From the Editors

To our readers in 2020: we hope you are not experiencing inordinate loss. We write this introduction in the midst of multiple events resonant with historical import—and with the possibility for positive, lasting change: worldwide protests for racial justice, the U.S. Supreme Court decision against job discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and significant attempts to save lives and jobs in the face of the ongoing pandemic. Amidst these events, of course, we are all engaged in conversations exploring how education will need to adapt.

Scholarship is even more important now, not just to identify and reflect on courses of action but also as we reconfigure our thinking and innovate in our centers. While embarking on scholarly projects may feel challenging in the face of so many sacrifices, constraints, and uncertainties, we wonder about reframing, when possible, to consider the affordances of the moment (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gibson, 1977). From the research and theory in the pages of this issue, we see the possibility of many such affordances arising. For example, the pain and injustice inflicted by the ideology of white supremacy demands that we interrogate writing centers’ participation in systems of racism. There is so much to do.

Moments of radical change offer new perspectives that expose unexamined questions and shed light on what we’ve been doing all along. Shifting from occasional to entirely online sessions, as some centers are currently doing, is just such an example. Anna Worm’s research can help centers justify this move by providing evidence demonstrating how perceptions of online writing center work are influenced by affective beliefs, which may be grounded...
in lore and unfounded biases. On the other hand, those centers returning to in-person sessions must confront how to teach tutors to communicate emotional intelligence through and around masks and at a physical distance. What possibilities might be created for writers connecting exclusively over text rather than also with body language and facial expressions? As the structure of our embodiments changes, so too must our pedagogies. Hannah Telling’s 2019 IWCA/NCPTW keynote, in print here, highlights the importance of writers’ and consultants’ embodiment. Her work suggests new questions about the understudied intersections of writing centers and disability studies. How do our skills in communicating help us collaborate effectively with writers who may never have recognized physical cues? And, what results from the increased emotional labor that comes from communicating in these ways? The research in this issue by Hohjin Im, Jianmin Shao, & Chuansheng Chen explores not only tutors’ perceptions of emotional labor but also tutors’ own emotions and the strategies used to cope; the work is accompanied by evidence-based strategies for incorporating stress management into tutor training.

In terms of new research affordances, we note that the move to mostly, or entirely, online sessions by many writing centers allows for easier creation of transcripts and recordings, as authors Carolyn Wisniewski, Maria Paz Carvajal Regidor, Lisa Chason, Evin Groundwater, Allison Kranek, Dorothy Mayne, & Logan Middleton point out in their piece. A wealth of discourse-analysis possibilities lies within session transcripts, to which centers may now have greater access, and Michael Rymer offers a primer for those interested in diving into this research area.

But not only new developments bear investigating. At these moments of great change, expanding research into the fundamental questions and values of writing center studies remains key, particularly as centers face COVID-related budget cuts and must further demonstrate the scope and impact of writing centers. Laura Kate Miller’s study of the impact of a course-embedded tutor in an engineering course does just such work, bringing Carol Dweck’s scholarship on promoting a growth mindset into writing center conversations. Miller shows that the writing center can be an important location for promoting such a mindset. Analyses of growth mindsets connect to a persistent writing center question: transfer. Ellen Carillo’s article highlights the recent literature on the ways transfer can be undertaken in writing center work and then extends that work through a preliminary study that provides a more nuanced perspective on studying transfer, as well as teaching for transfer when educating tutors.

As our current situation provides fresh perspectives on our daily practices, Rachel Azima’s piece connects ideas of social justice to an old question—the merits of required visits. Azima evaluates the impact of mandatory visits in a summer academic program for multicultural students, providing evidence that required visits for this student population can contribute to students’ sense of
institutional belonging. Azima’s work draws on student perceptions, which are important because they are linked to learning outcomes (Church, Elliot, & Gable, 2001). Student self-perceptions are, of course, key to gaining insights into student learning experiences. Carol Severino, Deirdre Egan, & Shih-Ni Prim demonstrate this in their study of multilingual students’ perceptions of their own writing development and how those perceptions relate to writing center visits, finding that writing center users believe their writing is more developed than the writing of nonusers. Krista Speicher Sarraf & Ben Rafoth’s article also reflects on the perceptions of students and professionals in computer science to first identify workplace writing challenges and then address those challenges in writing center tutoring tailored to that discipline.

We conclude this issue with reviews of important recent books, under the guiding hand of WCJ Book Reviews Editor Steve Price. Jonathan Rylander provides a review of Out in the Center: Public Controversies and Private Struggles, a collection edited by Harry Denny, Robert Mundy, Liliana Naydan, Richard Sévère, & Anna Sicari that explores the challenges faced by writing center tutors, faculty, and administrators bridging their own intersectional identities in the wake of public controversies. Kerri Aldrich & Amanda Gallogly examine Susan Lawrence & Terry Myers Zawacki’s timely edited volume Re/writing the Center: Approaches to Supporting Graduate Students in the Writing Center, in which contributors explore how writing center pedagogies should be adapted to the needs of graduate student writers. Finally, the journal is trying something different: seven participants from the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association’s 2019 summer online reading group—Lisa Bell, Lori Brock, Clint Gardner, Victoria Hennings, Rachel Herzl-Betz, Eduardo Mabilog, & Jamaica Ritcher—collaborated on their response to Laura Greenfield’s Radical Writing Center Praxis: A Paradigm for Ethical Political Engagement (winner of the 2020 IWCA Outstanding Book Award). We think readers will appreciate the reviewers’ wide-ranging perspectives.

Together, the pieces in this issue point us to the fact that writing centers are, in a sense, entering what we would call a universal design moment, a philosophical approach itself rooted in social justice and inclusion (Center for Universal Design, 1997; Steinfeld and Maisel, 2012, p. xi). The unforeseen growth brought on by this extraordinary moment of change and accompanying important conversations can—and we hope will—make for more accessible and stronger work overall with a wider range of writers in the future.
References


