the Consortium for Worker Education, Irwin and me. This meeting remains indelibly etched in my memory: for the first time I saw two City College deans agreeing to support re-instatement of the MA in Language and Literacy.

As a result of the offer of resources for program reinstatement from the Consortium for Worker Education, the MA program acquired increased internal support from Humanities Division Dean Watts, who removed the MA in Language and Literacy from a list of CCNY programs now slated to be officially and permanently deregistered. CWE Dean Daniel Lemons and my colleague, English Department Professor (and former Chair) Joshua Wilner, provided meaningful internal support for several years and continued to do so until the program was officially reinstated in 2005. With external support offered by the Consortium for Worker Education, the MA in Language and Literacy re-opened in fall 2003, now on an experimental basis, with the support of English Department Chair Fred Reynolds, who persuaded the English Department Executive Committee members to approve a proposal to allow applicants to enroll initially as non-matriculated students. In December 2003, I sent a letter to multiple administrators requesting that graduate students be permitted to matriculate before enrolling in spring 2004 courses. That request was agreed to by college administrators and facilitated by Fred Reynolds, who obtained all needed committee approvals for reopening the program with a revised curriculum.

In spring 2004, English Department Chair Linsey Abrams sent a letter to English Department faculty stating that the MA in Language and Literacy had been officially reinstated.[1] That decision was upheld by CCNY Provost Zeev Dagan one year later when a new cohort of prospective students were applying to enroll in fall 2005 courses. As a result of the official program reinstatement process that occurred between 2004 and 2005, I transferred my line from the CCNY Center for Worker Education (my home base from

1997 to 2007) back to the English Department in order to administer the MA program.

With a strengthened focus on teaching adult learners, the MA in Language and Literacy began attracting a new type of graduate student—individuals who had some experience with tutoring or teaching adults, often within CUNY or SUNY programs. In this same time frame, CUNY was starting two new programs that could employ part-time and full-time instructors: CUNY Start (for CUNY applicants who need remedial writing, reading, and math instruction to prepare to take the CUNY entrance exams) and CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP), a program that provides English language instruction for CUNY applicants who are English language learners. In addition, CUNY colleges' continuing education divisions employ part-time teachers whose highest educational attainment is a bachelor's degree. Already engaged in teaching/tutoring, these older, professionally active MA applicants were attracted to a program focused on preparing adult educators.

The new curriculum for the adult learner-oriented MA program included four core courses (in the areas of language, literacy, adult learning, and second language learning), two language and literacy electives, and four general electives, which could be fulfilled by enrolling in additional courses in literacy, language, teaching and learning, literature or creative writing graduate courses, or other courses that students related to the MA program's curriculum and mission. A lasting remnant of the dual master's program that Sternglass and O'Nore had created in 1985 was—and still is—the option for students to enroll in twelve credits outside the CCNY English Department. This option provides opportunities for students to take advantage of courses offered by the CCNY School of Education, other CCNY departments, and other CUNY colleges. The thesis option was eliminated due to a lack of full-time composition faculty available for mentoring: for most of the years between 2003 and 2014, I was the sole full-time CCNY English Department faculty member teaching graduate courses in the Language and Literacy MA. However, the thesis option is now available for graduate students participating in a study-abroad version of the program, which allows students to enroll in courses offered at specific universities located in Germany, Austria, France, or Italy.

From 2003 to 2014, the MA in Language and Literacy benefited from the contributions of numerous excellent instructors: Lynn Quitman Troyka, J. Elizabeth Clark, Kate Garretson, Joanna Herman, Elizabeth Rorschach, Adele MacGowan-Gilhooly, Jane Maher, Mary Soliday, Thomas Peele, and Mark McBeth. These highly talented instructors were full-time CCNY pro-

fessors, full-time professors at other colleges, or part-time CCNY faculty. Three former CCNY graduate students also taught graduate courses: Marco Fernando Navarro, Wynne Ferdinand, and Lynn Reid. And in fall 2014 the English Department renewed its commitment to the MA by hiring two full-time composition professors, Thomas Peele and Missy Watson, who have both made significant contributions to the program by teaching and mentoring graduate students, designing new courses, proposing professional conference panels with graduate students, judging graduate student awards, and providing leadership for the first-year writing program—which employs CCNY graduate students and alumni.

The MA program has also received significant support from a great many accomplished, hard-working, and generous graduate students, starting with a fall 2003 cohort of about twenty individuals who agreed to enroll in two graduate courses as nonmatriculated students in order to help reopen a program with a very uncertain future.[2] Only about one-half of those students continued in spring 2004, but a handful of new students entered the program in spring 2004, and in 2005 and 2006, sixteen individuals earned MA degrees in Language and Literacy. Several years later, in spring 2011, current students started planning elaborate graduation receptions, inviting registered students, recent alumni, and faculty to gather for celebrations with food, music, and organized activities. Additionally, in fall 2013, Joel Thomas spearheaded an initiative to start up an official CCNY graduate student organization, the Institute for the Emergence of 21st Century Literacies (IE21CL), whose activities can still be found on a publicly available Facebook page.[3] Most recently, Maria Vint, Michele Sweeting-DeCaro, and Debra Williams participated in four student recruitment open houses on the CCNY Harlem campus and at the CCNY Center for Worker Education campus.

Since the Language and Literacy MA program re-opened in 2003, a wide assortment of electives has been offered, including existing courses, such as Sociolinguistics, and many new special topics courses: Community College New Literacies, Digital Literacies, Writing Center Theory and Practice, Composition Pedagogies, Discourse Analysis, Translingual Writing, Composition and Rhetoric, Reading and Writing Autobiography, Living in a Visual World: How the Eye Writes, and New Literacies. Two additional courses focus specifically on teaching and will be described more fully in this essay: Basic Writing Theory and Practice and Teaching Adult Writers in Diverse Contexts. These two courses directly support the program's mission:

> This graduate program. . . prepare[s] individuals who wish to teach

> reading, writing, and language to adult learners, especially those enrolled in adult literacy, ESL, or basic writing/reading college classes. (*MA in Language and Literacy Mission and Goals Statement*)

Because developing existing professional careers and finding secure employment are primary motivations of many graduate students, the MA has offered Basic Writing Theory and Practice and Teaching Adult Writers in Diverse Contexts several times in recent years. Those two teaching-focused courses allow students to become familiar with the fields of basic writing and adult education while exploring best practices for teaching writing and reading to adult learners.

Introducing a New Basic Writing Graduate Course

A graduate course titled Introduction to Teaching Basic Writing and Literature had existed in the MA curriculum since its inception in 1975. However, during the 1990s, that course's focus on basic writing disappeared when the phrase "basic writing" was deleted from the course title. In summer 2006, a new course—Basic Writing Theory, Research, and Pedagogy—was offered by Lynn Troyka, who composed a course description that appears in her syllabus:

> How does 'basic writing' (BW) differ, if at all, from garden-variety 'writing'? How are basic writers different, if at all, from other first-year writing students? To explore these and related questions, we will use a practical approach to debate the conceptual frameworks underlying theories of BW, including those of cognitive development (Vygotsky), critical literacy (Shor), psycholinguistics (Smith), and experiential models (Hillocks). We will critique the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative research designs, including those for assessing writing and drawing conclusions about effective BW pedagogy. We will craft cases and simulations for BW classroom use; analyze and share productive responses to provided samples of the writing of BWs; define our visions for potential research, conference presentations, and journal articles about BW; and write reflections on our readings and discussions. Each student will craft a pre-approved final project to explore or apply ideas related to the course. (Troyka, Syllabus)

This innovative graduate course introduced students to the professional field of basic writing, best practices in teaching basic writing, and related research. By participating in this course, students also gained heightened awareness of controversies and ongoing debates in higher education. Three of the sixteen graduate students enrolled in Troyka's 2006 BW graduate class went on to develop full-time careers in higher education: Reabeka King-Reilly, Assistant Professor, Information Literacy and Library Instructional Services, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY; Michael Burns, Assistant Professor, English, West Chester University of Pennsylvania; and Lynn Reid, Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Composition and Director of Basic Writing at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

After Troyka taught the initial basic writing graduate course in 2006, similar graduate courses have been offered four more times by the MA in Language and Literacy.[4] These courses have introduced graduate students to instructional approaches for teaching basic writing—such as possible uses of multimodal composition in basic writing (Gleason, "Multimodal"), basic writing curricula, including various forms of Accelerated Learning Programs (*ALP – Accelerated Learning Program, Community College of Baltimore County*; Anderst, Maloy, and Shahar), and scholarship focused on how college students' reading and writing practices are perceived by students, teachers, scholars, and journalists writing for mainstream media (Adler-Kassner and Harrington; Gray-Rosendale, "Re-examining"; Gray-Rosendale, "Rethinking"; Tinberg and Nadeau).

All five recently offered basic writing graduate courses made use of Susan Naomi Bernstein's edited collection (in multiple editions) of basic writing scholarship, *Teaching Developmental Writing: Background Readings*, and instructors of four courses relied on either the second edition of *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing* (Adler-Kassner and Glau) or the third edition of *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing* (Glau and Duttagupta). These books were provided to students free of charge by Bedford St. Martin's Publishing Company (now Macmillan). Guest speakers have also been a common feature of these classes. In spring 2011, Jane Maher spoke to graduate students about her biography of Mina Shaughnessy, her own education, and her teaching life at a community college and at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women (Maher, "You Probably Don't Even Know I Exist"). In spring 2013, Bernstein talked with graduate students about editing *Teaching Developmental Writing: Background Readings,* teaching basic writing at the University of Cincinnati and LaGuardia Community College, and understanding students' learning differences. Bernstein also described

her own experience with an ADHD learning difference (Bernstein 26), a highly authentic teaching moment that strongly engaged the attention of all students present. Additionally, two former basic writing students spoke with graduate students about their experiences in CUNY college basic writing courses.

For a course that I offered in spring 2013, ENGL B2802 Basic Writing Theory and Pedagogy, I provided an overview of the curriculum in my syllabus:

> Our curriculum blends a survey of instructional practices and curricula with an analysis of BW issues and topics. We will first explore terms: *basic writing, basic writers, remedial English, developmental writing, basic composition.* What do these terms mean? Why do terms matter? The perspectives of teachers, students, and institutions will all be considered—with special attention to writing instruction at The City College of New York. Our second focus: we will examine curricula, textbooks, and writing assignments. You will become familiar with strategies for *scaffolding* writing assignments. We'll focus on teaching invention, composing a first draft, revising, and editing. Third, we will contrast alphabetic literacy with digital literacy and we will also contrast purely text-based composition with multimodal composition. Fourth: We will be discussing BW issues throughout the semester. A key issue is the controversy about whether or not teachers should encourage students to use their own linguistic codes and preferred modes of communicating in academic writing courses. (Gleason, Course Syllabus)

Course participants were asked to write literacy narratives, create blogs for informal responses to readings, participate in a group discussion and present a collective report on a particular book, write individual book reviews and write reflective essays.

One direct outcome of that spring 2013 course was a conference presentation the following semester at TYCA NE (Teaching English in the Two Year College-Northeast) in Morristown, NJ. Mabel Batista, Sofia Biniorias, Mark Jamison, Nayanda Moore, RAsheda Young, and I presented a panel titled "Graduate Student Blogs: Preparing to Teach in the Digital Age." Today, all of these former graduate students have gone on to develop significant careers in teaching and/or program administration: Mabel teaches basic reading and writing as a full-time instructor for CUNY Start; Nayanda teaches writ-

ing to undergraduates enrolled in courses at The City College of New York's Center for Worker Education; Mark is Senior Program Manager of Learning Operations at ACS Workforce Institute (in partnership with CUNY School for Professional Studies); Sofia served as Director, Undergraduate Education and Strategic Initiatives, until recently being promoted to Advisor to the Dean, Katz School of Yeshiva University; and RAsheda is a Lecturer at Rutgers University.

Student Perspective: Lynn Reid

One of the graduate students in Troyka's 2006 BW graduate class, Lynn Reid,[5] has developed a full-time career as a teacher and scholar of basic writing. After earning an MA in Literature at CCNY, Lynn completed a PhD in Composition and Applied Linguistics at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, where she was the 2018-2019 recipient of the Patrick M. Hartwell Memorial Scholarship for an IUP graduate student in Composition and Applied Linguistics PhD program.

Reflecting on her experiences in Troyka's summer 2006 basic writing graduate course, Lynn comments on her reasons for enrolling, her impressions, and an immediate professional benefit from course participation:

> Although I was a literature student, I had been introduced to composition studies briefly the year before as I worked as an intern at the Rutgers writing center where we read about the power dynamics of peer tutoring and pedagogical approaches to writing center work. In the summer of 2006, I was set to begin work as a writing tutor for the Rutgers Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) summer program. I saw that a course titled Basic Writing Theory, Research, Pedagogy would be offered in July and, thinking that this course might inform my work as an EOF tutor, I secured permission to enroll.
>
> Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was stepping into a course taught by a former editor of *Journal of Basic Writing*, a former CCCC Chair, and a winner of the CCCC Exemplar Award, Lynn Quitman Troyka, whose passion for basic writing and community colleges was infectious. Through this course, I was introduced to the language politics and social justice imperatives that gave rise to basic writing as a professional field of study in the 1970s. Much of the class centered on reflection through in-class writing, but most memorable were the

> poems that Lynn concluded each session with. Within six months of taking this course, I interviewed for a part-time professional tutoring position at the Brookdale Community College Writing Center, where I began to focus my scholarly and pedagogical interests on working with students enrolled in basic writing courses. (Reid)

Although Lynn may well have found her way into the composition field independently and in her own time, Lynn's opportunity to study with a basic writing teacher-scholar as prominent and talented as Troyka had a profound impact on her career. Lynn is a recent Council of Basic Writing Co-Chair (2015-2018) and current Associate Editor for *Basic Writing Electronic Journal*. And as an IUP doctoral student, Lynn has written a dissertation focusing on narratives of institutional change appearing in *Journal of Basic Writing* and *Computers and Composition* between 1995 and 2015. Even though Lynn has only recently completed a PhD, she has already made numerous significant contributions to her profession and is well known nationally by basic writing teacher-scholars.

Student Perspective: Erick Martinez

Having entered the MA in Language and Literacy directly after completing a BA in English at City College of New York, Erick Martinez enrolled in my spring 2013 Basic Writing Theory and Practice course with no prior experience as a college writing tutor or a teacher.[6] A son of immigrants from Mexico, Erick recalls how his parents risked their lives to enter the United States: "My parents swam across the Rio Grande river, my mother almost drowning with her baby in her hands." At a young age, Erick became fluent in both Spanish and English, developing a strong bilingual identity that he continues to maintain and rely on today. Although he went to work as a young man in order to help support his parents and siblings, Erick remained unwavering in his focus on education. As a CUNY college student, he earned an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in his twenties, and now, in his early thirties, he is enrolled in the English PhD program at the University of New Mexico—in part supported by a $10,000 Sydney and Helen Jacoff Scholarship awarded by the CCNY Humanities and Arts Division and primarily supported by a teaching assistantship provided by the University of New Mexico.

Reflecting on his experiences as a student in that spring 2013 basic writing graduate student, Erick recalls conceptual and pedagogical issues addressed in class:

> In this course we learned about the field of basic writing, what it means to be a 'basic writer' and how people see the field. Learning the history of City College and how it helped shape the field of basic writing was eye-opening. In class, we examined various curricula, textbooks, and writing assignments that one would teach in a basic writing course. The course itself was structured in the way a basic writing class would be taught. This is one of the differences that make this particular course stand out apart from other graduate courses. We also discussed the contrast between alphabetic and digital literacies and whether or not students should be encouraged to use their own language varieties when communicating in college classes. (Martinez)

The spring 2013 graduate course proved particularly consequential for Erick's future employment as a teacher. While still registered in his MA program, Erick secured an opportunity to teaching basic writing (for the first time) at a New Jersey community college. He reports that he was hired because he had completed a graduate course on teaching basic writing and because he was enrolled in the MA in Language and Literacy. Erick's involvement in teaching basic writing extended to taking over a class for another teacher in mid-semester and discovering that his basic writing course syllabus was being used to help restructure curriculum for all basic writing courses.

Today, as a PhD student, Erick is acutely aware of the role he will play in higher education as a Latino and a bilingual professor:

> Being a Latino male in America has shaped the way I see the world, especially when it comes to education. Most of my instructors were white. Being someone from a different cultural background, I have always felt like an outsider. Many of my friends did not go on to college and many of my colleagues in college were white. I had trouble identifying a group to which I would belong. My day consisted of going from home to school to work. I could never go away to college because I had to help my family with finances. Sometimes my work obligations came before my school obligations and it affected my classwork; but I persevered. That is something I learned from my parents. As I continue my progress toward the doctoral degree, my focus will be on trying to help the students that are marginalized. (Martinez)

For his dissertation, Erick is researching assessment and multimodality in basic writing classrooms—yet another outcome of Erick's introduction to basic writing while he was a CCNY graduate student. As a current college instructor and future professor, Erick Martinez aims to offer support for multilingual college writers, at-risk students, and first-year writing programs.

Teaching Adult Writers in Diverse Contexts

In spring 2015 and again in spring 2018, I taught a new course titled Teaching Adult Writers in Diverse Contexts. The course title came directly from a section title of a book that Kimme Nuckles and I had recently co-edited (Gleason and Nuckles). That section of the bibliography featured abstracts of essays and books focusing on various educational environments for adults seeking formal learning, e.g., GED or High School Equivalency (HSE) preparatory workshops, English language learning courses, Adult Basic Education (ABE), remedial writing and writing and college composition in community college classrooms, union-sponsored education programs, prison education, adult-oriented college degree programs, and workplace education.

Guest speakers were featured both times this new course was offered. Debby D'Amico, worker education research writer and consultant for the CUNY School for Professional Studies and for the Consortium for Worker Education, was a guest speaker in the spring 2015 course. And Language and Literacy MA alumnae Michele Sweeting-DeCaro and Melissa Valerie spoke to students enrolled in my spring 2018 course. During her class visit, Debby discussed the importance of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA). She explained that funding for adult literacy education was increasingly tied to work—which limited the subjects that could be taught and defined curriculum for courses supported by government grants, a long-standing revenue source for adult education. Debby's presentation encouraged graduate students to consider adult education from the perspectives of labor, unions, and worker education in New York City. Subsequently (in spring 2018), Michelle and Melissa discussed their teaching experiences in two very different adult-oriented programs: the CCNY Center for Worker Education (which offers two undergraduate degrees and one graduate degree for adult workers who are also college students) and the SUNY Manhattan Educational Opportunity Center (which offers workshops for adults who seek high school equivalency diplomas). In addition, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY

Professor Shoba Bandi-Rao gave a stimulating presentation on her use of digital storytelling in her basic writing classes.

A second major component of my spring 2015 course and a subsequent spring 2018 course was a field research study of an adult-oriented program or course. Every student enrolled in both sections of Teaching Adult Writers in Diverse Contexts identified a course or program that educates adults, sought permission to visit and write about the course/program, and then conducted a limited ethnographic study. Students practiced conducting interviews, writing descriptive field notes, and collecting primary source documents. They read selected chapters from *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*, 4th Edition by Bonnie Stone Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, wrote field research reports on adult-oriented educational programs, and delivered related oral reports to their peers in class. This project allowed students the experience of conducting and writing independent research while engaging in "self-directed learning," a pillar of adult learning theory (Merriam and Bierema).

Influenced by Debby's presentation on unions and worker education, Lisa Diomande researched a College Prep Program managed by the 199SEIU Training and Upgrading Fund, a component of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. (A few years later, Lisa was hired as HSE Program Coordinator and Instructor at the Henry Street Settlement House.) Kevin Kudic studied the Manhattan branch of the American Language Community Center, a for-profit educational program for adult English language learners. (After completing his MA, Kevin taught high school English in China for a year and is now pursuing a second master's degree in English Education at Queens College, CUNY.) Erick Martinez researched an English language learner class at La Guardia Community College. And Maria Vint studied the GED Bridge to College and Career Programs at La Guardia Community College. Lisa, Kevin, Erick, Maria, and I ultimately made a presentation at the fall 2015 TYCA NE conference in Lancaster, PA on the basis of these field studies. Our TYCA NE panel was titled "Understanding Adult Learning in Diverse Educational Contexts: Profiles of Four Pre-college Writing/Reading Courses."

Student Perspective: Maria Vint

Maria Vint exemplifies the older, more professionally active graduate students who were attracted to the MA in Language and Literacy in greater numbers when the program re-opened with an adult learner focus in 2003.[7] Having entered college at age 23, Maria began her undergraduate studies

as a returning adult enrolled in a basic writing class at Nassau Community College. Maria's experience in that class and her undergraduate education as a whole were transformative:

> The first time I found myself in a remedial writing course wasn't as an instructor; I was twenty-three, in the first semester of my associate's degree, working full-time to support myself, and in need of the basics. I can still remember, clearly, as the instructor wrote the outline of the five-paragraph essay on the board. It was in that moment that all of the frustration I was always overcome with, the anxiety, all of my indirection and hopelessness, finally melted away. There was a formulaic nature to writing, with rules and structure, and this basic writing class introduced me to them.
>
> I went on to become a language major in my undergraduate studies, analyzing the growth and structure of English and Spanish, and with each degree achieved, I felt empowered, refined my identity, and increased my self-worth. After witnessing the transformative effects of a higher education, I was overcome with a passion to help other adult students in similar situations to my own. (Vint)

After earning her associate's degree, Maria spent her spring 2011 semester in Salamanca, Spain, where she enrolled in the Cursos Internacionales program for language learners through the American Institute of Foreign Studies. As a result of learning Spanish and becoming interested in language studies, Maria decided to major in English Language Arts and minor in Spanish at Hunter College. In her senior year, she provided leadership for re-activating an existing chapter of an honors program for Hispanic students and served as acting president for that chapter for a few months.

In the same year that Maria completed her BA at Hunter College, she earned a Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) offered by the Cambridge English Language Assessment. Soon thereafter Maria began working as a teaching assistant for CUNY Start, applied to the MA in Language and Literacy, and began coursework in spring 2014, when she enrolled in Second Language Acquisition and Adult Learners of Language and Literacy. The following semester, fall 2014, Maria registered for Basic Writing Theory and Practice, Introduction to Teaching Composition and Literature, Sociolinguistics, and Introduction to Language Studies.

In spring 2015 Maria enrolled in Teaching Adult Writers in Diverse Contexts. Here are some of her memories of her learning and of professional benefits gained from course participation:

> As a student in the Teaching Adult Learners in Diverse Contexts class, I engaged in eye-opening conversations about various adult learning sites, from literacy programs to English as a second language classrooms, prison education settings, and union labor education initiatives. We dissected both the pedagogies and structures of these courses, the stigma and complications surrounding some of them, the innovative work being produced in this area, and the socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that can lead an individual to search for such courses. I took away more than just than the knowledge I developed as a result of 15-week investment in studying these topics; I acquired experiences, skills, and insights which will last a lifetime and built critical relationships with individuals who continue to aid in my growth as an adult educator today.
>
> Once the major assignment for the semester had arrived – the ethnography of an adult learning site – I had a specific site in mind but was not able to gain access. Professor Gleason then offered to connect me with a Language and Literacy program alumna who was involved with innovative work in the area of higher school equivalency exam preparation—Wynne Ferdinand.
>
> Being introduced to Ms. Ferdinand was the best "plan B" I didn't know I needed; our interaction for the project has enhanced my expertise as a teacher and a graduate student while helping me to redefine my professional path. During our first meeting, Wynne Ferdinand described the Bridge to College and Careers HSE program. I learned about the intricate complexities of program creation, from the research needed to create an effective system, to proposal and grant writing, to different types of funding structures and the need to meet certain goals. Becoming aware of this information has significantly altered the trajectory for the future I envision. I witnessed the ways that the needs of the people enrolling in an HSE program were heard and taken into consideration. I later discovered that

> three factors inhibiting NYC HSE students from completing their programs are income instability, inability to pay for a prep course, and lack of resources for commuting to campus. Traditional HSE / GED programs often require a tuition payment and do not provide support for commuting to class; however, the Bridge to College and Careers program offers MTA card incentives, tuition-free course enrollment, a college-readiness orientation and work-oriented themes for curricula, which have successfully impacted rentention and GED/HSE testing pass rates.
>
> Following the completion of my work for Teaching Adult Writers in Diverse Contexts, Wynne Ferdinand, Barbara Gleason, and I presented a speaker panel focused on the graduate course field research project at the CCCC national conference, in Houston, TX. Our talk offered three perspectives: the professor implementing this project, the coordinator of the HSE program, and the graduate student engaging in this field research.
>
> My academic relationship with Wynne Ferdinand subsequently opened various doors for employment in other areas of higher education: Ms. Ferdinand hired me for a part-time administrative role at John Jay College. As a First Year Program Associate, I learned about student success and retention initiatives, recruitment campaigns for special programs, and inter-departmental collaboration. Following this experience, I was offered and accepted a full-time program administrative position at John Jay College. (Vint)

It is worth noting that Maria began her undergraduate experience as a community college student enrolled in a basic writing course. As Sternglass argues in *Time to Know* them, early educational support in critical reading and academic writing can be vitally important for many students who enter college without adequate strength in academic literacies. This was true for Maria, who recalls a highly positive experience as a student enrolled in a basic writing class. Maria advanced so dramatically as a writer that she received both of two awards available for Language and Literacy MA students: the Marilyn Sternglass Writing Award and the Marilyn Sternglass Overall Merit Award. And in summer 2019, Maria enrolled in the first semester of her PhD in Composition and Applied Linguistics at Indiana University of Pennsyl-

vania. Maria's educational life exemplifies the fundamentally important possibility of success for many undergraduates who begin their college lives in supportive basic writing classes.

Student Perspective: James Dunn

James Dunn entered the MA in Language and Literacy as a self-described "mid-life career changer."[8] Earlier in his life, he had been a traditional residential campus college student who completed his degree in four years between the ages of 18 and 22. He then earned a master's degree in communications and journalism and he worked as a professional writer before moving to New York City to become Manager of Web Production for the Brooklyn Public Library. Five years later, James became managing editor for three social media websites in New York City. Then, in 2007, James began teaching college writing as an adjunct lecturer at Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY. So when James entered the MA in Language and Literacy in spring 2014, he was actively developing a new career as a college instructor.

Basic Writing Theory and Practice and Teaching Adult Writers were two of the ten courses that James completed to earn his MA. Here is James' commentary on his learning in the basic writing graduate course:

> Although I benefitted from all the courses that I participated in, it was the readings, lessons, and discussions from Basic Writing Theory and Practice (fall 2014) that have shaped my professional identity most profoundly. That semester, we read an essay by Adrienne Rich that was included in Bernstein's book, *Teaching Developmental Writing*. In 'Teaching Language in Open Admissions,' Adrienne Rich writes, 'I think of myself as a teacher of language; that is, as someone for whom language has implied freedom, who is trying to aid others to free themselves through the written word, and above all through learning to write it for themselves' (Rich 23). Adrienne Rich wrote this essay during the 1970s. But in 2019, a time of increasing police brutality, income inequality, austerity budgets, and political instability, it is even more of an imperative for teachers of basic writing to aid others in freeing themselves through words. Even today, I can see how students who are underprepared for college through no fault of their own are often stigmatized and in some instances seen as lost causes. One thing I know for sure is that the teaching of basic writing is a form of resistance to those

> who would have some people in our society remain as part of a permanent underclass. (Dunn)

At the 2018 TYCA NE conference in New York City, James met Susan Bernstein. He told Bernstein how much he had enjoyed the diverse perspectives represented in *Teaching Developmental Writing: Background Readings* and later commented to me on how meaningful it had been to meet one of the scholars whose work we had discussed in a graduate course. James' interest in developing his expertise as a teacher of basic writing and college composition increased substantially as a result of a two-year substitute line lecturer position that he held at Medgar Evers College, CUNY between 2017 and 2019.

In spring 2018, James enrolled in Teaching Adult Writers in Diverse Contexts. Although he had entered the MA program in order to advance his career in higher education and, more specifically, his experiences as a college instructor, when it came time to choose a site for a field research project, James decided to focus on an adult English language course offered by Catholic Charities for adults living in Brooklyn and Queens. This choice allowed James to learn about teaching and learning experiences that were unfamiliar to him:

> The field research report took me from the confines of my computer-networked CUNY classroom to an adult-oriented hybrid Civics/ESL course located in a church basement on a tree-lined street in the New York City borough of Queens, where nearly half the residents are foreign-born. Students sat at brown card tables in a classroom with no computers or any other multimedia components that you would likely see in a modern and well-funded classroom. This classroom was a barebones operation. Even so, there was nothing lacking in spirit among the instructor and his fifteen students. I observed them struggle, laugh, share, and support one another. Despite the rigor of a three-hour class, these students persevered in order to improve their access to social and economic opportunities. As both self-directed learners and a community of learners, these adult learners willingly shared their individual learning experiences with each other. These students had a lot at stake. The goal of this course is to prepare them for the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) naturalization test that consists of 100 civics (history and government) questions. (Dunn)

James has also commented on the linguistic diversity of his students and how their cultural backgrounds—as well as his own—impact his thoughts about teaching:

> My students are a linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse group: most are black women; some are first generation college students. As a writing instructor, I focus on getting to know what social, cultural, and political issues are important to my students, and I choose various texts that will give them an opportunity to use prior knowledge and experience to interpret situations, events, or various discourses. My approach is heavily influenced by my experiences as a graduate student enrolled in Language and Literacy courses and by my lived experience as an African-American man. Although basic writing courses are no longer offered in the Medgar Evers College English department, I still at times refer to basic writing theory in my work with first-year composition students. (Dunn)

Although James could easily continue to find employment as a part-time college writing instructor, he is also exploring opportunities to teach adults preparing to pass the New York high school equivalency exam. High school equivalency exam preparation programs and other forms of pre-college adult education are widespread in New York City, in part because they are needed by a large immigrant population and in part because about 27% of New York City's high school students fail to earn a traditional high school diploma in four years (Chapman). There is abundant part-time work and also a significant number of full-time jobs for adult education teachers in New York City. James hopes to gain experience teaching pre-college adult education courses in the upcoming year.

Conclusion

In 2006, I argued for increasing the presence of courses focused on teaching basic writing in composition and rhetoric graduate programs ("Reasoning the Need"). At that time, CCNY was in the initial phase of restarting the CCNY MA in Language and Literacy with a newly established emphasis on preparing adult educators for multiple professional pathways. I now understand that my focus on basic writing graduate courses was too narrow, that the larger curricular context is very important, and that graduate program curricula and program missions are equally deserving of scholarly attention.

In order to broaden and complicate this essay's narrative point of view, I invited five former graduate students to contribute written commentaries on their learning and professional experiences related to MA program participation. Diverse in age, race, gender, and culture—these five contributors all share a common focus on developing careers as teachers of adults. Anita Caref, Lynn Reid, Erick Martinez, Maria Vint, and James Dunn have actively pursued professional opportunities that support their aspirations as educators—either in higher education or adult education contexts or both. Their stories illustrate the possible lives of adult educators and the many ways that a graduate program can contribute to students' professional opportunities and career advancement. The contributing authors also reveal how central students' experiences and perspectives can be to the current and future life of a graduate program. It was largely owing to the presence of Anita and other graduate students pursuing adult education careers in the 1990s that the need for professionalizing adult literacy education via graduate education became apparent, first to Sternglass and then to me.

Every year, graduate students earn Language and Literacy MA degrees and go on to find meaningful employment as teachers, program administrators, writers, and editors, most often by relying solely on the MA, and sometimes by relying on a second master's degree or a PhD. While jobs may not be equally plentiful across the US, in New York City, both part-time and full-time jobs are abundantly available for professional educators whose highest educational attainment is a master's degree. No matter what jobs students have pursued, completing the MA in Language and Literacy has readily allowed most graduates to find part-time and full-time employment or advance in existing careers.

A research-active core group of talented faculty has proven particularly crucial for maintaining and growing the MA in Language and Literacy. We have been exceptionally fortunate in being able to attract first-rate instructors. What has also been apparent for a very long time is that the MA in Language and Literacy relies heavily on key alliances with other instructors—including the English Department MA in Literature and the MFA in Creative Writing faculty, who have long provided essential support for the Language and Literacy MA. In addition, the MA program has formed important alliances with the CCNY School of Education, the CCNY Center for Worker Education, La Guardia Community College's GED Bridge to College and Careers Program, and the Consortium for Worker Education. These alliances have kept the MA program afloat in difficult times and benefitted students by offering course enrollment and employment opportunities.

For more than three decades, the MA in Language and Literacy has thrived by continuously attracting highly qualified graduate students and developing a strong base of alumni support.[9] Graduate students are drawn to the MA primarily because it offers opportunities for career advancement and for starting new professional pathways, especially for adult educators and program administrators. In presenting the MA in Language and Literacy as a model, we recommend that other graduate program administrators, faculty, and students consider expanding curricula to include a blend of adult learning, TESOL, language studies, composition and rhetoric, and basic writing studies. We also recommend that graduate programs consider expanding program missions to include forming educators for multiple professional pathways rather than focusing on one or even two professional careers. In so doing, programs open up opportunities for graduate students to learn about professional endeavors that they may not have known about before embarking on graduate studies and to find viable employment in areas related to teaching and learning. Equally important are the contributions that graduate programs can make to their communities: some of the most complicated teaching challenges are situated in adult literacy and language programs, pre-college basic writing and reading programs, and first-year college writing courses. Providing well-designed, affordable professional education for adult educators contributes not only to their professional futures but to the well-being of thousands of students who whose lives they will impact as teachers and educational program administrators.

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made substantial contributions as an instructor and thesis advisor and strongly supported reopening the program at a crucial juncture; Joshua Wilner, who has supported the MA in Language and Literacy all through his career at CCNY and served as Acting Program Director; Renata Miller, who generously supported the MA in Language and Literacy in her capacity as English department chair; current English faculty chair Elizabeth Mazzola, who provides strong support of the program; Yana Joseph, Administrative Manager, CCNY English Department; and Migen Prifti, Director of Graduate Student Advising, Division of Humanities and Arts. Finally, we deeply appreciate the contributions of all editors and manuscript reviewers who have supported the writing of this essay: Michael Baugh, Jane Maher, Louise Wetherbee Phelps, Hope Parisi, Cheryl C. Smith, and Laura Gray-Rosendale.

Notes

1. On May 8, 2004, English Department Chair Linsey Abrams distributed a letter to all CCNY English faculty. She wrote, "The English Department is pleased to announce the resumption of the MA Program in Language and Literacy. We owe thanks to Professor Barbara Gleason, newly its Director, for her vision and hard work in giving the program new life. We are pleased to welcome all the newly matriculated students, and wish them well in their future studies. –Professor, Linsey Abrams, Chair."

2. The first six graduates of the reopened MA in Language and Literacy were Elise Buchman, Martha Galphin, Patricia Moreno, Michael Orzechowski, Ruben Rangel, and Kristina Brown, who all earned degrees in June 2005. Four of these students received tuition benefits from the Consortium for Worker Education. Nine more students earned degrees in June 2005: Arlene Gray, Renee Iweriebor, Judith King, David Abel, Michele Fulves, Asma Amanat, Patricia Jones, Michael Montagna, and Albricia Moreira. All of these students enrolled in a program with an uncertain future. And they all knew that they were contributing to an effort to reopen the program.

3. Elected IEL21C officers in AY 2013-2014 were Mark Jamison, Sofia Binioris, Lisa Diomande, and Melisha Rose. Elected officers IEL2C officers in AY 2014-2015 were Stephanie Jean, Raynira Tejada, Nicholas Magliato, and Maria Vint. Elected IEL21C officers for AY 2015-2016 were Maria Vint, Erick Martinez, Ivan Learner, and Kevin Kudic.

4. After Lynn Quitman Troyka taught a basic writing graduate course in 2006, basic writing-focused graduate courses were taught by Barbara Gleason in spring 2011, spring 2013, and fall 2014; a fifth course was offered by Lynn Reid in Fall 2016.

5. Lynn Reid was invited to contribute to this essay (by Barbara Gleason) because she completed a CCNY basic writing graduate course, she taught a basic writing graduate course for the MA in Language and Literacy, and she is an active basic writing teacher, program director, and scholar.

6. Erick Martinez was invited to contribute to this essay (by Barbara Gleason) because he enrolled in both graduate courses discussed in this essay, he has spoken about his graduate student experience at TYCA NE, he is focusing on basic writing for his dissertation research, and he exemplifies the many multilingual students who participate in the MA in Language and Literacy.

7. Maria Vint was invited to contribute to this essay (by Barbara Gleason) because she exemplifies many undergraduates who start their college careers as basic writing students and then go on to become high performing undergraduates and graduate students; because she completed both graduate courses discussed in this essay; and because she has very effectively spoken about her graduate experiences as a panel speaker at TYCA NE and at CCCC.

8. James Dunn was invited to contribute to this essay (by Barbara Gleason) because he completed both graduate courses discussed in this essay, he has substantial experience teaching first-year writing courses in two different CUNY colleges, and he exemplifies many mid-life career changers who participate in the MA in Language and Literacy.

9. Between 2005 and 2019, 141 graduate students have earned MAs in Language and Literacy. A small group of former leaders of the graduate student organization are now forming an alumni organization for the MA in Language and Literacy.

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