

“From Administrative Allies to Accomplices: Strategies for Navigating Risk While Advocating for Inclusive Practice as a Non-tenured WPA”

Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2022

Amy Cicchino (amycicchino@auburn.edu), Amy Hodges (amy.hodges@uta.edu), Megan Mize (mmize@odu.edu), Amanda Sladek (sladekam@unk.edu), Sarah Snyder (sarah.snyder@azwestern.edu)

Outcomes

- Discuss how contexts, positionality, and privileges impact the strategies and concrete actions used by untenured WPAs
- Reinforce that WPAs are accountable for social justice in their programs and administrative actions and must performative commitments to equity and inclusion
- Develop and share context-specific strategies for enacting social change in our writing programs and on our campuses

Scenarios and Guiding Questions

Skip to...

- [Room 1: Linguistic Diversity](#)
- [Room 2: Accessibility in Teaching and Learning](#)
- [Room 3: Digital Literacies and Online Composing](#)
- [Room 4: Writing Assessment and Course Placement](#)

Break Out Room 1: Linguistic Diversity

Guiding Questions

- What actions can we take to create changes in institutional writing ecosystems to accept and value students' linguistic diversity?
- What actions protect linguistic diversity, and what actions enact linguistic justice (Baker-Bell)?

As we consider these questions, we must also think about how our positionalities inform our strategies:

- How might we advance actionable change in response to the shared scenario and other related instances?
- What risks might we run in doing so?
- How might we navigate such risks?
- How do we respect the boundaries of identity and belonging?
- Who benefits from these actions?

Sample Scenario

You are directing a Writing Across the Curriculum program at an institution where the majority of students and faculty speak a variety of English dialects as well as White mainstream English, and there is a large population of international students and international faculty. Years ago, the WAC committee passed a requirement that all majors have one upper-division writing-intensive course in their department. Although there is occasionally some grumbling about the requirement, most faculty generally agree that students need discipline-specific training in writing.

You've been invited to join a committee tasked with assessing the senior capstone course taught across all departments in the College of Engineering. You know that all of these departments are interested in showing improvement on their upcoming ABET review,

particularly the outcome that they think the writing-intensive course addresses: “an ability to communicate effectively with a range of audiences.”

At the initial meeting, the conversation shifts to what challenges the faculty members are facing with students’ capstone projects, and they start talking about some of the projects they saw at the most recent set of capstone presentations. “The project was fine, but the report was terrible!” one faculty member laments about one of their capstone teams. “I was embarrassed by that presentation,” another adds, pointing at the names of one mechanical engineering group who worked with a company from India on a medical drone system. “They had grammar errors all over their PowerPoint. They would not present in front of our industry guests if they were in my capstone.”

“Come on now,” interjects one of your engineering faculty allies, who has been a strong supporter of WAC at your institution. “The project was very good, and the industry partner liked the students’ idea – they even hired two of them to work at that company! They are not graduate students. The industry knows they still have some room to grow.”

How do you direct this conversation and this engineering capstone assessment in ways that will promote linguistic diversity in the WAC program?

What risks might we run? How might we navigate such risks?

- You might lose your engineering ally (or mitigate their ability to handle the others).
- You might reify perceptions about White mainstream English as the only dialect used in the workplace.
- You might drive faculty away from writing-intensive courses if those courses appear to mostly serve the WAC program instead of the department.
- Others?

Who benefits from these actions?

- Do engineering faculty benefit from an emphasis on linguistic diversity? The engineering faculty likely think that they are benefitting their students by preparing them for the workplace – see how your ally uses the students’ employment as a reason that the grammar errors weren’t so bad.
- Do students (specifically international students) benefit from an emphasis on linguistic diversity?
- Does the WAC program benefit from an emphasis on linguistic diversity?
- Do industry employers benefit from an emphasis on linguistic diversity?
- Other benefits? Other stakeholders?

Possible Strategies

Please share some strategies below! [Skip to example strategies for this scenario.](#)

•

Additional Resources

Antiracist WAC Toolkit (Syracuse University)

<https://thecollege.syr.edu/writing-studies-rhetoric-and-composition/writing-across-curriculum/antiracist-wac-toolkit/>

- Baker-Bell, A. (2020). *Linguistic justice: Black language, literacy, identity, and pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.
- Canagarajah, S. (2020). *Transnational literacy autobiographies as translingual writing*. New York: Routledge.
- Condon, Frankie & Young, Vershawn Ashanti (Eds.). (2013, August 7). Anti-racist activism: Teaching rhetoric and writing [Special Issue]. *Across the Disciplines*, 10. Retrieved from <https://wac.colostate.edu/atd/special/race>
- Inoue, Asao B. (2015). Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future. *Perspectives on Writing*. The WAC Clearinghouse; Parlor Press. <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives/inoue/>
- Poe, M. (2013). Re-framing race in teaching writing across the curriculum. *Across the Disciplines*, 10(3). Retrieved from <https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/race/poe.pdf>.
- Pedagogue* podcast interview with Genevieve García de Müller
https://www.pedagoguepodcast.com/uploads/4/1/9/0/41908851/genevieve_garc%C3%A1Da_de_müller_transcript.pdf

Break Out Room 2: Accessibility in Teaching and Learning

Guiding Question: How can WPAs move programs away from retrofitting accessibility based on students' legal accommodations towards Universal Design for Learning that accounts for and welcomes disability?

As we consider these questions, we must also think about how our positionalities inform our strategies:

- How might we advance actionable change in response to the shared scenario and other related instances?
- What risks might we run in doing so?
- How might we navigate such risks?
- How do we respect the boundaries of identity and belonging?
- Who benefits from these actions?

Scenario: You are developing shared materials on writing that teachers at your institution can pull from and use in their courses. These include handouts and worksheets on common writing challenges, like using and citing primary and secondary sources in research writing. You are hoping to model accessible practices that will become the new standard across your writing program.

You don't know if the teachers or students using these materials will have disabilities, but you hope to design resources that promote Universal Design for Learning and have built-in accessibility measures. Luckily your writing program has developed [a guide on accessibility and inclusivity](#) that you can refer to as you develop these resources. You also revisit [CAST's Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#).

What risks might we run? How might we navigate such risks?

- Teachers (especially contingent faculty and graduate students) in your program who are already experiencing burnout are worried measures taken to promote accessible design will increase their already high workloads. Asking them to do more could increase ill-will and harm the program's collegial culture. Faculty with the most power in the program might be a source of the most resistance—as an untenured WPA, it can be difficult to push against those sources of resistance.

- Some accessibility standards require expertise and technical knowledge. How can we support all faculty and staff in developing the knowledge they'll need to enact accessible design consistently and to meet certain standards?
- If we neglect accessibility, we hurt our ethos as a program and also make ourselves vulnerable for neglecting a student's legal accommodations.
- Working at cross-purposes with the Office of Disability recommendations which can urge us not to accommodate students without formal letters.
- Does UDL give us a false confidence and exclude student voices in the process of developing inclusive practices.

Who benefits from these actions?

- **Students**, particularly students with (un)reported disabilities who need programs to consider their access and learning needs
- **Teachers**, if they hope to develop technical knowledge on accessible instructional material design
- **The institution**, who reduces their liability for legal risk when students' accommodations are met preemptively. They also may gain this benefit without having to properly compensate teachers and administrators for this additional labor and expertise if the need is met programmatically without additional resources being provided

What specific strategies related to accessibility can you employ as you create these shared programmatic resources? [Skip to example strategies.](#)

- Have members of the departmental community lead workshops on accessibility practices.
 - What if those folks are graduate students?
 - What if there's no money to compensate those facilitators?
- Invite accessibility scholars to Practicum class sessions to bring this conversation responsibly among new teachers.
- Ask new teachers to read Disabilities Studies scholarship.
 - Maybe an FLC?
- Gather free and easy-to-use tutorials (e.g., YouTube's auto-caption and editing tools).
- Voluntary learning circle with shared resources. Have conversations to explore issues related to ableism and racism in classroom and higher ed contexts.
- Model choice in assignment design in all our own classes.
- Work with Centers for Teaching and Learning who might offer course enhancement grants to add criteria for UDL to such course improvements.
- Paid mandated training for the entire staff.
-

Additional Resources

ADA National Network. (2021). What are a public or private college-university's responsibilities to students with disabilities? *Americans with Disabilities Act National Network*.

<https://adata.org/faq/what-are-public-or-private-college-universitys-responsibilities-students-disabilities>

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.

Cedillo, C. V. (2018, Summer). What does it mean to move?: Race, disability, and critical embodiment pedagogy. *Composition Forum*, 39.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1188979.pdf>

- Madden, S. & Wood, T. (2014, July 3). Suggested practices for syllabus accessibility statements. *PraxisWiki Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*.
https://praxis.technorhetoric.net/tiki-index.php?page=Suggested_Practices_for_Syllabus_Accessibility_Statements
- Ross, V. & Browning, E. (2018). From difference to différence: Developing a disability-centered writing program. *Composition Forum*, 39, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1188972.pdf>
- University Writing. [Accessibility and inclusivity guide](#). Auburn University.
- Vidali, A. (2015, Spring). Disabling writing program administration. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 38(2), 32-56.
- Yergeau, M. R. (2016 Fall). Saturday plenary address: Creating a culture of access in writing program administration. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 40(1), 155-165.

Break Out Room 3: Digital literacies and online composing

Guiding Questions

Within our roles, what actions can we take to ensure that activities meant to foster learners' digital literacies and practice writing for online audiences will not harm those meant to benefit from such experiences or further enact systems of oppression?

As we consider these questions, we must also think about how our positionalities inform our strategies:

- How might we advance actionable change in response to the shared scenario and other related instances?
- What risks might we run in doing so?
- How might we navigate such risks?
- How do we respect the boundaries of identity and belonging?
- Who benefits from these actions?

Sample Scenario

ePortfolios are often celebrated for their ability to foster digital literacies while making visible a student's learning process and related experiences. However, by their very nature, ePortfolio assignments can potentially expose students to risk or exclude learners in multiple ways such as: foregrounding identity uncritically, promoting conformity, projecting subjective ideas of "professionalism" onto student narratives, appropriating student work for departmental and institutional ends, running afoul of FERPA and privacy considerations, and assuming ready and stable access to technology, to name a few. At the same time, increased representation can foster change in fields and increase visibility for students often excluded from disciplinary narratives.

You are working with a department or a program that wants to require all students to produce ePortfolios (or a similar online project that could potentially face external audiences) that highlight their learning journey with standardized elements. However, some students express concerns or outright object to the requirement due to feeling this activity exposes them to risk and potential bias from online audiences. The department/program refuses to alter expectations to account for these concerns. How do we ensure that all students can participate in a way that does not harm them and allows the learner to reap the greatest benefit (vs. the institution)?

Possible Strategies

Please share some strategies below! [See example strategies.](#)

- **Ex:** Generate support materials and assignment design that does not assume previous experience or stable access to portfolio platforms and related tools, highlighting available resources or alternative strategies for completing the assignment.
- **Ex:** Include examples of portfolios/assignments that represent a variety of learners, use multiple dialects, and draw on diverse cultural backgrounds.
- **Ex:** Facilitate on-going conversations with faculty and administrators about the purpose and function of such assignments, alerting them to the possible risks and discussing practical strategies for avoiding inflicting harm.
- Solicit student feedback (anonymously but in writing) that can be collected and taken back to admin, departments, etc. to act as a direct conduit for the students to those in positions of power.
- Work with Office of Digital Learning or similar, UDL teams, library, etc. to develop the assignment and draw on our collective wisdom/power to put into place a variety of options for students that adapt to their needs.
- Allow students to opt out of assessment in terms of sharing permissions, etc. and/or use a variety of platforms that allows them not to share it publicly
- Alternative assignments, working through rhetorical choices, modeling ways we can do this work in step with the students
- Work with students to find authentic value in such exercises

What risks might we run? How might we navigate such risks?

- This risk varies depending on your role and connection to the department, though you could certainly alienate powerful individuals who might influence budget issues or cut your program off from meaningful collaborations. Identify allies within the department who might join you in advocating for alternative activities and training.
- Students who already feel vulnerable may not want to serve as mouthpieces or may feel that voicing their objections (even anonymously) could have repercussions.
- We might be circumvented in future efforts, lessening our ability to influence change, or even indicating we are not integral to the success of such work (with a huge caveat here)
- We might get stuck with a platform that protects privacy but doesn't address other concerns
- Instructors might 1) chose to opt-out due to their own concerns about technology, 2) have additional labor to learn technology they aren't compensated for, 3) damage relationships with instructors v. their department heads/administrators
-

Who benefits from these actions?

- It's important to interrogate why we might fight to keep one assignment over another, so we need to genuinely interrogate if the online assignment in question benefits the students, ourselves, the program, etc, the most. Are they being asked to do this so there are public facing student materials that can be shown around to enhance the dept's reputation/marketing? Then that may not benefit the student.
- Students should have a voice in how they are assessed and in what that assessment is used for, how it is used, etc.

Additional Resources

- Boyle, A., Wallace, R., Grace, K., & Sharma, R. (2010). ePIE — ePortfolios for Indigenous educators: Successful partnerships for sustainable solutions. *EPortfolios Australia Conference 2010 Book of Abstracts and Papers*. ePortfolios Australia: Widening participation — engaging the learner, Melbourne, Australia.
https://eportfoliosaustralia.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/eac2010_abstracts_ebook_2010_1214.pdf
- Conefrey, T. (2017). LEADing the way with ePortfolios in a first-generation learning community. *International Journal of EPortfolio*, 7(2), 161–173.
- Hill, C. G., & DeHass, M. C. (2018). Digital representation of indigenous peoples through sharing, collaboration, and negotiation: An introduction. *Museum Anthropology Review*, 12(2), 40–54. <https://doi.org/10.14434/mar.v12i2.23540>
- Singer-Freeman, K., Bastone, L., & Skrivanek, J. (2014). EPortfolios reveal an emerging community of underrepresented minority scholars. *International Journal of EPortfolio*, 4(1), 85–94.
- Wallace, R. (2009). Empowering disenfranchised learner identities through ePortfolios. *Learning Communities: International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts, e-Portfolio Edition*, 104–123.

Break Out Room 4: Writing assessment and course placement

Guiding Questions

- *Within our roles, what actions can we take to ensure that course placement mechanisms (directed self-placement, standardized test scores, placement essays, etc.) are equitable and student-centered while protecting the time/service workload of WPAs in vulnerable positions?*
- *How might we reimagine course placement and/or the writing course sequence to minimize our participation in systems of oppression?*
- *What power do we have within our roles as nontenured WPAs to advocate for antiracist writing assessment practices within our writing programs? How should we go about this work?*
- *What writing assessment practices should we advocate for?*

As we consider these questions, we must also think about how our positionalities inform our strategies:

- How might we advance actionable change in response to the shared scenario and other related instances?
- What risks might we run in doing so? How might we navigate such risks?
- How do we respect the boundaries of identity and belonging?
- Who benefits from these actions?

Sample Scenario

You are working with a department or program that is undergoing an audit/potential redesign of its first-year writing program (to make this as beneficial as possible for you, you can consider your own context when thinking of student population, departmental/institutional politics, etc.).

For the sake of discussion, let's assume the following about the program's current structure:

- There is a non-credit-bearing Basic Writing (BW) course that students must take if they score below a certain standardized testing benchmark (ACT, SAT, or TOEFL).

- If students do not take the BW course, they take a two-semester General Education writing sequence (English 101 and 102) in their first two semesters of coursework. Students who take the BW course start this sequence after completion of BW.
- There are no guidelines for writing instructors in how to respond to student writing or determine grades, and no standardization of first-year writing curricula.
- This structure has been in place for as long as anybody you've talked to can remember.

You have been told by the department chair (or a similar authority figure) that you have the freedom to make any suggestions you want, but as untenured WPAs, we know how loaded that statement can be.

What risks might we run? How might we navigate such risks?

- Take a moment to mentally fill in the gaps in the above scenario with your own institutional context and (to the extent possible) current position. What risks would you run in facing the above scenario? How might you navigate them?
- Risk losing your position without protection of tenure
- Risk losing a basic writing program all together

Who benefits from these actions?

- Faculty?
- Students? Use of data about things like difference in performance among student demographic groups can help us get closer to our programmatic goals while reinforcing bias about students.

Possible Strategies

Please share some strategies below!

- **I was hired into an old school department at an R3 in a very conservative state as a pretenure WPA to run the program. I was able to secure a WPA Consultant-Evaluator visit for my previous program & changed placement to The Write Class, a type of DSP, but this work was not well received in the department. So my strategy was to focus on areas where I could actually make change, which was primarily in GTA training, which included preparing them to teach co-req classes and to teach in antiracist ways. I did lose my position because of my actions as WPA, but then I got a better job with better conditions.**
- **Needs assessment study to guide any revisions (as part of that needs assessment, you can include focus groups with tenured, not-yet-tenured faculty, contingent faculty, and even students in order to create buy-in for revisions)**
- **Revising course descriptions, learning outcomes, statements, etc. that require all-faculty review helps to get the word out to the full faculty. For instance, when I proposed the following course description to replace our skill-and-drill course that had existed previously, it prompted questions from stakeholders across campus and while it wasn't popular, I was able to have individual conversations that helped me to find accomplices: ENG 100 - Writing Seminar: Students will reflect on their own literacies and the expectations of an academic audience, with an emphasis on how to organize argumentative essays. Students will practice reading academic texts and their own writing for the choices writers make in form, language, and mechanics. Prerequisite(s); if any: By permission of the English Department.**

Works Consulted and Further Reading

- Carillo, Ellen C. *The Hidden Inequities in Labor-Based Contract Grading*. Utah State University Press, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv20zbkwn>.
- Craig, Sherri. "Your Contract Grading Ain't It." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2021, pp. 145-146.
- Inoue, Asao B. *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future*. WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press, 2015, <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives/inoue/>.
- Summerhill, Daniel, et al. "Confronting the Comp Classroom: Implementing Anti-Racist Pedagogy and Navigating Opposition." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2021, pp. 121-28.

Possible Strategies (Presenter-Generated List)

Room 1 Linguistic Diversity:

- Rely on your engineering faculty ally to argue for the importance of content over 'grammar,' and save your linguistic diversity battles for another committee meeting.
- Generate professional development for capstone faculty on code-meshing in professional communication.
- Share examples of strong student capstone projects that incorporate multiple languages or dialects.
- Bring in students' employment in global industries as reasons for valuing World Englishes

Room 2 Accessible Teaching and Learning:

- *Writing about research writing in such a way that does not assume previous experience with U.S. academic research conventions*
- *Include examples of research writing that use multiple dialects and draw on diverse cultural backgrounds*
- *Help teachers discuss the larger purpose or goals of the assignment as it relates to their course assignments and context*
- *Giving students choices in the examples that they review (e.g., creating examples that are specific to disciplinary or professional contexts)*
- *Designing activities that give students opportunities to practice using sources without penalty or fear of failure. Give teachers and students opportunities to work individually or in groups*
- *Clearly defining academic research terms, like primary source, secondary source, cite, in-text citation, quote, summary, paraphrase, synthesis*
- *Guiding teachers in considering when they should introduce students to these resources in the process of writing a larger research project*
- *Creating version of the resource that could be delivered synchronously, asynchronously, in-person, or online*
- *Instruct teachers on options they have for giving students feedback on this activity*
- *Creating multiple formats (PDF, Word, video/audio)*
- *Using heading styles*
- *Giving images and media alternative text descriptions*
- *Create a moment for students to reflect on how they can transfer what they've learned from this activity to the larger research assignment for the course*
- *Run software accessibility checkers to reflect on opportunities to improve accessible design*

Room 3: Digital Literacies and Online Composing

- Generate support materials and assignment design that does not assume previous experience or stable access to portfolio platforms and related tools, highlighting available resources or alternative strategies for completing the assignment.
- Include examples of portfolios that represent a variety of learners, use multiple dialects, and draw on diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Design iterative opportunities to generate student input into the purpose/outcomes of such assignments vs privileging only departmental/institutional assessment needs.
- Provide sample assignments that foreground formative feedback as a means of generating relationships and understanding between faculty and students.

- Facilitate on-going conversations with faculty and administrators about the purpose and function of such assignments, alerting them to the possible risks and discussing practical strategies for avoiding inflicting harm.

Room 4: Writing Assessment and Course Placement

- Continue using standardized test scores for course placement, which enables you to potentially keep departmental allies who could later assist you in other antiracist initiatives.
- Suggest the program implement something like directed self-placement instead of relying on standardized test scores, which have been demonstrated to be racist, sexist, and classist.
- Enlist a paid consultant (such as the WPA consultant-evaluator service) to help make your case. This might lend authority to your case or may diminish your own authority, depending on your context. This also, of course, depends on funds (as we need to pay professionals for their labor!).
- Lead professional development workshops on antiracist writing assessment practices, such as labor-based contract grading and recognizing/teaching code meshing. While this would likely involve less risk than mandating curricular or assessment programs, it also means that instructor uptake is likely to be inconsistent.
- Push for reframing the program audit to have an explicitly antiracist goal and recruit like-minded colleagues to assist you in this work.

References Cited in PPT

- “Bibliography of Black Lives Matter and Anti-Racist Projects in Writing Program Administration.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2021, pp. 193–94.
- Carter-Tod, S. (2020). Administrating while Black: Negotiating the emotional labor of an African-American female WPA. In C.A. Wooten, J. Babb, K.M. Costello, and K. Navickas (Eds.), *The things we carry: Strategies for recognizing and negotiating emotional labor in writing program administration* (pp. 197-214). Utah State University Press.
- CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2. <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>
- Craig, C. L. and Perryman-Clark, S. (2016). Troubling the boundaries revisited: Moving towards change as things stay the same. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 39(2), 20-25.
- Desnoyers-Colas, E. F. (2019). Talking loud and saying nothing: Kicking faux ally-ness to the curb by battling racial battle fatigue using white accomplice-ment. *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, 8(4), 100-105.
- Graziano, Leigh, et al. A Return to Portland: Making work visible through the ecologies of writing program administration. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 43(2), 2020, pp. 131–51.
- Inoue, A. (2019). *How do we language so people stop killing each other, Or what do we do about White language supremacy?* Retrieved from <https://docs.google.com/document/d/11ACkIcUmqGvTzCMPIETChBwS-Ic3t2BOLi13u8lUEp4/edit?usp=sharing>
- Powell J. & Kelly A. (2017). Accomplices in the academy in the age of Black Lives Matter. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis* 6(2), 42-65.
- University Writing. (2021). Accessibility and inclusivity guide. *Auburn University*. <http://www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/university-writing/resources/?tag=Accessibility>
- WPA: *Writing Program Administration*. (2021). Special Issue: Black Lives Matter and Anti-Racist Projects in Writing Program Administration, 44(3). https://wpacouncil.org/aws/CWPA/asset_manager/get_file/604389?ver=2