

# Materiality and Writing Studies

ALIGNING LABOR, SCHOLARSHIP, AND TEACHING



**Holly Hassel and Cassandra Phillips**

**SWR**  
STUDIES IN WRITING AND RHETORIC

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Cover Image: [iStock.com/Alexmia](https://iStock.com/Alexmia)

NCTE Stock Number: 30841; eStock Number: 30858

ISBN 978-0-8141-3084-1; eISBN 978-0-8141-3085-8

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### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Hassel, Holly, author. | Phillips, Cassandra, 1971- author.

Title: Materiality and writing studies : aligning labor, scholarship, and teaching / Holly Hassel, North Dakota State University and Cassandra Phillips, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee at Waukesha.

Description: Champaign, Illinois : National Council of Teachers of English, [2022] |

Series: Studies in writing & rhetoric | Includes bibliographical references and index.

| Summary: "Takes an expansive look at the discipline of writing studies, arguing for centering the field's research and service on first-year writing, and offers a reimagined vision for writing studies that roots its scholarship, research, and service squarely within the changing material realities of contemporary college writing instruction"—Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021047247 (print) | LCCN 2021047248 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814130841 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9780814130858 (adobe pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: English language—Rhetoric—Study and teaching (Higher)—United States. | Community college teaching—United States. | English teachers—Training of—United States. | College teachers—Training of—United States. | Academic writing—Study and teaching (Higher)—United States.

Classification: LCC PE1405.U6 H38 2022 (print) | LCC PE1405.U6 (ebook) | DDC 808/.0420711—dc23/eng/20211128

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021047247>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021047248>

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## Materiality, Labor, and Disciplinarity

***English 098: Introduction to College Writing  
University of Wisconsin–Waukesha  
Fall 2018, the First Day***

*It is difficult not to be affected by the students in developmental writing<sup>1</sup> from the first day. The goal of the first class is usually fairly simple—access email, student accounts, and the learning management software; write a fairly simple self-assessment; and talk about the class and its (and their) expectations. As often is the case when teaching a class such as this one, the most important goal is to have students leave the classroom thinking that they do belong in college and that it is possible to learn academic reading and writing.*

*Over twenty years of working with these students doesn't diminish the humanity of their goals, the obstacles they face, and the visible emotional distress that so many of them experience. For example, even walking around the room while students are accessing their accounts and drafting an initial self-assessment reveals a wide level of disparity. After fifteen minutes of work time, one young woman has written close to a page. The rest of the students, however, are far, far short of that length, and several students cannot access their accounts, usually because of financial or clerical issues. Most eventually produce a short paragraph or two in that time, but some struggle to write more than a complete thought or sentence.*

*If the class goes well, students will feel comfortable raising their hands and asking for help or clarification. Because so many fight instincts to ask for help, it is important to make connections from Day 1, and to keep reminding them that they belong. Doing so is incred-*

*ibly difficult when they are unable to navigate their student accounts, have little to no experience with word processing, can't understand the idea of self-assessment, or struggle to draft complete thoughts in class. Some students are willing to articulate directly that they are extremely anxious about being in college, an anxiety that seems to be compounded by their furtive glances at the students who are writing freely and seem comfortable with drafting. And some will push back in different ways—a self-defense mechanism in an environment they do not trust.*

*Almost all of them have goals, though. When asked, they can articulate what they are hoping to do if they are successful in college: become a teacher, work for the FBI, work with computers, start a business, or fulfill a promise to someone. Hearing those goals underscores the importance of this day, and of having an understanding of the steps that must be completed to achieve these goals. For many of these students, English 098 is not the only non-degree-credit course they must take on this journey. Many of them won't pass the first time, or even the second. This journey for them is longer, has more obstacles, and is full of uncertainty. It is daunting for both the student and the instructor to think about how to achieve these goals. The needs are so broad, so encompassing, and so fraught with obstacles that it is difficult, and so very humbling, every semester, to figure out where to begin.*



We open this book with a story from one of this book's coauthors, Cassie, and her developmental writing class in order to foreground the work that animates us and that drives our research and teaching. For decades, writing studies has engaged in reflective praxis,<sup>2</sup> seeking to name, define, and make visible the discipline of writing studies.<sup>3</sup> Yet it's not often that we see students like those in Cassie's 098 class represented fully and consistently in our discipline—those who begin at our open-admissions two-year college. Whether through scholarship, research articles, learning outcomes, habits of mind, position statements, or other documents that serve as artifacts of our field, over the years we have struggled to educate our students with much of what our field has to offer. As such, we want this book to show what underrepresentation in the field's conversations looks like and feels like for two-year-college teachers

and students. We want to show what it means to work in a constantly changing environment that is increasingly austere. And perhaps most important, we want to show how underrepresentation of these students and these classrooms weakens the foundation of our field through their exclusion.

Embracing the disciplinary status of writing studies as an assumption of this book, we ask the following questions: “For whom does this discipline exist? Whose interests, experiences, and values does it reflect? And what are the implications of exclusion for our most marginalized students and teachers?” We believe that asking these questions will benefit not only the students and instructors in the two-year environment, but will also benefit all instructors who teach in institutions that prioritize access over selectivity. As teachers, administrators, scholars, and members of the discipline, we argue for the value of research-based studies for a writing pedagogy and assessment that supports the important work of both access and success for students, and that provides the literacy skills required by an increasingly diverse range of students in college today. We do not see this important work sufficiently supported by our field at this moment in either the scholarship that is produced or the emphasis of graduate education. Our goal with this book is to illustrate that absence and call for the visibility, if not centering, of a changing majority of students and instructors within writing studies.

What we hope to show in this book is that the world of writing instruction in US colleges—the students, the classrooms, the instructors, the programs—is bigger, wider, and in other ways different than it is represented in research. Throughout *Materiality and Writing Studies*, we establish how writing studies has evolved such that it is centered on research-intensive institutions and tenure-line labor conditions, despite its progressive rhetoric. It is centered on students at selective universities—largely white, middle class, and traditional aged. Adapting a term from feminist scholar Audre Lorde, we call this group a “mythical norm” (116) of college students, rather than what we see as the “new majority” (Maimon) of college students. It is critical that we address that difference if we are to build sustainability between the labor, scholarship, and teaching



realities of writing studies. Our foremost contention is that the new majority of students and instructors needs to be seen more clearly and described more richly within the research of our field.

We begin by demonstrating how the students at two-year colleges are reflective of an increasing majority of college students, and how because of that representativeness there is an unrecognized level of expertise about teaching and learning that two-year-college faculty have to offer in meeting their needs. Yet that knowledge has not been integrated into the discipline's knowledge base (see Toth et al. for examples). Invoking the importance of such experiences, we then suggest strategies for writing studies scholarship, teacher training, and organizational work that can move forward with an ethical, responsive agenda supporting a greater and more heterogeneous range of students' literacy development and retention in college. In doing so, we also argue for a commitment not just to students, but to more effective preparation for the work of teacher-scholar-activists (a term Patrick Sullivan has coined) to effect change around working conditions. In other words, we propose a set of priorities that build from the needs of diverse first-year writing students to priorities that are a foundation for professionalizing all instructors.

The fundamental basis for this book is a concern for how contingency as well as material realities facing instructors shape pedagogies and classrooms. As we will show, these material conditions in two-year colleges and open-access institutions shape the learning environments of students whose relationship to college is fragile and often not the highest priority in their lives. Likewise, we emphasize throughout the book the material conditions of this learning that takes place with teachers who work in precarity. We see it as a moral mandate to serve the most at-risk or structurally disadvantaged students in the country, and just as important we also see improving labor conditions as a prerequisite for a sustainable path forward for the field. Through the chapters that follow, we argue that the discipline must not only account for these students and these instructors to advance disciplinary knowledge, but must also move to center the core work of first-year writing and open-admissions institutions.

FOUNDATIONS TO REFLECT A  
NEW MAJORITY OF STUDENTS

We write this book based on our experiences as two-year-college English teachers who are always searching for effective, evidence-based resources to help us in our professional contexts. We are two PhD-credentialed tenured faculty who have taught for almost thirty-five years between us in two-year colleges, which inexorably affects how we view disciplinarity. Holly taught courses ranging from non-degree-credit writing to transfer-level composition for three years as an adjunct at a community college while she was working toward her PhD and for sixteen years at the University of Wisconsin Colleges (UWC), a two-year junior college. Her thinking draws deeply from her experiences as a working-class, first-generation college student and academic. Cassie did her dissertation research at a community college and then taught as an adjunct before teaching at UWC for the last twenty-plus years as a tenure-line faculty member.

We also write from a more recent position of change. We worked together for sixteen years for UWC, which was an open-access junior college with thirteen brick-and-mortar campuses and a robust online program that functioned as a single unified institution since it was first chartered by the state of Wisconsin in 1971. As a single institution, UWC had its own mission of transfer and access, statewide curriculum, faculty personnel processes, and assessment program. We saw as our focus the need to create a rigorous transfer-level curriculum that would allow students to seamlessly move to the four-year institution of their choice, or to complete a high-quality liberal arts associate's degree. Though the structure that had been established for UWC since its inception was unusual, it offered some important benefits. For example, the small sizes of our individual campuses and our locations in even the most remote corners of the state meant that a transfer-level curriculum with well-qualified instructors was accessible to many nontraditional place-committed students who would not have had the will or resources to move away for college. Our tuition and fees were also much more affordable than the residential four-year institutions. The low cost allowed students to save money by living at home. Our non-



traditional student populations (who were about 25 percent to 35 percent of the student body, depending on the campus) could work in established jobs and meet their family responsibilities.

For us, then, the two-year campuses truly embodied one of the core principles of the University of Wisconsin System—the Wisconsin Idea. The Wisconsin Idea is a concept that originates from a 1905 address by former UW President Charles Van Hise, who asserted, “I shall never be content until the beneficent influence of the University reaches every family of the state” (“Wisconsin Idea”). Located in both small and large communities throughout the state, our campuses had a unique mission of access and relentlessly sought ways to distinguish our programs and classrooms. These efforts resulted in two disciplinary program awards, a Diana Hacker TYCA Award for Outstanding Programs in English for Two-Year Colleges and Teachers (2015), and a Conference on College Composition and Communication Writing Program Certificate of Excellence (2016–2017). On October 11, 2017, however, a Wisconsin newspaper leaked a story that the institution would be dissolved, and its campuses reassigned as small branch campuses—or perhaps “additional locations”<sup>4</sup> of nearby comprehensive campuses in the University of Wisconsin System. With the announcement of our department and institution’s dissolution over the 2017–2018 year, our mission was essentially wiped out, in part because most of the four-year campuses do not invest in the mission of access in the same, mission-focused way as we did in our autonomous structure. As a result, both of us now find ourselves, differently, working in or with university contexts that have heightened our understanding of the distinct cultures of two-year- and four-year-college writing programs. We began the work on the project described in this text while we were both tenured and full-time faculty members at an autonomous two-year college; but the book has evolved in emphasis as we have each moved into different relationships with university writing programs (which we share throughout the book).

We provide this background for readers in order to contextualize how our thinking—and our literal jobs—have been shaped by both the long history of the mission of access to our campuses, as well as

the subsequent abandonment of that mission by the state. We take for granted as teacher-scholars that access to education is good—it is meaningful, desirable, and central to the work of college writing instruction, particularly in two-year colleges. Though college writing courses can and historically have functioned as gatekeepers, we also know from our students how important those courses are as pathways to college because of their role in developing the critical literacy skills valued in postsecondary education. The dissolution of UWC was a threat to that mission but it also provides an object lesson to readers who also value access and critical literacy for more rather than fewer students.

Following the announcement of the institution's dissolution in 2017, our colleagues and students prepared as best as they could for the dismantling of their existing governance structures, course catalog and bulletin, transfer articulation agreements, and other institutional practices and documents (and yes, our entire award-winning writing program). We all prepared to be absorbed by what were called “receiving institutions” and sometimes “parent campuses” (or even worse, “host” campuses). This meant that all department curricular, placement, faculty evaluation, and equity work would disappear as our department was absorbed into the practices and processes of the main campus (or even eliminated, with the main campus practices to replace them).

Currently, the new arrangement purports to preserve the ability of students to start at a branch campus and move to any UW campus; however, as at most four-year campuses, transfer “out” is seen not as a success because students are pursuing their educational goals, but as an institutional loss since these campuses are losing the income from full-time student tuition and the efforts of recruitment and enrollment. UWC's original mission, like that of most two-year campuses that focus on granting certificates and associate degrees, was explicitly transfer—we always expected to prepare students to leave and go somewhere else. Our primary role was to prepare them to do so. Access, transfer, and skill-building—getting students ready to go wherever they want to go—were part of the architecture of the writing program (as in many two-year-college

writing programs)—and, we think, offer a window into what the discipline of a writing studies centered on access could be. We argue that the ease with which our programs, structures, and policies were discarded in favor of those of many of the four-year host institutions is not unlike the way that writing studies scholarship overvalues the experiences of a specific echelon of students and faculty while devaluing the expertise built from years of curriculum, instruction, and assessment work in first-year composition studies. That access and transfer mission—central to the Wisconsin Idea that has governed the state’s system of higher education for over a century—is now diminished.

To illustrate the specifics of this change, we include throughout the chapters the voices of our institutional colleagues reflecting on what the changes have meant, like those of Lisa Schreibersdorf, tenured faculty at what was the UW–Fond du Lac campus, and now part of University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh. We purposefully integrate these voices with those of other scholars in our field, emphasizing the recentering we champion through this book.

**Lisa Schreibersdorf, UWC–Fond du Lac:**

Some of the most fundamental differences relate to the access and transfer parts of our campus’s mission. I’ve been involved in a number of conversations that took a long time to get to the moment where it clicked that we were starting from different assumptions. For example, we assume that our students will be transferring, so our system of transfer agreements, our advising processes, and the information we make available to students when they register are set up to help them see how individual courses will transfer to other institutions for future majors; we think of credit transfers proactively, while a four-year college will think of this reactively (how an advisor can help an individual student who has decided to transfer and has already taken the classes they hope to transfer). We also see being an open-access campus, without the requirement of high test scores and grades for admission, is a point of pride for our faculty and staff, not an embarrassment.

Perhaps fortuitously (even though it was incredibly difficult as an experience), the story of UWC can serve as an important reminder about the positionality of two-year-college teacher-scholar-activism in the matrix of writing studies scholarship. It can also serve as a frame for our larger arguments about writing studies, scholarship, and materiality in part because the labor of two-year-college contexts is becoming increasingly relevant to the larger higher education conversations, especially with their values of access and equity. Whether it is online and asynchronous learning, hybrid courses, flipped classrooms, distance/remote instruction, dual credit and concurrent enrollment partnerships, or success and retention interventions, two-year-college campuses have pioneered this work. Open-admissions policies mean that instruction has to be as available and flexible as possible. Instructors in these environments should become a knowledge source that is essential as we navigate the pandemic, an unanticipated event that has forced all colleges to develop accessible and flexible instruction. Likewise, if the hypothesis that more students will stay closer to home (perhaps starting at community and technical colleges nearby rather than moving to residential campuses), more campuses than ever will need to think about transfer (including reverse transfer, as students who began at their campus potentially return home—and then back again—with accumulated credits). Put another way, the knowledge about how college can look is uniquely available at two-year colleges, if only the larger academic community will ask for it.

From this context, we do not claim to speak for all two-year-college faculty (whether at a technical college, traditional community college, or junior college; whether adjunct, tenure-line, or full-time non-tenure-track). We do, however, draw from a rich foundation of decades of teaching in the two-year environment, working with hundreds of instructors both tenure-line and contingent, teaching thousands of students over that time period, and conducting research in the process. We also draw from the work we did in department, campus, and institutional governance bodies: senates; evaluation committees for faculty promotion, tenure, and retention; assessment; and curriculum. All of this work is generally less

visible than teaching and research but equally important in terms of creating writing programs that work for teachers and students. We want to tell the story of teachers, scholars, and activists within this lens of political threats to our discipline's integrity. In this way, the fate of UWC can serve as a parable for broader threats to what might be our "new discipline."

We hope to make clear the voices we believe are missing from writing studies scholarship. By integrating the experiences of instructors and students like those of Lisa above and Rachel below, we aim to help them be seen (and heard) in a text like this—not just as statistics or as silent members of a large academic population, but as people who can provide firsthand knowledge of the material conditions of teaching and learning in the two-year environment. These stories told by instructors and students will underscore how the field does and does not account for their working and learning conditions.

**Rachel Barger, UWC—Washington County:**

As instructional academic staff, my position has always been provisional. I've essentially remained an adjunct on a semester-to-semester contract for my fourteen years for [UWC], and I had never really felt any security. But on that day [of the announcement of the dissolution], I struggled to feel anything but apprehensive. Because I'm human, I initially reacted with thoughts of how will I support my family, and should I start looking for another job? My initial selfish response was quickly replaced by my fear of what would happen to our students and community. All I could think about was the UW Colleges Mission that attracted me to my position. . . .

We questioned how joining with the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee would affect our institutional goals. As an open-access institution located in a small community north of Milwaukee, we attract a wide variety of students with diverse backgrounds, educations, and preparation levels. Access and affordability are significant to our student population. While there is some overlap in who is attracted to both institutions, many of

the students enrolled in our university come underprepared for college-level work. Through our strong developmental education background, we have consistently been able to meaningfully support their specific needs in ways four-year institutions hadn't needed to. And, because we give it to them at a reasonable cost, they can justify the initial risk. They get a University of Wisconsin education and a new beginning no matter where they came from or what their end goal is. Since we give opportunities to students who wouldn't otherwise have an option to go to a four-year institution, we worried about how they would survive the restructuring and how it would affect future students like them.

One way to illustrate the working environment of two-year-college faculty like Rachel is to look at the material conditions of the new majority of students, which significantly influence the two-year-college classroom. The “new discipline” of writing studies exists in part because, as Elaine Maimon notes, this new majority of students—students of color, first-generation students, and low-income students—increasingly make up our student populations, with BIPOC students significantly more likely to start their educations in two-year colleges. As College Board research shows: “44 percent of Black and 56 percent of Latinx students were in the public two-year sector in 2014, compared with 29 percent from these groups in the public four-year sector” (Ma and Baum 5). Data from the Lumina Foundation show that students are increasingly nontraditional in terms of age, are the first in their families to go to college, are financially independent, and are working significant hours while in college. Or, to be more precise:

- Thirty-seven percent of college students are twenty-five or older, and 46 percent are first-generation college-goers.
- Sixty-four percent of college students work, and 40 percent of them work full-time.
- Forty-nine percent of college students are financially independent from their parents.
- Six percent of college students serve or have served in the US armed forces.



- Twenty-four percent of college students have children or other dependents. Fifty-seven percent of students live independently—away from their parents or campus housing.
- Thirty-one percent of college students come from families at or below the Federal Poverty Guideline. The majority of college students (53 percent) come from families at or below twice the poverty level.

Data from Pew Research also demonstrate that

- In 2016, 20 percent of dependent college students were in poverty, up from 12 percent in 1996. At two-year colleges, that number has doubled from 13 percent to 27 percent between 1996 and 2016; and
- 42 percent of independent college students were in poverty in 2016, compared with 29 percent twenty years earlier.

And here UWC's story—along with the material realities of two-year colleges nationally—becomes relevant, because the discipline of writing studies should be one that responds to the needs of the students we commit to educate, and those students increasingly resemble the students that have always sought out two-year colleges as their postsecondary option. The majority of students do not experience college as a place they “go away” to, nor is it the only thing they do or even the biggest priority in their lives. These “new students” are really the “traditional students” of community-college and open-access institutions. The knowledge of writing studies should be as influenced by the diversity in our students as our students are by the knowledge of writing studies. If we are to meet the needs of our discipline's classrooms, then we need to learn from the work of teachers like those at UWC. We need to learn how to support such programs in the face of the austerity-driven restructuring of our classrooms. We require rigorous research to meet this moment, and that research has already begun in community colleges.

The existence of this research and praxis is what brings us back to the foundational role of first-year writing all across higher education. The most significant location for this kind of interactional

knowledge and practice work is not just two-year colleges, but first-year writing courses, a curriculum that is a vexed, contested, and yet essential part of the field. It is also a part of the field that is underrepresented in important ways in our discipline's bodies of knowledge, even though teachers and students at two-year colleges have been doing relevant disciplinary work for decades. In this way, we build on and affirm the work of Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt and Chuck Bazerman, who have called for the centering of writing studies on first-year writing and writing classrooms. As Bazerman noted in his 2010 CCCC chair's address, "First-year writing remains the largest part of our work and our main site of engagement with most students. Through the efforts of our classrooms, almost every college-educated adult has come to understand more about writing" (578). Eight years later, Calhoun-Dillahunt echoed this call, citing the tagline of the show *Heroes*: "Save First-Year Comp, Save the Discipline." As an interview with Calhoun-Dillahunt in the *Council Chronicle* documents (and as we demonstrate later in this chapter), "the majority of English PhDs will likely end up teaching composition and writing in some form, either in graduate school or when they seek teaching jobs" (Ryan 28). In the context of this reality, to integrate the knowledge production in writing studies with the focus of the work people do—and in the actual places they do it—is to create the center, the core, that offers an avenue into the public discourse around writing. Yet such discourse is increasingly legislated and mandated by external stakeholders (see Adler-Kassner's CCCC chair's address, 2017). FYW instructors—whether two-year-college faculty, graduate teaching assistants, or contingent and lecturer faculty—should be acknowledged as the field's center, not its margins, particularly as they provide the foundation upon which graduate program faculty maintain their own positions with low teaching loads and hyperspecialized course assignments. The power of first-year writing instruction, either to uplift or to obstruct students, should be rooted in the experiences of students and teachers. Instead, writing programs and writing studies knowledge is often disconnected from those experiences, and (especially at research-intensive institutions with graduate programs) prioritizes

staffing practices, opportunities for graduate students, and theorizing knowledge that is often imposed from above rather than emerging from the daily realities of college writing classrooms in diverse settings. We ignore this disconnect at our peril.

**RECENTERING TEACHING RESEARCH TO  
REFLECT CURRENT LABOR CONDITIONS**

Two-year-college students as a group are different from the traditional vision of an undergraduate. Faculty and instructors in two-year colleges, as well, work in significantly different conditions from those whose workload includes research and publication as an assigned component of their contracts. In addition, faculty with research expectations who research and write for the purposes of tenure might produce writing studies scholarship that represents first-year writing as a singular, and universally understood, entity—a single course or degree requirement that students fulfill in their predicted road to a major, degree, and career or graduate school. In reality, first-year writing is a complex constellation of placement processes and multiple distinct courses in reading, writing, and learning skills, and it is governed by a diverse array of department, institutional, and state expectations. Each of these features is influenced by and responds to student populations and the local academic ecology. Within this more complex understanding of what first-year writing is and does, there is an accompanying need for disciplinary scholarship that reflects the labor realities of faculty holding both contingent and full-time positions at teaching-intensive institutions (which we define as teaching twelve contact hours or more during a term—typically but not always four courses) who navigate such terrains. This is a labor reality that the majority—and increasing proportion—of those earning graduate degrees in English will occupy.

To illustrate, according to the MLA's Office of Research, "In 2016–17, the decline in the number of jobs advertised in the MLA Job Information List (JIL) continued for a fifth consecutive year. The JIL's English edition announced 851 jobs, 102 (10.7 percent) less than in 2015–16." They further report that "[t]he declines of

the past five years bring the number of advertised jobs to yet another new low, below the level reached after the severe drop between 2007–08 and 2009–10. The 851 jobs in the English edition for 2016–17 are 249 (22.6 percent) below the 1,100 advertised in 2009–10, the previous low point” (1). Illustrating data (see Table 1.1) breaks these numbers down further into tenure-track positions advertised in subfields of English, which include composition and rhetoric, technical and business writing, and creative writing and journalism, put alongside literature. What the MLA data show is a fairly steady decrease in tenure-line positions across all subfields, with a slight bounce back in 2017–2018 for composition and rhetoric. The 2020 pandemic—with its upending of teaching, staffing, hiring, and budgets—is likely to have a significant negative impact on hiring of new faculty in the coming years.

Further, these figures need to be placed in the context of the number of PhDs earned in the larger field of English studies (see Table 1.2.). For the 1,232 instructors receiving terminal degrees in literature fields, creative writing, or language in 2018 or the 1,358 in 2017, a number not aligned with the available 539 tenure-track jobs advertised in that year, employment will probably mean lecturer and adjunct positions, nearly all of which will have responsibility for the teaching of college composition. Such employment will also likely be in a two-year college (TYC), teaching courses almost exclusively in the lower division. And, as Christie Toth and Patrick Sullivan note, about 25 percent of community college liberal arts faculty nationally hold doctoral degrees (253).

For quite some time, the common wisdom of the field of English has been that though literature PhDs and the accompanying job market for them has contracted to the point of unsustainability, a doctorate in writing studies would be a smart investment on the part of a graduate student seeking secure employment. The data in Table 1.2 should give us pause regarding that common wisdom. Instead, these numbers demonstrate that more and more instructors with degrees in all subfields of English, even in rhetoric and composition, can expect to work off the tenure track in less secure or part-time positions. Though an increasing amount of attention

**Table 1.1. Data Drawn from MLA Office of Research Report on Advertised Tenure-Line Positions in Subfields of English**

	Writing (Composition and Rhetoric)	Technical and Business Writing	Creative Writing and Journalism	Literature (all)	Total
2017–2018	112	38	65	324	539
2016–2017	94	45	80	354	573
2015–2016	135	58	91	316	600
2014–2015	161	57	96	367	681
2013–2014	164	47	79	369	659

**Table 1.2. Data Drawn from National Science Foundation Data on Earned Doctorates in Letters, Historical (*Doctorate Recipients; Survey*)**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
American literature, United States and Canada	338	327	361	367	409	397	349	334	342	311	273
Comparative literature	166	179	197	192	201	218	196	165	172	166	172
Creative writing	73	76	81	84	93	79	87	97	79	84	Not listed
English language	156	104	146	179	154	92	147	153	127	159	121
English literature, British and Commonwealth	397	388	419	354	423	399	396	412	414	369	383
Rhetoric and composition	NA	NA	NA	NA	154	220	207	238	211	227	241
Speech and rhetorical studies	126	138	152	165	53	33	29	42	39	42	42
Total	1256	1212	1356	1341	1487	1438	1411	1441	1384	1358	1232

has been paid to preparing graduate students for “alt-ac” positions, and some efforts have been made to prepare students for a wider range of types of academic positions, it still seems that most doctoral programs are preparing students for a career in the academy. A 2020 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article by Leonard Cassuto and Robert A. Weisbuch makes the numbers clear, imagining the prospects of an entering class of eight graduate students in English:

Now let’s flash-forward in time. According to recent statistics, four of the eight (50 percent!) will not complete the PhD—and those are pre-Covid-19 numbers. Of the four who do finish, two will not get academic positions and will seek jobs elsewhere. The remaining pair will get full-time faculty jobs, most likely at teaching-intensive institutions. Perhaps they’ll get tenure-track assistant professorships, though the chances for those positions have been shrinking. And maybe one of the two will get a tenure-track position at a research university like the one where those eight students assembled years earlier.

The solution that these authors advance is to call for “a PhD that looks outside the walls of the university, not one that turns inward,” a solution we couldn’t disagree more with. There is important work to do within the academy, but only if we reconceptualize what it means to work in the academy. This involves deeply investing our time and energy into preparing graduate students to be teaching-focused faculty with as much as if not more commitment than we do research faculty. Teaching-intensive positions at less-selective four-year, regional comprehensive, and especially community and technical colleges offer a rewarding and intellectually enriching professional life, and there are critical needs in such institutions for committed teacher-scholar-activists (to use Sullivan’s and Darin Jensen’s term). However, potential faculty preparing for the academic life of teaching-intensive schools need a different kind of graduate school experience than the ones we currently have.<sup>5</sup>

Those PhD recipients who make the transition to a TYC context will find a wide range of position responsibilities and types, but



they can be certain that the working conditions will be markedly different from those of their senior faculty at their graduate institutions as well as from their own experiences as graduate teaching assistants. TYC institutions are diverse. They can be technical colleges that have some general education or university offerings but largely serve an applied degree program; they can be community colleges that typically have both vocational and general education/transfer curricula; or they can be junior colleges (such as UWC) that offer only a transfer-parallel liberal arts curriculum. But they do share some consistent features, as recently reported by the TYCA Workload Task Force's report, "The Profession of Teaching English in the Two-Year College: Findings from the 2019 TYCA Workload Survey." Survey data from over a thousand two-year-college faculty showed the following:

- Fifty-six percent worked off the tenure track (though of those, 20 percent had a stable position with a renewable annual contract, and another 14 percent had a permanent or multiyear contract).
- The most common teaching load identified was 28 to 35 credit hours per year (or an average of 14–17 credits, for example, on a semester schedule), though course assignments in two-year colleges can include 4-, 5-, and 6-credit corequisite courses that do not directly translate to a traditional 3-credit course structure in university settings.
- Overload teaching is common, with instructors taking on additional courses for additional compensation (more than a third of respondents do so always or regularly).
- Seventy percent of respondents spent at least one and up to six hours a week on service activities, with most identifying institutional and departmental service as the most frequent type of service performed.
- Respondents identified multiple types of disciplinary service they engage in on campus and beyond, including curriculum development (14 percent), assessment (11 percent), faculty training (10 percent) and writing program (9 percent) and developmental education program work (9 percent).

- Seventy-three percent of two-year-college faculty respondents also engage in disciplinary service, including serving as peer reviewers for conferences or journals, serving on committees or in leadership roles for professional organizations, and serving as editors or on editorial boards.
- Nearly all respondents identified participation in professional development activities—with 89 percent engaging weekly in some form of professional development. An important feature of two-year-college professional development is that PD work is not aimed toward research and writing—just 10 percent of respondents identified scholarly publication as their professional development goal. More common ongoing professional development in these contexts includes attending or presenting at conferences, participating in and facilitating training on nondisciplinary teaching topics, and facilitating disciplinary training for colleagues, among other activities.

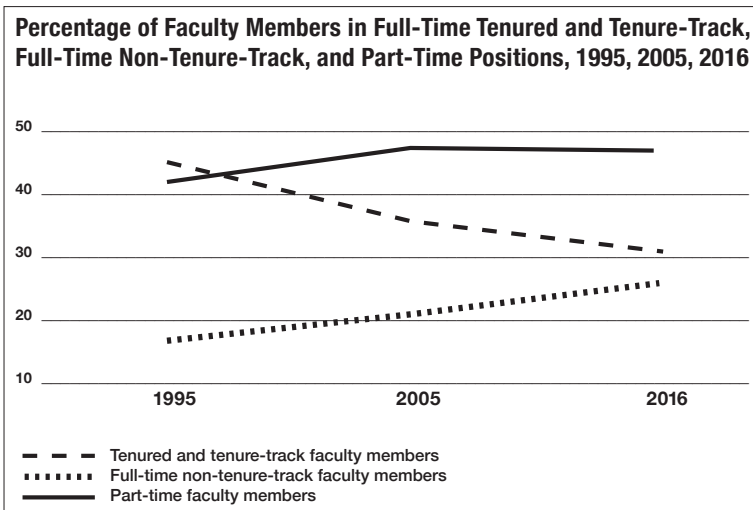
By emphasizing research and publication over teaching (and emphasizing scholarly publication as the premier form of professional achievement), we are as a field, then, doing the opposite of what is necessary if we acknowledge that two-year colleges are an enormous, important sector of higher education employment. David Laurence's *Demography of the Faculty: A Statistical Portrait of English and Modern Languages*<sup>6</sup> shows that the total number of faculty members whose teaching field is postsecondary English numbers 82,400, 47.9 percent of whom teach in Carnegie associates institutions. Most striking for our purposes here, though, is his assertion that “[d]espite the extraordinarily high percentage of faculty members teaching off the tenure track in two-year colleges, the 8,704 English faculty members holding tenured and tenure-track positions in two-year colleges outnumber the tenured and tenure-track English faculty in every other sector” (2). In other words, and as we discuss throughout this book, two-year-college English teaching is an enormous site of employment for those who earn graduate credentials in the field of English (both MAs and PhDs)—one that has a crucial and distinct mission that is consistently undervalued in the academic hierarchy and prestige economy of the academy. It is

undervalued even though the type of work performed by two-year-college faculty is similar in some key respects to the work that takes place in universities—with a greater proportion of it happening in the classroom.<sup>7</sup> We discuss the relationship between the employment conditions of two-year-college teachers and its relationship to the classroom in more depth in Chapter 3.

When thinking about how English and writing studies graduate programs prepare their graduates for work beyond the MA or PhD, these numbers must also be framed within an overall shift in employment stability and structures within higher education. And as we discuss in more detail later, the curricula of such programs are minimally aligned with the kinds of work those students will ultimately do in most teaching contexts. But it is not just a diminishing number of tenure-track positions and/or an overproduction of doctorates that is causing this labor situation. It is also the casualization of academic labor that frames the data above, a phenomenon that is particularly urgent for college composition because of the “universal requirement” of first-year writing to employ a large corps of instructors to offer sufficient sections to accommodate enrollment, while simultaneously maintaining the flexibility to cut sections (and teachers) when enrollments do not go as planned. As Marc Bousquet observed in 2003, “Since the restoration of tenure-stream lines is rarely a department-level prerogative, a department with the power to reduce graduate-student admissions will generally be driven to substitute other casual appointments (postdocs, term lectureships, single course piece workers)” (209). These are the new majority of teaching appointments that graduates from English departments will enter, whether they are earning master’s degrees or doctorates, and they will need both to understand the workload expectations and the students at open-access institutions, if they choose to make a career in the academy.

Too much has changed in the last thirty years to assume that PhD overproduction is the appropriate access point for conversations about labor in our field. The casualization of labor will not be reversed anytime in the future, which is a separate but related issue in any conversation about labor realities in teaching college

writing. As reported in a 2011 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, “According to the Department of Education, in 1975, 57 percent of university faculty members were tenured or on the tenure track. By 2007 that number had dropped to 31 percent” (Ennis). A report from the AAUP confirms that “[t]he majority (70 percent) of academic positions today are not only off the tenure track but also part time, with part-time instructional staff positions making up nearly 41 percent of the academic labor force and graduate teaching assistants making up almost another 13 percent (part-time tenure-track positions make up about 1 percent of the academic labor force)” (Shulman et al. 13). Laurence’s MLA report “Demand for New Faculty Members, 1995–2016” provides a visual representation of this shift (see Figure 1.1). What this figure illustrates is that the work many graduate students are training for (or that they expect constitutes the “academic life”) will not exist when they complete their degrees. The investment of years of labor, energy, and opportunity cost will not pay off for many of them, at least not in the ways they were trained to expect.



**Figure 1.1. Percentage of faculty members in full-time tenured and tenure-track, full-time non-tenure-track, and part-time positions, 1995, 2005, 2016.**

Efforts to change the culture of graduate programs are shown in recent professional documents like *CCCC Statement of Professional Guidance for Mentoring Graduate Students*, which offers important recommendations like “Graduate students should be encouraged and validated for career aspirations, choices, and outcomes beyond (ever fewer) conventional academic tenure-track positions,” and “Graduate students and mentors should learn about the state of the academic job markets, including the casualization (i.e., the current climate of nontenure track and contingent labor) of the academic workforce.”<sup>8</sup> Directly addressing how mentoring and program culture influence the ways that future faculty understand their professional responsibilities is one important component of the shift to this new discipline.

However, we also want to place this disciplinary conversation within the larger framework of labor activism and ideological-economic shifts in higher education that have as much of an influence on how the academic discipline of writing studies can move forward in attending to an integrated vision of labor, teaching, and scholarship. This means acknowledging that even if graduate students succeed at finding such employment, they cannot assume the security of previous generations of professors. Tenure as an employment construct has been under constant assault such that any assumptions about the stability of tenure protections into the future should be challenged (see Gardner). Along with the narrative of overproduction of PhDs and the increase in contingent appointments, the diminishment of tenure has contributed to a new discipline to which we have not adjusted. Efforts to rebuild board- and state-level documents that allow for faculty layoff in the case of program discontinuance or closure have been achieved or are underway in Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. This increasing instability within academic culture has been exacerbated by austerity measures that have substantially decreased the stable foundation of funding that public institutions could, in past years, count on to offset such fluctuations, with the result being an increasing dependence on tuition revenue to manage budgets.<sup>9</sup>

The cumulative effect on the ability of writing programs to ensure quality instruction, assessment, and administrative coher-

ence is potentially devastating. Sarah Snyder notes in “Preparing to Become a Two-Year College Writing Program Administrator” that formal WPA positions in two-year colleges are rare—noting that the National Census of Writing cites just 11 percent of two-year colleges having formal WPA positions (in contrast to 51 percent of four-year programs) (107). The importance of faculty who are trained in administrative and program issues, especially specific to open-admissions and -access institutions and changing educational structures, is even more evident. Non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty are often discouraged from institutional engagement, in particular from participating in the work that is required to maintain shared governance: curricular maintenance; development of new programs; support and mentoring of new instructors, along with major and minor undergraduate students; and assessment of student learning. These are all expectations for tenure-line faculty but not a usual component of the workload of instructors working off the tenure track, meaning that the glue that holds our collective work together is weakening.

Within this context, consider data just about writing program staffing. Two sources over the last decade have attempted to track the percentage of staffing types in English departments and writing programs, the 2009 report from the CCCC Squire Office of Policy Research (Gere) and a 2014 MLA report on a staffing survey (*Data*). Table 1.3 provides a comparison across institutional types and data sources of the percentage of first-year writing courses in the surveyed departments that were taught by which types of instructors. These data demonstrate how differently configured writing programs are in terms of instructor employment status, and gesture toward why there are gaps between the ways we prepare students to become writing instructors in college (and members of a campus or program) and how the work actually looks. In institutions with PhD programs, first-year writing is essentially the province of novices—graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) whose first introduction to teaching will be the first-year writing courses that are the entry point into academic literacy development for new college students. Very few first-year writing courses are taught by tenure-line faculty in those departments that offer graduate degrees (13.4 percent and



17.6 percent, in PhD- and MA-granting campuses, respectively). The majority of the rest of the instruction is handled by part-time and full-time non-tenure-line instructors.

Put another way, first-year students at such campuses are highly likely to take a writing course with someone for whom the teaching of writing is a part-time job or an apprenticeship (63 percent of teaching staff are GTAs and part-time faculty). By contrast, 61 percent of first-year writing courses at two-year campuses are taught by full-time instructors—teachers for whom helping new college students make the transition to college literacies is their full-time work, which leads us to the question of what, exactly, professional identity in college writing programs looks like. We next want to explore the relationships between professional identity, labor, and the experience of first-year writing students alongside one another, so that we can make clear what the work of writing faculty in higher education actually does look like, and what it could look like.

**Table 1.3. Percentage of Writing Program Instructors Whose Status Is Best Described by Each Employment Category**

Percentage of writing program instructors whose status is best described by each of the following categories	CCCC Squire Report (2009, results not disaggregated by institution type) <sup>10</sup>	MLA Staffing Survey (2014, PhD-Granting Institutions)	MLA Staffing Survey (2014, MA-Granting Institutions)	MLA Staffing Survey (2014, Two-Year Colleges)
Tenure-line faculty (tenured or tenure-track)	20.93% tenured and 11.72% tenure-line (total of ~32%)	13.4%	17.6%	37%
Full-time non-tenured faculty	28.6%	23.5%	29.9%	24%
Full-time staff	7.3%	NA	NA	NA
Part-time faculty	39.44%	24.2%	37.5%	38.9%
Other (graduate teaching assistants)	33.61%	38.8%	15%	NA

MEETING THE RESEARCH NEEDS  
OF THE TEACHING MAJORITY

Within this higher education market labor context, we ask: What does it mean, exactly, to be a professional in the field of writing studies? A good deal of professional literature has also asked this question (for example Wardle and Scott; Larson; Del Principe). We ask it here with the purpose of advancing our queries about the relationships between labor conditions, writing studies emphases, and the needs of students—as well as how that professional identity is or is not served by the professional resources that are available. We also consider the role of the master's credential in teaching, research, and graduate education, particularly related to writing programs and curriculum.

For two-year-college tenure-line faculty who likely have primary training and backgrounds in literature, creative writing, or other related fields, and for most contingent faculty at nearly all institutional types, a different type of scholarship and research is necessary to support their work. Most teach primarily in the lower division, without the protections of tenure, with a new majority of college students. These are instructors who could benefit from, and who are looking for, research that reflects the material realities of their work. These are instructors who, along with their students, are ill-served by the gaps we describe above.

**Valerie Murrenus Pilmaier, UWC Sheboygan:**

I am so proud to have been a part of [UWC]. While I was offered jobs at four-year institutions, I chose to work [at UWC] because, as a first-generation student myself, I believe in the mission of access. I have witnessed, countless times, that moment of transformation when a student realizes that he/she/they do belong in college and their entire sense of self shifts. I have had the privilege to work alongside the most brilliant, dedicated instructors, all of whom are experts in their fields and believe as passionately in the mission of access as I do. I have watched our staff work twelve- to sixteen-hour days without complaint to ensure that all of the student events go off smoothly, and I have seen our

deans provide their own personal funds to pay for activities for the staff and students. If only our dedication alone could have kept it afloat. In the end, I know that we changed lives and made a difference, but I'm left with the realization of the colossal loss for our students, for our colleagues, and for our state.

Many two-year-college instructors have graduate preparation at the master's or doctoral level focused nearly exclusively on literature and creative writing. As a result, their primary research and creative work, for those whose institutions reward such efforts, falls in those related areas that are significant to their professional identities within English studies, even though writing courses make up most of their teaching responsibilities. As we have sought to differentiate writing studies as its own subfield, it's possible that more than ever before instructors who have responsibilities for teaching writing courses as well as other areas of English are discouraged from seeing relationships between those areas of their professional preparation and their daily classroom work. This is a mismatch, we argue, that calls for a shift in the scholarship we call knowledge. Annie Del Principe articulates the competing lines of thinking on this topic in her 2020 article "Cultivating a Sustainable TYC Writing Program: Collaboration, Disciplinarity, and Faculty Governance," citing Holly Larson's award-winning 2018 *TETYC* article, whose "argument seeks to elevate practitioner knowledge to scholarly, professional knowledge" (61). Larson's position, argues Del Principe, "would define being in the field of composition as teaching composition classes, reflecting on one's experiences teaching those classes, and processing those reflections and experiences reciprocally with other composition teachers" (117). Del Principe herself questions whether such a definition is fair, valid, or reflective of definitions of professional membership, concluding somewhat speculatively that "in order to have expertise and professional status in writing studies one must participate in the communal, scholarly interactions of the field—right?" (62). The different positions reflected by Larson and Del Principe expose the core questions around writing studies, professional expertise, and disciplinarity, as well as the poor align-

ment between the three pillars of our work: labor, teaching, and scholarship.

To further complicate these issues, we acknowledge that we've focused so far largely on the job market for the PhD in writing studies or rhetoric and composition, but that to understand the labor market for two-year colleges and for the teaching of writing, it's also important to attend to the graduate credential that most typically qualifies someone to teach in the lower-division English curriculum—the MA degree. The graduate preparation of such instructors—who make up the majority of both the two-year-college English workforce and the first-year writing instructors in most contexts<sup>11</sup>—gives us another way to think about the work that scholarship and research in writing studies could and should perform. If scholarship in the field is intended to advance knowledge but also establish best practices and standards, the absence of attention to systematic research on pedagogy and first-year writing (as we will demonstrate later in the book) has particular exigency for those instructors whose prior graduate preparation is not aligned with the intensive work they will do in college writing classrooms.

In the 2008 MLA/ADE report on the workforce in English, there is a special inset note remarking upon the master's degree as the standard credential for teaching in the lower division, and it should be noted that the vast majority of instructors who are teaching in two-year colleges would hold this as their highest degree. As the report authors wrote, "The data summarized in figure 14 caught the committee by surprise. We had assumed that most full-time non-tenure-track faculty members would hold the doctorate. A master's degree seems to be the qualifying degree for teaching off the tenure track (and teaching in the lower division)" (*Education*). This finding is no surprise to two-year-college faculty, or even to WPAs who regularly evaluate credentials for the teaching of first-year writing. A subsequent MLA report, the 2011 *Rethinking the Master's Degree in English for a New Century*, observed that "[i]n fact, overall in two-year institutions, about 89 percent of English faculty members do not hold a doctorate (fig. 2)" (3).<sup>12</sup> Most relevant from this report, though, is what it reveals about the sub-

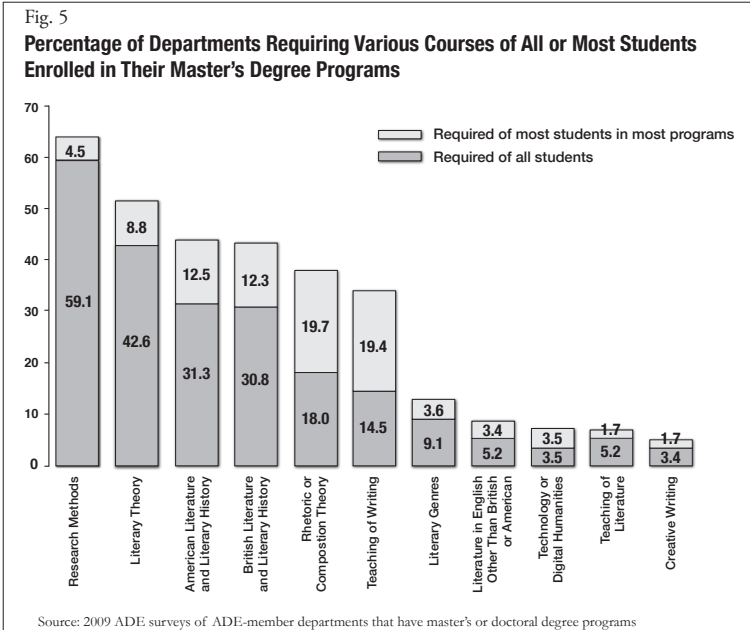
stance of masters' programs (both MA and MFA, both of which predominate as credentials for the teaching of first-year writing) and their often inadequate inclusion of training in the teaching of writing, as well as relevant coursework on pedagogy, assessment, and composition theory.

Because the current body of writing studies scholarship is aimed largely at specialists, the graduate curricula of MA programs and the backgrounds that such instructors bring to their classrooms illustrate the ways that working conditions as well as teaching and learning conditions perform specific functions for the teaching staff of the majority of FYW courses. As the report notes,

62.4 percent of respondents designate the preparation of postsecondary teachers as important or very important to their missions (Table 1.4), but it is not at all clear that most programs structure course offerings and requirements that are explicitly directed to prospective teachers. Because the common curriculum for the MA degree has largely stagnated, the role of responsive and relevant scholarship is especially important. As Figure [1.2] reveals, the most common requirement is a course in research methods, required for all or most students at 63.6 percent of the programs that responded to the survey. (9)

Figure 1.3 shows what the typical required courses are for a master's degree in English, with the majority requiring research methods and literary theory, while the teaching of literature and creative writing courses was required by just a handful of programs.

In brief, then, the two courses most often required of master's students are literary theory and research methods, regardless of the area of specialization or intended employment or educational goal of the master's student. Half of programs have literary theory as a course requirement, approximately the same proportion of programs that require a course in the teaching of writing (58.1 percent), though literary theory is unlikely to be a teaching responsibility for any instructor with a master's-level credential (*Rethinking*



**Figure 1.2. Required coursework in MA programs, survey from the Associated Departments of English, 2011.**

Table 5  
**Percentage of Departments Requiring or Not Requiring Specific Course Types**

	Required of All Students	Required of Most Students in Most Programs	Required of Some Students in Some Programs	Not Required
American literature and literary history (64)	31.3	12.5	26.6	29.7
British literature and literary history (65)	30.8	12.3	24.6	32.3
Creative writing (58)	3.4	1.7	41.4	53.4
Literature in English other than British or American (58)	5.2	3.4	13.8	77.6
Literary genres (55)	9.1	3.6	9.1	78.2
Literary theory (68)	42.6	8.8	27.9	20.6
Research methods (66)	59.1	4.5	18.2	18.2
Rhetoric or composition theory (61)	18.0	19.7	36.1	26.2
Teaching of literature (58)	5.2	1.7	22.4	70.7
Teaching of writing (62)	14.5	19.4	24.2	41.9
Technology or digital humanities (57)	3.5	3.5	17.5	75.4
Other (22)	27.3	13.6	4.5	54.5

Source: 2009 ADE surveys of ADE-member departments that have master's or doctoral degree programs  
 Note: Response counts are given in parentheses.

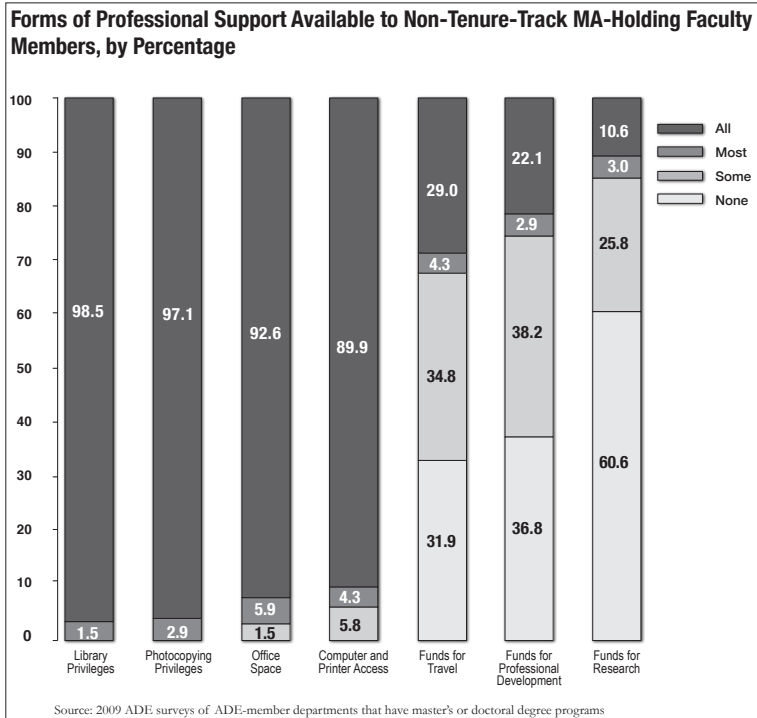
**Figure 1.3. Required coursework for MA degree, Associated Departments of English survey.**

10).<sup>13</sup> Even introductory/general education literature courses informed by such coursework may be in short supply in a two-year college for instructors working off the tenure track.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, the report authors conclude, the MA degree curriculum is “little different from what might have been found fifty years ago: British and American literature surveys; period course requirements; major authors; the three standard genres of fiction, poetry, and drama; and an occasional special topics course” (9).

We think it is a given that MA programs ultimately grant degrees to people who will work as instructors of first-year writing (and not literature, creative writing, or another subspecialty within English studies). It stands out that the MA credential underprepares most graduates who plan to enter a teaching position in which first-year writing courses are likely to be their primary responsibilities (or who do not plan to teach full-time but find themselves doing so for some reason or another). This is not to say that coursework in other foundational areas of English studies—such as the analysis and writing work of literary studies or the workshop and craft focus of creative writing—cannot inform the work of the first-year writing classroom or that this baseline disciplinary knowledge does not fulfill other important purposes for graduate students in English. However, being effective in the ever-changing writing classroom is most likely to occur when such creative or literary study is supported by principles and pedagogical content knowledge in composing, critical reading, rhetorical knowledge, and knowledge of processes. Perhaps with this gap in mind, professional organizations have been working to prepare guiding documents and position statements that will help writing teachers—for example, the 2016 *CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing* and the recently published “TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College” (Calhoun-Dillahunt et al.). These are excellent steps toward beginning to articulate a shared understanding of what it takes to be prepared to work in a teaching-intensive position in a variety of types of institutions (see Leverenz and Goodburn; Carillo, “Beyond”).

There are important implications here for graduates with MAs or PhDs who leave their degree programs with minimal or non-existent coursework in pedagogy, composition theory, and assessment. One is that there is little opportunity for those instructors who are master's-credentialed and, increasingly, working off the tenure track, to rectify these gaps in their graduate coursework such that their knowledge is aligned with the regular work they do. As in the MLA/ADE report, the majority of writing instructors who are accounted for in the CCCC survey do not hold doctorates (51 percent MA, 13 percent MFA, 25 percent other)<sup>15</sup> and have no or limited opportunity for ongoing professional development either in the form of conference travel or independent research (Gere, "Initial Report"). In the MLA report, a question that sheds light on our current discussion is the sorts of professional support that non-tenure-track MA-holding faculty members (who teach the vast majority of our lower-division courses, first-year writing in particular) could expect in their departments (*Rethinking*). What we see being made clear through these data is that the professional responsibilities of writing faculty and writing program administrators, and the work that current graduate students are being prepared to do, are much different from what the work looks like at the research-intensive or research-extensive programs where they will earn their degrees. The published research, professional statements, and development opportunities must instead reflect their material realities: heavy teaching loads, diverse student populations, limited opportunities for ongoing professional development, and strapped budgets. Figure 1.4 shows the professional resources that non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty with MA credentials can expect. The vast majority of such instructors could use the library or make copies, and most have office spaces and access to computers and printers, but fewer than 15 percent of departments provided funding for independent research projects to their non-tenure-track instructors—and funds for professional development (perhaps conference attendance or workshop participation) were guaranteed available to fewer than a quarter of such instructors. Fewer than a third of instructors could count on any travel funding.





**Figure 1.4. Forms of professional support available to non-tenure-track instructors**

All of this is to say that whatever education, training, and professionalization most writing instructors gain in their graduate programs will—in all likelihood—not be supplemented by their employing institution (as things stand now), nor will they have resources to undertake systematic inquiry and assessment projects that can inform decision making in their own local contexts.<sup>16</sup> As Sarah Z. Johnson reflects in a report on her work as chair of the CCCC Task Force on Preparing Teachers of College Writing, “Professional development programs that rely solely on the altruism of full-time faculty to mentor or the desire of part-time faculty to volunteer their extra time do not work. If preparation and professional development are not built into the assigned workload of the department and into the institution’s compensation structure, programs will fizzle or, worse, become a meaningless and unhelpful hoop new

hires must jump through” (25). Without prior coursework or training, instructors without formal training in composition theory and practice may even find it intimidating or unwelcoming to participate in professional communities focused on composition theory and pedagogy.

The funding structures reported in these data are one way that NTT instructors are encouraged to see teaching and research as disconnected activities, but another way this disconnect is exacerbated is by the inadequate representation of the working conditions of such instructors in the body of scholarship, the lack of systematic inquiry that can inform their classroom work, and the accompanying gap in knowledge that results. Ann Penrose asks questions about membership as disciplinary practitioners and scholars in “Professional Identity in a Contingent-Labor Profession: Expertise, Autonomy, Community in Composition Teaching.” She observes:

[W]e are well aware of the factors that would make it natural for nontenure-track (NTT) faculty to wonder if they are truly members of the academic community. Despite the best efforts of WPAs and department heads, the material conditions of NTT teaching—from low pay, short-term contracts and shared offices to the lack of recognition from tenure-track “colleagues” passing in the hall—clearly create the impression that NTT faculty are not members of the professional communities in which they work. (109)

As we discuss in the next section, there are some specific ways that these gaps between preparation and employment responsibilities, and between the role of generalists and specialists, can be bridged with some strategic and intentional efforts. This alignment involves reconceiving what constitutes “membership” or how we define colleagues—and also how we define the discipline.

#### STABILIZING THE FIELD: ALIGNING LABOR, SCHOLARSHIP, AND TEACHING

With this changing context in mind, we argue that writing studies as a field—both the knowledge production and the material work

of that field—must evolve to serve the needs of those instructors who teach writing and who need to survive in the neoliberal university, for two key reasons. First, we need research focused on such students' success, retention, and learning as an essential part of our national agenda. As the gateway course to college ways of reading, writing, and thinking, first-year writing programs serve a unique function within higher education. Engaged and quality instruction in these courses, while not serving an “inoculation function,” as it has been called, does roughly map onto students' ability to proceed into more demanding reading- and writing-intensive courses (see Giordano and Hassel). It is a central component of helping students to stay in higher education and to graduate.

Second, we need to maintain the integrity of the field, by which we do not mean “rigor” or “prestige,” with both of which the word *integrity* is sometimes conflated. Instead, we mean effective writing instruction that uses and responds to disciplinary knowledge in writing studies. Without engaged instructors working in relatively stable and supportive positions, the quality of instruction in writing and the accompanying gains that students can realistically make will be compromised. This lack of integrity erodes the public perception and actual quality of postsecondary writing instruction, further reinforcing the increasing effort to “take care of” or “get out of the way” those first-year writing requirements (see Hansen and Farris; *Statement on Dual Credit*). Attention to the teaching and learning conditions of college writing courses has the potential to restore public confidence in higher education and literacy development as a long-term intellectual process rather than a single experience to be eliminated as a degree requirement. In this way, *integrity* refers not to an exclusionary knowledge system or greater numbers of terminal-degree-credentialed instructors; rather, it refers to an accurate and complete picture of college writing. Such integrity reflects a reality in which the knowledge produced and disseminated matches up with those who use it, rely on it, and build upon it.

In the following pages, we tell the stories of these teachers and these students—the new majorities. We provide a road map for how the architectural components of writing studies, including our

pedagogies, scholarship, and labor structures, can fit together in ways that will fulfill two goals: advancing access to higher education in the service of democratic participation and social justice and integrating the dimensions of writing studies in the service of that advancement. Without a greater, stronger foundation of work that directly relates to these teaching and learning conditions of the vast majority of writing instructors (see Hassel and Giordano, “Occupy”), it will be difficult to engage practitioners with the scholarship because it does not appear relevant to their day-to-day work of teaching first-year writing to a wide range of students. In “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” James Berlin wrote, “It should now be apparent that a way of teaching is never innocent. Every pedagogy is imbricated in ideology, in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed” (492). This same assessment can be applied to knowledge production in the field: the scholarship that we produce reflects our values; what we publish reflects the values of the field and its gatekeepers; the material conditions that persist are, as Berlin asserts, ideologically serving a purpose. Now is an opportunity to critically reevaluate how the materiality of writing studies can be reconciled with its intellectual and symbolic substance.



### ***Cassie’s English 098 Course: The Last Day***

*This particular semester was unusual in that out of the twenty-two students enrolled on the first day, sixteen attended on the last day. Around five to six of those sixteen did not attend regularly but were there to complete and submit their final portfolios and attend the last-day-of-class celebration. The last day is a mess of emotions—relief to be finished with the class, pride in completing a body of work, and fear of the final grade.*

*Some students will learn that they have to repeat English 098, and when one student came to this realization, he picked up his chair and threw it on the ground out of anger. His frustration was understandable—he attended class fairly regularly, and he completed many of the assignments during the semester. He was not, however, able to demon-*

*strate several of the key learning outcomes of English 098, mainly because two of his essays were incomplete. His outburst of anger frightened the students in the class—and me. I asked to speak to him outside in the hallway. We spoke for a few minutes and he left, and he seemed to feel a little better when he had a better understanding of the option to repeat the course with an “R” grade and realized that other students have used this option successfully each semester.*

*While I have not experienced a student throwing a chair before, I have experienced anger and frustration on a regular basis. Most of my colleagues have. I was shaking for at least an hour after the class and was fortunate to have a writing meeting (about this chapter) during which I could talk with Holly about what happened. We connected what happened to the material conditions we work in every day, and we tried to break down what happened on an intellectual level. I feel such an incredible sense of failure when students who risk so much to come to college do not achieve their particular goal of completing English 098—the one goal I feel as though I should be able to help them with. This feeling of failure drives a lot of us in our work, in both debilitating and productive ways.*

*Materiality and Writing Studies* is a powerful call to us writing studies scholars and instructors to critically reexamine how we support our most vulnerable and overlooked students. Veteran two-year college professors Hassel and Phillips make a compelling case for *all* of higher education to heed the work of writing instructors at two-year colleges in order to challenge long-held assumptions about students' material learning conditions and work toward a writing studies discipline centered on access and equity.

– Charissa Che, Queensborough Community College

This book is a powerful call to action for writing studies scholars to center first-year students and instructors of “the new majority” in our research and to prioritize their needs in the professionalization of all instructors. Hassel and Phillips present a compelling argument for “research-based studies for a writing pedagogy and assessment that supports the important work of both access and success for students, and that provides the literacy skills required by an increasingly diverse range of students in college today.” This volume is both timely and important given that the majority of English and writing studies scholars will, at some point, teach first-year writing.

– Bernice Olivas, Salt Lake Community College

*Materiality and Writing Studies: Aligning Labor, Scholarship, and Teaching* takes an expansive look at the discipline of writing studies, arguing for the centering of the field's research and service on first-year writing, particularly the “new majority” of college students (who are more diverse than ever before) and those who teach them. The book features the voices of first-year writing instructors at a two-year, open-access, multi-campus institution whose students are consistently underrepresented in discussions of the discipline. Drawing from a study of 78 two-year college student writers and an analysis of nearly two decades of issues of the major journals in the field of writing studies, Holly Hassel and Cassandra Phillips sketch out a reimagined vision for writing studies that roots the scholarship, research, and service in the discipline squarely within the changing material realities of contemporary college writing instruction.

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