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Writing Center Journal: An Alternative History

Melissa Ianetta and Lauren Fitzgerald

Not long ago, we could pull a neatly folded history . . . out of our glove compartment, unfold it, and navigate our course through the web of lines . . . each [essay] preparing us for the next, like Burma Shave signs. . . The map we were using did exactly what we wanted it to do: it met our professional, intellectual and social needs.

– Cheryl Glenn, *Rhetoric Retold* (3)

We might ask at the macro level through venues, such as this one, which voices are being granted influence and at whose expense?

– Elizabeth H. Bouquet and Neal Lerner,
“After ‘The Idea of a Writing Center’” (185)

This issue, the thirtieth anniversary of *Writing Center Journal*, looks forward by looking back. That is, in order to shed new light on the history of the journal and, by extension, on the future possibilities augured by the growth of the field, we’ve asked a notable group of writing center scholars—Beth Boquet, Harry Denny, Michele Eodice, Nancy Grimm, Neal Lerner, and Michael Pemberton—to select essays that draw our collective gaze to research published during *WCJ*’s first three decades and whose reconsideration would benefit the field as a whole. Through this joint effort we hope to broaden both our historical understanding and our sense of future potential.

On the one hand, our work as editors has convinced us that a revised history of writing center studies can be a rich repository of useful knowledge able to benefit us all, individually and collectively.

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It does so, in part, by deepening our connection to that scholarship which falls beyond such oft-cited disciplinary commonplaces as Andrea Lunsford's "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center," Jeff Brooks' "Minimalist Tutoring," and, of course, Stephen North's "Idea." The contribution of these essays to the growth of the field cannot be overestimated, and yet, as with the expansion of any canon, broadening our gaze beyond our beloved disciplinary touchstones offers us the opportunity to draw, as Cheryl Glenn describes in the first epigraph to this introduction, new "maps," new ways of understanding the roads we've traveled so far.

On the other hand, this backward glance helps us re-survey the landscape in front of us. Admittedly, this collection of essays is striking in that it underscores how much has changed: no more taping sessions with actual tape recorders, no more smoking in offices; we have different citation practices and new media to cite; articles have become longer, and, through the proliferation of their citations, these essays document the always expanding web of conversation in which our inquiries take place. While these differences may fill us with nostalgia (or not!), further perusal of these manuscripts reveals the continuity of our concerns: How do we help—or know if we've helped at all (Janangelo)? What kinds of evidence can we offer for our foundational beliefs in the value of what we do (Davis et al.)? How do we better embrace the diversity our centers hold and how do we define that diversity (Denny, Okawa et al., Welch)? What do new ways of knowing, learning, and composing offer the writing center (Trimbur)? By making strikingly new connections between what knowledge is available and our current concerns, the writing center scholars who have selected and introduce these essays demonstrate the future possibilities charted when we revise our past understandings.

We invite you, then, to consider this an alternate map of writing center history and, in so doing, to create new futures for our individual writing centers and our shared communities of knowledge.

And, of course, happy birthday, *Writing Center Journal!*

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