Instructor Alienation and the Accelerated Pipeline of the Post Pandemic's ALP Classroom

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the alienated labor of ALP writing instructors, who are being held accountable for a community college completion agenda that might not be best serving students. Discussing some of the larger historical forces and local institutional contexts impacting ALP teachers at CUNY, and drawing on recent studies of CUNY faculty, it argues that the neoliberal culture of speed, which emphasizes the numerical data of pass rates, has created increased pressure to accelerate students through composition courses. In particular, the speed-focused construct of the accelerated pipeline used nationally to promote ALP creates alienating conditions for faculty oriented toward the slower work of social justice education. With speed fetishized, learning compressed, and standards lowered—all in the name of social equity reform—instructors of ALP are becoming confused about priorities and unclear about the value and purpose of their teaching. Meanwhile, the work of basic writing instructors has been made substantially harder due partly to the pandemic.

KEYWORDS: accelerated learning; alienated labor; ALP instructors; basic writing; composition pipeline; COVID-19; culture of speed

Accelerated learning approaches and programs have been increasingly embraced in higher education across the U.S. over the last five to ten years. As part of this trend, institutions of higher education that serve basic writers have expanded such programs, adopting a compressed corequisite model in place of non-credit bearing remedial course sequences, which are more time-consuming and expensive for students (Jenkins et al. 1). By now, over 200 two- and four-year colleges offer Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) writing courses (Anderst et al. 12). And as the call for this special issue of *JBW* on ALP noted, support for acceleration in education has not only come

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from educators and education policy experts, but also from politicians and business leaders.

These stakeholders frame accelerated learning initiatives as democracy-building projects that excavate faster and more direct educational passageways for disadvantaged students. Promoting the Gates Foundation's *Accelerate ED: Seamless Pathways to Degrees and Careers Program*, for example, the foundation website states, "As students grapple with the impacts of COVID-19 on their education journey, now is the time to accelerate this work and extend these opportunities to all students, especially Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds who have historically had less access to these types of programs." Gates' urgent message that "now is the time to accelerate this work" highlights the capitalist value of speed and the faith in fast learning that is intrinsic to the accelerated learning movement. Although seemingly innocuous, this plea for academic acceleration is part of a problem causing the alienation of many ALP writing instructors.

The alienation of basic writers has been a central theme of basic writing literature for at least three decades (Abt-Perkins; Mutnick, *Writing in an Alien World* and "Still Strangers in Academia"; Gongora). In their article "Basic Writing and Resisting White Innocence," Sean Molloy and former student Alexis Bennett locate a historical root of this alienation in the inherent racism of early basic writing programs, such as that of CUNY's City College, which segregated students linguistically and physically, and which leave behind a dominant legacy of monolingualism that is still painfully disorienting for BIPOC students in writing courses. For an important recent example of the theme of alienation regarding Kingsborough, the Brooklyn-based CUNY community college where I teach, Emily Schnee's study of composition students in "Exploring College Purpose" powerfully demonstrates the alienating effects of "academic momentum policies" that "are undermining community college students' passions and purpose in pursuing a college education" (1). Although the theme of basic writer alienation persists, thanks in no small part to top-down policies that push acceleration in education, few researchers have explored the alienation of those who teach basic writing.

Because the conditions of our labor closely align with and contribute to student alienation in our basic writing courses, any thorough analysis regarding accelerated learning and its pedagogy should work to understand the current context of ALP instructor alienation and its history and, in so doing, resist the systemic forces that continue to promote it. I offer some of this historical context and macro ideological analysis here, along with some specific problems of CUNY's ALP writing program, to interrogate the

largely unexamined assumption that accelerated learning is categorically better for basic writers and to trouble Peter Adams' assertion that ALP *throws open the gates* for the "the most democratic segment of higher education" ("Giving Hope" 19). But I also provide both the larger structural and local institutional contexts to highlight the need for more attention—more research, more resources, more care—to address the alienated labor of basic writing instructors, who are now required to teach more in less time and who, with no control over the dramatic changes brought by ALP's sweeping implementation and the concurrent decimation of developmental courses, are being held accountable for a community college completion agenda (McPhail) that is not of their own doing or necessarily in their interest. This intention aligns with calls to remedy the problem that faculty voices have largely been missing from the national conversation about the wide-scale adoption of accelerated learning models in place of slower developmental approaches (Schrynemakers et al.; Hassel et al.).

The most available justifications for the promotion of accelerated learning projects have been economic ones. They are sold generally, but to adult learners (read: consumers) and nontraditional students specifically, as products for faster career advancement. As the logic goes, acceleration can help such students develop important skills, build necessary knowledge, and obtain career enhancing degrees in a manner that is more cost effective because it takes less time. Here, for example, is the rhetoric of acceleration Kingsborough uses to promote its "15 to Finish Program": "Graduate on time. Save money. Earn sooner. Complete 15 credits each semester & graduate in 2 years." From this institutional viewpoint, it is not too difficult to pan out to the broader capitalist perspective wherein acceleration in education is enthusiastically endorsed because it presumably readies more effectively trained workers for its needed industries in a shorter period. Along these general lines, accelerated learning is commonly construed as a "win-win" approach, promising students better jobs more quickly, costing students and tax payers less money, and ultimately benefiting the whole U.S. economy by supplying it with a better educated and more suitably trained workforce. ALP writing courses have been billed as particularly beneficial for disadvantaged students, such as those underprepared basic writers in public universities and community colleges, shortening their pipeline to graduation, allowing them to enter the workforce and begin earning a living wage more quickly, and helping them to be more competitive in the job market. In sum, the connection between fast-tracked college degree programs (of which ALP is a vital part) and economic gain is compelling to many educational stakeholders.

For these reasons, it should come as no surprise that the accelerated learning movement still appears to be in its glory days of widespread celebration and, if Gates' call to speedy action is any indication, may even be gaining momentum since the pandemic.

Elevating the Data to Sell ALP as Equity Reform

Within the field of college composition and sub-field of basic writing, arguments for the benefits of ALP draw on substantial research, like that done by the Community College Research Center, demonstrating that students in ALP writing courses are more likely to successfully complete Composition 1 and Composition 2 when compared to students taking non-credit bearing stand-alone developmental courses (Jenkins et al.; Cho et al.). This research is cited far and wide by education reformers and administrators to justify the top-down elimination of developmental education in favor of the allegedly more democratic and equity-oriented ALP model (Suh et al. 3). Take, for instance, this ALP happy tweet from CUNY's Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez: "Replacing the outdated remedial approach with a more effective, equitable, and evidence-based system is an important advance in our ongoing mission to provide all our students with educational opportunity and the support they need to succeed" (12 Jan 2023).

In the name of social equity reform, the argument for ALP writing classes conveniently elevates the data by drawing primarily on the promising news of good pass rates in first-year composition courses. But we need to be careful about the uncritical acceptance of any numerical data that has the power to control public policy (Newfield et al.). The utilization of ALP data relies too heavily on the insular and instrumental view that the complicated work of democratizing higher education through better college completion is measured mainly by the numbers of students passing first year comp courses. And yet, students drop out of college for a myriad of reasons that have nothing to do with what is happening in composition, so meaningful research needs to the take into consideration the underlying causes of college attrition and avoid one size fits all solutions (Boylan, Interview, 20). In their helpful article "Clarifying Terms and Reestablishing Ourselves Within Justice: A Response to Critiques of Developmental Education as Anti-Equity," Emily Suh et al. explain that the better pass rates justification for ALP is based on the mistaken conflation of educational equity with "equal enrollment in gateway courses rather than support throughout the college experience which takes into account students' varied starting points" (3). This confla-

tion happens at the level of the administration with concerns coming down "from above" (e.g., from the provost) together with department chairs regarding low enrollment and the poor retention of BIPOC students in accelerated courses. But it also happens "from within" our departments, with concerns coming from well-meaning course coordinators, writing program directors, and other faculty who search for solutions to disparities in pass rates *only or primarily* in what happens in composition. In both cases, the abundant structural problems that students face, which result in poverty, food and housing insecurity, lack of available childcare and healthcare, and time, work, and family constraints (to list only a few) are minimized or in some cases entirely ignored. Instead of focusing on the wraparound supports needed to address these nonacademic issues (Mangan), attention is turned toward dubious numerical outcomes data with the implication that ALP writing faculty should take responsibility for said data.

The conviction that new data-driven ALP courses will close equity gaps (See Mirabito) produces increasing pressure for ALP faculty to do more work even though there is confusion about priorities, especially in the context of ALP's accelerated format. Are basic writing instructors supposed to be doing meaningful social justice teaching? Or should they be focusing on passing students out of composition courses? And this cloudiness results in an uncomfortable expansion of teaching responsibilities towards a misunderstanding of equity (Armstrong), with some instructors, including this author, insisting that changes to ALP learning outcomes are mostly just "moving furniture around the room" for the purposes of the administration (See Bennett and Brady). Meanwhile, on the writing program level, there is not enough clear discussion about how passing students out of our classes more quickly combats any oppressive systems or tackles any of the underlying causes of social injustice. This leaves ALP faculty to forge ahead with the vague faith that access to higher education alone offers a panacea to inequality. Moreover, there is little honest admission that when institutions with ALP programs place a high emphasis on speed and pass rates, they may be more likely to endorse lower standards and to accept easier and less work—less reading and writing—which might result in students graduating without the knowledge skills they need to succeed in their chosen fields, not to mention to succeed as engaged citizens (Armstrong 64) in a democracy racked by systemic oppression. This knowledge deficiency is suggested by a 2022 survey of employers that found that most did not feel that community colleges are producing work-ready employees (Fuller and Raman 5). The confusing accelerated approach to social justice education also coincides

with and is compounded by exigencies of pandemic teaching that simplified course work requirements, with instructors reducing assignments and lowering expectations around meeting learning outcomes in response to learning loss (West and Lake 10) and fears about low enrollment and high attrition. Indeed, the results of a recent national survey of tenured professors reveal that the lowering of standards is a widespread concern among faculty, with over 30% admitting to inflating grades and "reducing the rigor" of their courses (Horowitz et al.).

By telling only the happy story about the efficacy of ALP, the positive pass rate data dodges sobering evidence that points to ALP's limitations as a social equity reform. For instance, a recent comprehensive review of evidence by the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness reports that "while discrete reforms to developmental education may improve completion of introductory college-level courses, few interventions have been shown to increase long-standing outcomes" (Bickerstaff et al. 3). Hunter Boylan's work also shines light on the propagandizing of data that has led to the drastic decline of developmental education. In his article "No Silver Bullet," he argues that redressing social inequity in community colleges will require them to broaden their focus far beyond the completion of composition courses. He writes:

> It will also require that they address non-academic issues that may prevent students from succeeding, improve the quality of instruction at all levels, revise financial aid policies, provide better advising to students at risk, integrate instruction and support services, teach college success skills, invest in professional development and do all of these things in a systematic manner integrated into the mainstream of the institution.

Of course, the promotion of ALP through only the hard data of the increased numbers of students passing composition also conveniently ignores the lived experiences of faculty, eliding the findings that many instructors teaching ALP are not convinced that it is working very well (Schrynemakers et al.; Lane et al.). In the main, this over-reliance on the data driven metric of student pass rates as the ultimate measure of program success is a signpost of neoliberalism's stranglehold on higher ed. It results from the inaccurate painting of public education as economically inefficient, which has spurred public universities and colleges to adopt managerial models that demand hard numerical data to ensure funding (Newfield). For as Christopher New-

field points out, "Even super wealthy foundations like Gates are looking for direct measurable impacts from their donations and for the confirmation of their value" (Williams 747).

By now, this process of reifying pass rate data as the bottom line in educational equity reform has been almost completely neutralized in the field of composition. ALP founder Peter Adams, for example, promotes ALP programs nationally by asserting that with them "74% of our basic writers are passing first year composition." He further assures us that reluctant faculty at six colleges in Connecticut, who had been mandated to adopt corequisite models, abandoned their skepticism and "became increasingly proud ...when their data showed they had doubled the rate at which developmental students passed first year composition" ("Giving Hope" 20). Even though the over reliance on composition pass rate data typified by Adams' declarations have become standard fare in ALP advocacy, it was not a foregone conclusion in the early stages of developmental education. In fact, it wasn't until the twenty-first century that state legislators and education leaders began to put pressure on accountability to show better pass rates and "success in developmental education began to be measured on student retention and successful completion in gatekeeper classes" (Stahl et al. 10). This development came on the heels of the national No Child Left Behind initiative created by George W. Bush in 2001, which ushered in the regime of high stakes testing and expanded the federal role in ensuring that schools demonstrate learning outcomes. Along with federal and city grant money, increased private sector funding flowing into public colleges and universities in the name of a better prepared workforce has further fueled the learning outcomes assessment movement at the level of higher ed (Bennet and Brady 148). Now both federal grants, such as that of Title V, and private sponsors, such as The Lumina Foundation, require hard evidence of outcomes to justify expenditures. And what better evidence at community colleges—long positioned as "defacto 'suppliers' to local and regional business" of an emerging middle skilled workforce (with more than a high school degree but less than a four-year college) (Fuller and Raman 5)—than the impressive data point showing a larger number of students passing out of the college pipeline more quickly?

Elevated Data's Transport: ALP's Speed-Focused Pipeline

With the national education discourse consistently positioning composition as a major gateway in the college completion agenda, an ac-

celerated ALP pipeline framework has emerged in the reformist imaginary. Here's the view from the ALP pipeline perspective: the only viable entry point to the accelerated pipeline is a credit-bearing comp course and any work (e.g. developmental courses and/or ESL courses) done prior to arriving at this intake point is deemed unvaluable or wasteful; the amount of students flowing into and out of the pipeline must match up, so students who don't make it through in a linear fashion are considered to be problematic "leakages" (Adams' words, "Throwing Open" 53), evoking broken plumbing or dripping faucets, as Elizabeth Garbee notes; and it is largely the ALP instructors' job to keep the pipeline flow going, shunting any holes (better known as non-passing students) that might not make it through. Conveying the consternation that many faculty feel about this accelerated pipeline paradigm, a community college instructor cautions us: "If we cave to the pressure from the administration to push them through, all we are doing is creating failure later on. It is essential to actually bring students up to the college level of reading, writing, and mathematics before allowing them to take credit-bearing courses" (Quoted in Schrynemakers et al. 23).

Several authors have discussed the importance and potential dangers of naming and framing in the fields of developmental education and basic writing. Pejorative names/frames of developmental education programs, such as the "the bridge to nowhere," or in the unpretty parlance used in my institution for the work formerly done in developmental courses, "circling the drain," another unfortunate plumbing metaphor, have the power not only to make students and instructors feel ashamed, but also to influence public opinion, public policy, and program funding (See McGee et al. and Mlynarczyk). In place of such undesirable frameworks suggesting immobility and slowness, the ALP model offers fast flow through the composition pipeline. In the words of the Accelerated Learning Program's website, ALP is successful because "The pipeline through which [students] must travel is shortened from two semesters to one" ("Features"). And yet, both types of frames—be it the sad slow circling of the drain or the upbeat rapid passing through the pipeline—hinge on the capitalist value of speed and are destructive. The ALP pipeline metaphor, after all, is an economically derived model of education imagining a limited and linear prescription for career success. The accelerated pipeline does not adequately honor the lived experiences or various starting points of students, nor does it carefully consider the multiple hindrances encountered or multiple paths taken by them. Barrie McGee et al. explain that even though

> external entities like CCA [Complete College America] seem to advocate for college access and success and even invoke the language of social justice, it is difficult to take these presuppositions seriously when they fixate on a single segment of the "pipeline" and ignore the rest (i.e., socioeconomic, racial, linguistic, cultural) of the realities that provided both the catalyst and the mission for DE [developmental education] in the first place. (3)

Finally, the ALP paradigm of an accelerated pipeline through which ALP students must pass quickly also goes against what most writing instructors know about learning. Even ALP teachers with no formal training in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of education (which emphasized that learning is a gradual process, only unfolding over time as students integrate new knowledge skills learned through social interactions) intuitively understand that learning is reiterative and relational; that it is not easily measurable or quantifiable; and, most importantly, that it takes time.

Despite its flawed accelerated pipeline paradigm, which narrowly defines success as students passing first-year composition, the ALP writing movement, now over 15 years since its launch at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) in 2007-2008, has gained even more momentum since the pandemic. Fretting about low student enrollments after COVID-19, institutions around the country have scaled up accelerated learning models, such as the FastStart program at the Community College of Denver and ALP at SUNY's Onondaga Community College, to help entice students back to campus with promises of fast-tracked degrees. The pandemic-induced pivot to digital classrooms and "flexible" modes of remote instruction have given accelerated approaches a further boost by making them even more attractive and widely available, especially at community colleges serving nontraditional students and basic writers. At Kingsborough, 26% of ALP writing classes currently have an online component. So ALP students not only can save time taking credit-bearing writing courses; they can also save time by not commuting, a barrier to success at over 40% of the nation's community colleges, which lack transit stops within walking distance (Povich). Kingsborough, for example, is located on a remote beachside campus on the Southern end of Brooklyn with no subway nearby. Clearly the efficiency of internet learning that was bolstered by the pandemic fits well with the academic culture of speed, education momentum policies, and accelerated learning programs, all of which, taken as a composite, throw into sharp contrast the

time-consuming walk to and from many community college campuses and the slow work of social justice pedagogy (Bruenig).

Some Pertinent History of the Capitalist Value of Speed

Because the main point of ALP writing programs is to accelerate students through the credit-bearing composition pipeline, and they draw on a framework that foregrounds pace and fetishizes fast learning, it is worth examining some broader history of the capitalist value of speed in the U.S. Speed has long been a weapon in capitalism's effort to control labor with processes that demand faster production time; and vice versa, attempts by labor to resist capitalism have frequently involved slowing down production or "jamming the works" (See Burowoy on the politics of capitalist production). In the introduction to their book *Slow Cities: Conquering Our Speed Addiction for Health and Sustainability*, Paul Trantor and Rodney Tolly explain that today's prevalent culture of speed has roots back to industrial capitalism and the expansion of railway transportation in the 1800s. The railway system established standard times in agreed-upon time zones and introduced a new orientation toward timetables. According to the authors, "Railways made the notion of 'clock time' the dominant way of understanding time. This meant precise timing of work and leisure activities, and the view of time as a resource that could be saved, consumed, organized and monitored, and used as 'productively' as possible" (11). This development contributed to the view that *time is money* and that time spent in transit is wasted time, much like the ALP framework of the accelerated pipeline sees developmental coursework as something to get done with as quickly as possible. Both perspectives venerate the moment of arrival at a destination and ignore the real possibility that time spent in process—traveling on transportation or learning in developmental course—might have intrinsic value.

In the early days of industrial capitalism, speed was still seen negatively, as a disorienting force that could cause "sick hurry," an uncomfortable condition brought by too much rushing. In fact, it wasn't until the development of the automobile and the rise of Fordism in the early part of the twentieth century that acceleration became a cherished value in American education. Fordism helped to prompt a national obsession with efficiency, acceleration's close corollary, which enabled the vast spread of Taylorism into work, home, and school life. And by extension, Franklin Bobbit, the inventor of curriculum, drew on principles of scientific management to argue that schools should function like efficient businesses with the aim of

preparing students for industry. Business-like models of operation gained solid traction in universities and colleges in the 1980s, when institutions of higher learning began to widely adopt them to increase their own profitability. In her chapter, "Accelerated Time in the Neoliberal University," Kristin Smith explains:

> The adoption of neoliberalism as a re-organizing approach in post-secondary education has amplified corporate, market orientation where demands for "accountability," efficiencies, measurable outcomes, quality control mechanisms, and cost-effectiveness are embedded at every level of academia. Within this context both educators and students have experienced both a work intensification and a quickening of their daily lives whereby there is never enough time to complete the demands of their work. (163)

Certainly, in our current stage of advanced capitalism—also called "go go capitalism" and/or "turbo capitalism" for good reasons—the neoliberal landscape of higher education has fully absorbed the love of speed along with the tenets of instrumentalism, work efficiency, and economic incentive. "Neoliberalism," as one colleague at my institution aptly puts it, "has become the air we breathe." As part of the process of corporatizing higher ed, acceleration, a term once linked to the cost benefits of machine technology and transportation systems, has now been solidly retooled as both a humanistic value, something students desire for themselves, and as a value adding product—a good deal leading to a better life. We should be wary of this retooling.

ALP: An Ineffective Quick Fix for Slow Systemic Problems

By proceeding from the historical fact that acceleration in our ALP writing classrooms is a longstanding and potent force of capitalism that prioritizes efficiency over education, and by understanding that it adheres to neoliberal policies emphasizing numerical outcomes, such as the data of passing composition students over social justice approaches, which require much more extensive wraparound supports and slow systemic interventions, we may find that, contrary to the ways in which it is promoted, ALP's acceleration of basic writers complies with social inequality rather than combats it. Some evidence of this point was found in a longitudinal study of ALP at CCBC done by the Community College Research Center already in 2012. Sung Woo Cho, a researcher who analyzed the data, admitted that while

evidence clearly showed that ALP students had better persistence through comp 1 and 2, "analyses suggested that ALP was more effective for white students and also the higher income students" ("TRPP TALKS").

In his influential book *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*, first published in 1976, Richard Ohmann argued that composition courses in American colleges and universities were reinscribing social injustices and class divisions. According to Ohmann, by teaching students through "skills drills" and other formulaic methods of writing instruction that were common at the time, writing classes were inadvertently preparing students for deskilled, repetitive work in the job force. He posited that instead of such routinized instruction, we should be teaching students of writing "critical thinking." And by this, Ohmann meant anti-capitalist analysis and the complex thinking that *takes the time to* understand how hegemonic power works and how to oppose the oppressive systems that structure our relationships and control our lives. Nearly fifty years later, Ohmann's work is still important for its reminder that composition programs and course sequences, like the colleges and universities in which they are embedded, when capitulating to capitalist forces, can reinscribe social inequity, reproduce oppression, and cultivate the conditions for alienated labor for both students and instructors. An important role of social justice educators, as Suh et al. have argued, is to acknowledge the institutional oppression that Ohmann reminds us of and work to dismantle it while continually reflecting "on our own socialization and assumptions" (6).

To be clear, by invoking Ohmann, I am not suggesting a return to non-credit bearing remedial courses that culminated in high stakes tests, effectively functioning as unmovable gates, blocking too many students from ever earning an advanced degree. For there are some important benefits to ALP writing classes, namely the corequisite aspect, which enables students to earn credits while doing the work of college courses; and the smaller cohort, which offers the possibility of more personalized instruction. At Kingsborough, for example, ALP classes are capped at 8 students who get 2 hours of extra instruction on top of the standard 4 hours of class time integrated with the rest of the composition class. This manageable class size, a key component of the original ALP model developed by Peter Adams at CCBC, allows time to get to know and respond to the individual needs of each student writer and more opportunity to do essential one-on-one writing workshops. It also enables ALP students to ask for help when they need it. I worry, however, that these benefits are far outweighed by the larger accelerated pipeline structure of ALP, particularly as it now functions at all

six of CUNY's community colleges, which were mandated by the Office of Academic Affairs to phase out stand-alone developmental courses and replace them with corequisite ALP models by fall of 2022. Understood with this top-down mandate in mind, ALP appears to operate as an arm of a corporatized university more interested in credentializing students than teaching them, offering a fast ineffective fix—a pass through the composition pipeline—for structural problems equally impacting students' lives and learning. And by participating uncritically in ALP's accelerated pipeline process in the name of social equity, many justice-oriented composition instructors are becoming alienated from their work and unclear about the value of their teaching/labor. Recent research on faculty attitudes toward corequisite reforms at CUNY demonstrates that as ALP faculty face the daunting challenge of teaching "more content in less time," they

> struggle to understand how the accelerated corequisite timeframe could adequately support the needs of all students, particularly those who would benefit from traditional developmental education courses' emphasis on developing the college success skills (e.g., time management, critical thinking, and study skills) necessary for long-term success. (Fay et al. 18)

Although ALP writing instructors (hopefully) are no longer teaching the formulaic writing methods Ohmann criticized, they might still be preparing students as unskilled workers, thereby reproducing an underclass suited only for the lowest level jobs. By buying into (no pun intended) the prevailing pipeline framework and notion that their main responsibility as ALP instructors is to move basic writers along through the college system, and quickly, they may be scaling back on requirements and instruction, e.g., reducing the number of units/assignments/drafts, covering less challenging reading or replacing it with more accessible visual media, abandoning the teaching of scholarly articles and the research required to find them, and devising endless, easier ways for students to get better grades. By providing ALP students with only bare bones literacy skills, instructors are contributing to a wider "dumbing down" of young Americans due to years of disinvestment from and attacks on public education (Hartman 2022). And, because learning is always a two way street, ALP students who also buy into the ALP pipeline's accelerated ride through composition requirements may be less likely to take the time to avail themselves of the extra help instructors provide, such as office hours, or the extraneous services on offer, such as writing tutoring,

which is not automatically structured into ALP at Kingsborough, as it once had been in longer developmental course sequences. In their 2019 survey of faculty at three CUNY community colleges, Ilse Schrynemakers et al. found that most instructors "perceived students' reading and writing skills as below necessary proficiency levels for college" and did not feel that changes to developmental education, including the adoption of ALP, were effective. They report that results "showed faculty's desire for higher academic standards, including more stringent college placement thresholds; the maintenance and expansion of semester-long developmental education sequences; and the need for more reading and writing instruction in all credited content areas." In a follow up study one year later, these researchers found that 59% of faculty perceived grade inflation, and 37% believed that the expansion of ALP and elimination of developmental sequences would result, or already has resulted, in the lowering of academic standards (Lane et al.). Corroborating this evidence, I admit that since the pandemic in my own ALP course, which is themed around issues of translingualism and language justice, I have had to reduce the amount of reading we do, sadly cutting back on several core texts. This spring I regretfully eliminated James Baldwin's influential work "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me What Is?", which seemed far too difficult for my ALP students, several of whom were still struggling with easier readings. Because I feel so strongly that we should all be teaching Baldwin's text in our basic writing classes, for its courageous reclamation of Black English and brilliant insistence on historical analysis, this cut really hurt, and certainly contributed to my own feelings of alienation.

Instructor Alienation and the Expansion of the ALP Pipeline at CUNY's Community Colleges

While acceleration is being promoted for individual, institutional, and even national economic gains, CUNY has joined the speed learning bandwagon, gradually growing ALP writing at its community colleges until it has eclipsed the developmental sequence. (For instance, Kingsborough started with only five ALP sections in 2013; in fall of 2023 we ran over ten times that with 57 ALP sections.) But amid this educational culture of acceleration, another powerful movement is brewing. Books such as *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* by Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*'s special trends report, *Burned out and Overburdened* (Jan 2021), along with articles such as "The Great Faculty Disengagement" (McClure Fryar) (and as I write this article, in my inbox,

Chronicle of Higher Ed's latest, "Overcoming Faculty Fatigue"), warn us that the neoliberal landscape of higher education and the academy's culture of acceleration is overwhelmingly alienating for instructors. Berg and Seeber demonstrate clearly that higher education's neoliberal emphasis on speed, productivity, and efficiency is making college and university instructors unwell. Our responsibilities, according to the authors, have "ballooned" (their words) far beyond our job descriptions and ken. Seeking to address this increasingly alarming problem, the Modern Language Association (MLA), the largest professional organization for professors of language and literature, chose "working conditions" as its theme in 2023. In his winter newsletter, Christopher Newfield, the MLA president at the time, explained the choice for the theme in this way: "Your work had additional care labor layered on during the pandemic, and this labor has not been removed. You've knocked yourself out to maintain educational quality in a year summarized by the headline 'My College Students Are Not OK' (Malesic)." More recently, a Call for Papers for a special issue of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* (47.1 Fall 2023), edited by Jacob Babb and Jessie Blackburn, indicates that those of us administering composition have hardly escaped "the consequences of burnout, exhaustion, and low morale" resulting from the "shifts in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic and the tumultuous sociopolitical landscape of the 2020s." They call for research "toward administrative practices that make space for carework and well-being."

We need look only as far as our own ALP writing courses to see some of the ballooning of responsibilities that Berg and Seeber discuss. Certainly, in the more than 25 years that I have been involved in directing developmental writing at both private and public institutions in New York City, including Kingsborough, I have watched the demands on instructors of basic writing increase unsustainably. Basic writing instructors have long been called upon to do tremendously heavy lifting—to create sophisticated scaffolding for the diverse learning styles, different levels of preparation, and multilingual and multicultural orientations of their classrooms. Still, the simultaneous occurrences of the long pandemic and CUNY's wide-scale institutionalization of ALP have further exacerbated our exhaustion. ALP writing faculty at Kingsborough and elsewhere are now tasked with an ever increasing list of duties, including mastering multiple technologies, online platforms and multi-modal approaches; performing emotionally draining psychological and classroom management interventions during a time of increased mental illness; being expected to know and counsel students about rapidly changing and shrinking school resources; maintaining COVID-19 safety

protocols; drumming up clever ways to sustain student attention and course engagement because focus appears more fractured than ever, and following up with students who disappear from class by repeatedly calling them on the phone. Plus, at Kingsborough, 42% of ALP courses are currently taught by adjuncts or other non-tenure track faculty whose labor there, as elsewhere in colleges across the nation, is already alienated by stressful job precarity including "short contracts, no assurance of renewal, low pay" and " little if any say in faculty governance or in the making of the curriculum" (Ohmann and Schrecker). Almost another 30% of ALP classes at KCC are taught by literature PhDs or creative writers, some with little exposure to composition pedagogy or developmental education theory. And while our tiring duties and unmanageable expectations have multiplied since the pandemic, at several of the CUNY community college campuses, faculty have not yet fully returned to campus. The resulting ghost town feeling of our empty hallways and lack of available community to confer with and confide in has intensified what Karen Uehling identified as the "almost impossible challenge for basic writing faculty to find and enact a professional identity" (66).

These alienating circumstances of ALP writing at CUNY's community colleges have also been aggravated by the administration's adoption of a new placement system to determine college readiness. In 2019, CUNY began using a proficiency index (PI)—an algorithm based on student high school GPA plus SAT and Regent scores if/when available. At first pass, this new placement metric seemed promising because it takes multiple student measures into account, as opposed to earlier placement mechanisms that used timed assessment tests, such as the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW). In practical application, however, the CUNY placement PI is dysfunctional to the degree that there are "major concerns" about its effectiveness across colleges among faculty, staff, and administration (Fay et al. 14). Typically, in the ALP courses I teach every semester, fully half of the ALP cohort—at least 4 out of 8 students—seem misplaced. Often the strongest student in the entire composition class is placed in ALP, and at least 2 or 3 other students placed in ALP would be much better served by ESL courses. The remaining half of the ALP cohort usually needs more than the minimally supportive extra two hours that Kingsborough's model offers. And my ALP courses don't seem to be an exception in this regard, for Fay et al. found that "there is widespread perception" among CUNY faculty that "there is a lack of available [ALP] models appropriate for students with more profound support needs" (7). This problem is partly the result of a general trend of ALP over placement/under placement because CUNY's PI algorithm still does not

combine, as Hunter Boylan correctly asserts placement measures should, "standard indicators together with assessment of affective characteristics and life circumstances" (Levine-Brown "Interview" 20; See Boylan). On balance, Kingsborough faculty and students alike are befuddled by the results of the ALP placement system, and the particulars of the algorithm have not been clarified or broken down for us by the administration. But while students don't understand why they land up in the ALP support class, which demands two more hours of their precious time, what they do understand well is that time is money. So, they are resentful—and definitely stigmatized—because they must stay longer than the other students, or come earlier, or worse yet, commute to our far-off campus on an entirely different day to attend the ALP class. As a result, ALP students often want to leave ALP lessons early or skip them entirely. In response, ALP instructors feel pressed to construe the ALP support portion as entertaining, well-spent time. At Hostos Community College, for example, instructors spin the ALP class as a "cozier" Composition 1 or the "English 110 after-party" (Fay et al. 4).

What's more, burgeoning trends in composition and basic writing theory that have called for even more labor from writing instructors might be making our alienation worse. For instance, the trend advocating practices of extreme flexibility in assessment and curriculum design (see, for example, Powell's call for "Absolute Hospitality in the Writing Program") can make it hard for ALP instructors, particularly at institutions like mine where our quarters are only 12 weeks long, who must operate within a time bound term and vis a vis the ALP passing pipeline. These instructors need to set boundaries about when writing is due, and the very notion of flexible time for the completion of assignments is directly undercut by the forceful speed-focused model of the accelerated pipeline. Other trends, such as those suggesting we hone new areas of expertise beyond our job descriptions, folding in work that should not be ours (see, for example, Bruno's suggestions that we integrate institutional policy into our courses), while admirable in so far as that they correctly identify the needs of students that exceed writing instruction, may also add to our burden. Finally, all these discrete classroom solutions create more alienating labor for ALP writing instructors by ignoring Deborah Mutnick's salient point that we cannot solve students' unpreparedness for college because "the root causes of weak literacy and other academic skills are not located in the sphere of education—teachers, curricula, methods—but rather in oppressive social structures and growing economic inequality." By putting the onus on ALP instructors to solve sys-

temic problems with classroom-oriented pedagogical changes, these trends play into the neoliberal culture of job creep undergirding our alienation.

Conclusion: ALP's Accelerated Pipeline vs. CUNY's Broken Plumbing

The alienation of CUNY's ALP instructors matters in a discussion of post pandemic basic writing because teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions, as Diane Ravitch has famously observed. Kingsborough's campus is a perfect example of Ravitch's point, with its aging infrastructure in obvious disrepair due to years of austerity and further neglect from disuse during the pandemic. Last spring, for the entire semester, the computers in our classroom did not work properly. Despite multiple visits from Information Technology Service staff, the computers could not maintain internet access, so students repeatedly lost written work mid-task, until many gave up and used their phones instead. Then, during the final week of class, a water main broke, forcing campus to close for the last few days of the semester, truncating an already short term. Making light of the sorry state of our campus, to which instructors and students have mostly grown accustomed, several of us faculty joked about our unexpected "toilet holiday." We got by with Blackboard, and my students managed to submit their final portfolios, which are assessed for pass or fail by another ALP instructor, virtually from functioning home devices.

Read against the robust image of the accelerated pipeline used in the nationwide promotion of ALP, this local broken plumbing is a humble reminder that things at our colleges and in our classrooms are not working. Rather than just a sad joke about the conditions of our labor and learning space, let this broken pipe be a cautionary tale about ALP, reminding us that beyond the fast fix of the accelerated pipeline through gateway courses, much deep time-consuming structural work needs to be done to fortify both the equity in our students' educations and the wellness of the faculty who want them to succeed. Just as ALP students need nonacademic wraparound support (Mangan) to help them throughout their whole college experience, ALP faculty need extensive assistance to mitigate their alienation and safeguard against their burn out ("Burned Out and Overburdened"). Faulty college placement systems that reduce students to numbers, like CUNY's current PI algorithm, can improve by adding the slow and thorough work of interviewing incoming students to better understand their individual starting points, circumstances, and needs (Boylan). And writing programs can benefit from

spacious and thoughtful conversations among ALP faculty toward a better understanding of the crucial terms *social equity* and *social justice* as they relate to the goals of their writing courses and pedagogies; and collective reflection on how the system of higher education works "as an engine of inequality, starting with the inequality of learning, which has worsened as a result of this century's practice of measuring and managing" and "top-down, often autocratic governance" (Newfield) that mandates accelerated solutions for complex problems. Finally, students and faculty need to work together to resist the academy's culture of speed and its juggernaut of neoliberalism, which is barreling over them with the force of faster and bigger—albeit not necessarily better—pipelines.

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