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From the Editors

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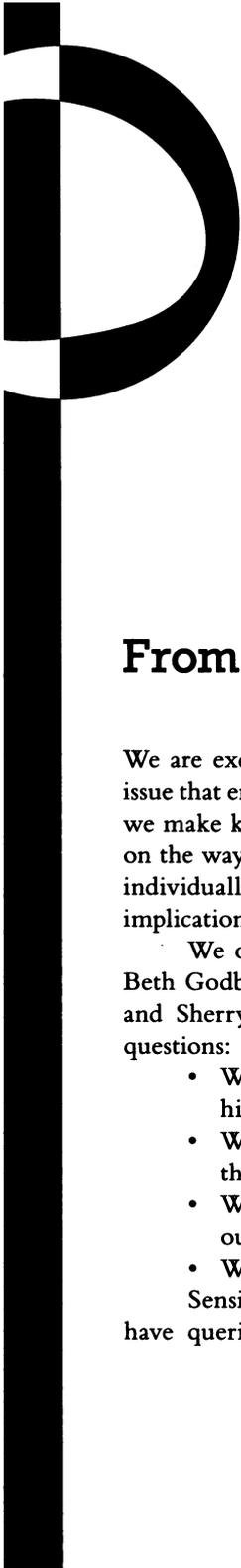
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From the Editors

We are excited to present issue 34.1 of *The Writing Center Journal*, an issue that embraces a range of empirical research and highlights the ways we make knowledge in our writing centers. The articles share a focus on the ways we understand our identity as a field. How do we grapple individually with the commonplaces of writing centers and what are the implications of our place within higher education writ large?

We offer an exceptional line-up of contributors: Dana Driscoll, Beth Godbee, Neal Lerner, Sarah Liggett, John Nordlof, Lori Salem, and Sherry Wynn Perdue. They ask us to engage with important questions:

- What is a writing center? How are we defined in the larger higher education context?
- What can we learn when we recognize conflict between our theory and our practice?
- What do the citation patterns in our scholarship tell us about our field?
- What are our community's beliefs about RAD research?

Sensing a shift toward more empirical research, some of you have queried us about submitting manuscripts that might not *look*

empirical—theoretical pieces, think pieces, narratives and explorations, meditations. Are we interested in such pieces? Or are we drawing our editorial lines to include only empirical studies in *WCJ*? Our honest answer: We are especially inclined toward empirical research—but not exclusively so. If a manuscript possesses strong explanatory power, then *WCJ* is interested. We recognize the value of theoretical exploration, of exceptional thinking, of insight. And we take an expansive view of what constitutes empirical. Empirical research no longer equates only to experimental research: Alice Gillam reminds us that “the term empirical, once it is detached from assumptions of positivism and scientific objectivity, can be used to refer to . . . case studies, ethnography, and various forms of practitioner inquiry” (p. xvi). We remind readers that empirical research can fall anywhere on the quantitative–qualitative continuum and reflects the methodological pluralism and range of methods we want to promote in *WCJ*.

We are often asked what we’re looking for in submissions. First, we value intentionality: a *planned*, intensive investigation of even the simplest of questions. Second, we promote an ethos of questioning. To create new knowledge and understanding requires a bit of the “doubting game”—to question what we often have taken as orthodoxy in practice. Research requires risk: our findings might invalidate long-held beliefs or valued practices. But rather than see invalidation as a threat, we need to study *why* something happens, works, or fails, and celebrate discovery. Certainly we value reflective practice, including our stories and cautionary tales. However, for the credibility of the field, we cannot afford to let the intellectual work of our community end with anecdote. Intentional plans for investigation and a willingness to question provide us with a means of understanding our work.

Frankly, a central problem of our field is that we have yet to embrace the identity of “knowledge-maker.” As co-editors, we feel the collection of articles in 34.1 comes at an important moment for writing centers. More and more, our community is not only being required to show results—assessment and accountability—but also to show *what* writing centers actually do. What happens in a writing tutoring session? How is tutoring like teaching, which some people understand better and value more? Do our findings paint rich pictures of student writing and learning? Of the contexts and environments in which we operate? How well do we articulate our findings? And how effectively do we communicate with different audiences, including administrators, new writing center directors, and faculty outside of writing-centered disciplines? What has seemed implicit to us in the everyday must be made explicit for others. Research gives us a voice, a currency that

confers a power in contexts where our lore alone won't carry much weight.

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Reference

Gillam, A. M. (2002). Introduction. In P. Gillespie, A. M. Gillam, L. F. Brown, & B. Stay (Eds.), *Writing center research: Extending the conversation* (pp. xv-xxix). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.