From the Editors

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Time is on my side, yes it is.
Time is on my side, yes it is.
—By Norman Meade (for Irma Thomas and The Rolling Stones)

In her recently published book *The Midnight Disease*, author Alice Flaherty is gripped by a need to write that keeps her up at night. In her manic phases, Flaherty describes words as “flee[ing] from [her] head like rats from a sinking ship” (34). Each time we describe this compelling book to friends and co-authors trying to squeeze in a bit of writing time, their responses are always the same. “I sure could use a case of that 'Midnight Disease,'” lamented one colleague, as the alarm on her sabbatical clock went off.

We have been thinking a lot about time lately, about the ways that clock time is often at odds with our goals to learn something new, keep up with developments in our fields, spend time with loved ones, or even “get more writing done.” Time becomes an either–or proposition: either we have it or we don’t. Most days, it feels like we don’t.

All three of the authors whose articles are featured in this issue urge readers to revisit binaries, troubling either–or divisions, that interfere with our ability to re-imagine productive futures in and around our writing centers. In the opening article, “Tick–Tock, Next: Finding Epochal Time in the Writing Center,” Anne Ellen Geller, drawing on the work of organizational management theorist Allen Bluedorn, contrasts epochal time (where “the event defines the time” and where time is linked to a person’s internal rhythm, or to an external social rhythm) with fungible time (where the clock is the determiner of starts and stops, of beginnings and endings). Using vivid descriptions of illustrations generated by her tutors, all of whom feel constrained by the clock on the wall, Geller urges her readers to consider that “if we embrace the notion of epochal time, we can also embrace the notion that conferences are defined by much more than the time that it takes to hold them.”

This expanded approach to the work of the writing conference makes us wonder about many other time–constrained situations. One in particular are the deadlines we operate under (and assign to our students) for many writing projects. When was that proposal due? How soon is that conference coming up? You want my annual report by when?! Consider the advice we often give writers when it comes time to revise: put that
draft away for awhile, get some distance, a fresh perspective, and, above all, don’t pro-
crastinate! Our slow-down, hurry-up approach is often more about when grades are
due or the length of a quarter or semester than the time needed to craft a powerful
essay or an effective report. Our narratives, then, run on a clock not of our own mak-
ing, and we wonder just how much that idea constrains our work.

A more familiar, though no less problematic, binary is the central-marginal paradox
that has dogged writing center literature for decades. In "The Polyvalent Mission of
Writing Centers," Phillip Gardner and William Ramsey engage the "deep uncertainty"
that our marginalized identity seems to offer. Just as Geller urges readers to reconsid-
er time, Gardner and Ramsey argue for a reconsideration of the dominant "counter-
hegemonic" writing center identity. Avoiding facile categorizations of writing centers
as "anti" or "extra," these authors argue that our ambivalence about the writing cen-
ter's critically intellectual curricular role has inhibited the development of discourses
necessary for writing centers to survive and thrive.

Insider-outside status is a concern for our third contributor as well. Julie Bokser in
"Pedagogies of Belonging: Listening to Students and Peers" considers the question,
"How can we better train tutors to tutor imaginatively and effectively"? For Bokser, the
answer takes her staff away from clock watching and into the potential for epochal time
that Geller proposes. Bokser recommends equipping tutors with a "rhetoric of listen-
ing" to help students in the process of dealing with cultural difference, of "belonging"
to the institution, the course, or the discipline. For Bokser, time has changed. She tells
us, "I now spend more time listening to how my tutors listen."

The two books reviewed in this issue—Virtual Peer Review: Teaching and Learning about
Writing in Online Environments and Writing Groups Inside and Outside the Classroom—
continue the theme of thinking about our work in seemingly alternate ways. Both
books are not about writing centers per se, but both offer views of teaching and learn-
ing in various settings, whether on- or off-line, that expand what we know about the
one-to-one work conducted in familiar settings. Expanding what we know or believe
is certainly worth our time, we feel.

One additional site of our struggle with temporal reality has been the disconnect
between the dates listed on each issue of WCJ and the actual dates they arrive in sub-
scribers’ mailboxes. While it seems a nice gesture to offer our readers spring/summer
in October, this discrepancy has gradually become a crisis of sorts, particularly when
WCJ is held to other calendar-year requirements (such as the nominations for the
IWCA Outstanding Scholarship Award). As a result, starting with this issue we have
decided to revise the dating/timing of our issues. Rather than fall/winter 2004, this
issue is labeled volume 25, number 1 (2005). Historically, the seasonal designations in WCJ have ebbed and flowed. We are the first editors, however, to remove the seasonal distinction altogether. An issue that asks readers to consider the arbitrary nature of temporal markings seemed an opportune moment to bring our own external deadlines in line with our administrative rhythms.

Our current fascination with time leads also to one more analysis and that’s an attempt to understand the relationship between writing and time in terms of our own editorial rhythms. As we try to schedule our own writing, our own teaching, and our own extra-curricular lives, we thought it might be helpful to have a sense of when you are thinking and writing and, subsequently, sending articles to us. As Figure 1 shows, October through February are long, dark, cold and lonely months here in the Northeast, as we await the ding of an inbox telling us we’ve got mail. In contrast, June through September are popular months for submissions. Summer, it seems, stretches out before us all, filled with Geller’s epochal time, dedicated to writing, free from the competing demands of the school year.

What would happen, we wonder, if those competing demands became complementary events or experiences that helped our writing rather than hindered it? In other words, what if, rather than making writing a low priority during the academic year, we made it a high priority—not to the exclusion of our other duties, but instead as a parallel activity? How would writing enable us to do the work we do better, whether that’s gaining a more complete understanding of our writing centers or putting ourselves
constantly in the spaces we offer to our students—as writers discovering new knowledge? How can we place our own writing in epochal time?

Now, we are not talking about coming down with a case of Flaherty's "Midnight Disease." However, we're convinced that putting (even forcing) thoughts into words, scheduling regular writing time (even in short bursts), writing along with others, and having the courage to send out that work despite the occasional rejection are fine strategies to get more writing done. We look forward to seeing the results in future issues.

WORKS CITED