

Cross-Disciplinary Solidarity Through Labor-Oriented Research in WAC

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This article calls for increased attention to labor in WAC research and faculty development. In increasingly neoliberal and corporatized academic contexts, longstanding assumptions of divides among disciplines need to be replaced with solidarity. I argue that one step in achieving solidarity can be labor-oriented WAC research and labor-conscious faculty development. I draw on a study of emotional labor in writing-intensive disciplinary courses to demonstrate the potential for research revealing commonalities such as shared values and experiences of management. I close with calls for areas of inquiry in research and attention in faculty development.

In a recent article in the *Labor Studies Journal*, Seth Kahn and Amy Lynch-Binieck (2022) argue for a shift in emphasis from “activism” to “organizing.” Discussing this shift in the context of ongoing needs for equity and inclusion in higher education, and noting that the burdens of activism can fall more heavily on traditionally marginalized groups, Kahn and Lynch-Binieck note that “organizing” foregrounds collaboration and group involvement, not the actions of individuals (pp. 324-325). Their proposed “rhetorical and structural shift” could, they argue, “build solidarity in the face of increasing precarity” (p. 321).

Shifts that support solidarity across disparate groups that might be invested in apparently differing or even competing interests remain as necessary as ever, if not more so, in the face of higher-education labor landscapes that continue their path toward neoliberal values, corporatization, and an academic gig economy. The Covid pandemic did not create these conditions, although it made them more visible for many faculty as institutions reduced budgets, enrollments fell, and faculty lost their jobs. But the ongoing crisis of academic labor has existed for decades.

Writing studies scholars and activists, such as Kahn and Amy Pason, have long called for attention to issues such as precarity and the rise of neoliberal and corporate values in academic institutions. Such attention requires an understanding of institutional contexts, in both local institutions and larger higher-education trends and forces. One important element of these contexts is managerialism—the institutional management of faculty labor, which faculty themselves often participate

in. For example, Marc Bousquet (2003) critiques growing managerialism (and its accompanying divisions and discontents), urging rhetoric and composition scholars and managers to look away from managerial discourse and division in order to increase solidarity and resist forces that undermine the idea and power of faculty (p. 235). This urging is echoed in the call within the Indianapolis Resolution, the 2014 statement on labor conditions written by members of the Conference on College Composition and Communication Labor Caucus, to resist the managerialism that can accompany professionalism and to join professionalism with activism (Cox et al., 2016). Donna Strickland (2011) traces the history of managerialism in composition and argues that critiquing managerial power and relations is essential to improving material conditions for faculty. All of these critiques and calls highlight the importance of institutional structures, people, expectations, and values in shaping not only material conditions but also academic freedom.

Attending to these calls becomes even more crucial in the context of a higher-education landscape characterized by fears of declining student enrollments and shrinking budgets—fears that occur in institutions that are also embracing corporate and neoliberal values and practices. Under these conditions, austerity measures, values that are more corporate than academic, and precarity are potential conditions for all faculty. For example, in the introduction to their collection of essays on austerity and composition, Tony Scott and Nancy Welch (2016) describe some of the dangers of an austerity culture, including a reductive emphasis on metrics and a turn to a “corporate audit culture” (p. 12); and noted that these conditions are now affecting all disciplines (p. 5). Scott (2016) cautions that a turn toward entrepreneurialism (encouraged in the cash-strapped neoliberal university) could undermine higher education’s service of the public good; although he focuses on its effects in the field of composition, entrepreneurialism can be found in departments across most universities.

Not only do precarity and contingency affect those in the contingent positions, but widespread contingency has broader negative effects on academia: it undermines faculty governance (Cross and Goldenberg, 2009), academic freedom and faculty power (Ginsberg, 2011), and the ongoing stability of higher education itself (Bousquet, 2008). Austerity, accountability, and audit regimes can also affect faculty well-being, whether through tenure reviews (Sheffield and Muhlhauser, 2021), the scope and quantity of everyday employment expectations (Lackritz, 2004), or work-life balance (Jacobs and Winslow, 2004). As Anicca Cox et al. (2016) argue, the spread of neoliberalism in higher education can lead to feelings of “inevitability, enormity, and isolation”—and then despair (p. 41). These effects can be felt by all faculty, no matter their discipline or rank.

This sampling of warnings and critiques indicates problems with institutional structures and conditions across the curriculum and thus the need to address them in solidarity, across all disciplines and ranks. The cross-disciplinary connections of writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs could well be a fruitful source of such solidarity wherever possible—including in the faculty development connections between writing studies faculty and administrators and disciplinary faculty teaching writing. Finding the possibilities for those avenues and then forging the connections will require new research in WAC, with a focus on disciplinary writing instruction as labor, particularly in local political-economic institutional contexts, and with attention to both the commonalities among faculty and the managerial structures and conditions that affect their labor.

Since “labor” has been extensively theorized and variously defined, I want to offer a brief explanation of how I understand “labor” and “management.” I am using here Kahn and Pason’s (2021) concept of labor, which insists that labor comprises both the tasks involved and the worker’s relations with management. As Kahn and Pason explain, “[I]f we’re not talking about how work is managed, we’re not talking about labor issues” (p. 114). This concept of labor has the benefit of aligning with calls in WAC faculty development for attention to local institutional contexts and managerial structures (e.g., Condon et al., 2016, p. 31). Furthermore, this emphasis on managerial structures aligns with institutional ethnography’s emphasis on the coordination of people’s activities as an object of study (as I will discuss later) and with concerns in academia about the effects of administrative values and choices on faculty and their labor. “Management” is a crucial component of academic labor: institutional policies, practices, and procedures influence what faculty do, how they are held accountable, how (and whether) they are compensated and rewarded, and whether the material support for their labor is sufficient. At the same time, as I will discuss, the nature and degrees of management have fostered division among faculty instead of prompting solidarity. Using these concepts, I am calling on WAC researchers and faculty developers to normalize the consideration of labor issues in research and faculty development, and I offer an example of what such research might look like.

In 2015, Michelle LaFrance made a similar call: “It is time to make labor concerns a central component of forthcoming statements in WAC/WID [writing in the disciplines] programmatic work and a more central component of research in this sub-field of writing studies” (p. A15). LaFrance focused mainly on the labor conditions of contingency and emphasized the importance of labor-oriented research for the sustainability of WAC programs, a focus and emphasis more specific than the broader solidarity issues that I am considering. It is notable that though she pointed to these gaps and limitations in WAC research in 2015, little has been done to address them since then.

While WAC research has not examined the labor of disciplinary writing instruction directly, some scholarship has at least implicitly acknowledged labor and management issues such as rewards and workloads. For example, in the conclusion of their study of faculty development, William Condon et al. (2016) note that universities must materially value and reward teaching and faculty development in order to support an institutional culture that values teaching (p. 123). Faculty development and changes to teaching methods that require additional labor should be institutionally recognized and compensated. For example, Jody Swilky (1992) describes a faculty member who, after participating in faculty development, wanted to revise his course to incorporate more writing instruction, but he did not do so because of the increased labor that it would require. A further structural constraint on faculty development appears in Condon et al.'s (2016) finding that nontenure-track faculty were reluctant to significantly innovate because of fears of the effects on their student evaluations (pp. 64–65). Pamela Flash (2016) touches upon the institutional context of labor in the conclusion of her discussion of reflection and faculty development, questioning whether economic forces could undermine the sustainability of faculty-development efforts (p. 248). Studies such as these fleetingly acknowledge the realities of academic labor, the political economy and managerial choices that might constrain faculty in their desire to support student writing and learning.

In this article, I call for more research to explore the political economy of academic labor, as well as the ways faculty experience that labor in disciplinary writing instruction. I argue that in doing so, we can add new dimensions to our understanding of disciplinary writing instruction, building additional bridges to faculty development and labor solidarity. In particular, I am arguing that with more research into faculty's experiences of the management of their writing-instruction labor, writing studies faculty can find common ground and cause with their colleagues across the university. As faculty better understand the institutional structures that shape both material conditions and academic culture, they can thus perhaps better navigate and influence those structures. I will first describe signs of separation between writing studies faculty and faculty in other disciplines. I will then present insights into disciplinary faculty's values and methods in teaching writing and into the institutional structures that affect that labor. I draw from a study of emotional labor in writing instruction in the disciplines that used institutional ethnography, a methodology well-suited for an exploration of structures and management. I will close with some suggestions and questions for labor-conscious faculty researchers and developers to consider.

Signs of Separation: Disciplinary Siloing across the University

While writing studies faculty and disciplinary faculty do collaborate within WAC initiatives, potential commonalities and connections—bridges to understanding and

solidarity—are sometimes overlooked, and even undermined, in WAC literature, perhaps in part due to a history of disciplinary faculty questioning the disciplinarity of writing studies or criticizing the “products” of first-year writing classes. For example, in his plenary talk at the 2021 International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference, Chris Thaiss listed addressing the complaining questions of colleagues in other disciplines (“Why doesn’t the English department / writing program do its job?”) as part of the “fearlessness” required in WAC labor (p. 9). These types of questions suggest that such interactions with colleagues are something that we might fear.

Even when conversations with colleagues in other disciplines do not involve the potential for critique, defensiveness, fear, or courage, they sometimes occur across pedagogical and dispositional gaps. Thaiss, for example, highlighted the “complacent walls of disciplinary jargon,” “awkward conversations,” and “our own ignorance of others’ expertise” (pp. 8–9). While he urged WAC faculty to listen, “and keep listening to, and learning from people across an institution whose views on students and the goals of education differ from our own” (p. 9)—a laudable call to bridge differences—the emphasis on separation, on difference, remains. There are efforts to achieve common ground, but within an assumed context of a lack of it.

Faculty developers, too, have sometimes operated from a position of separation and difference. Joan A. Mullin (2008), for example, highlights the frequency of this position even as she seeks to bridge it. She criticizes “a traditional, missionary form of knowledge transmission,” in which a more knowledgeable WAC faculty developer engages with a disciplinary faculty member who needs to be “converted” (pp. 498–499). Instead, she argues for a more collaborative relationship grounded in rhetorical listening. While in this case the writing studies expert is not in a position of “fear” or defensiveness, the assumption of difference and separation remains.

Such assumptions potentially undermine the kinds of connections and collaboration that support understanding and solidarity. Moreover, they can exacerbate the tendency among writing studies faculty to identify as victims—the “wound attachment” and “rhetoric of subjection” that Laura Micciche (2007) describes (p. 36). When we believe that we require fearlessness to engage with our colleagues in other disciplines, or that we must overcome resistance or convert them, we inadvertently solidify a long-standing set of perceived power relations in which composition sits near the bottom. Moreover, as Micciche argues, when we maintain an attachment to the subjected identity, “[c]omposition’s emotional and institutional subordination then functions as an identity marker rather than a source of critique and change” (p. 40). It is difficult to effect change, whether in disciplinary writing instruction or labor conditions, when one is in a defensive crouch.

This is not to say, of course, that there are no differences between writing faculty and faculty teaching writing in other disciplines, nor that institutional systems and

individual faculty do not devalue composition. There are, and they sometimes do. In fact, there is a body of literature devoted to exploring the sources, history, and meaning of that divide, particularly, but not exclusively, as it appears within English departments. Feminist scholars often point to the historically gendered demographics and perceptions of composition: a predominantly female faculty, engaged in what was perceived as “care” (Schell, 1998, ch. 4) or hygiene (Strickland, 2011, p. 40) work on a contingent basis. These characteristics contributed to composition’s lower status, especially in comparison to disciplines engaged in the supposed “real” work of the university, not the “clean-up” of callow first-year students. Also emphasizing the role of gender and feminization in composition’s separation and low status, Susan Miller (1991) explores these dynamics in detail in her history and analysis of the relationship between composition and literary studies, pointing to the broader political and hegemonic systems that both determined the fate of composition and were sustained by it.

As Miller describes, institutional values, systems, and practices contributed to the separation of composition from literature and other disciplines; in other words, these separations occur within institutional structures and managerial and cultural practices in which all faculty are enmeshed. For example, Kahn (2020) argues that while institutions might claim to “value” teaching, they often do not, and this devaluing is signaled through lower pay, contingency, larger class sizes, and implicit characterizations of teaching as punishment—conditions that affect faculty in all disciplines. Courses and faculty most associated with teaching (general education courses, first-year writing, contingent faculty) feel the negative material effects of this devaluing the most, along with marginalization in relation to other courses and faculty.

When these structural and managerial forces are more overt, as in first-year writing (Strickland, 2011), this association with managerialism can contribute to the separation between writing studies and other disciplines instead of fostering solidarity born out of commonalities. Scott (2009) and Bruce Horner (2016) both argue that the perceived association among bureaucracy, management, and composition can lead to separation between writing studies and other disciplines. Scott distinguishes between “professionals” and “bureaucrats”: professionals (scholars and faculty in more managerial roles) have more autonomy, expertise, and prestige, while bureaucrats (among whom are composition faculty) “are more highly managed” and lack prestige (pp. 43–44). Horner, too, argues that composition’s “low academic status” is not due to any actual lack of disciplinarity but to other disciplines’ discomfort with the ways that the material labor conditions of composition reveal structures and relationships that other disciplines would like to pretend do not exist (p. 167). In other words, composition confronts faculty in other disciplines with the labor realities of academia, including the reality that academic labor is in fact managed—realities to

which they are subject, too, as I have described above.¹ Thus, one of the foundations of separation between writing studies and other disciplines is actually grounded in our common condition of laboring within institutional structures that affect our teaching labor.

The particularities of separation between writing studies and other disciplines, despite shared challenges, occur within academic cultures prone to widespread division and silos. In arguing for greater coordination among different employee cohorts in universities, Daniel Scott and Adrianna J. Kezar (2019) claim, “For too long in higher education, different worker groups have conceived of themselves as separated by distinct, even competing interests and priorities” (p. 101). These self-conceptions, according to Scott and Kezar, undermine efforts to engage in the activism and solidarity that Kahn and Lynch-Binieck call for: “The isolation of different types of higher education workers reduces communication, fosters unawareness of common interests, and hinders the ability to effectively collaborate in solidarity. . . .” (p. 101). In times of austerity and calls for individual entrepreneurship, these silos may well extend beyond departments and cohorts to include faculty who feel compelled to look out for themselves. Efforts to bridge the separations between writing studies and other disciplines must thus also attempt to account for the myriad other separations that undermine solidarity and faculty activism—separations that may benefit institutional structures and individuals who want to heighten forms of management that work against faculty power.

Because WAC is inherently collaborative and involves bridge-building across disciplines, especially in faculty development, it is an important site for exploring the spread of detrimental labor conditions and the possibility of solidarity and activism. But by focusing on differences, separations, and dismissals, and by assuming that broad gaps and strong resistance exist, writing studies scholars and faculty developers might be coming to these relationships with their guard up—and their minds made up—already casting themselves as different, separate, and even lesser before their colleagues have the chance to do so. I believe that further exploration of disciplinary writing instruction as labor, in its local institutional context and within larger institutional structures, can mitigate such tendencies because (as I discuss in the next section) it can reveal commonalities and insights that can serve as the foundation to labor solidarity and action.

1. In fact, WAC courses serve as especially fruitful sites of research into curricular and pedagogical management in other disciplines because they often require courses to include certain pedagogical elements and practices, and they might also insist that WAC faculty participate in faculty development.

What Labor Research Can Reveal: Insights from an Institutional Ethnography of Disciplinary Writing Instruction

In order to overcome perceived differences in values and status and lay the groundwork for navigating and changing managerial practices that negatively affect faculty, WAC administrators and faculty can find sources of commonality and solidarity by researching the labor of disciplinary writing instruction. The latter involves exploring the practices and experiences of faculty whose teaching tasks are managed, not only because of the requirements of a WAC program but also because they are employees subject to the policies, requirements, and expectations of an academic institution. I undertook such a study in the fall of 2020, conducting an institutional ethnography of the emotional labor of faculty teaching “W2” courses (writing-intensive courses that fulfilled a second-level university writing requirement) at a mid-sized, R1 private university. In this section, I will present two areas of insight—the values and the experiences of institutional structures and management—that demonstrate some of the potential of labor research in general and institutional ethnography in particular.

Institutional ethnography (IE) is a fruitful methodology for research into WAC labor, in part because IE is intended to examine workplace activities as they are managed (or coordinated, in IE terms) and experienced. As Michelle LaFrance (2019) says in her book on IE and writing studies research, “IE enables us to systematically study the hierarchical systems of labor, professional systems of value, and notions of expertise and prestige that structure the realm of higher education, the field itself, and our local actualities as these are manifest in, around, and through writing” (p. 12). Developed by sociologist Dorothy Smith (2005), IE provides an epistemological framework and research methods that surface the often-overlooked relationships among employees, their activities, management structures, and the norms and values of the institution. It directs attention to particularities and calls on the researcher to resist broader generalizations or prior theorization; it also relies on the researcher’s rigorous, iterative, impressionistic interpretation (instead of relying only on the coding) of the various connections, coordinations, and disjunctures (Campbell and Gregor, 2004, pp. 84–85). Smith (2005) argues that institutions coordinate employees’ activities, usually via institutional texts, and that this coordination reveals the “ruling relations” (the norms and values) of the institution (p. 227). Crucially, IE insists that individuals participate in their coordination; coordination is not control. However, IE also highlights the institutional accountability structures that track, evaluate, and reward or criticize individuals. Moreover, an important component of IE research that pertains to my study is the recognition that there might be gaps, resistances, and disjunctures in institutional coordination.² IE can therefore reveal the complexities

2. LaFrance (2019) provides multiple examples of IE’s power to illuminate labor conditions in writing studies. IE has been used elsewhere to study academic labor, although not WAC labor or teaching labor; see, for example, McCoy (2014) and Wright (2014).

of managerial functions in an institution, as well as the values and norms embedded in those functions and the ways that faculty experience them.

The study that I undertook involved eighteen participants from a variety of faculty cohorts (adjunct, term, tenure-track) and disciplines (arts, sciences, humanities, and social sciences; professional schools of public affairs, international service, and business), and a mix of age ranges, teaching experience, and genders. Three participants were faculty of color, roughly reflecting the broader demographics of faculty teaching W2 courses. I conducted focus groups with fifteen of the participants; with the other three, I met for three individual interviews throughout one semester. In keeping with the principles of IE, I drew on participants' experiences as a source of knowledge and expertise. Also in accordance with IE, I collected documents that were disciplinary (e.g., accreditation standards), institutional (e.g., personnel policies, W2 requirements, department-level learning outcomes), and course-specific (e.g., syllabi, feedback on student writing). I used these documents to trace the institutional management of participants' activities and compared that tracing to participants' descriptions of their experiences.

These faculty had taken advantage of various forms of support for teaching W2 courses. The proposal form for creating a new W2 course, or converting an existing course to a W2, required faculty to understand elements of writing pedagogy such as high- and low-stakes assignments, writing-to-learn activities, interactive feedback, and information literacy; the general education program and the faculty committee overseeing the W2 courses offered workshops to help faculty learn these concepts and prepare their proposals. Six participants had been members of faculty-learning communities for faculty teaching W2 courses. All three interview participants indicated involvement in some form of professional development related to writing instruction, whether it was a university-sponsored workshop, a disciplinary conference session, or social media or blogs by colleagues knowledgeable in pedagogy. Nonetheless, most participants expressed at least some feeling that they did not know enough about teaching writing.

In the discussion that follows, I will focus on participants' experiences and their feelings about those experiences. I will highlight two areas of insight drawn from this study: participants' values regarding writing instruction and their experiences of institutional management. I believe that these areas serve as examples of the rich material that can be garnered from labor research—material that can provide a foundation for better understanding managerial structures and experiences and thus for labor solidarity and action.

Participants' Values for Writing Instruction

As we explored their emotional labor, study participants described values concerning teaching and learning, including a deep sense of obligation to student learning and

satisfaction in their identities as teachers, that will appear familiar to faculty in writing studies. They clearly gave a great deal of their intellectual attention to pedagogy, including ways to support student writing development. All of these professed values indicate shared ground with writing faculty, a foundation of care and commitment that could ground common cause in labor solidarity, an understanding of shared structures, and even labor-oriented faculty development.

In their study of WAC faculty development, Condon et al. (2016) found that contrary to conventional wisdom that disciplinary faculty only care about research, “teachers care deeply about their teaching” (p. 62). The participants in this study, too, consistently expressed that they cared about their teaching and about student learning, including student writing development. Sam,³ a government professor in one of the focus groups, put it simply: “But I’m also a teacher, because I’m interested in doing a good job for my students and with my students.” Sam not only embraced the identity of “teacher” but also equated that identity with supporting his students.

Participants also revealed that they recognized their own responsibility for student writing development, although they often worried that they lacked the means to fulfill that responsibility. Eight of the focus-group participants and all of the interview participants indicated a lack of confidence in their ability to teach writing. For example, Karen, a psychology professor, voiced both her feelings of inadequacy in her writing-pedagogy knowledge and her obligation to still support students’ writing development: “So I definitely have an incredible respect for the people who do this, and this is their job, to teach undergraduates how to write, and I, I don’t even know that I would know the first place to start to do it according to maybe general practices and principles, but I do my best.” Similarly, Miriam, who teaches art history, expressed both anxiety and obligation: “I do feel like a little bit panicked, actually, when I, when a student like replies, and it’s like, Oh, I need even more specific advice, and I think, oh, you know, I hope I’ll be able to do this.” These faculty understood what their jobs required of them in the W2 classes, but they worried that they might not be able to fulfill those requirements.

Despite such concerns, ten of the focus-group participants and all of the interview participants expressed a belief in the requirements, demonstrating that they shared the values expressed in the W2 course-development materials. An international studies professor, Joseph, explained that he had already been supporting student writing, but the W2 framework helped him to do so: “Because it had always been a writing-intensive course, but [the W2] gave us a frame to actually, you know, really emphasize that part of it.” The W2 label and structure facilitated Joseph’s efforts to teach students to write in his discipline. Others who had not already been emphasizing writing expressed some initial resistance but subsequently experienced a shift

3. All names mentioned in this study are pseudonyms.

in their views. Miriam described the process in this way: “I was reading [student papers], thinking, that one was pretty good, actually. And I read another one. And then it came to me, hey, this might be the W2 actually working. I couldn’t believe it! I didn’t think it would actually work. And it’s like, they’re quite well written.” What is notable here is that not only did Miriam realize the effectiveness of a writing-in-the-disciplines approach but also, even before that realization, she was able to implement the W2 approach. She sufficiently valued the importance of student writing development, and the role of disciplinary writing in that development, to go along with the W2 requirements, do her best to implement them, and help students improve their writing.

All the study participants held strong feelings of obligation and accountability for student learning. This accountability was not codified in university policies (nor did the student evaluations of teaching capture it); instead, participants constructed accountability for themselves—what, based on my research, I am calling “deep accountability,” a multifaceted feeling of obligation constructed from professional identity and values, institutional and cultural influences, and a humane sense of care for students. Participants’ desire to do what the W2 framework required of them was rooted in deep accountability: they believed that the W2 requirements would benefit students’ writing development, and so they tried to follow them and deployed emotional labor to support their students in achieving the W2 learning outcomes.

These faculty often expressed their feelings of deep accountability quite directly. For example, Carl, who teaches chemistry, described a lofty disciplinary purpose for his writing instruction: “But in, in the sciences now, being able to finesse and, and be a good communicator and understanding how to communicate your research topic or just your scientific results in general is just critical, both to the success of your profession, but also this, you know, global enterprise that we’re all in right now.” But Carl also recognized the more specific obligations to students who would have jobs in laboratories: “So you know, if a student goes out and is working at a testing facility, they need to be able to write their, their technical reports in a very specific way, and, and so our students are comfortable doing that on, at graduation, they’re going to be better off when they go to their job. So we all see it as part of our responsibility that this kind of training is important in general.” In both of these cases, Carl constructed a connection between writing instruction and his students’ future writing endeavors. There was no institutional accountability for this preparation, but Carl still believed in it and in the role of his labor in creating successful outcomes for his students.

As I have noted, however, participants also believed that they lacked sufficient knowledge of writing instruction to fully support students. To satisfy their sense of accountability, they supplemented what knowledge they did have with knowledge

they felt confident in: their understanding of students as people and their ability to engage in relational and emotional labor.⁴

Emotional labor involves emotional self-management, and all study participants described experiences of managing or repressing their own feelings so that students could maintain a positive disposition and motivation. Joseph articulated this tension between the frustration or irritation that a teacher might feel and the desire to maintain students' investment and motivation: "I want to write something really, really direct, almost brusque, right now. And I guess to convey the feedback, I need to frame it in something that's a bit more, hopefully, you know, thought-provoking for the student, but also doesn't just instantly frustrate them with me saying, no, you're wrong." Although Joseph had not been trained in providing constructive feedback, he believed in his knowledge of student motivation, based on his years of teaching experience, and used that knowledge to guide his feedback approach. That approach was a form of emotional labor, requiring him to manage the expression of his emotional response—irritation—in order to prompt the desired response in the student writers—motivation to continue to try to improve. Such deployments of emotional and relational labor will likely seem familiar to writing studies faculty—as will the experiences of exceeding what an institution explicitly requires of its faculty.

Indeed, it is important to emphasize that in fulfilling their perceived obligations through time- and energy-consuming emotional labor, participants were not fulfilling explicit institutional requirements, nor would they be held directly accountable for them. Their own sense of professional accountability and their values drove them to exceed what institutional policies explicitly required for writing instruction in their discipline. In other words, they followed the actual W2 requirements and then exceeded those requirements and others related to teaching—demonstrating a commitment to student writing development that surely will seem familiar to writing studies faculty. Yet these insights also indicate complexities and nuances in institutional requirements, structures, and management that might not be immediately visible to faculty, beyond the sense that their labor is not accounted for, recognized, or rewarded.

Institutional Context for the Labor of Writing Instruction

These experiences of the labor of disciplinary writing instruction demonstrate that the study participants believed in the importance of their labor and strived to engage

4. I am relying on Arlie Russell Hochschild's (2012) definition of emotional labor, which involves, in the course of one's job, managing one's own emotions in order to create the desired emotional outcomes in others. Emotional labor has been extensively discussed in writing studies (e.g., Jacobs and Micciche, 2003; Lamos, 2016; Micciche, 2007; Sicari, 2020; Wooten et al., 2020) but not as it pertains to disciplinary writing instruction.

in the labor in ways that would benefit student learning. The experiences occurred within institutional structures, policies, and management that coordinated their labor, but only partially, as these faculty exceeded what was explicitly required in that coordination. Other insights from this study underscore the importance of the context in which labor occurs, the institutional supports and constraints. Participants described complicated relationships with their institution. As I explained above, they believed that the W2 structure aligned with their values of supporting student learning; even those who initially questioned its merit and felt some resistance agreed with it once they saw the positive effects on student writing. Although, as I have noted, some writing studies scholars have argued that the management and bureaucracy associated with composition contribute to composition's low status in institutional hierarchies (e.g., Scott, 2009; Horner, 2016), the participants in this study did not object to the management of their labor when they saw it as benefiting their teaching and their students, and they even described positive changes to their teaching practices resulting from the W2 requirements.

But when these faculty believed that the institution was not acting in the best interests of teaching and learning, they were more critical—and yet they continued to engage in the labor they believed would satisfy the deep accountability they had constructed. These complex relationships of labor and institution provide potentially valuable insights for labor advocates and those who would engage in labor-conscious faculty development, who might build on the shared values and impulses described above to better understand and act in response to labor management.

One such area of insight was the awareness of insufficient institutional material support for disciplinary writing instruction, as ten focus-group participants attested. An area of concern was institutional choices related to class size, which influenced their ability to support student writing development. For example, Steven, a marketing instructor and interview participant, had seventy-five students in three sections of his W2 course. He described his thought process when reading a set of papers in this way: "I mean, right now I'm—you know, 75 papers. I started out really strong and I'm putting in a lot of effort. But then as I look at, okay, well, that just took me 30 minutes, I've got seven—you know, like, it's, okay, I've got to try to shorten this down. And so I want to treat each paper fairly and give them the proper attention and feedback. But you know, there's only so many hours in the day, and you've got to kind of prioritize." Steven felt obligated to give each paper more attention, but he also recognized the material reality of the number of papers that needed attention and the unrealistic labor burden that it entailed.

Similarly, Karen, the psychology professor, responded to my question about institutional expectations for her writing instruction by pointing to class size: "The expectations for me come from the class size. So if you're going to make a W2 class

30 people, and I'm the only instructor, and it's three credits, one semester. . . . Then there's only so much I can do. So you're, you're setting the expectations of how much time I can spend working with students as writers. If there were *ten*, then they'll get better writing instruction. If there's 30, then they're going to get, you know, less—less writing instruction.” Like Steven, Karen could see how material conditions directly affected teaching: there was less time for written feedback and for engagement—emotional and pedagogical—with students.

It is notable that although these faculty were aware that the institution did not create the most positive conditions for their writing-instruction labor, they continued to feel accountable to students. Their desire to support students' writing development and their sense of deep professional accountability compelled them to find ways to do the best they could within those constrained conditions.⁵

Moreover, they did so with the awareness that the institution often did not value or reward this labor. All three interview participants felt that the institution did not sufficiently value teaching in personnel evaluations, including those for term and adjunct faculty, whose primary duty is teaching. Carl said, “I think a lot of the things that we do in, in instruction, it's hard to see where doing well and, and actually having students be proficient and, and good at what we're training them for, I don't think that's really reflected in, in my tenure or advancement progression, or in our term faculty lines progression, either.” (Carl, a tenured professor, serves on committees that review term faculty.) Others expressed uncertainty about how “good teaching” might even be institutionally defined. Miriam was not certain that such a definition existed in her department's guidelines for term reappointment and promotion: “I can't, I can't bring to mind any kind of definition of satisfactory teaching in there, but I know one, one aspect of, for example, the additional things you can submit for your reappointment. One of them is a syllabus, and in there it says specifically, like, that the sources you have in your syllabus are like really up to date.”

Without clear expectations and rewards for teaching, these faculty developed their own sense of deep accountability to student learning, often exceeding the labor explicitly required of them. These dynamics indicate a complicated and often fraught relationship between faculty and the institutional structures and policies that coordinate/manage their labor. Participants pointed to alignments between their professional values for student writing and institutional policies for the W2 classes, but they also highlighted a lack of institutional support and acknowledgement of their labor, including the emotional labor that exceeded explicit requirements. Uncovering these

5. As a result, unfortunately, these faculty sometimes seemed to participate in their own exploitation. In other words, instead of resisting or trying to change potentially exploitative conditions, they tried to make the best of those conditions.

complex relationships through research can open the door to the types of understanding that benefit labor solidarity and action.

Conclusion: Inquiry and Action

Revealing alignments and divergences between those who labor and institutional structures is a hallmark of institutional ethnography (IE). IE allows researchers to examine the particularities of labor experiences and structures and then “look up” to comprehend the broader institutional structures, values, and norms that influence those particularities. As LaFrance (2019) concludes, “As we continue conversations about how IE may enable us to tell stories differently, to uncover what can only be seen when we ‘look up,’ ‘study up,’ or ‘stand under,’ we are also discussing how it is that our research prepares us *to act* alongside others” (p. 136). That is, comprehension leads to action in solidarity with others.

In this IE study of emotional labor in disciplinary writing instruction, participants expressed feelings of obligation, accountability, and care for students and their writing development, as well as a lack of institutional support and recognition—all of which will likely sound familiar to writing studies faculty. Labor conditions often assumed to be the unfortunate lot of composition faculty have now spread across disciplines and faculty ranks: “Today, workers across different groups in higher education face more similar conditions than in past times. Most workers at non-executive levels face job insecurity, shrinking wages, a lack of benefits, de-skilling and de-professionalization, as well as mounting accountability pressures” (Scott and Kezar, 2019, p. 102). This labor study reveals values and experiences that could serve as the foundation to stronger commonalities and solidarity among faculty from different disciplines: deep accountability to student writing development, labor exceeding (often unclear) local institutional expectations, and often inadequate material support and rewards. Moreover, this study reveals successes and insufficiencies in management, both support for improved teaching of writing and policies that do not reward, or even undermine, that teaching.

It is difficult to imagine a path to labor action that does not involve understanding the institutional context in which that labor happens, especially the complexities of the management of that labor. In the case of my study, helping disciplinary faculty to “look up” and recognize their own sense of accountability and obligation, the labor they perform in response to that sense, and the insufficiency of official personnel procedures and policies to reward that labor creates possibilities for change, including action to improve personnel mechanisms. In addition, demonstrating to writing studies colleagues that faculty in other disciplines share not only our values but also our experiences of institutional management creates a foundation to overcoming long-standing separations, leading to solidarity and shared action. Moreover,

these study findings could be useful to faculty developers interested in accounting for labor conditions. For example, WAC faculty development might help faculty reflect on their sense of accountability and obligation to create more effective ways to meet those obligations, or faculty might consider how to deploy emotional labor as efficiently and effectively as possible. Or, perhaps, WAC faculty developers could incorporate analyses of labor conditions and possibilities for solidarity and action into their definition of “faculty development”; for example, in the case of this study, they could consider how to communicate instructors’ labor in personnel files or even strategize to improve personnel policies so that they reward the labor of teaching writing.

More broadly, IE and other forms of research into the labor of disciplinary writing instruction could take a variety of paths that would create a better understanding of writing instruction in the disciplines, WAC academic labor and management, and WAC faculty development—as well as paths to labor solidarity and action. What follows are some suggestions for future paths.

Areas of Inquiry for Labor-Oriented WAC Research

WAC research that brings labor into the picture, either as important context or as the topic of research, can generate new lines of inquiry that provide a fuller picture of disciplinary writing instruction. Researchers might ask questions such as the following:

- How do institutional policies for WAC and for personnel processes associated with teaching occlude power relationships that might exploit or marginalize the labor of women and BIPOC faculty?
- What affordances do disciplinary faculty draw on to help them in the labor of disciplinary writing instruction, especially in the absence of institutional support?
- How do institutional accountability measures for the labor of teaching (such as student evaluations) align with or diverge from faculty’s own sense of accountability to student writing development?

In asking questions such as these, WAC researchers will not only reveal insights that support faculty development and improve instruction: they will also start to forge paths to solidarity by surfacing commonalities among disciplines and premising their research on the idea that labor matters.

Areas of Consideration for Labor-Conscious Faculty Development

WAC faculty development has always been a site of bridge-building across disciplines, and faculty development arising out of labor-oriented research can further

support solidarity by continuing with the premise that labor matters—and that this labor, of disciplinary writing instruction accomplished by committed, caring individuals, should be valued. Labor-conscious faculty developers might consider the following:

- If faculty feel undervalued and unsupported, how can WAC faculty development value and support them? How can faculty development be crafted so as not to perpetuate exploitation via additional burdens and expectations beyond what is explicitly required by personnel policies?
- What unacknowledged resources do disciplinary faculty bring to writing instruction? How can emotional labor, for example, become less of a burden and more of a powerful affordance in conjunction with fuller knowledge of writing pedagogy?
- What role does labor advocacy play in faculty development? Should solidarity and self-advocacy fall under the umbrella of faculty development?

WAC faculty developers already have a great deal on their plates, of course, and so attention to the resources and exploitation of disciplinary faculty must be reflected in attention to the burdens that faculty developers bear. But recognition of the role of labor in disciplinary writing instruction and WAC faculty development might also lead to faculty development that is not only more ethical but also more efficient.

Exigence for Action: We Need to Act Together

WAC initiatives and faculty development have always fostered connections across disciplines, thereby resisting academic siloing. A political economy of increasing precarity and corporatization, though, calls for greater attention to ways of forging connection and solidarity. As Scott and Kezar (2019) argue,

Without collaborating in solidarity across different worker and other constituent groups, members of the higher education community may not be able to resist the harmful trends that have been transforming the sector over the previous decades. Neo-liberal trends like shifting towards increasingly exploitative employment and labor management practices, eroding worker involvement in governance, and lowering the quality of working conditions have been undermining the ability of higher education to serve its students, perform community service, and achieve its research missions. (pp. 101–102)

WAC research, instruction, and development have the potential to be important sites of collaboration in solidarity and of resistance to one of the dangers of neoliberalism:

“Neoliberalism has thus replaced an emphasis on collectivism and the public good with an emphasis on individual competition and entrepreneurialism, converting higher education workers from people with shared interests to a motley collection of individuals who compete with one another for scarce resources” (Scott and Kezar, 2019, p. 110). Scrambling for resources, with an “every-person-for-themselves” attitude, can place faculty into positions of complicity with an exploitative system.

Labor-oriented research and faculty development in WAC are not a panacea, of course, and will not suddenly eliminate corporatization and neoliberal impulses. Solidarity is difficult to achieve, and creating a healthier, more humane political economy in academia is even more difficult. But gaining deeper insights into the labor of disciplinary writing instruction, and then using those insights to support faculty and forge connections with them, can at least be a site of resistance and create important steps toward cultural and institutional change.

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