

Collaborative Co-Mentoring: Building Horizontal Alliances through Faculty Development

M. Amanda Moulder

University of San Diego

Sophie Bell

St. John's University (Queens)

ABSTRACT

This article presents a method for faculty development called collaborative co-mentoring, which can alleviate some of the pressures created by the neoliberalization of university teaching often felt especially strongly in university writing programs. The authors draw on examples from their own multi-year collaboration to illustrate the practices of collaborative co-mentoring and show how collaborators navigate resistances between them to build a mutual appreciation of their different approaches. The examples show the benefits of unpaid, voluntary collaboration. Still, the authors suggest that institutionalizing and incentivizing the practice could benefit writing programs and the faculty who teach in them. Collaborative co-mentoring between experienced colleagues, especially those whose approaches to First Year Writing vary, can bring faculty together across intellectual divides to sustain reflective pedagogy and has the potential to build coherence in a writing program.

First Year Writing (FYW) makes visible many of the labor problems that are manifested throughout departments and programs in universities. Because traditional university reward systems do not value the labor required to teach the FYW course, tenure-stream faculty often refuse to teach it, leaving it to be taught by casualized labor, a mainstay of the contemporary neoliberal university (see Bousquet, 2008; Lamos, 2016; Schell & Stock, 2001; Scott, 2009). In turn, as the course is

associated with graduate student and adjunct faculty, it obtains a stigma of low status and becomes the focus of negative feeling. Many contingent FYW faculty members are highly qualified but isolated from one another because of the under-resourced nature of their positions. Often, they have low pay, little-to-no office space, and job insecurity. Finally, because the course is frequently taught by temporary labor, administrators may feel the need to standardize the curriculum to make

courses more coherent, especially given higher education's over-reliance on outcomes assessment.

Curricular standardization can leave FYW faculty feeling both marginalized within their institutions and as though their institutions do not respect their expertise. In other words, Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) or other university leaders might standardize the FYW student experience by imposing a set of priorities, designing and mandating a set of assignments, and enforcing faculty compliance through learning outcomes assessment, but doing this is dangerous. It may leave faculty feeling alienated and drive away talented faculty. The program as a whole may lose the chance to benefit from important perspectives and voices. Contingent faculty often have had many years—and experiences at multiple institutions—to develop sophisticated ideas about the role FYW should play in students' academic lives. Yet, without opportunities to talk over an extended period of time about their pedagogical priorities and come to mutual understandings with one another, faculty may feel isolated and the writing programs they serve may not be able to benefit from their experience.

While this article does not propose a global solution to the multidimensional problems stemming from the employment of contingent faculty, we present a method for faculty development called collaborative co-mentoring which can alleviate the pressures of some problems. We offer strategies to reduce the isolation and competition that faculty feel in the neoliberal regime of academic scarcity, typified by increasing insecurity and defunding of university instruction (Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005). We illustrate collaborative co-mentoring with examples drawn from our own multi-year, teaching-focused collaboration on FYW curricula in the context of a writing program where all faculty—contingent and tenure stream—had curricular autonomy but also suffered from isolation.

While we were not compelled into this rich professional development practice, our experiences suggest that incentivizing collaborative curricular and pedagogical development may facilitate mutual admiration for different approaches to FYW, encourage faculty to ally with one another, and create space to sustain reflective teaching practice. This article does not focus on how to incentivize collaborative co-mentoring at a programmatic level. However, we propose that by encouraging faculty to develop their own teaching-focused projects, writing program leaders may resist the increasing yet misguided attempts to standardize and quantify the FYW classroom experience into an easily measurable set of learning outcomes. Based on our own experiences with this model of faculty development, we propose that teaching-focused collaborative co-mentoring facilitates openness towards unexpected possibilities and contributes to making the important but often invisible labor of teaching writing more visible and more satisfying. Our experiences have taught us that pedagogy-focused collaborations between experienced faculty exist informally but are not often valued or well documented and have not received enough attention in the world of higher education.

In the first part of this article, we articulate the scholarly and theoretical foundations of our argument and put our experiences into conversation with scholars who theorize the effects of collaboration and the dynamics of working both within and against institutions. Next, we offer our own case study—a description of our experiences with collaborative co-mentoring—in which we discuss our university's context and the exigencies that led us to develop a multi-year collaboration around teaching and curriculum development. Then, we discuss the politics and pitfalls of institutionalizing collaborative co-mentoring as a form of faculty development. Finally, our essay argues that

the potential benefits of institutionalizing and incentivizing collaborative co-mentoring outweigh potential problems.

Scholarly Conversations on the Dynamics of Collaboration

The discipline of rhetoric and writing has a long tradition of studying collaboration. Scholars have investigated topics such as collaborative learning techniques that encourage student interdependence (Bruffee, 1993); interdisciplinary collaboration and interdisciplinary team teaching (Dinitz, Drake, Gedeon, Kiedaisch, & Mehrtens, 1997); collaborative learning practices in pedagogy practicum courses for new FYW instructors (Ebest, 2002); collaboration in the context of community partnerships (Flower, 2008; Kimball & Dubord, 2016); writing together for scholarly purposes (Duffy & Pell, 2013; Lunsford & Ede, 2012); rhetoric-informed Writing Across the Curriculum programs collaborating with other disciplines (Tarabochia, 2013; Zawacki & Cox, 2014); and faculty collaboration with students (Kerschbaum, 2014; Toth, Reber, & Clark, 2015).

Rhetoric and writing studies scholars have also studied how to use collaboration for faculty development. In “Faculty Development through Professional Collaboration,” Lyons (1980) outlines how WPAs might use faculty reading groups to develop in literature faculty “a serious professional interest in composition” (p. 15). While this sort of collaboration may prove useful to many faculty, reading composition scholarship together is just one small facet of the type of collaboration we advocate. Furthermore, Lyons’ centering of WPA authority—“faculty participants in the group obviously should not usurp any of the policy making functions of the writing program administrator” (p. 15)—runs counter to the aims of collaborative co-mentoring, as well as

the collective values embraced by the contemporary discipline of rhetoric and composition. Obermark, Brewer, and Halasek (2015) encourage sustained collaborative professional development among TAs in the graduate school years that follow the pedagogy practicum course. They argue that collaboration among graduate TAs can help bridge the gap between those individuals who “had previous teaching experience from MA programs or from working as classroom teachers in secondary school contexts, and . . . Others [who] still felt like novices, particularly because they had never been asked to develop their own syllabi” (p. 35). We agree with Obermark, Brewer, and Halasek that continued collaboration is key. Yet, our central concern is with a different group of faculty: experienced teaching-track or contingent faculty, who may not need collaboration to help bridge experience gaps, but would benefit from continued collaboration to help reduce the isolation that so often hinders ongoing faculty growth and development. Furthermore, continued collaboration between experienced colleagues can bring faculty together across intellectual divides, create curricular coherence, and sustain reflective pedagogical practices.

The process of collaboration creates space for this reflective practice. Certainly, collaboration in a simple sense—creating something together—will reduce faculty isolation. However, disagreement or resistance between collaborators and the way collaborators navigate through their resistance creates potential for fruitful faculty development. Duffy (2014) helps us theorize how our own collaboration fought both isolation and the negative affect that sometimes circulated around our FYW teaching work. Building on the work of Bruffee (1984), Ede and Lunsford (2012), and Goggin (2012), Duffy moves from a social constructionist model of collaboration to a model that is rhetorically-based. He outlines

what makes collaboration possible and, as we show, what makes it ultimately satisfying. Duffy contends that collaboration should not merely be “conceptualized as conversation that aims for consensus” (p. 419). He explains that “collaborators do not just ‘converse’; they deliberately engage and interact with objects of discourse” (p. 422). This model helps us “shift how we talk about the benefits of collaboration, away from whatever textual products it might yield, to the kinds of enhanced perception collaborations foster . . . we must recognize that what collaborators share with one another is an enhanced capacity to triangulate meanings” (p. 423-425).

With an attention to “enhanced perception,” triangulation, and negotiation, Duffy’s (2014) theory of collaboration aligns nicely with other rhetoric scholars’ theories of understanding difference. Triangulation as the aim of collaboration resonates with Ratcliffe’s (2005) rhetorical listening, defined as “a stance of openness” (p. 17) toward difference in which listeners co-create meaning with speakers; Kerschbaum’s (2014) theory of difference as “dynamic, relational and emergent” (p. 56); and Leonard’s (2014) rhetorical attunement, or “an ear for, or a tuning toward, difference or multiplicity. . . . a literate understanding that assumes multiplicity and invites the negotiation of meaning across difference” (p. 228). Rhetoric and composition, after all, has historically been concerned with finding common ground and shared meanings, all while figuring out how to listen carefully for the values that undergird differing views. Accordingly, Duffy points out that “the talk collaborators foster requires more than the dialogic back-and-forth we often imagine conversation to entail” (p. 423) and that “there is value in paying attention to the resistances that affect the discourse [collaborators] are able to produce together” (p. 426).

In our own collaboration, we found value in the tensions that derived from our

discussions of teaching and curricular texts. In coming to understand the sources of our resistance, we benefitted from one another’s approaches and grew as teachers. The resistances we encountered in our collaboration were just as important as the support we offered one another. Because triangulation is productively gratifying, collaborative co-mentoring can serve to increase what Lamos (2016) calls “good feeling” among contingent or teaching-track faculty. Lamos argues that cultivating perceptions of “good feeling” about the work of an academic program correlates with better working conditions, more respect, and more resources.

The term “good feeling” is therefore a strategic one. Building on work that calls for efforts to improve the labor conditions for contingent faculty, Lamos (2016) argues that we need to address the “bad feelings” associated with teaching-track and contingent university work. As we will describe in our case study below, the labor of collaboration-as-triangulation—of coming to understand the work and values of another composition instructor—was both immensely satisfying and highly strategic. The “enhanced perception” fostered by our collaboration prompted us to continuously change and adapt our own stories about what was possible and productive in the FYW classroom. Collaboration helped us combat our perceptions of lower status within our institution and the “negative affect that circulates around such work” (Lamos, 2016, p. 363). Both of these had the potential to reduce our expectations of the importance and possibilities of our work.

Our different disciplinary backgrounds in literature and rhetoric made us want to collaborate, but there were points in our process where the slightly different disciplinary communities we belonged to and our differing values obstructed our ability to find shared meanings. The parallel nature of

our interests in race, language, and social justice made us a natural fit, but we taught very different courses before our collaboration began. Pre-collaboration, Sophie emphasized blending personal narrative and critical inquiry in her FYW course, and Amanda emphasized rhetorical analysis and public argumentation. Eventually, after several years of collaboration, we came to approach FYW as a cultural rhetorics course in race and language with an emphasis on public engagement. Through collaborative co-mentoring, we recursively honed our syllabi for nine consecutive semesters. We eventually taught curricula that were more similar than any other two instructors in the program, yet our priorities, backgrounds, and research interests—Amanda’s in cultural and indigenous rhetorics, civic literacy, and rhetorical history; Sophie’s in critical race theory, American literature, and critical pedagogy—did lead us in different directions.

While difference may not be as important for sheer collaboration, our differing values for the teaching of writing were a critical factor in making our co-mentoring relationship fruitful. We were collaborating to learn from one another, to get better at triangulating meaning with others, and to come to a broader, deeper understanding of what was possible within and outside of the FYW classroom. However difficult it was to triangulate meaning, difficulty was actually the point.

The Institutional Context of Our Collaboration

For five years, we collaborated on the curriculum of a required FYW course in the university core curriculum at a large Catholic institution in an urban area on the east coast. FYW was not located in a university department, but a free-standing program. FYW courses were part of the general education curriculum, which included two other courses designed to help first-year

students transition to university-level study. During the years we collaborated, our writing program consisted of ten full-time, tenure-stream faculty and a fluctuating number of adjunct and graduate student faculty, all of whom taught FYW almost exclusively.

There were several adjunct faculty for whom part-time teaching was ideal, but three groups of us were concerned with our job security: adjuncts who would have been open to full-time work, graduate students who were hoping for tenure-track appointments, and those of us on the tenure track. The job security concern was exacerbated by the form of tenure that existed in the program. Elements of contingency were built into the FYW tenure-track positions. We—the authors—were both tenure-stream faculty in our program, but we did not have the same type of tenure-stream positions that faculty in departments at our university had. People on the tenure-track in our writing program had higher teaching loads than people in departments. We were also working towards “programmatically tenure,” a type of tenure that our university invented, which was tied to the continued existence of the university’s FYW program. We were often told by university leaders that our tenure could be dissolved if the FYW program were disbanded. Our writing program never seemed to be in true danger; however, our different status and purported lack of permanence was demoralizing at times. Indeed, the contractual language that described these positions was opaque to any reader looking to understand the job security the positions provided.

In spite of these job security concerns, the FYW program was designed to give faculty freedom to choose their course themes, syllabi, and curricula. Beyond a set of explicitly evolving FYW learning outcomes, assignments were not standardized, which allowed for a maximum amount of freedom. There was no common FYW syllabus or textbook. The program, in fact, eschewed textbooks. Our program exemplified the great

diversity of approaches that exist in FYW teaching. Philosophies and beliefs about best practices varied widely: some faculty took a writing about writing approach, others a rhetorical studies approach, others an expressivist approach, and still others a genre studies approach.

For much of the time we collaborated, our program also had institutionalized de facto FYW faculty development, which came in the form of required learning outcomes assessment. This occurred at the end of each semester when all tenure-line faculty and some adjunct and graduate student faculty gathered to read samples of students' ePortfolios, which contained student-authored texts and students' metacognitive reflections about their writing processes and products. Through this assessment, we gained a rough idea of what other instructors were doing in their classrooms. The assessment served to make us curious about other faculty members' approaches, but we had little time to learn from one another about the values or theories behind our different curricula.

While we appreciated curricular autonomy, it meant that our program sometimes lacked curricular coherence and made the two of us feel isolated. This freedom inspired a desire to create something in common with another faculty member and, given how our training and intellectual backgrounds differed, to learn from one another. We started by collaboratively building one curricular unit together, which gave us the chance to experiment with each other's approaches in small doses. For example, Amanda offered Sophie lesson plans that taught rhetorical analysis of texts and supplied context for the lesson plans with composition and rhetoric scholarship. In turn, Sophie guided Amanda through lesson plans that initiated discussions of Critical Race Theory among FYW students and provided writing assignments that asked students to write about their racialized identities.

As our interests in each other's approaches grew, we began taking full-day retreats at the beginning of each semester to plan our syllabi. We initiated each of these meetings with goals we wanted to achieve during the subsequent semester—usually small changes to assignments—and we worked at Sophie's kitchen table to think through ways to assist each other. Throughout the semester, we met on a weekly basis. After about six semesters of consecutive collaboration, we were teaching more or less the same assignments throughout the semester. Over the span of five years, our curricula became more aligned and more coherent. In this time, we also grew to trust one another deeply. Even after we were no longer working at the same University—Amanda left to take a WPA position at a smaller Catholic university on the west coast—we have maintained contact, co-mentoring each other about professional, scholarly, and pedagogical matters.

At multiple points each semester, we helped each other troubleshoot assignments and students' responses to them. We alternated taking the lead as we mentored each other through the processes of some difficult teaching challenges. Because we were teaching in one of the more racially, ethnically, and economically diverse schools in the nation, we were eager to focus our students' attention on issues that disproportionately affect people of color and of lower economic status. But, as white, middle class women our experiences had not necessarily prepared us to ask students to think about their own experiences with racism or classism. In early 2012, at the height of the Occupy movement, we asked students to begin the semester with an investigation of college student debt, including, at times, their own debt. While this unit of study yielded rich opportunities for students and teachers to exercise their "sociological imaginations" (Mills, 1959), the complex and personal writing students

generated on this topic called for us both to think quickly and do a lot of mutual debriefing. Amanda took the lead, as our own levels of comfort and experiences paying for college and graduate study came into play in our responses. Sophie realized that although she was comfortable talking about class and debt culture in principle, she had little experience doing so in concrete, personal terms. Amanda's experience with her own college debt and her savvy in this area helped her lead us through student projects. This early experience with collaboration increased our capacity to navigate the important and loaded topics we had brought into class.

Our teaching about student debt allowed us to explore the connections among students' immediate experiences as college students and sociological questions, critical consciousness, and current activism. Sophie presented the data she gathered during this unit at a conference later that year, and we considered developing our teaching and scholarship in this area. Yet, we shifted our focus the following summer because we each independently began studying an area of inquiry that encouraged students to engage their "sociological imaginations," while also residing more deeply in the questions inherent to the field of composition studies: translingual and multilingual rhetorics. That summer, Sophie began investigating the history of the "Students' Right to Their Own Language" movement and, at the same time, Amanda participated in a Rhetoric Society of America Institute entitled "Shifting the Paradigm: Towards a Translingual Rhetoric of Writing."

Our collaboration allowed us to pay attention to this unique coincidence. Had we not been involved in teaching-focused collaboration, we may not have seen the curricular potential contained in these parallel lines of inquiry. As we developed a series of lessons related to the history of language rights in composition studies and the emergence of a language resource approach,

our collaboration enabled us to change our curriculum and shift our research. Sophie began writing a book about the student writing we assigned during this unit, while Amanda gave a conference presentation about the resonances between her archival work on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Cherokee rhetorics and contemporary translingual practices and questions.

Developing curriculum collaboratively was a satisfying learning experience, yet we also learned by "trying on" each other's activities, thereby partially inhabiting each other's teaching lives. As we did so, we resisted one another, but also freed ourselves from the potential rigidity of our own philosophies and learned to value the differences between our approaches. Collaborative co-mentoring helped catalyze major shifts in our assumptions about what was possible or appropriate inside and outside of the classroom. For example, Amanda initially resisted adopting one in-class activity that Sophie used in her classroom called "One-Minute Stories," drawn from Bell, Love, and Roberts (2007). The activity presents questions that prompt pairs or groups of students to tell one-minute stories about their racialized identities, such as "When were you first aware of yourself as a part of a particular racial/ethnic group?" and "When have you witnessed or experienced someone (or yourself) being treated differently because of his or her racial group?" The activity closes by asking students to reflect on how telling their one-minute stories made them feel. At first, Amanda could not see the value of asking students to volunteer stories that might be traumatic to them and worried that they might not be able to gain critical distance from their personal narratives. Yet, following several semesters of being impressed with the self-aware, actualized work that Sophie's students produced after this activity—and after failing to get students to produce similarly self-aware work—Amanda decided it was time to try Sophie's pedagogical techniques.

The resulting in-class conversations surprised and inspired Amanda: students were braver than they had been before. Many students described memories that were important to their personal development but that they had suppressed because of the negative affect that surrounded the experiences, such as memories of racist microaggressions that they had witnessed, endured, or even committed. Amanda realized that the activity functioned as a rhetorical invention exercise, helping to strengthen the writing that students produced following this activity. Sophie's lesson plan showed Amanda a way to invoke and value students' deeply personal experiences in her FYW classes. Moreover, Amanda's fear that students would not critically engage their personal experiences was allayed quickly, since the activity prepared students with critical race theory vocabulary terms—marginalization, privilege, intersectionality—that functioned as a lens through which to view their experiences.

Sophie gained parallel insights into the resonances between her teaching and scholarship by borrowing and trying on Amanda's rhetorical analysis and methods activities. Like many full and part-time faculty who teach composition, Sophie came to the university without a grounding in composition or rhetoric. She was a life-long teacher with a literature Ph.D. and a Master's in teaching. She was committed broadly to teaching as a means for social and personal transformation, but that commitment was not rooted in the particular orientations and histories of rhetoric and composition studies. Through working with Amanda, she began to see how her priorities and concerns mapped onto specific disciplinary histories and debates within composition and rhetoric: the discipline's origins in Black and Latinx Freedom Movements, "Students' Rights" history and debate, translingualism and global Englishes, patterns of migration and neoliberalism, and how those histories play out in universities. Previously, she had seen

writing studies work as related only to her teaching, and she resisted seeing this work as related to her scholarship on race in nineteenth-century American literature. In working with Amanda, she began to see composition and rhetoric studies as a space for those two strands to come together. It initiated new scholarship on her students' writing, and her research around this is now turning into a book.

By drawing on each other's co-mentorship, we were better able to pay attention to the interesting idiosyncrasies of our students' writing. This was significant because, as Gallagher (2012) argues, higher education's over-zealous focus on learning outcomes leads to "separation of ends and means . . . diversion of attention away from the existing conditions for teaching and learning; narrow fixation on singular results rather than openness to emergent consequences" (p. 45). While our entire program would focus on learning outcomes at the close of each semester, the two of us had access to each other's mentorship throughout the semester. We mentored one another through activities we created together or separately and we talked through difficult or problematic student responses. Because we were able to draw on the benefits of having a co-mentor as a sounding board, we avoided closing ourselves "off from what [was] surprising or excessive or eccentric" (Gallagher, 2012 p. 46) about our students' responses. When a student responded to an assignment in a way that one of us did not expect, we were able to talk through that response, thereby recognizing consequences or potential consequences of our pedagogies.ⁱ

We also challenged one another to articulate the foundations of or values behind our curricular choices, especially when one of us resisted adopting an assignment or activity. As such, we were able to reflect deeply on the nature and purposes of the assignments we created. And, through all of this labor, we were learning to understand each other's

teaching values and, consequently, value each other's teaching more than we did when we started our collaboration.

The Pitfalls of Institutionalizing Collaborative Co-Mentoring

Although our collaboration has been crucial to our development as teachers and scholars, we see that institutionalizing collaborative co-mentoring in a program with a dependence on contingent labor has pitfalls. First, as tenure-stream faculty, we had resources that made our voluntary collaboration possible. While we were told by administrative authorities that our tenure-able status was tied to the continued existence of our program, and that it could be revoked were the FYW program terminated, our positions at the university were not as tenuous as ones occupied by part-time, contingent faculty. We had time, office space, the ability to request our teaching schedules, and other protections that many contingent faculty do not have.

The second related pitfall has to do with the nature of our collaboration: it was completely voluntary. The danger in institutionalizing and incentivizing this kind of collaborative work is that doing so may kill the spirit that made it so valuable to us. Because our collaboration was voluntary, it took the shape we wanted and needed. No one from the outside imposed arbitrary requirements on the products we had to produce, which made it personally and professionally valuable. In other words, because these sorts of relationships are non-hierarchical, they may flourish best outside the structures of academic competition as a practice based on the desire of individuals to do unpaid, unrecognized work. However, we don't think that we would have been upset to have been offered stipends for the work we were doing, so long as the stipend was not also attached to some sort of mandate that

made it difficult to tailor our collaboration to our needs.

The Benefits of Incentivizing Collaborative Co-Mentoring

We contend, however, that the benefits of incentivizing collaborative co-mentoring outweigh the pitfalls. Firstly, while our own collaboration was in part facilitated by a set of resources not always available to adjuncts, we argue that contingent faculty members' disparate schedules and lack of office space may exacerbate the isolation we experienced. Therefore, funding this collaborative faculty development may be even more necessary with a contingent labor force because it will offer this group of qualified faculty resources they need to fight isolation and allow them more support than what a single WPA is able to offer on a one-on-one basis. Furthermore, as Horning (2016) argues, all faculty should be financially compensated for any faculty development they do.

It is important to note, however, that an institutionalized collaborative co-mentoring program should maintain the spirit of freedom by remaining optional, if incentivized. Much like the Writing Fellows programsⁱⁱ that many writing-across-the-curriculum programs institutionalize, a collaborative co-mentoring program would offer funding for faculty proposals that use collaboration to explore a question or solve a pedagogical issue important to several faculty in the program. Co-mentors should be encouraged to present or publicize their aims and any results of their work together, if only within the program in a lesson plan archive, program blog, or presentation for program faculty. Doing so could initiate program-wide conversations about the shape and purposes of FYW at the institution, and as such, collaborative co-mentoring would feed back into institutional practice.

We also contend that faculty participation

in collaborative co-mentoring may help writing programs resist some of the most disturbing effects of neoliberal adjunctification: curricular standardization and the over-reliance on outcomes assessment. Lamos (2016) argues that one major reason for the negative affect surrounding teaching-track work is that “effective teaching is increasingly perceived not in terms of creating specific and unique spaces, but rather in terms of creating standardized spaces that can purportedly provide universal, acontextual, and easily assessable skills and competencies” (p. 367). Gallagher (2012) echoes Lamos’ concern, maintaining that the neoliberal university’s focus on outcomes assessment creates “the pernicious separation of ends and means, the rigidity of fixed ends, the narrow focus on predetermined results, and the imposition of external ends on faculty and students” (p. 49). As our own examples show, collaboration can create coherence among syllabi that faculty teach and the values that undergird pedagogical choices while allowing faculty to follow their own development as professionals in the field.

Our own syllabi grew together organically because we were motivated to fight isolation and open to the possibilities of another faculty member’s ideas. Co-mentoring one another through the processes of implementing our curricula allowed us opportunities to conduct research into our own teaching and still come together, as the process requires that the collaborators triangulate meaning. As we triangulated meaning with one another, we became more aware of what worked and of what we should value.

Ultimately, building pedagogical knowledge together without the explicit supervision or overdetermined direction of our program’s leaders gave us freedom to build a coherent curriculum and grow to value what our co-mentor brought to the collaboration. The horizontal alliances that faculty create through collaboration are beneficial to the group as a whole. By

incentivizing these horizontal alliances between faculty, program leaders will show that they honor faculty members’ distinct abilities and remain open to the diverse ideas that faculty bring to the teaching of writing. Finally, we agree with the consensus among leaders in the field that we should be working for greater job security for all writing faculty, or more specifically, that all faculty should have available the necessary means to achieve their desired working conditions. Our experiences with collaboration have taught us that valuing faculty expertise can support the goal of better working conditions for writing faculty.

The huge growth in contingent positions represents a dire set of problems for universities in general and for FYW programs in particular. This is of particular concern because, as Ahmed (2012) warns, when forms of work garner less institutional “value,” “then to become responsible for this work can mean to inhabit institutional spaces that are also less valued” (p. 4). However, as Lamos (2016) argues, improvement in job security and labor conditions can come in many forms, such as multi-year contracts, better salaries, and better access to office space. We should, therefore:

make teaching-track affective and material lives better until such time that the full protections of tenure might be realized. Thus, while our ultimate strategy should remain the achievement of tenure, our near-term tactics can and should include the achievement of other lesser forms of job security. (Lamos, 2016, p. 380)

The two goals—making incremental improvements in teaching-track working conditions and holding out for teaching-track tenure—don’t conflict.

Conclusion

Collaborative co-mentoring is a structure for faculty development that aligns with current values in rhetoric and composition. As

Detweiler, LaWare, and Wojahn (2017) argue, rhetoric and composition scholars should seek to work both within and against traditional university leadership structures, and to lead “in ways that align with who we are and how we want to make a difference” (p. 452). In the same journal issue, Jackson (2017) and Villanueva (2017) develop models that exemplify what this leadership looks like. Jackson argues for “collaborative models of service where the objective is not to be out in front of others but rather to work with others for collective goals” (p. 497). She advocates for decolonial leadership models that make “academic institutions more accountable to their own cultural locations as institutions of public learning that honor multiple ways of knowing, doing, and leading” (p. 497). Villanueva contends academia imagines academic labor happening in a mythical isolation that never really existed:

We must abandon the “lone academic” recognizing that we all tend to be too busy to be that old-style intellectual—if he ever existed (invariably a “he”)—who could sip brandy and puff his pipe while talking with professors of other departments in the dark, wood-paneled, leather-chaired lounge. (p. 491)

He argues for conceiving of academic work carried out by “collective subjects” who are “subject to collective causalities” (p. 491). In line with Jackson’s and Villanueva’s ideas of what makes good leadership, we advocate putting people in collective, collaborative contexts to do better work than they could

while going it alone. Moreover, the horizontal alliances that grow from collaborations can encourage faculty to build the kind of organic curricular coherence that raises the profile of writing programs within universities and, subsequently, to grow louder in their collective voice against unjust institutional policies.

Collaborative co-mentoring turns disagreement or misalignment into productive tension. This model of faculty development taught us about the different priorities really wonderful teachers have when they approach First Year Writing courses. This was an important lesson, since both of us went on to perform writing program administrator roles later. One central question for writing program leaders is how to use our power as administrators to partner with teaching-track and/or adjunct laborers to build a platform of support for them. One answer to this question has to be to encourage these faculty members to ally with one another, not only to share experiences, but also to build mutual appreciation for their different approaches. By offering faculty positive incentives to collaborate and co-mentor one another through their approaches, writing program leaders facilitate the proliferation of different successful approaches. After all, learning to honor multiple approaches and valuing disagreement is the lifeblood of writing program work.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bell, L. A., Love, B., & Roberts, R. (2007). Racism and white privilege curriculum design. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, & P. Griffin, (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (2nd ed.) (pp. 123-144). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bousquet, M. (2008). *How the university works: Higher education and the low-wage nation*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Bruffee, K. A. (1984). Collaborative learning and the “conversation of mankind.” *College English*, 46(7), 635–652.
- Bruffee, K. A. (1993). *Collaborative learning: Higher education, interdependence, and the authority of knowledge*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Detweiler, J., LaWare, M., & Wojahn, P. (2017). Academic leadership and advocacy: On not leaning in. *College English*, 79(5), 451-465.
- Dinitz, S., Drake, J., Gedeon, S., Kiedaisch, J., & Mehrrens, C. (1997). The odd couples: Interdisciplinary team teaching. *Language and Learning Across the Disciplines*, 2(2), 29-42.
- Duggan, L. (2003). *The twilight of equality?: Neoliberalism, cultural Politics, and the attack on democracy*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Duffy, W. (2014). Collaboration (in) theory: Reworking the social turn’s conversational imperative. *College English*, 76(5), 416-435.
- Duffy, W., & Pell, J. (2013). Imagining coauthorship as phased collaboration. In A. E. Geller & M. Eodice (Eds.), *Working with faculty writers* (pp. 256-269). Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Flower, L. (2008). *Community literacy and the rhetoric of public engagement*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Ebest, S. B. (2002). When graduate students resist. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 26(1/2), 27-43.
- Gallagher, C. W. (2012). The trouble with outcomes: Pragmatic inquiry and education aims. *College English*, 75(1), 42-60.
- Goggin, M. D. (1996). Collaboration. In P. Heilker & P. Vandenberg (Eds.). *Keywords in composition studies* (pp. 35–39). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Horning, A. (2016). Contingent labor and the impact on teaching: Thoughts about the Indianapolis Resolution. *Literacy in Composition Studies*, 4(1), <http://licsjournal.org/OJS/index.php/LiCS/article/view/110/152>.
- Jackson, R. C. (2017). Resisting relocation: Placing leadership on decolonized indigenous landscapes. *College English*, 79(5), 495-511.
- Kerschbaum, S. (2014). *Toward a new rhetoric of difference*. Urbana, IL: NCTE/CCCC.
- Kimball, E., & DuBord, E. (2016). Cross-language community engagement: Assessing the strengths of heritage learners. *Heritage Language Journal*, 13(3), 298-330.
- Lamos, S. (2016). Toward job security for teaching-track composition faculty: recognizing and rewarding affective-labor-in-space. *College English*, 78(4), 362-386.
- Leonard, R. L. (2014). Multilingual writing as rhetorical attunement. *College English*, 76(3), 227-247.
- Lunsford, A. A., & Ede, L. S. (2012). *Writing together: Collaboration in theory and practice, a critical sourcebook*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins.
- Lyons, R. (1980). Faculty development as professional collaboration. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 4(2), 12-19.
- Obermark, L., Brewer, E., & Halasek, K. (2015). Moving from the one and done to a culture of collaboration: Revision professional development for TAs. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 39(1), 32-53.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ratcliffe, K. (2005). *Rhetorical listening: Identification, gender, whiteness*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Schell, E., & Stock, P. (Eds.). (2001). *Moving a mountain: Transforming the role of contingent faculty in composition studies and higher education*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Scott, T. (2009). How we do what we do: Facing the contradictory political economies of writing programs. In D. Strickland & J. Gunner (Eds.), *The writing program interrupted: Making space for critical discourse* (pp. 41-55). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Toth, C., Reber, M., & Clark, A. (2015). Major affordances: Collaborative scholarship in a department of writing and rhetoric studies. *Composition Studies*, 43(2), 197-200.
- Tarabochia, S. (2013). Language and relationship building: Analyzing discursive spaces of interdisciplinary collaboration. *Across the Disciplines: A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing*, 10(2), 1-20.

Villanueva, V. (2017). "I am two parts": Collective subjectivity and the leader of academics and the othered. *College English*, 79(5), 482-494.

Zawacki, T. M., & Cox, M. (2014). *WAC and second language writers: Research towards linguistically and culturally inclusive programs and practices*. Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse.

Notes

ⁱ When we shared our students' responses, we anonymized them. Also, we were each conducting IRB-approved studies of our students' work, so we had obtained permission from students to share what they wrote.

ⁱⁱ At many universities, a faculty member teaching a writing-enriched course can apply for funding to have a Writing Fellow embedded in the faculty member's course. The Writing Fellow is usually an advanced undergraduate who functions not as a teaching assistant, but as a trained writing consultant. The student audits the class and meets with students to assist them with the discipline-specific writing in the course. In these programs, the faculty member and the student collaborate closely to improve writing instruction in the course. Sometimes, the programs also require that all faculty members in the program meet as a group with a writing program administrator throughout the semester to discuss best practices in teaching writing. Thus, funded collaboration occurs between a faculty member and the student consultant and can also occur among faculty participants in the program.