

# Editor's Introduction:

## Untidy Alignments

*"Beside permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. . . . Beside comprises a wide rang of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations." (Sedgwick 8)*

**E**ARLY IN THE OPENING ARTICLE IN THIS ISSUE OF *OPEN WORDS*, Pegeen Reichert Powell and Danielle Aquiline explain their essay's side-by-side organization: "This format," they write, "and the frantic nature of the reading of it, illustrates our difficulties of going back and forth between students' voices and retention research, our struggle to reconcile both of these discourses into one tidy narrative, and the disjointedness of our understanding of retention." I could not help when I read this sentence during our final editing process but to consider how it spoke to ways this issue of OW itself has been arranged and the ways this arrangement calls attention to the journal's aim to explore the range and dynamics of political, professional, and pedagogical issues related to open admissions and non-mainstream student populations. Consecutive pagination, although not altogether futile, no longer seemed optimal.

Indeed, these articles could all very well be sliced and spliced in ways to create two or more sets of columns throughout. Side-by-side, passages recounting Danielle A. Cordaro's experiences tutoring Michael, a deaf student navigating his first-year curriculum at Purdue, would resonate with Wendy Olson's mapping of the shifting terrains of Basic Writing's social material processes. These mappings would resonate with Robin Murray's work with Native American and returning nontraditional students in an open-admissions college in Oklahoma, and her work would resonate with Cordaro's scrutiny of disability theories and policies, which would resonate with arguments Murray makes for ecofeminist standpoint theory as a frame for literature instruction, which would resonate with the story that Reichert Powell and Aquiline tell of Jenelle, along with Jenelle's own first-person account of the academic experiences, the family life, the institutional supports, faculty interventions, financial issues, and just plain runs of bad luck that determine her persistence rate in school. The frantic nature of reading such works set side-by-side rather than on consecutive pages would illustrate the

need for scholarship in educational access to function more intersectionally, to find ways both at the level of content and level of representation to align and transect the multiple sites and discourses that shape post-secondary education for students considered nonmainstream and to dismantle the undemocratic forces that course through it.

The untidy narrative that is the struggle for educational access persists in discourses that shape theoretical considerations as well as classroom stories and student voices. Its telling involves an aligning of those theories, stories, voices that shape related programs—not just English programs and student services, but disability, gender, and ecological studies, any place discursively and materially related to the critique of dominating culture and the programs, offices, attitudes, and pedagogies that might serve it. Together, essays collected in this issue speak to the broad array of sites through which resistance to elitist and stultifying machinations of the traditional curriculum are underway, and they indicate how an alignment of these sites might destabilize myths that contrive a singular story for mainstream society—a story that elides the fact that nearly 39 percent of all college students attend two-year schools, that 4.4 million students attending Title IV institutions in the U.S. are “minority” students (National Center 3), and that over a third of students in postsecondary education are above the age of 25 (“College Enrollment” 22). We tend to think of *Open Words* as the site at which their resistant stories might gather, as “untidy” as such a gathering might be.

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## Works Cited

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