Writing Analytics: Expanding the Body of Knowledge

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As I began writing this note in early December, I could only feel as if much more than ten months had passed since many of those interested in writing analytics gathered in February, 2020, in St. Petersburg, FL for the 9th Conference on Writing Analytics. Several of the articles and notes in this volume were presented in an earlier form there; discussions of plans for the European Analytics conference in Tartu, Estonia, scheduled for September, 2020, were underway.

The global pandemic changed many plans for 2020, but thanks to the work of our authors, our Board of Reviewers, and our editorial staff and publisher, it did not stop us from producing the published research you'll read here. In this volume, readers will engage a total of nine research articles and notes, along with two book reviews, which serve to help us broaden our knowledge base in writing analytics. We see work that emanates from writing programs, writing centers, and writing courses, as well as from outside of writing studies, the discipline most closely associated with writing analytics.

Ian G. Anson's invited article, "Advancing the Field of Writing Analytics: Lessons from 'Text-as-Data' in the Social Sciences" leads off the issue by reviewing how "text-as-data" research has become a vibrant area of study in political science. Anson then considers how this development could potentially inform the continued growth of writing analytics.

Our research articles come from researchers at Western Michigan University, Case Western Reserve University, and Furman University. In "Peer Review Practice, Student Identity, and Success in a First-Year Writing Pilot Curriculum: An Equity-Minded Analysis," Brian Gogan and Samantha Atkins use McNair et al.'s equity-minded approach as their lens for examining peer review practices in a first-year writing curriculum. They analyze relationships among such

constructs as student practice, student success, and identity markers via data collected from over 750 students to find connections among the constructs as students complete peer reviews in their pilot curriculum. Gogan and Atkins find text-equity gaps occurring even in low-stakes practice that require redress, since they impact student success. Michael Householder and Martha Wilson Schaffer move the discussion from first-year writing course to general education program, and from peer review to reflection, in their article "Writing Analytics and Program Assessment: How Novice Writers Use Rubric Terminology in Reflective Essays." Using mixed methods analytics, they examine reflective writing from students who have taken three of five writing intensive courses in their general education program to consider how such writing can be incorporated more rigorously into programmatic assessment, as well as what evidence of transfer of knowledge about writing is evidenced in the writing. Finally, David Eubanks and Sara Vanovac's "Divergent Writer Development in College" interrogates a methodology used at Furman University for assessing student development as writers over four years. Instructors rate individual students as writers once each semester (in addition to evaluating individual writing assignments from each student during the term); Eubanks and Vanovac examine these ratings for validity and reliability. Their results indicate that the "Matthew effect" indicated by these ratings and other datapoints requires attention from university faculty and administrators to try to lessen divergence gaps.

The five research notes hail from Northeastern University, North Carolina State, University of South Florida, Furman University, and Providence College. These researchers are located in writing programs and writing centers, and their work examines data generated by these locations. Kyle Oddis and colleagues' "Possibilities for a Public-Facing Digital Writing Program Archive in the Age of Analytics" explores the ramifications of both the "archival turn" and the "public turn" on the exploration and use of Northeastern University's digital writing program archive. In their note, they consider the "methodological, legal, ethical, and practical complexities of collecting, sorting, ingesting, and organizing these data with the ultimate goal of making them accessible to the public" (p. 164). Anson et al. examine how novice writers transitioning to post-secondary education conceive of their work in progress through analysis of students' recorded reflections on their ungraded, preliminary drafts. Recordings were "analyzed for time-oriented focus (what was done to produce the draft, what is the status of the present draft, and what needs to be done to revise the draft) and for function-oriented focus (text, meaning/ideas, and audience considerations)" (p. 141). Results from this pilot study suggest directions for future research that could impact how instructors of first-year writing can respond to the different constructs students have of their writing and writing skills.

Alaina Tackitt and David Eubanks' note, "Resetting the Score: Scores as Measures of Learning," focuses on the nexus of rubric scoring and the resulting inferences that program administrators and instructors often draw from the scores. Their discussion of "the reset" that occurred between the courses in the first-year writing sequence calls into question the assumptions surrounding the statement that score increases are indicative of increased student learning. Michael Rose and Suzanne Klonis consider how a developing method for coding

writing, which they term "line matching," can be used to assess higher order traits in student writing. They tackle the problem of assessing high impact practices, such as summer internships and research projects, by applying the line match coding to reflective writing from the students involved in these activities. And Mark Pedretti and Megan Jewell's "Gender Preferences in Writing Center Appointments: The Case for a Metadata-Driven Approach" argues for research in writing centers that invokes the metadata collected in the course of daily operations. The methods they invoke in this note can be adopted by other centers to examine a variety of metadata at their disposal.

Volume 4 concludes with two book reviews. Lauren Cagle introduces readers to D'Ignazio and Klein's *Data Feminism*, which offers readers an ethical, actionable framework in which to consider data-driven studies. Bill Marcellino presents Laura Aull's *How Students Write: A Linguistic Analysis*, which enacts many of D'Ignazio and Klein's recommendations in her work.

The articles, notes, and reviews presented in this volume indeed assist us in broadening the knowledge base and including more stakeholders in writing analytics research. From courses, to programs, to writing centers, our authors present studies that run the spectrum of scope. Smaller pilot studies and large data sets are represented here, while authors clearly engage with many of the ideas presented in D'Ignazio and Klein's text, as well as in Aull's analysis. Diverse methodologies are applied throughout these studies to ends that are both actionable and ethical. But much more can be done; in terms of data sets, researchers can look toward technical or professional writing courses or programs, general education programs, or inter-institutional collaborations. Beginning in 2021, *Analytics* will participate in the WAC Clearinghouse/Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC) Scholars for the Dream (SfD) partnership, which will result in an SfD winner working with the journal in some capacity in 2021–2022. We also anticipate reaching out to our colleagues at two-year colleges, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Native American colleges and universities, and Hispanic-serving institutions to collaborate on projects going forward. And we hope to broaden access to data repositories for conducting analytics research.

Next year will bring two firsts to *Analytics.* In early spring, our first special issue will drop, shortly before the 2021 Convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. And during the conference, Writing Analytics will meet as a Special Interest Group (SIG). We invite all to join us in whatever modalities are available at this gathering. In early 2021, we'll also have information about future North American and European conferences, as well as the CFP and publication schedule for Volume 6 of *Analytics.* We will post information to the WritingAnalytics_L listserv as it becomes available.

In closing, I want to thank everyone involved who made this volume of *Analytics* possible. Our Board of Reviewers continues to go above and beyond in reviewing and offering constructive, insightful commentary on manuscripts, while our editorial staff members listed below have done a fabulous job in moving manuscripts through all phases of the publication process. And, as always, a thanks to our publisher, Mike Palmquist and the WAC Clearinghouse for providing such a wonderful home for *Analytics.* In an exceptional year, we are proud to bring this volume to you and look forward to hearing your response to it.