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Invisible Labor in the Academy

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Invisible Labor in the Academy

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From the Editor: “Invisible” Has Always Proven a Useful Verb

Christina V. Cedillo, University of Houston-Clear Lake



“Despite the relentless attempts to silence, our voices erupt, flow, cultivate, and generate. We, the perpetual outsiders within, come together, even if only briefly, even in discord, in transformation. I cannot fathom any other journey. These paths cannot be traversed by any one of us. This is a coalitional and intersectional journey, each piece of it part of an unfinished and always partial mosaic.”

—Lisa A. Flores, "Towards an Insistent and Transformative Racial Rhetorical Criticism"

Rhetoric is a powerful technology that highlights the ability of language to fashion reality. When we engage rhetoric—talk about it, use it, teach it—we engage practical action. Not just theoretically or at a remove, but in, as, and of the world. Materially, affectively, corporeally. Nonetheless, too often we reduce rhetoric and its power, if not to simple persuasion, to a matter of communication in words alone. However, even when we do acknowledge the polymorphic modality of rhetoric, we tend to discuss modes in isolation, as if they emerge simultaneously or overlap rather than mutually constitute each other through rhetorical interactionality. I use this term intentionally to evoke Karma Chavez’s work illuminating how “our intersectional identities, power and systems of oppression intermesh, interlock, intersect, and interact” (2013, p. 58). The makeup of this ever-protean nexus of forces thwarts (or should, anyway) attempts to render identities and structures as static. By extension, I argue, interactionality applies to communicative modes as well, since the same forces determine our valuation of different modes, how we learn to “listen” or not through them, and even whether we recognize particular modes as registers of meaning-making.

Identities, power, and systems of oppression cohere in the world through multimodal application and experience, and by force, coercion, or accident, we are trained to privilege those modes that expedite perception that sustains oppressive and/or status quo systems. For example, in our society, driven by surveillance and dataveillance practices, specularity informs impressions of objective reality and watchability as worth (Daston, 2010; Marshall, 2010). On January 6th, we experienced one extreme outcome of this modal privileging/deprivileging: we watched in amazement, anger, and not quite surprise as white supremacists attacked the U.S. Capitol, using self-authorizing discourses to paint themselves as victims while openly denying

the lived experiences of minoritized communities—they were “tired of being erased.” But said “erasure” suggests a presence that minoritized people seldom have, ever displaced by stereotypes and caricatures. Hence, despite evidence of the alt-right’s gratuitous looting, vandalism, reckless endangerment, and destruction of federal property, many sympathizers dared deflect from the violence through lazy comparisons to the Black Lives Matter movement. For all the talk of liberty and justice for all that we are trained to recite from birth, surveillance practices habituate dehumanizing attitudes that frame BIPOC as criminals even when they struggle to breathe. Social circumscription that occurs vis-à-vis the spatial and procedural (legal) modes reifies the reality of race, including assumptions about white innocence and Black and brown guilt.

These issues should necessarily prompt questions regarding the communication, reception, and teaching of multimodality. How much meaning gets lost when we overlook the multimodality of all texts and, therefore, overlook one mode at the expense of others (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1998; Wysocki, 2005)? How much suasion is enacted in modes we are trained to ignore? What bodies do we ignore in the process? And, for the purposes of this issue, how much hard work is discounted when it manifests in modes other than those privileged by privileged people?

A story: I like to tell students that much of the labor that writing calls for never makes it onto the page or screen, that 75-80% of writing actually happens before, after, or alongside our putting pen to paper or sitting before a computer. (That percentage is my rough estimate of my own process, but while the numbers might vary according to person, I sincerely believe that the numbers will still be high no matter the writer.) “You say composition is difficult,” I say. “Well, have you ever considered how living life as a disabled and/or racialized person, trying to get by with a family, a job, responsibilities to friends and community, dealings with -isms and -phobias, and *then* school are part of the process? That those supposedly unrelated things are constantly refining your perspective, biases, and analytical skills? And that as you compose an essay or speech or video, you’re doing the difficult work of assessing and creating knowledge against every one of those experiences? Your audience is doing the same. No wonder you think it’s hard. Writing, and reading, and knowing is hard. You’re doing a lot. So maybe give yourself a little credit... Or maybe a lot.”

There is so much more to be said regarding these issues. This special themed issue on invisible labor represents just one tiny fraction of what needs to be highlighted. And yet, I hope that even this limited look at everything that permits, precludes, facilitates, and hinders our rhetorical endeavors shows up the very high stakes attached to what we ignore when we hone our attention solely on privileged modes and their products. The work the authors featured here undertake, too, is hard work. It’s difficult to articulate the unspoken in words and images when we have been conditioned to ignore much of our contexts of writing. Our racialized and gendered identities, our dis/abled identities, the languages we speak, the communities we come from, and the systems that seek to in/validate our lives all make their way into our writing, no matter how neutral we try to sound. Positionality influences our goals and frames our ethoi, creates impressions of insider and/or outsider status in rhetorical relationships, and affects others through our constructions of discursive spaces. It is inescapable though some

believe it's not always about "identity politics." Life is about those things for us all, even if default norms obscure those dimensions of privileged persons' identities and obscure the lives of those without privilege altogether. As Tara J. Yosso argues, subjugation "is often well disguised in the rhetoric of shared 'normative' values and 'neutral' social scientific principles and practices" (2005, p. 74). This is why it proves crucial that we recognize the invisible labor that many of us must undertake to even make our way to pen and paper or a computer desk.

Trying to make our way into communicative contexts and make ourselves "heard" entails a lot of effort in the embodied and spatial modes that we are directed to exclude in conversations that center sanctioned modes of speech. We can't forget that Aristotle ascribed full potential to the unmarked masculine body, an impression still equated with authority. Consequently, rhetoric and writing aren't morally neutral even if they tend to be taught as though they can be. Given Aristotle's classifications of female, disabled, racialized, and otherwise Othered bodies, his rhetoric was aimed at a very select population defined by very selective paradigms of morality and citizenship. Such specificity hasn't dissipated simply because contemporary communication is aimed at diverse audiences. It is precisely rhetoric's power as epistemological architectonic that expedites the framing of culturally-distinctive whistestream techne as universal principles. We must acknowledge the embodied efforts that some of us must take on to communicate; we all write in/with/through the body, but some of us are penalized for living in our bodies more than others. We must honor the spatial navigation that allows marginalized and minoritized folks to bridge academic environments and their extracurricular worlds even when some would seek to destroy those bridges. We must make room for affective registers too often discounted because they reveal the inequities of our systems and society. Ultimately, we must demand that the immense amounts of unrecognized labor we put into our work be recognized and compensated. Otherwise, the whole notion of a good person speaking well will continue to promote epistemic violence.

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The Cultural Tax Refund

Reconsidering Invisible Labor and Cultural Taxation For Early-Career Researchers Of Color

M. O'Brien and Cynthia Pengilly, Central Washington University,
with Brittney Poston, Sound Editor

Cultural Tax Refund Transcript

[Music Playing: “Cold Cracks Us” by TrackTribe]

Dr. Pengilly: I'm Dr. Cynthia Pengilly.

Dr. O'Brien: I'm Dr. Michel O'Brien. Our article is “The Cultural Tax Refund: Reconsidering Invisible Labor and Cultural Taxation for Early-Career Researchers of Color.”

Pengilly: And we both teach at Central Washington University in the Pacific Northwest in the middle of the state. And we'll start with a little bit of background and introduction.

[Music Playing: “Dreams Come True” by Purple Planet]

Pengilly: Dr. Pengilly, I identify as a Black American cisgender female, a disabled faculty of color living a daily life with lupus. I'm a single parent and I'm an early-career researcher in a tenure track position. In terms of teaching, I'm an Assistant Professor of professional and technical writing and my primary courses include rhetoric, professional and technical writing, and new media, and I'm an affiliate faculty with Africana and Black Studies and Accessibility Studies program. I have nearly 15 years' experience teaching at the college level including online and one would say that is my specialty. I also am a digital pedagogy scholar and I study online writing instruction, online writing centers, and quite a bit with curriculum development.

O'Brien: My name is Dr. Michel O'Brien. I'm a non-binary multiracial faculty of color. I'm Sri Lankan Irish and my family lives in Malaysia. I live with a disabling chronic health condition. My teaching is in global and transnational literatures and ethnic studies with a focus on Asian North American studies and my classes and work combine sociological research on race with literary critique, so I was trained as an interdisciplinarian. My research is on forced migration in the trans-specific and connections between minor sites of empire like Malaysia, Singapore, Canada, and Australia and at our present institution, I also teach and work with the Women Gender and Sexuality Studies and African and Black Studies. My service work is in diversity and inclusion at the institution and curriculum related to ethnic studies, cultural studies, and areas studies.

Pengilly: Awesome, we're very busy.

(Both laugh)

O'Brien: Very busy.

Pengilly: Okay, great. So let's start by defining a few of the terms that we'll be using throughout this essay, such as "invisible labor" and "cultural taxation." The first being "cultural taxation" coined by Padilla in 1994,¹ which basically describes increased expectations of faculty of color particularly when we feel like we should address diversity related departmental and institutional concerns, and I think the emphasis is on *should*.

[Music Playing: "Progress" by Purple Planet]

Pengilly: Because of those diversity-related activities, we tend to have that lack—feeling a lack—of camaraderie with our colleagues and our research is also usually in these same areas so it's marginalized as well and that contributes to the invisible labor, and invisibility, and the solo status.

O'Brien: Cultural taxation seems to manifest when you're asking something of colleagues that are made uncomfortable by the ask itself, or administrators, and then also when you're actually like going up for tenure or post-tenure view or applying for a position in the institution and you're already perceived as not doing serious work.

Pengilly: Mm-hmm. Yeah and in the case of full faculty, like how the cultural taxation seems to multiply as you go up the ranks, rather than reduce.

O'Brien: Right.

Pengilly: I think that's a big one, for faculty of color anyway.

O'Brien: So for "invisible labor" I'm going to quote Nichole Margarita Garcia here where she notes that "feminist of color scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Morgana, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Barbara Smith and countless others have noted that invisible labor has been used to describe the unacknowledged work that faculty of color are taxed with through a heavier service burden, diversity efforts, racism, isolation, and/or mentorship that limits the amount of time allocated to work towards tenure promotion."² I myself often defer to Patricia A. Matthew's discussion of invisible labor³ and how invisible labor is often that work that somehow appears on your slate or your workload that you're expected to do and there's the unspoken agreement that it will somehow appeal to you, particularly because you're a faculty of color. So additional burden of mentorship that you might want to do, but then

¹ Padilla, Amado M. (1994). Ethnic minority scholars, research, and mentoring: Current and future issues. *Educational Researcher*, 23(4), 24–27.

² Garcia, Nichole Margarita. (2019, Oct 16). Can I meet with you? Yet, never give you credit for your labor. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://diverseeducation.com/article/157566/>

³ Matthew, Patricia. (2016). *Written/unwritten: Diversity and the hidden truths of tenure*. University of North Carolina Press.

suddenly just appears anyway and you're forced into those roles or of sitting on every diversity committee at the institution or being the first name that comes up when there's a search committee and there that has a diversity requirement. So, invisible labor is often also when the university has decided it needs to be more diverse and it means people to fulfill those roles in order to make the university more diverse but it's still pulling from the historical lack of racial, ethno-racial diversity at the institution, so the same five or six or ten or twenty scholars are appearing on all of the same committees and assigned the same types of work.

Pengilly: Yes, as a single parent with some of the things that I have to do for my son for school, we joke about the concept being "voluntold" to do something and sometimes I feel like that applies with some of the work we're talking about here where, if faculty of color are few and far between at institutions, that we are voluntold where it's like, "oh you're volunteered to do this, didn't you? Didn't you want to serve on this diversity committee?"

O'Brien: I think similarly, we both mentioned in our openings dealing with being disabled in our everyday lives and there is the line from the disabled community: "nothing about us without us." There's also that implication, that feeling that if we're not doing this work ourselves, it's going to be done by someone who is from an out group and who doesn't have the lived experiences, and so it's going to be done by someone who's going to speak for us, or groups of people who are going to be speaking for us. Which again means that if you're not actually making the institution more inclusive, you're still pulling from the same groups and you're still "voluntelling" them.

Pengilly: And that reminds me of a few of the pieces that we've talked about, so why don't we go ahead and transition to the previous research on these topics. In this article "The Burden of Invisible Work in Academia: Social Inequities and Time Use in Five University Departments," mentorship was spoken about but it's not the same as professional advising, and what they found was that, particularly between men and women of color that are faculty, that men do the latter, which is more professional advising to keep a distance in terms of like being more objective, so they spend a lot less emotional labor and a lot less time total invested in the student versus women faculty of color, who are actually doing what we would define as mentorship.⁴

O'Brien: Right.

Pengilly: Which I found that to be really interesting. They also cited Jacob's 2004 and this article where women faculty who had children at home how there's even less time available for research, which is where most faculty do their research. It's not at work; it's not during the academic year; it's at home, at night, on weekends, and in the summer. But for female faculty of color, parents of color, they don't have that space at home to be able to do that. So I found—obviously I know that as a parent—but this is the first article that I'd ever come across where they actually explicitly dated it and followed it.

⁴ Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group. (2017). The burden of invisible work in academia. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 39, 228–245.

[Music Playing: “Progress” by Purple Planet]

Pengilly: In terms of it was a study where they had faculty write in journals and stuff and labeled it so that they could track how and where faculty of color were spending their time. As we move up the ranks, we still don't reduce our amount of service and we continue to teach more courses than white faculty as full profs.

O’Brien: Right.

Pengilly: So that the cultural taxation becomes like: I guess in other words, the tax is higher. It doesn't reduce as we go up the ranks.

O’Brien: Yeah, the tax goes up and you deserve a rank bracket, almost like an income bracket.

Pengilly: That's a very interesting analogy and I would definitely agree with that, and I think this idea of a higher cultural tax and even the higher income bracket, as you just coined that phrase, also shows up in a few of our other pieces. After I finished reading “Why Don’t You Get Somebody New to Do It?”⁵ and “My Skin is Unqualified: An Autoethnography of Black Scholar-Activism for Predominantly White Education”⁶ that was a really interesting piece for me, particularly, not just as the Black scholar, but because it's a PWI⁷ and he's a Black scholar who talks about going through the tenure process and what he was restricted in being able to do pre-tenure versus post-tenure. He uses this term “racial battle fatigue” which I thought was a very very right clear and apt name. I was like “Oh yes, I didn't even need an explanation of what that is.”

[Music Playing: “Redemption” by Purple Planet]

Pengilly: And also just kind of reflecting on the two parts of himself as a Black man, but then as a Black education scholar and he started with a poem and one line that stood out to me is “I can't claim that I'm woke but I am having trouble sleeping / with professorial me and some company he's keeping” (19-20), which I thought was really poignant because I think as scholars of color we struggle with who do we befriend? Who do we keep in our inner circle as our actual friends and allies, our white allies? He talks a bit about that kind of hesitation of accepting white allies, which I think that all scholars of color go through. But ultimately, he came to the decision through experience that we have to have that, especially in a predominantly white institution in order to support what we're doing and to legitimize what we're doing. If we don't have the white diversity advocates working alongside us that nothing that we do will be seen and heard. It's unfortunate, but it's true that it just won't get done by Black and brown folks alone.

O’Brien: Yeah, definitely.

⁵ Joseph, Tiffany D., & Hirshfield, Laura E. (2011). “Why don’t you get somebody new to do it?” Race and cultural taxation in the academy. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34(1), 121–141.

⁶ Hughes, Sherick. (2019). My skin Is unqualified: An autoethnography of Black scholar-activism for predominantly white education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 33(2), 151–165.

⁷ Predominately White Institution.

Pengilly: That was just really interesting to me and stood out.

O'Brien: In Joseph and Hirshfield, I think that's the "Why don't you ask somebody else to do it?" they mention faculty of color and white diversity advocates, so the white faculty are also doing diversity work. They'll identify other people's racially problematic behavior and that they themselves, people interested in the diversity work, are deemed to be "feeling that some white colleagues believe faculty of color are overly sensitive to race issues, participants also suggested that some white colleagues are insensitive to such issues" (137). So I think that's also part of it too is that we know that the white allies or white colleagues or advocates have to be involved, but there's also that concern that if there's not an amount of education or even just affirmation for what they're doing, that they'll carry that into the classroom and that affects students. A part of the ethical driving force is to try to be the scholar and the professor and the advocate that you wish you had when you were going through the institution, then that makes it impossible without also doing that additional labor of bringing someone into your inner circle. You do have to do a lot of explaining and sort of create your teeth through culturally inappropriate jokes or racially insensitive comments because you want to bring them over onto the side of being able to implement that work or take the hit at a meeting that is going to be dealing with conflicting race issues: racial battle fatigue. Definitely.

Pengilly: Yes, yes. There was something else that I came across. It was also Hughes' piece. He talks about whiteness as property and that whiteness functions almost like ownership of property in that it gives power and privilege to those with white skin by not only explicit laws but hidden laws as well, much like the legal rights given to property owners. So, it ties race and class together. He goes on to talk about if we think about property owners, the rights that are given property owners, it applies to whiteness as property as a construct too in the sense that they have the right to use their whiteness, exchange it, enjoy it, dispose of it. It provides reputation and status and also provides a right to exclude others. So, all of these different traits come with whiteness as a form of property that they can choose to put on as a cloak when they want, take off, choose to ignore it, all these you know different things. I just thought that was a really interesting metaphor, thinking about it as a property owner, and you're a property owner. It makes me think about Black fishing, of course.

O'Brien: Also like the exchange is interesting. The cronyism that's involved with whiteness as property in CRT⁸ is always fascinating because essentially the power that comes with whiteness and the privilege it affords you, the fact that you can exist and be the center of any conversation of any room and just be the status quo in any space the institution, which must be amazing. But then it can be exchanged and, just like you would hand your property over to your child or a loved one, you can hand over some of that power and distribute it back to someone as a form of cronyism, and that's how you get the same person hired or promoted in the same roles. The same people step into the same positions of power. It's very much the "like wants like" to join them.

⁸ Critical Race Theory, a theoretical approach which examines how race and power augment socio-political structures.

Pengilly: Legitimacy came up in both of those articles. The idea of fighting to prove that your research is legitimate, your scholarship is legitimate: all of it. We're always fighting for that.

[Music Playing: “Spiritual Moment” by Purple Planet]

Pengilly: And in this piece by Sherick Hughes, “My Skin is Unqualified,” it brought me back to the conversation we had earlier about the hypervisible and invisible and kind of being in both modes sometimes simultaneously because, we will be asked to sit in on a meeting because of our expertise only to then have our comments be dismissed. And in this piece one of the lines “I observed too often the dismissal of my contributions with my dark brown skin rendering me unqualified to offer sound ideas even from my areas of expertise” (p. 3). That's that racial battle fatigue. We're fighting all the time. Even when they're like, “Hey, we know that you know this stuff, and we really could use you on this committee or this task force.” They ask that of us and we say, “yes, of course, let's solve this problem, whatever that is.” And then to be dismissed because of the color of our skin. We've recognized that in several instances where then our white allies will have to step up and say something just because their skin qualifies them to make the same statements but to be heard, and valued, belonged, understood. Basically all of the things in that continuum that we're struggling with: they have just by virtue of having white skin.

O'Brien: There's hypervisibility of discussions about race and diversity.

Pengilly: Yeah.

O'Brien: Like not everyone can do this work. You can be trained in doing it but then support the training necessary if you want to do this work.

Pengilly: Mm-hmm.

O'Brien: As opposed to this idea of “Well anyone can do it and it doesn't require any sort of rigor or understanding or engagement.”

Pengilly: Yeah, it's sort of like the whole “anyone can teach English.”

O'Brien: There was this article “The Burden of Care: Cultural Taxation of Women of Color Librarians on the Tenure-Track,” and all of its review study.⁹ It was great, but it was the exact same material that we've seen elsewhere. So they, Anantachai and Chesley (2018), mention the tension between the connection provided by diversity work and the failure to recognize it by personnel committees and tenure review committees and there's not sort of much else in terms of what comes next. I found it useful in the fact they even identify that. They identified that there is a benefit to this work.

⁹ Chesley, Camille, & Anantachai, Tarida. (2018). The burden of care: Cultural taxation of women of color librarians on the tenure-track. In Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho (Eds.), *Pushing the margins: Women of color and intersectionality in LIS* (pp. 301–327). Library Juice Press.

[Music Playing: "My Personal Journey" by Purple Planet]

O'Brien: There's something to be said for the return or rebates that is possible for people working on diversity and inclusion, especially for us in a rural, primarily white institution, is that it can put you into conversation with other faculty of color, with other folks of color and allow you to be seen, allow you to enter into spaces where the effects that race and ethnicity have on you is just assumed. It can also be how we develop knowledge between us: where do you go to get your haircut? Where do you go to get the particular food items that you need? It is absolutely not possible for everyone at every institution, and I don't think we're arguing this should be the bar for everyone, that you should invest in diversity and inclusion work and research and service and teaching and it will immediately pay out in this form of connection. But, it is important to acknowledge that it is one way of harnessing that invisible labor and can be a particular type of even if it's ephemeral, social capital, at least between faculty and staff of color.

Pengilly: Connecting to others: that for me, doing the racial and diversity work, does allow me to connect to others at our institution because it isn't what I was trained in. So, we are in a geographically isolated regional institution in the middle of the state on the other side of the mountains and it makes it difficult to get to cultural centers and large urban areas, and so the work that I do with Africana and Black Studies and with other faculty of color allows me to be connected in ways that I would otherwise be truly isolated. And, so, I'm seeking that work out because of the connections that it allows me to have with students of color and faculty of color that otherwise my disciplinary training would leave me on my own.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Pengilly: I would be really isolated. It's different, right, if we lived in Tacoma, like you said, or Seattle. If we were in larger metropolitan areas, I maybe wouldn't have to seek out this (laughs) sort of connection.

O'Brien: I feel like the broad race work I do doesn't really fulfill that desire to connect to people that can understand my experiences specifically, but does at least put me in conversations where there's a presumed understanding that race affects everything that you do at a PWI. That it affects your teaching, your service, what research is viable to you in effect, and literally every moment even when we're not physically on campus.

Pengilly: It's hard though because the articles, as you've pointed out, kind of stopped short of tying our pedagogy, our scholarship, and our service all together as informing one another.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Pengilly: That they seem to separate all of those items out when they actually are more integrated than what the current research seems to suggest.

O'Brien: Yeah, invisible labor seems really attached to service, and then service as it appears when it comes to extra advising out of teaching. But it doesn't seem to really extend into research except when it's critiquing how invisible labor takes time away from research.

Pengilly: Mm-hmm. Yeah, exactly. Basically, it can prevent you from getting tenure, right? So, that keeps coming up over and over.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Pengilly: That invisible labor actually can inform your research that leads to tenure.

O'Brien: Like, I don't feel like I'm taking off and putting on different hats when I'm moving between research and I'm not switching off different parts of my brain. It all extends from the same foundational expertise. It's just the difference in how interlocutors perceive it when it's something that's not taken as seriously.

Pengilly: There was something that we read by the journal co-editors Tuck and Yang (2018). This was out of that special issue that was referenced in the CFP.¹⁰ It was a very short introduction but it also stops short with the intersections between service, pedagogy, and research. One of the lines that I liked was that people of color are what make the universities legitimate, but I think that the discussions about cultural taxation that have come up by Audrey Williams June (2015) and others, which is this kind of polite way to say Black and brown tax, but all of it still seems to be focused mostly on service as you said, instead of the fact that all of it is integrated.

O'Brien: I don't feel like we're working with the same definition of "invisible labor" that a lot of the articles that talk about taxation or hypervisibility are because this is work that we would want to be doing. I find it enjoyable to work with my colleagues and my peers to put together new programs and to think about student needs and to mine the data. I find the research fascinating. I enjoy it all. I just want to do it and have it be perceived as what it is: rigorous research, that is then developed into a university program. That's like in the same way that we take administration seriously as business practice, I want what we do to be taken that amount of serious. It's not anything that anyone's asking us to do particularly. It's literally that I want to do this work, but I want it to be done well and without all of the nonsense that comes along with it.

Pengilly: So, it sounds like what we have is a blurring of lines between hypervisibility and invisibility, and then also a blurring of lines between scholarship, teaching, and service that the current research is not necessarily speaking to. You were talking about being hypervisible, that I am hypervisible when it comes to pedagogy, curriculum design, teaching online, that sort of stuff.

O'Brien: Mm-hmm.

¹⁰ The Call for Papers for this special issue on Invisible Labor in the Academy.

Pengilly: And then invisible with the emotional labor for student mentoring.

O'Brien: Yeah, there's this lacuna, this weird elision between the two things where this part of your academic profile is considered valuable, hypervisible, tangible. It gives people a good feeling that it's a Black woman who can do all of these things, and then suddenly it hits this line of "oh, and here's the invisible labor part." It's like there's not a way to validate that all of this is still part of one individual's academic profile, whereas for a traditional academic, all of that would be seen as deriving from the same research profile and the same individual.

Pengilly: Okay, so then how do you see yourself in that dichotomy of hypervisible and invisible?

O'Brien: I think like my research and my particular expertise in those areas that chugs along as hypervisible and also because we have, unlike you, I'm not rendered invisible when it comes to scholarship, I get more tokenized in terms of "Oh, we have a brown scholar who publishes and is the director of this [program]." That's hypervisible. Then when it comes to the other forms of labor that really extend immediately from my scholarship, that's seen as irrelevant. It's not actually seen as grounded in my expertise, even when I'm making the argument for more actual inclusivity on campus based on my expertise.

Pengilly: Yeah, so when you serve on the CAH¹¹ diversity committee, for example, it's directly connected to your research in social justice and cultural studies but it's not considered valuable.

[Music Playing: “Redemption” by Purple Planet]

O'Brien: Yes, exactly. It's like my research talks about one type of race, which is a theoretical academically viable and validated idea of race, and then when it comes to the work that I do to argue for raciality on campus, that's seen as not a real thing. That's seen as more of like a problem, or a emotional burden, or a thing that people can get defensive about. It's the same thing. I see the same reticence when I'm observing how people approach your pedagogical expertise. When it suits upholding the status quo, what you know is valuable. You're like this database of wealth of information, but also someone that can actually implement new program changes and put courses through. When it goes to the other side, when it goes to actually "this is what our students need and this is not how we're meeting their requirements," even the work with Kandee [CWU's VP of Diversity and Inclusion], that is more focused on "to have a strong student body you need to support your faculty of color," suddenly all of that other stuff that they value just kind of vanishes

Pengilly: Mm-hmm.

O'Brien: You're not seen as a pedagogical expert. It's suddenly like arguing from a place of "this somehow benefits you."

¹¹ College of Arts and Humanities, Central Washington University. The speakers are Assistant Professors in the English Department, which is housed in CAH.

Pengilly: Yeah and I think because our backgrounds are so different in terms of our pedagogy and scholarship, diversity and race work isn't necessarily central to what I do. It's not what I was trained in at least from an academic training standpoint, but I still have the lived, embodied experience as a person of color in America in a predominantly white institution that I'm able to draw from, and corporate experience, so we definitely have different ways that our knowledge is legitimized.

O'Brien: What you were saying about legitimizing the discipline was interesting because I think for a lot of white colleagues and scholars the drawing on personal experience or personal professional experience does allow them access to other disciplines. So, if there, I can think of a few that work primarily in a regional-based study of an area who is then allowed to become an expert on Mexican culture and teach that as Cultural Studies, but I think there would be questions about someone else, someone in our position, saying "well, I work adjacently with this area. Now I'm an expert on this particular cultural artifact." So, if anything you should have more expertise and more of an understanding by virtue of, like, living as a Black woman, but that's not really how it plays out in terms of who's afforded certain opportunities, of course.

[Music Playing: "Spiritual Moment" by Purple Planet]

Pengilly: So, when my pedagogy intersects with race, social justice, inclusivity, particularly when I start arguing for why we need better support for our online students, for example, that are oftentimes in marginalized communities, for example, then that pedagogical expertise is dismissed.

O'Brien: Whereas I think we're at an institution where there's a sense that like anyone can do race. But, to keep those students, it requires all of that subtended invisible labor.

Pengilly: Yeah, of course.

O'Brien: We are wanted in the room to meet that certain criteria, but the actual knowledge that we bring, whether it's lived experience but it's also lived experience informed by rigorous critical frameworks that come from our disciplines, how that's dismissed out of hand until a white colleague, or white ally reiterates something similar. The same obviously doesn't hold true for our white colleagues who can be on committees. They might have absolutely no expertise with whatever university affair committee. By virtue of being on that committee, they can then speak to "well, this is how governance works at the university and this is how budgets work, etc." So, the knowledge that they earn by being in spaces in the university is still seen as valuable and applicable to everywhere else and allows them to elevate and to move upwards in tiers and ranks of the institution. If we do the same thing when talking about race, or talking about disability, or talking about gender it suddenly becomes "well, that that's too subjective. That must just be a *you thing*." Even if we're speaking from the very same particular, "Well, no, I observed, as a member of this committee, that this was an issue around race and racism." So there's this weird, this one type of knowledge is transferable and applicable and valuable, and the other type of knowledge, because it has something to do with something more amorphous or ephemeral, like race or identity, is just dismissed out of hand. Even though they should be

like the same unit, the same item; they should have the same exchange [value]. That would also be a way for us to attach that to our CVS or attach that to our tenure and promotion files. Because that type of experience on committee is not seen as the same as someone who learns how a budget works.

Pengilly: Right. We recognize that we're being viewed differently than how we're perceiving ourselves and that's always at play for faculty of color. We're not actually shifting ourselves. People are shifting us in and out of these different spaces.

O'Brien: I think, in like critical race, we talk about that sometimes as figuration. Like how you are being figured by others.¹² It's not even really categorization, because it's related to too many different elements of your individuality, but how in the moment you're actually being figured into the particular space that you're entering into.

Pengilly: So, as we've been discussing the perceptions of faculty of color and the figurations, I've kind of been developing this chart in my head, almost like a continuum that shows the different spaces that we occupy, oftentimes simultaneously as faculty color, so I'd like to run that by you. So, I have of course, hypervisible/invisible, written/unwritten... and you said that was from whose book?

O'Brien: That is from Patricia A. Matthew's book, *Written/Unwritten: Diversity and the Hidden Truths of Tenure*.

Pengilly: So, I'll start from the top. I have hypervisible/invisible, written/unwritten, legitimate/illegitimate, valued/unvalued, qualified/unqualified, acceptance and belonging vs. rejection, and then I added in benefit/deficit. And that comes from Hughes' piece as well. Basically it's this idea of they [PWIs] want to be able to quote diversity numbers in terms of how many faculty are diverse, so that's a benefit. But then when they actually ask us to do things, it becomes a deficit. It's like "Oh, but what? They want to be compensated for that, and they want to be *heard* and *validated*? No, now all of a sudden it's a deficit."

O'Brien: What's that quote? "If all you've ever experienced is privilege, being asked to give up anything or do anything different feels like oppression." Like, it feels like that in some sense. They're conceiving of two different types of race, race as "oh, we want these courses, and we want faculty of color, and we want the veneer of race as a practical object," but when it becomes "okay, well then integrate in your curriculum," it and you and me are seen as like less rigorous or less serious.

Pengilly: Mm-hmm.

¹² "Figuration" refers to how individuals are defined against one another through networks of power and comes from Norbert Elias' 1977 text *What is Sociology?* and has been used in Critical Race and analyses of race broadly to describe how race augments power. See Denise Ferreira Da Silva's *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (2007) for more on figuration and race.

O'Brien: Like that's not coming from me real place even though all of the research points that it is.

Pengilly: Yeah. So, that's where we are right now with this continuum chart.

O'Brien: Something related to agency and a lack of agency. I think you read it "The Burden of Invisible Work in Academia" by the Oregon Social Sciences Feminist Network. This is going on a tangent quickly, but they talk about how "mentoring junior colleagues or students of color, working on committees to address racial troubles on campus, and giving public lectures related to diversity issues can give faculty of color a chance to give back to marginalized communities, ameliorate feelings of isolation, and give faculty of color energy and a sense of purpose" (p. 233). Okay, yes, I think that's very astute. "In this way, race-related service work opens up the possibility for critical agency" (p. 233). So their argument is such that it can allow faculty of color to... They might be "culturally tax based on their racial and sometimes gender identity, but invisible work may provide individual and institutional benefits and that allows them to actually challenge underlying assumptions about advancement." That one's a little bit trickier when you're an ECR¹³ at a PWI. That's a very different set, but this idea of critical agency, I think, assumes that white faculty have agency, which is true. I think they have a lot more opportunities by the fact of existing as the status quo, and then we have whatever the opposite of critical agency is.

Pengilly: Yeah.

O'Brien: Which I think is all the unspoken rules and parameters around a faculty of color that prevent them from entering into certain rooms or roles, so we need something like that in the list.¹⁴ The work needs to be done. You want these programs and this work to exist. But you also feel maligned that it's concentrated into one Black body. I think if we're talking about cultural taxation, like with invisible labor, it seems very limited to "it is service you are expected to do because you are a person of color." But I don't really think that's what we're talking about in our experiences. We're more talking about "some of this work could be enjoyable and could be effective, but we would like it to be validated as rigorous and stemming from expertise."

Pengilly: Mm-hmm.

O'Brien: And I think that's a different way of approaching invisible labor and cultural taxation than the articles.

Pengilly: It's definitely an implication, or just kind of hidden practice, among academics that as you move up the ranks you naturally take on more administrative work, which is service, and do less teaching and less scholarship.

O'Brien: Right.

¹³ Early Career Researcher.

¹⁴ See Figure 1 for a completed Continuum Chart of the ideas discussed in this audio essay.

Pengilly: But, that doesn't seem to apply for faculty of color. It's like an unwritten expectation or rule, or whatever, but it does not apply to faculty of color. If anything, all three areas continue to grow.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Pengilly: In that case, that would be invisible labor of the current definition, where it has a negative connotation.

O'Brien: Yes.

Pengilly: Right? But what we're talking about is not the same form of invisible labor.

O'Brien: It's like the responses to the work that we are wanting to do is the same as it is in the negative connotation of invisible labor, like we are perceived as burdensome, taken un-seriously, it's not treated with rigor, there's not substantive engagement with it. I think that that remains true of invisible labor irrespective of if you're on the side of "I want to be doing this work. This is fun. This is interesting," or if you're on the side of "I don't want to be doing this work and I keep on getting called up because I'm the one Black or brown faculty member."

Pengilly: Yeah. But even in those cases, obviously, much of it is labor and that negative sense, but there is some positive too, even as even as full prof.

O'Brien: Yeah, up until the point when it is wrapped up in higher-level administration, when it then moves into "okay, we need this for accreditation. We need this for the university to actually function, and receive funding, and remain accredited, and perhaps become a minority serving institution." It becomes revalidated on that side. So, yeah, there is this interesting chart of like at what point does that labor that we're doing as early career researchers make it through the pipeline and gets revalidated when a D&I¹⁵ professional is doing that on the administrative side.

Pengilly: Yeah, I think that's a great point, and it seems like what we're getting at is that we need to redefine, I guess getting back to the quote that you read from that introduction piece by Tuck and Yang (2018), that "invisible labor" maybe was never a great label to begin with, right, that maybe it needs to be redefined. Because what you're getting at is that all of the research in this area is basically making invisible labor seem like it's a burden.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Pengilly: And maybe it's the *labor* part of "invisible labor." That the connotations of the word "labor" is very negative. It makes it seem as if it's not something that we value and want to do, and, as you said, that we are happy to do. And, I think it's maybe that word "labor" that's

¹⁵ Diversity and Inclusivity Professional, often those working in diversity initiatives as administrators who have training in this area.

attached to “invisible labor” that is maybe bringing that negative connotation in and we need to redefine that.

O'Brien: Yeah, I think that's a good way of putting it because I enjoy research. I'm a researcher, of course, I enjoy research. I enjoy instruction. I'm a teacher. You're a pedagog? Pedagogue?

Pengilly: Yeah (laughs)

O'Brien: (laughs) Yeah, you're that thing!

O'Brien: This is stuff that we enjoy. We're just implementing in a way that's in an exciting area because it gives students access to disciplines and knowledge that we didn't have when we started. That should be fun, and it should also be celebrated and given support at the institution because we're saying “hey, we're willing to do this work for you.” But there's just this gut response to it not being treated as a serious practice, that we are not serious about it, that it is emotional and emotionally driven, and that that's not something you can slot on Faculty 180,¹⁶ that you have an investment in something when we all do. Maybe, we can start to think about how you can hold both spaces at the same time, insofar as you can be hypervisible within the space of a meeting or in an email because you're attached to a particular right like, your race, your embodiment is attached to a particular... “Like if a Black woman is asking this of me then I need to approach this differently than my white peers.” So, there's that moment of hypervisibility, but then the actual labor that undergirds it remains invisible.

Pengilly: So do we have any more specific examples of early career researchers kind of blending our scholarship, service, and teaching?

O'Brien: My example would be: it wasn't until I worked at a PWI that I realized the issues of people conflating Area Studies, Cultural Studies, and Ethnic Studies as one entity and not actually looking at the origin of each of these. And, so at our institution, we have interdisciplinary programs that are quite marginalized and not given the support, and the faculty members, the funding, and the visibility that they need to thrive on campus. Apart from the tireless work of people in those programs, there's not a lot of effort to make them viable as cornerstones of ways to retain faculty of color and students of color. And there's not a lot of parity between them, so we have some that are in Area Studies, which comes from Anthropology, so they focus on a very specific physical boundary area of the world, and then we have a bunch that are in Ethnic Studies that are more about actually dealing with the particular racial-ethno experiences of individuals. But because of that, that means that there's glaring gaps in them and there are no Asian American courses on campus, apart from one. And, even though we have an increasing number of Asian American students, we can't really serve them without a program like that. And so, my service work is then to try to make that viable and to add more broad-based ethnic studies courses and to build up these programs so that for

¹⁶ Faculty 180 is a web-based system used for submitting paperwork or files associated with tenure, promotion, and re-appointment.

any student of color that arrives, there will be some way that they can see themselves in the curriculum. So we're not just doing it based on population and we're not just doing it based on who's currently hired, but so that we can always allow people to understand race and their individuality and their backgrounds when they come into the institution, through whatever means that might be. And now, I'm working on scholarship that discusses the ways that Ethnic Studies can actually inform Area Studies and make it more robust and allow for Area Studies to contend with race because Area Studies often involves discussing race. So, the fact that we have an Asian Studies program, while that's very exciting, the history of Area Studies has not dealt specifically with raciality and marginalization and racial violence and what that means in America. So, there's a pretty big gap there that we're not really serving our students or faculty's needs. What will happen with that? I mean all of these constraints still exist. Is that actually seen as viable service on campus? Is that seen as viable research when I'm hired to do to focus on very specific fields? But it's germane to actually being able to do my work on campus is to interrogate these questions.

Pengilly: My role in that project of helping us to build a more robust Cultural and Ethnic Studies program for our students and faculty of color is that I'm working on it from a different angle in that I serve on many of those same committees, but I am more on the policy, administration, grant-writing side of things in terms of service. So, that's kind of one side of it, but from a teaching or pedagogy side of it, I infuse that into my courses in professional writing, such as the grant writing course, and I'm continuing that work with a graduate student this quarter. It'll be next quarter, but we're going to continue working on the grant for getting a new academic unit put into place at Central Washington University to house these programs and provide that support system. So, that it informs my teaching but also scholarship because I will eventually end up being an author on that grant and then that will count as a category A publication [for tenure], so these conversations are all integrated and happening in all three spaces for me: for teaching, scholarship, and service. And, I think the second example would be our push to add an anti-racist graduation requirement in that I'm involved in it from the service side of sitting on the Gen Ed Committee and the Africana and Black Studies affiliate faculty and steering committee, but also, we'll be working closely with Curriculum Committee to add and build new courses. We'll be building new courses, so we'll be creating more courses to support this effort, while also going over existing courses to see how they fit in. I don't know in terms of scholarship, but there are definitely some opportunities for us to write about this important work from a programmatic perspective and publish on what it's like to start something like this at a PWI in the middle of a Black Lives Matter cultural moment, right? I think that this could be a publishing opportunity for the faculty involved, at least faculty of color, specifically involved in this endeavor of adding this anti-racist graduation requirement, and I know your side of that is going to be very different than my contributions to that project.

O'Brien: I think similarly, though, because it requires so much research and so much actual scholarship, like reading scholarship, mining it to develop an anti-racist and a race and ethnicity graduation requirement, it lends itself to publication because you do have to look at examples of what works successfully because our institution is behind in this area. There's 30 years of data on this to pore through. There's also, because other institutions have suddenly rushed to

institute their own or shift their own race and ethnicity requirements given the current moment and in the middle of a Black Lives Matter movement and also with the current immigration crises, there are more models to look at that are also publishing materials, and so I think would make good sense for that to be tied firmly into scholarship. My work as a Faculty Fellow of Diversity will relate to that but it'll also look at what training will be necessary for faculty to have, since we are at PWI, for this requirement to exist. So, how can we actually ensure that our fellow faculty will be able to infuse their curriculum and their current courses with things that actually meet this requirement, to have it remain a meaningful environment, and not just be that you spent one day talking about race in the classroom or you talked about anti-racism briefly as it relates to physics, or something? How can we actually make sure that this has very, very clearly delineated boundaries and if anything, still privileges and emphasizes the tireless work that's been done by faculty of color who have experienced this diminishing and dismissal of what they bring to the table when it comes to teaching at a PWI? That gives you such a very specific skill set. I never appreciated it and I never really thought about it when I first took the position. That you're learning a completely different side of bureaucracy.

Pengilly: Yeah, for sure. Yeah, because I don't feel like I'm taking hats off either when I am in the meetings, and my expertise is different from yours, but, like you said, because of my background in professional writing and grant writing and pedagogy, I'm at those meetings serving in a very different capacity.

[Music Playing: “Spiritual Moment” by Purple Planet]

O’Brien: Racism is bad to experience. It causes emotional pain, but when I go into meetings and I'm drawing on my background in research in race, I'm not conceiving of a different idea of race. I'm still conceiving of race as a construct, race as informed through discourse. I don't want us to build this new department or school because I want people to care more about race. I think that it's vital to have a home for not only robust areas, these are important research areas, but also for minoritized people. It's not inherently to make people less racist. That's not the goal, but I think that's how it's perceived in meetings because of this whole idea of what invisible labor constitutes. That when you show up and you're asking for help with a project to take some of the burden away from your invisible labor, you're seen as asking for people to change in something inside themselves, like “change emotionally for us.”

Pengilly: So, I think that in both of these two examples we have with creating a new academic unit to house our Cultural and Ethnic Studies programs and then adding the race and ethnicity graduation requirement, that those two endeavors that we're working on from all three angles, it's very integrated; our scholarship, our service, and our teaching is all integrated into these two projects, and much of the scholarship talks about invisible labor and cultural taxation but doesn't actually talk about it from this kind of positive perspective. That it always seems to have a burden attached to it.

[Music Playing: “My Personal Journey” by Purple Planet]

Pengilly: That faculty of color are asked to do this without recognition. And yes, in many cases, we don't get recognition. But, we've been able to find ways as early career researchers to integrate the three, so that it is not a burden that it's helped us move up the tenure ranks, and perhaps this is a path forward that other early career researchers can take instead of feeling like they can't use the invisible labor in ways that can actually help them to move forward in their careers. I think it's important because we are coming from two different places in the sense that my area of expertise is *not* necessarily in diversity work, but that I've still been able to use it as an early career researcher to move my career forward in the tenure system.

O'Brien: What you just said about cultural taxation, it's almost like positive taxation, and you would know better than I would, but we need to term that means like what happens when you're getting your tax return back (Pengilly laughs), and how can you actually invest that intelligently. Because I feel like that's what we've done in a lot of ways. We've taken service that has no personal meaning to us and use those as doors in and to larger conversations that then when someone needed someone to do work, we were able to be like, "Okay, but you need to see our diversity work as equivalent to the work that we do with curriculum design, as equivalent to the work that we do with Senate service." So, there's something about this reinvesting of the tax that I think that we've done very shrewdly and intentionally but only because there's been no logical avenues for us to do that. Yeah, I think reconsidering invisible labor and cultural taxation for early career researchers: what happens when you want to do the work?

Pengilly: Mm-hmm.

O'Brien: Because a lot of the focus on invisible labor presumes that the person is called to do the work, and then it's not recognized and same for cultural taxation. You are expected to do the work and then it's just sort of folded into your workload expectations, but it's a little bit different when you're seeking that out. We should also frame it in the fact that we're not living in a metropole. The connections that you can form and the community that you can build for students and with other faculty is amplified if you're doing this type of connective work.

[Music Playing: “Cold Cracks Us” by TrackTribe]

O'Brien: If you're drawing on your background, your personal experiences, your interests, and your marginality to foster these connections. But that doesn't mean anything if when it gets to a personnel committee or review board, no one sees it as meaningful work. This *would* allow us to build different types of connections across the university. It *would* allow us to foster a different relationship and a sense of belonging.

APPENDIX

Continuum Chart: Perceptions and Figurations of Faculty of Color

hypervisible	\leftrightarrow	invisible
written	\leftrightarrow	unwritten
legitimate	\leftrightarrow	illegitimate
valued	\leftrightarrow	unvalued
qualified	\leftrightarrow	unqualified
acceptance and belonging	\leftrightarrow	rejection and isolation
benefit	\leftrightarrow	deficit
critical agency	\leftrightarrow	systemic limitations, or lack of agency

Figure 1. This Continuum Chart is a brief meta-analysis of the existing research on invisible labor and cultural taxation for FOC, re-imagined by two early career-researchers.

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Dr. **M. O'Brien** is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at Central Washington University on ancestral Yakama Nation land. Their work focuses on Asian North American and Asian diasporic literatures and theory, multiculturalism, comparative raciality, and transpacific studies. They are currently completing a manuscript that examines connections between forced migration and constructions of race in Canada, Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia. Their work has been published or is forthcoming in *Postcolonial Text*, *New Global Studies*, *The Comparatist*, and *Antipodes*.



Cynthia Pengilly (Ph.D., Old Dominion University) is an Assistant Professor of English and Co-Director of the Technical Writing Program at Central Washington University. She teaches courses in technical and professional communication, cultural rhetorics, medical/health rhetoric, and new media. Her research explores rhetoric, technology, and activism with a particular focus on competing representations and articulations of identity in online spaces. She also specializes in digital rhetoric and innovative

pedagogical strategies in online writing instruction (OWI) and online tutoring. Dr. Pengilly has several forthcoming articles and book chapters.

“*Se Tienen Que Poner Listas*”

Testimonio of an (In)visible Truth

Clara Oropeza, Santa Barbara City College

Your early years were spent speaking and swaying to the cadences of Spanish. Then, in the English-only classroom, your presence seemed more ethereal than earthly. You were slow to learn to read, as your attachment to words was insecure. As a young Latina, you knew that you would have to labor twice as hard to catch up. You also learned early on that your relationship to academia required a level of bravery and conciencia to face the darkness of internalized oppression.

In 1966, my parents emigrated from Nogales, Sonora, Mexico when my oldest sister was about to enter kindergarten. My parents never questioned that the hardships they had faced as immigrants in this country would translate into resilience, into a state of being *lista*, in their five daughters. To be *lista* includes being ready for anything, with an ability to not only recover from adversity, but be transformed by it. In our blood, my sisters and I carried the tacit knowledge that with our two wings, two cultures, we were destined to aspire to a future unique from that of our parents.

My elementary-through-high school years were difficult. I found little joy in the classroom, as I felt lost in the hollow that existed between my school environment and my home culture; yet I yearned to learn. Then my inner curiosity slithering within landed me in college, where I began to sense that I was on a journey toward intellectual and spiritual healing. For the first time, I studied Latino authors with Dr. Robert Cantu, at California State University Los Angeles. It was in these Latin American and Chicano Literature courses that for the first time as a student I felt the squeeze inside of me subsiding. I read Latin American testimonios, and as I heard the voices of my ancestors, I learned that the personal is political. I learned to self-reflect, critically think, and theorize about *mi cultura*, in various contexts. It was here that I began to examine the world, to develop the critical consciousness that was inspiring me to ask questions about my identity, of *mi familia*, my countries, my dreams, my world, including my education. I was living what James Baldwin called the “paradox of education—that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated” (1963, p. 1).

Consequently, it was during these years that I finally came to know the mentorship of a Latino professor who finally saw my intellectual capacity as earthly and creditable. My education then blossomed into a way to prepare myself for a liberated life, as I pursued my longing for knowledge to mend my Mexican-American heart.

But there was a risk to this new consciousness.

Nonetheless, I went out into the world, *lista*, equipped with navigational capital, comprised of inner resources, and with the hard-earned linguistic capital gained throughout the years moving alongside my father, interpreting a bilingual world (Yosso, 2005). I entered academia to be among students who also sought to individuate through higher education. Here, I took a vow to be a mirror for my students.

Fast forward two decades, and I still labor to understand, how is it that as part of the 15% of professors of color that make up the two-year college system, the systemic racism that marginalized me throughout my education could still render invisible both my intellectual contributions and my being? I know the answer.

Yet, the hidden strains tugging at my brown female existence, as one of two in an English Department with 20 white full-timers, are still enumerable. The countless and near daily microaggressions amount to a dire need to cultivate an inner state, an intimate space within, where the interior conversations that I am prompted to have *with myself* could live. The effort and time that it takes to process the microaggressions that unfold as I walk through the hallways and sit through meetings, demand labor that constitutes an unwavering and obstinate part of my experience as a Professor of English in the academy. However, the constant effort required by the psychological need to interpret oppression, remains invisible to those around me.

In “What is Internalized Oppression, and So What?,” E.J. R. David and Annie O. Derthick (2014) note that the effects of microaggressions produce “equally distressing psychological consequences as overt oppression and discrimination, perhaps even more so, because of the lack of a distinguishable target to which one can direct anger” (p. 5). The anger, confusion, and sense of hiddenness that lingers from an inability to confront the source of subjugation, is instead turned inward, causing a state of self-questioning, costing excessive emotional exertion.

I still hear Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1999) words reminding me that “[a]s a person, I, as a people, we Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. Most of this goes on unconsciously; we only know that we are hurting, we suspect that there is something ‘wrong’ with us, something fundamentally ‘wrong.’ Woven into the fibers of this internalized oppression is fear that holds one petrified, frozen in stone” (p. 67). To become conscious of internalized oppression, to “see” it, I must first call it to consciousness.

Ethos of Indiscernibility

“Latin American testimonios fall under slave narratives.”

When you create a new course for the English department titled, “Introduction to Literature,” you want to include Latin American Testimonios as one genre on a list of many possible that could be taught in the course. It is your effort to expand the definition of “literature.” Your white colleagues object. One colleague whose emphasis is British Literature, voices her disapproval by explaining to you that “Latin American Testimonios fall under slave narratives.” Her justification, despite the fact that your Master’s thesis is on Latin American Testimonios as

a literary genre, is used against your advocacy, and Testimonios are omitted from the course description, even under the heading: “Optional Genres to be Taught.”

When you insist on keeping “Latin American Testimonios” on the list of “optional” genres to be taught in the course, a second white colleague again challenges you and your choice by indicating she does not want to be held accountable to teach a genre she does not know, in the event that she may one day decide to teach the course. The voice in your head asks: Does the word “optional” not phase her?

“You’re the face of equity.”

You decide to lead a Faculty Inquiry Group (FIG) on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. It’s joined by interested faculty, and you meet once a month to discuss pedagogy, read articles, books and discuss your experiences with race in the classroom. Upon exiting the first meeting, a colleague pulls you aside to say: “You’re the face of equity.” Which one of your faces is she referring to?

“Thanks for being here. I know these spaces are difficult for you.”

You are invited to a meeting about an HSI grant where you are one of three POC at a large conference table seating 33 individuals. Utterances melding equity and equality occupy the room. You speak up against the misguiding equation. At the end, an administrator approaches you, and in a soft voice says, “Thanks for being here. I know these spaces are difficult for you.”

You know she heard one of your colleagues of color say at last week’s meeting that spaces on campus are uncomfortable for POC. Is she equating your experience with another woman’s experience, because all POC have the same experiences? Does she realize that you have occupied a minority seat at meetings the entirety of your 18-year career?

“I have been teaching for 16 years and have never had to have these conversations about race before. I noticed that all the articles discussing this topic are dated recently.”

“Do you think conversations about race in the classroom are new?” you want to ask her as you stare straight at her, sitting directly across from you. But you don’t ask, because you believe words are better saved for a more sensible endeavor. The next day, when you see her in the hallway, she smiles, and you’re reassured that not saying anything at yesterday’s meeting was, indeed, the right thing. But then you doubt yourself, and you ask: “was it, really? Is collegiality about mere poise and the appearance of peace?”

Year Two.

Another POC is hired in your Department. Before she starts, you are repeatedly assured that “you’re going to love your new colleague.” For the next six years colleagues insist on calling you by her name, and her by yours. Together, your and her uniqueness vanish into the hyper-visibility of your brownness. The two of you laugh at the cliché and tell each other that their inability to tell the two of you apart is due to your mutual, lustrous beauty.

Monologue 1. Location: Copy room.

"I attended the HSI grant meeting. There were representatives from student services at the meeting. They have good ideas, you know. The grant writer was there.... We talked about our concerns. We felt listened to. I was the only one there from our Department."

She has self-designated as the Department lead of the project despite the fact that you, not she, was asked by administration to lead it. You tell her you already heard about how the meeting unfolded, but she doesn't bat an eye at the sound of your voice.

Monologue 2. Location: Hallway on the way to your office. Time: 1 minute later.

"There were representatives from student services at the meeting. They have good ideas, you know. The grant writer was there.... We felt listened to because we talked about our concerns. I was the only one there from our Department."

Why is she repeating herself?

"People in the meeting were requesting research as you have been. I think that's a good idea. You know, student services people have good ideas. I have meeting notes. Would you like me to send them to you?"

Is this an honest inquiry? "Yes," you hear yourself say. She pauses for the first time in 10 minutes. Her meeting notes never arrive.

Entering a Coatlicue State

To escape the threat of feeling inadequate by the entanglement of microaggressions and my own internalized oppression, I found myself planted at the feet of Coatlicue, in "the state of Coatlicue," as Anzaldúa outlines in *Borderlands: La Frontera. The New Mestiza* (1999). In this state of being, Anzaldúa marvels:

Coatlicue is one of the powerful images, or "archetypes" that inhabits, or passes through, my psyche. For me la Coatlicue is the consuming internal whirlwind, the symbol of the underground aspects of the psyche. Coatlicue is the mountain, the Earth Mother who conceived all celestial beings out of her cavernous womb. Goddess of birth and death, Coatlicue gives and takes away life; she is the incarnation of cosmic processes. (1999, p. 68)

For me, Coatlicue represents a calling to take time out for soul-making change. She is about taking a pause in life for deep listening to make soulful, and embodied, sense of my world. Enveloped in Coatlicue's embrace, this pause occurred for me as soon as I received tenure in the teaching institute in which I saw myself growing roots, while residing in a town that sits nestled between a cordillera and the sea. It was a time when I felt insatiably eager to return to graduate school to pursue a long-standing dream of mine: a Doctoral program in Comparative

Mythology and Literature, with an emphasis in Depth Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute, a small institution that focuses on Jungian and Comparative Mythology curriculum.

Pursuing a Ph.D. at Pacifica involved another risk. It meant my education would not be valued when judged by the standards of a traditional R1 institution. Despite my dream, my perceived rejection that I believed would come from colleagues who value the R1 institution as the sole beacon of intellectual wisdom, mattered enough that I questioned whether or not I was doing the right thing. I was in the familiar territory of laboring, alone, with my own fear and feeling that something was “wrong.” Yet the forces that propelled me toward the work were fortunately even greater. And so, in many ways, this quest to get my Ph.D. in a subject toward which I felt a deep soul-calling has been my heart’s journey, because pursuing my educational goals was also about learning how to not betray myself. It was by reaching into the depths of Earth Mother consciousness, while paying heed to Coatlicue’s call, that I was learning to trust my inner voice—not the naysayers both in my head, as well as in my environment. I allowed myself to be guided by the tripartite intellectual, creative and spiritual search driven by what Anaïs Nin calls the two needs of our existence: “one is a human need to be intimate with experience... Then there’s a second need in human nature which is to create something that has more permanence, which is the myth of our lives, the symbolic spiritual significance of our lives” (1975, p. 190). Nin believed that, in order to move beyond the personal, we need the mythic (collective), to transform our experience through a well-crafted medium into something that has permanence.

From Invisible to Indivisible

A critical question that dominates this moment in my academic career is, how do I want to make myself visible? Where do I want my personal voice to resound? I yearn to live a life grounded in what bell hooks (1999) calls an intellectual life as opposed to academic careerism. The two are distinct in that an intellectual life inspires writing that constellates from the multifarious voices that live inside of us; it becomes writing about all subjects that casts a wider network outside of the academy, to decolonize subjectivity. Academic careerism, instead, according to hooks, requires, in some disciplines, homogeneous thought, which is “judged usually from a conservative stand point, that academia is often less a site for open-minded creative study and engagement with ideas and more a space of repression that dissenting voices are so easily censored and/or are more likely to be subject to a quality of scrutiny that curtails freedom of speech and thought” (1999, p. 140). As a daughter of immigrant parents, my intellectual, creative and spiritual yearning have always been nourished by numerous epistemologies and voices.

My role in the academy is the same as it is in life: to develop a meaningful relationship between my personal work, as I learn how to better face life’s vulnerabilities, and the experiences of others who too seek self-liberation. I want my students to know that to shape one’s own destiny involves laboring, often times invisibly, and tirelessly to create and re-create consciousness, to better “see” oppression in all of its guises, not just the internal kind. I want to support my student’s whose longing for healing and knowledge is the life line to expand their

critical consciousness as they too individuate. I stand *lista* to remind them of the words my father shared with me—as he prepared me for a life in which he knew I would struggle: “*Se tienen que poner listas y listos.*”

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Writer, educator and cultural activist **Clara Oropeza** earned a Ph.D. in Comparative Mythology and Literature from Pacifica Graduate Institute. A contributor to *Sagewoman* and *Minerva Rising*, she is also the author of *Anais Nin: A Myth of Her Own* (2019). She teaches at Santa Barbara City College, where her research combines comparative mythology, feminist and literary studies and cultural theory.

Invaluable, but Invisible

Conference Hosting as Vital but Undervalued Intellectual Labor

Jen Almjeld and Traci Zimmerman, James Madison University

We hosted our first conference in 2019. That same year we also made a solemn promise it would be our last. The conference was a success by many accounts: great attendance, lots of engaging and important presentations, and valuable time spent with a community of people we admire and love. But nothing really prepares you for the workload, the time lost, or the emotional investment that all too often goes un- or under-recognized by both conference attendees and existing university reward structures.

Much research exists to show the inequality of gender evident at many academic conferences, including the fact that women are less often invited to speak at major U.S. universities (Yong, 2017) and that women often choose to speak for shorter periods of times than male cohorts at conferences (Jump, 2014). Paul Jump, in *Inside Higher Ed*, discusses the results of an Australian study (Jones, et al., 2014), explaining that “overall, only 41 percent of female student presenters and 54 percent of presenting female academics gave a long talk, compared with 75 and 79 percent, respectively, for men.” While many conferences continue to have fewer women standing at the microphones, it seems most conferences have women running things behind the scenes. Though no research exists on gender differences among those hosting or organizing academic conferences – a telling phenomenon in itself – our own experiences at conferences in composition and rhetoric suggest that these conferences are often organized by women. This perception is not surprising as research shows us that “women shoulder a disproportionate amount of the service workload at many institutions” (Gee & Norton, 2009, p. 166), with women of color shouldering even greater loads of generally undervalued service (Moore, 2017; Duncan, 2014). Cassandra Guarino and Victory Borden (2017) confirm these perceptions with a study of annual performance reporting and a survey of hundreds of American universities that revealed that “women faculty perform significantly more service than men, controlling for rank, race/ethnicity, and field or department” (p. 672). The gendered nature of the division of service to and for the university (Denker, 2009; Hollenshead, 2003) is particularly troubling when we consider how service is valued and rewarded in most academic settings. Guarino and Borden explain:

Service is typically a time-consuming feature of the job of an academic and typically factors into faculty performance evaluations, alongside research and teaching. However, service is generally rated as less important than either research or teaching and is less likely to lead to career advancement within an institution. (p. 673)

This gendered disparity in faculty workloads often stems from sexist notions of women as particularly suited, based on gender, to certain kinds of work. Heather Maldonado and John Draeger, in their chapter in the 2017 *Surviving Sexism in Academia* collection, explain “behavior can be sexist without seeing women in a negative light. Indeed, the benevolent sexist views women as more nurturing, more virtuous, and more refined than men” (p. 8-9). Such ideas are often not the province of a single person or even organization, but instead are systemic and gradually accumulating notions that quickly become taken as truths about those who identify as specific genders. Maldonado and Dreager explain:

Sexism is perpetuated by both individual ‘bad actors’ and institutional ‘bad structures.’ Structures, such as institutions of higher education, cannot be analyzed without recognizing that the academic structure is (re)produced by the actions of the people in those structures. (p. 5)

The structures governing academic conferences, too, must be understood as subject to sexist notions of who is capable and best suited to plan, organize, and carry out complex events as well as how that work will, or will not, be valued and rewarded.

This article argues that conference hosting is another example of invisible labor that is disproportionately aligned with gender. We argue, too, that conference hosting—as a time-consuming and financially risky endeavor for an individual academic and her home department or college—is largely ignored in the literature, save a smattering of publications focusing mainly on the logistics of hosting (Rogers, 2013; Allen, 2009; Bice-Stephens, 2001; Lawrence & McCabe, 2001; McAleer, 1997). While such research offers practical advice and sample documents, they largely ignore the issues at stake for such work and make no move to elevate conference organizing from mere service to actual intellectual labor. With reference to our own experience as well as related research, we make the case for academic conference organizing as invaluable, though invisible, intellectual labor and outline five often-overlooked dangers of such work, suggesting strategies for individuals and academic institutions to mitigate those dangers.

Our Conference

Our local hosting committee began meeting 18 months before the conference began—and well before we had any idea of what it really entailed to host a conference. The committee of 12 included just one tenured male faculty member, with a significant number of the remaining women located in more vulnerable academic positions including three graduate students, one undergraduate student, one faculty member on a non-tenure line and one pre-tenure faculty member.

Much about the invisible labor of conference organizing did not surprise us: the endless string of emails from those submitting abstracts, questions from our generous reviewers, queries about technology set up at our venue, room arrangements, and any number of logistical details as well as pleas for lower registration rates, reconsideration of rejections, and requests for resources for presentations; all of these seemed burdensome, but understandable and necessary.

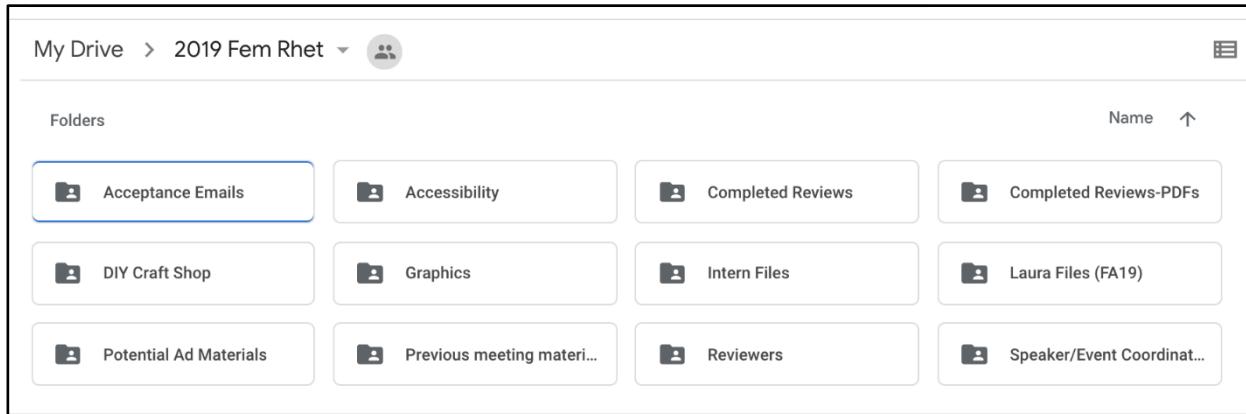


Figure 1: Different folders in the Google Drive.

However, as co-chairs we were surprised by the amount of uncompensated summer and evening work required (see [Summer Tasks document](#) from committee), the numerous and complex forms required for most budgeting and purchasing actions, the need not only to publicize the event via social media, but also the amount of “monitoring” generally needed to answer questions and to guard the reputation of our institution, and the incredible challenge of providing even a portion of the accessibility needs for our attendees.

Conference Organizing as Intellectual Labor

Another surprise was how intellectually challenging much of this work was. We might be tempted to think of academic conference organizing as event planning, a list of tasks to be ticked off in order to move large-ish groups of people from activity to activity over a series of days. However, we found two often-unrecognized tasks necessary for conference planning (writing the CFP and organizing panels) were surprisingly linked to traditional notions of disciplinary knowledge production and required a thorough understanding of scholarship and research practices in our field as well as a nuanced awareness of trends and themes in the literature. This disciplinary knowledge was also needed when assigning reviewers to conference abstracts.

We asked each of our 40+ reviewers to self-identify three areas of scholarly or research expertise (see Fig. 3) and then used that list to assign proposals. Building a call for papers

(Areas of Expertise) Conference Proposal Reviewers		
File	Edit	View
Insert	Format	Data
Tools	Add-ons	Help
<u>Last edit was yesterday at 12:54 PM</u>		
<input type="button"/>	<input type="button"/>	<input type="button"/>
100%	\$ % .0 .00	123
	Calibri	12
	B I <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A	
A	B	C
1	Reviewer Expertise List	
2	MAKE A LIST	
3	Reviewer Name	Email
		Area(s) of Expertise

Figure 2: Reviewers' areas of expertise.

Area(s) of Expertise
Ecofeminism/Ecorhetorics; Religion; Historiography/Archival
Historiography/Archival; Pedagogy; Technical Communication
Transnational Feminism; Materiality; Political Rhetoric
Queer Rhetorics; Religion; Transnational
Political Rhetoric; Activism; Rhetorical Theory
Historiography/Archival; Religion; Methods/Methodologies
Methods/Methodologies; Political Rhetorics; Literacy Studies
Pedaogogy; Rhetorical Theory; Narrative
Cultural Rhetorics; Embodiment; Rhetorical Theory
Activism; Digital Rhetorics; Popular Culture
Religion; Materiality; Digital Rhetorics
Embodiment; Technical Communication; Materiality
Embodiment; Materiality; Digital Rhetorics
Pedaogogy; Rhetorical Theory; Ecofeminism

Figure 3: Many different subfields within Rhetoric.

situated in related disciplines and with appropriate citations and generative questions to serve as a heuristic for the new knowledge that would be created for the conference and valued in this professional space was just the first step. Similarly, the process of organizing the 305 individual and group proposals that were accepted into our conference into 147 cohesive panels required creativity, an awareness of foundational literature in the field(s) and an ability to put scholars and scholarship in conversation with one another. The skills needed to complete these tasks are similar to those required for crafting successful publications.

Taken a step further, librarians Lawrence Treadwell IV and Christianne Casper (2008), promote conference organizing as a way to develop “leadership skills” (p. 136) in library faculty and staff and suggest conference organizers begin with a short survey as “a needs assessment ... to identify the interests of the constituent libraries and their librarians” (p. 139-140). Surveys and needs assessments are recognized scholarly tools

employed by many in rhetoric and writing for first-hand research for traditional journal articles and so may help to strengthen the view of conference organizing as intellectual labor.

Previous research has explored the value of conferences for building individual field-specific knowledge (Tomaszewskit & MacDonald, 2009) or as sites for growing the entire academic field (Gross & Fleming, 2011; Wang, et al., 2017). Wei Wang, et al. (2017), for example, suggest that academic conferences are fertile grounds for future research and acknowledge a new research collaboration mechanism known as “conference closure” wherein “scholars involved in a common conference may collaborate with each other in the future” (p. 177). Additionally, Judith Mair and Elspeth Frew (2018) cite research explaining that “at a conference, discussions around a topic of shared interest can lead to new ways of thinking about a problem or issues, may lead to future collaboration with other delegates, and can even be inspirational and motivating for delegates” (p. 2153). This essay, and our own experience, goes a step further to suggest academic conferences not only benefit attendees, but also are valuable intellectual spaces for conference organizers themselves and their larger disciplines.

It is important, then, that conference organizing be recognized not only as incredibly taxing invisible labor, but also as viable intellectual work, something that the academy marks, values and rewards. Continuing to undertheorize and undervalue such work may damage not only individuals, particularly those marginalized by gender, race, and other identity markers, but also may have a negative impact on individual universities and disciplines that will likely continue struggling to find hosts willing to take on such demanding and often-discounted scholarly work. Below we identify five things that are at stake, for individuals and groups, if we continue to

ignore such work as a form of scholarship (in our promotion and tenure policies or in our end of year reviews). We also offer some strategies that might be considered in addressing these issues.

What's at Stake

Time and Emotional Health. Work-life balance has become a fashionable topic of popular articles, on-campus meetings, and scholarship in recent years. Thinking critically about the amount of time we expend at and in our jobs is important, and there are many things we take on in the academy that are time consuming and emotionally taxing: advising, mentoring undergraduate and graduate students, serving as organization advisors, and all the other “care taking” that often goes along with teaching. The propensity to serve in these important roles in an academic community is what likely drew many of us to teaching, but conference organizing calls upon these skills in concentrated and prolonged ways that are often unsustainable, resulting in significant decreases to our professional and personal stores of time and energy. As co-chairs, finding time to communicate with conference attendees and service providers; create and revise budgets; review food contracts, technology contracts, space contracts and ASL interpreter contracts; coordinate with internal stakeholders and student groups; organize reviewers; design, edit and publish the program; and deal with the contingencies associated with conference hosting meant numerous hours of uncompensated (and unmarked) evening and weekend work. While this is not a new phenomenon for anyone working in higher education, the intensity of this work and the high financial and scholarly stakes creates new stressors for organizers while simultaneously diminishing time needed to adequately address them.

Unit / Departmental Energy and Productivity. Conference hosting not only draws significantly on the time and energies of individuals, but also demands quite a bit from hosts’ home departments. Contributing to our disciplines is important, but so too is the work of our individual academic units and much of this work – assessment, strategic planning, recruitment – is already largely invisible labor. Taking on a national or international conference will further deplete organizations that are likely already overtaxed. There are, to be sure, many benefits to working as a group on visioning and carrying out an academic conference, including an increased sense of community, intellectual invigoration, opportunity to leverage individual strengths and interests, and increased depth to professional relationships to name just a few. But these benefits come at a cost and mean that, by necessity, some things will and must go undone or perhaps under-done in an academic unit in order to successfully complete the Herculean task of hosting a conference.

Scholarly Inactivity and Advancement. Although service, teaching, and scholarship responsibilities bear different weight at different academic institutions, it seems widely accepted that all are needed for individuals to survive and advance in the academy. While conference hosting certainly checks off the service box in a big way, it may also negatively impact teaching and scholarly production. As an associate professor, Jen was three years from applying for full professor at the time of our conference and as such was paying particular

attention to producing the required scholarly texts for that promotion. After only a few months of conference organizing duties, she accepted that these 18 months would not include any traditional scholarship production. Carving out research and writing time is already a challenge for most of us, and this activity is most often the area that is sacrificed when space must be created for other immediate projects. Conference hosting for pre-tenure faculty or those not yet promoted is therefore a considerable risk. Since the conference's completion, Jen has been able to re-establish her previous writing and production pace, but this is largely due to the fact that she had earned a competitive, semester-long research leave that happened to be scheduled immediately following the conference. Privileging conference organization over more readily valued scholarly activities and texts is a risk, particularly for pre-tenure faculty. We believe it is important for conference hosts to be aware of such challenges and to plan accordingly for their own career trajectory.

Teaching Efficacy. While scholarly production is likely the area most impacted by conference hosting duties, teaching is often also affected. There will always be the same hours in a day and things like class prep, grading, student conferences, and curriculum design will not magically diminish during a host's conference tenure, unless organizers are able to secure course reassignment. Being realistic about intellectual, emotional, and physical strains that often accompany major projects may help organizers mitigate this issue, but in all likelihood a conference organizer's teaching will suffer or at least be significantly impacted.

Personal and University Reputation. Academic conferences are important high-profile platforms for individual scholars and for organizations and disciplines. The chance to raise the visibility of specific issues and speakers is important work, perhaps particularly in regard to certain members of a given organization. Stephanie Sardelis and Joshua Drew (2016) explain that the scientific community, for example, "faces numerous challenges in achieving gender equality among its participants. One method of highlighting the contributions made by female scientists is through their selection as featured speakers in symposia held at the conferences of professional societies" (p. 1). Increased visibility, though, comes with the risk of increased criticism. So while attendees will always have valid concerns or are simply be "unpleased" with decisions relating to the conference – like registration costs, resources available, or physical locations chosen – these reactions carry real weight for individual scholars and academic programs when broadcast on social media channels. Fleeting observations and complaints, as well as praise, are now permanently recorded in public places and may have consequences for conference organizers.

Strategies for Doing Better

Be transparent. Explaining the complexity of budgeting and accessibility efforts, as well as setting realistic expectations for timelines and time commitments, for chairing even small academic conferences might help potential hosts plan, professionally and personally. Such transparency might also better educate university administrators and others about the commitment and resources needed. Individual academic organizations, then, should consider providing robust hosting materials and mentoring. We were lucky to be gifted several Google

folders with advice on advertising, obtaining sponsorship, compensating speakers, creating transportation routes and schedules, tracking proposals (see image below) and a million other tasks you don't realize you need to know how to do until you need to do them.

Treadwell and Casper (2008) describe a “framework for ... a successful model of conference planning” (p. 137) used in their field. “What developed,” the authors explained, “was a ‘conference in a box’ framework that enabled someone from the Reference Committee who has little conference planning experience to successfully lead the planning of a conference or event” (p. 137). While each venue and local host committee will and should differ, having some best practices and concrete guidelines and materials passed from host to host may save time and create networks of support for conferences.

Accept that some things “have to give”. As conference co-chairs and administrators—serving as academic unit head (Traci) and director of grad studies for our unit (Jen)—we had to accept that some of our usual activities might not get done or might be done differently or on a different scale. As academic unit head, Traci implemented some important procedures including establishing a conference committee (see [Sample Committee Agenda](#)), chaired by Jen, that counted as regular department service work for committee members and took the place of another committee appointment. Creating a standing committee that meets regularly for months or even years before a conference can not only help with workflow and distribution of labor on annual performance reports and tenure and promotion applications, it can also help a unit or department, communicating the impact that faculty and academic units purposely and often to the outside world, have on students, university, and discipline—will go unnoticed in the service category.

Make conference hosting equivalent to a major publication. Although some universities, like our own, recognize and reward hosting major conferences as one way to earn an “exemplary”

Figure 5: Keeping track of conference proposals.

rating in service, tenure and promotion cases are rarely decided based on service. Scholarship and teaching are nearly always valued and weighted more significantly. Shifting conference hosting to scholarship status, then, may allow for more substantial and appropriate recognition of this intellectually rigorous and vital work and make conference hosting more manageable and attractive. Isis Settles and Rachel O'Connor (2014) explain that not only are "conferences ... important places for networking and mentoring" but they are "also places where attendees learn about the value placed on certain types of scholarship" (p. 74). Such research suggests that academic conferences, then, not only create space for knowledge demonstration, but actually set and preserve standards of intellectual rigor and scholarly conventions for knowledge making for specific disciplines. The conference we hosted, for example, required a formal application and proposal that was vetted by members of the parent organization executive committee before we were selected to host. This sort of oversight and peer review might surely locate conference hosting as scholarship or at least scholarly work. Such work is clearly important to our disciplines and suggests that a well-attended conference may have a more significant impact on a given field than a single article. As such, conference hosting should be viewed not as event planning, but instead as a critical contribution to scholarly conversations with a reach that most articles will never realize. Another strategy to make visible the value of this intellectual work is to publicize the event with university media relations offices (see [Redefining Feminist Activism](#)) and local news to help others see the impact beyond conference attendees.

Tie conference work to teaching. Teaching accounts for the lion's share of many faculty appointments and so finding ways to connect the conference planning workload, as well as intellectual energy and excitement, with existing classes or by creating "special topics" courses may help hosts streamline efforts and energies and will likely result in unique engaged learning experiences for students (see [Brennan Article](#)). In preparation for our conference, we arranged for Jen to teach a cross listed course, which was focused on the subject area of the conference, and for which we share instructional responsibilities with two other departments. Although creating projects and finding readings to make explicit the connections between the course and the conference was time consuming at the start, the opportunity to have Jen and her students in the same "headspace" immediately before and during the conference was invaluable. Students in the class attended talks, archived materials from the conference (see [Digital Archive](#)), and reflected on the nature of knowledge making in our field. As undergraduates, they enjoyed unusual access to a major academic conference and were also able to write for a real audience and contribute to the scholarly conversation. Another committee member engaged students in her Professional Editing and Document Design courses to produce and edit texts for the conference resulting in valuable documents for conference goers and experience working with clients for her students. These sorts of efforts not only enrich classroom experiences for students and faculty, but also allow for conference organizing to be highlighted as important intellectual labor in teaching sections of annual performance reports and tenure and promotion materials.

Be kind to conference hosts. We had so many lovely interactions with conference attendees—folks participated generously in events and activities, stopped by to offer thanks and

complements and registration, and offered lots of love and shout-outs on social media. There were also a number of criticisms shared about everything from venue, to food, to cost, to representation, and while not unexpected, much of this criticism took place online. As conference attendees, most of us have found ourselves complaining—sometimes vehemently—about late shuttles, boring or bad food, lackluster speakers, or terrible technology. But what was once ephemeral and temporal feedback now lives forever via tweets and posts and shares and has a real impact on those doing this sort of invisible labor for little or no compensation. Settles and O'Connor (2014) remind us that academic conferences are “understudied yet consequential extension[s] of the academic/ professional workplace” (p. 72) and so it seems important to observe similar conventions of civility and constructive rather than antagonistic criticism in conversations at and around professional conferences. Certainly, we don’t recommend ignoring major issues at conferences or not suggesting ways things might change or be addressed differently, but such criticism might be offered with a constructive and kind-spirited intent. We suggest only offering grace to hosts, who are likely learning as they go, trying to be careful stewards of a budget made up of fees paid by attendees, and dealing with numerous challenges that they were never formally trained for. Parent organizations for conferences should offer support and even “cover” when necessary, like our organization did, but perhaps conference goers can also endeavor to remember the human beings behind the always-already flawed event they are experiencing.

Conclusion

When we began researching for this article, one of the first—and only—article we found specifically addressing conference hosting was a 30-year-old piece from Barbara Baker. The personal reflection focuses on the author’s experiences chairing a four-day conference, a process she began 24 months before the actual event:

Conference planning is time-consuming, hard work. It is physically and mentally tiring. But when the conference is over, you realize it is one of the most rewarding and prideful experiences you will ever have. The team spirit from working with a group to put what has to be ‘the biggest and the best’ is exhilarating. The feeling of accomplishment almost overshadows the exhaustion.
(p. 247)

The 1989 article sounds hokey now, but the message of it all being worth it is not that different than what we tell prospective conference hosts now. Instead, we propose shifting the focus from conference hosting as feel-good and passion-motivated service to intellectual labor that directly benefits both hosts and the larger academy. Besides taking a small step in countering gender inequality around service in the academy, elevating conference hosting and organizing to scholarship may invigorate this intellectual labor and result in even stronger conferences and conventions. No matter the larger implications, it is important to stop undervaluing the intellectual work of women in the academy and allow the multi-year commitment of conference hosting to be more accurately valued in our academic economy.

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Jen Almjeld is an Associate Professor and the Director of Graduate Studies for the School of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication at James Madison University. She teaches courses in research, media theory, and composition. Her recent publications appear in *Computers and Composition*, *Kairos* and *Girlhood Studies*.



Traci Zimmerman is a Professor in (and the former Director of) the School of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication (WRTC) at James Madison University. Currently, she serves as Interim Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Letters. Her research interests are primarily focused on authorship/intellectual property, language and the law, and digital literacies, though her work as an administrator has prompted her to investigate more actively inclusive labor practices and transformative framings of feminist work.

Progress and Power in the First, Second, and Third Universities

A Case Study of the University of Waterloo

Shannon Lodoen, University of Waterloo

Introduction

In the burgeoning field of critical university studies, many scholars are bringing attention to the myriad issues associated with higher education, which range from academia's discriminatory biases (Smith et al., 2017; Shields, 2012), to poor working conditions for contingent faculty (Street et al., 2012), to a shocking lack of support for mental health and disability accommodations (Price et al., 2017; Chi Wing Lau, 2019). Many of these issues are linked specifically to the increasing economic and capitalistic involvement of universities, a process that started many centuries ago¹⁷ but has become especially pronounced within the past few decades. The current era of late capitalism—characterized by the globalization of markets and labour, mass consumption, and what Ernest Mandel (1975) identified as a “generalized universal industrialization for the first time in history” (p. 387)—in many ways relies on hiding and obscuring labour conditions in many industries and institutions, and the university is certainly no exception.

And yet, despite the growing criticisms against universities' structures, operations, and labour practices, there is still a prevailing rhetoric of progress and positivity within higher education that elides genuine attempts for large-scale reform. As history scholar Joshua Foa Dienstag (2009) notes, the notion of “progress” has been an integral component in modern discourses—ranging from medicine to economics to the social sciences—since its emergence in the late eighteenth century (p. 10). The idea that things are constantly improving (and capable of being further improved) is not only prevalent in these discourses, but in fact shapes the way these discourses function; Joseph Packer and Ethan Stoneman (2018) identify “an optimistic grammar at the heart of almost all rhetoric and argumentation” (p. 11), which suggests that the very way our discourses are organized reflects an inclination for growth, progress, and expansion.

This is particularly evident within institutional contexts, especially the Western tradition, wherein the idea of progress is a key aspect of education and institutional prestige.¹⁸ As Abigail

¹⁷ See Boggs et al. (2019) for a discussion of the history of universities from “an accumulative perspective” (p. 13). Although the article refers specifically to American universities, it provides an excellent overview of the lesser known aspects of universities’ historical involvement with capitalism and accumulation.

¹⁸ Eli Meyerhoff (2019) notes how, as early as 1536, “education” was used to legitimate the rise of King Henry VIII’s low-born counsellors, as it was employed as a “narrative solution to explain how an individual could

Boggs et al. (2019) explain: “The dominant popular and scholarly narratives about... universities tend to portray ‘progress’ with linear distinctions between past, present, and future” (p. 4). This framing of “progress” as something that moves along a linear timeline is problematic for many reasons, particularly the way in which constructing a singular narrative silences certain voices while privileging others (after all, what constitutes “progress” for one group or individual might be catastrophic or even deadly for another). As such, the modern emphasis on progress can have dire consequences for those who are not in positions of power or prestige, who are not given the space to refute the narratives of progress and positivity being disseminated to the general public. It also overlooks the efforts and labours of people who are not in positions of power, instead shining light only on the “accomplishments” and “breakthroughs” that directly contribute to society’s upward trajectory.¹⁹

This project demonstrates how this rhetoric of positivity and progress plays out in higher education, using la paperson’s (2017) notions of the first, second, and third universities as a framework to investigate which types of perspectives, positions, and labour are lauded and which are silenced or ignored. The visual component of this project, which “maps out” the different types of universities using the University of Waterloo as a case study, is inspired by James E. Porter et al.’s (2000) article on the rhetorical foundations of institutional critique, wherein the authors identify “postmodern mapping” and “boundary interrogation” as key critical tactics. Although this project certainly doesn’t constitute a feat of postmodern mapping, I was intrigued by the authors’ discussion of the power that maps have to shape and reflect not only spaces but also ideas, power relations, social narratives, etc., and hoped to explore this power in my own work. Moreover, the mapping aspect here allows us to move away from the ways we too often understand higher education only along a timeline of process. Maps can refuse some of this temporal logic by showing several layers, timelines, or narratives simultaneously, as the overlays on this map attempt to do. By visually mapping out the specific spaces within the University of Waterloo that constitute the first, second, and third universities, I consider how space influences the magnitude of power and voice that each can exert—and also what sort of labour conditions actually adhere in certain campus spaces that confirm or even build upon paperson’s (2017) iterations of the university.²⁰

I have taken up this project because I agree with Porter et al.’s (2000) assertion that institutions should not just be studied from a “macro-level,” which risks figuring them as “static, glacial, or

transform from one side of the binary [high-born vs. low-born] to the other” (p. 136). Thus, people who previously would not have been able to “progress” in society gained the ability to improve their status through education, which supposedly closed the gap between people on different rungs of the social hierarchy.

¹⁹ For example, traditional domestic tasks, or “women’s work” are crucial for the sustenance of traditional family models—and by extension, social models—but these daily toils are rarely recognized by the men in various institutions that are “driving society forward.”

²⁰ For example, the grand notions of progress and improvement pushed by official university documents such as the “Strategic Plan” (University of Waterloo, 2020b) or “The State of the University President’s Report” (University of Waterloo, 2018) come from the dominant first university, which takes up a great deal of the map; the labour performed in these areas is highly touted and seen as integral to the university’s success, whereas counter information that might be coming out of the third university spaces are relegated to very small or fleeting areas of campus (shown on the map in red) that are often rather endured or humoured rather than openly valued.

even unchangeable," but also from a micro-level (p. 620). Taking a more micro-level approach focuses on "the local and micropolitical operations of social institutions" rather than just their superficial structures (p. 621). Thus, it will enable a stronger analysis of the rhetoric employed by each type of university and the set of beliefs and ideals that they uphold (either implicitly or explicitly) through their practices and public engagement. By searching for instances of the third university within the first (as paperson asks us to do), my intention is to examine the way that prevailing narratives of progress and performance are complicated and indeed refuted by the presence of the third university and its proponents who reject the notions of linear progress and inherent positivity that underscore the operations of higher education institutions.



Figure 1: A GIF of the university in motion. [Click to cycle through.]

[Image Title: "discover your waterloo: home of the first, second, and third university"

Image Description: A map of the University of Waterloo campus and surrounding affiliated buildings. The GIF moves through three different versions of the map, described below. The changing text appears to the right of the map. There a building index with abbreviations below.]

Concepts and Theory

As one of Canada's most renowned postsecondary institutions, the University of Waterloo is an excellent object of study. It exemplifies the entrepreneurial spirit, the push for technological progress, the high value placed on invention and innovation. With its vast cooperative education program (the largest in North America), close involvement with start ups (including two large venture capital funds), and prominent position on the world stage,²¹ UW has not just adapted to, but indeed capitalized on, the globalizing forces of late capitalism. And yet, of course, this highly publicized version of the University of Waterloo does not represent the institution in its totality. UW also boasts²² an Arts faculty with enrollment levels rivalling that of the Math faculty (coming second only to Engineering),²³ and well as three affiliated colleges that specialize in areas such as Social Development Studies, Social Work, Peace and Conflict Studies, Music Studies, Native Studies, and Religious Studies (University Colleges, n.d.-a). It is also home to dozens of student clubs and organizations dedicated to social justice, equality, and activism, although one would have to look very hard to find any information on these aspects of UW's operations. As far as reputation is concerned, the University of Waterloo is all about prestige and progress, and thus privileges the sorts of labour that contribute directly to increasing its reputation as "Canada's most innovative university" (as *McLean's* rankings have deemed it for the last twenty-eight years) (University of Waterloo, 2020c).

While all universities engage in branding and publicity tactics, the University of Waterloo is an extreme example of the sort of ossification that occurs when a singular image is pushed for many years. As someone who has studied at UW for several years (St Jerome's University College BA in 2016, English PhD class of 2023), I can attest to the many ways in which UW's "brand" runs counter to many of its less-publicized operations, policies, programs, and faculty. As such, the University of Waterloo is a prime object of study for the framework set out by Ia paperson, better known as Wayne K. Yang,²⁴ in the third chapter of his 2017 text *A Third University Is Possible* entitled "A Third University Exists Within the First." The purpose of paperson's book is to highlight and develop the possibility of a decolonizing university emerging from the profoundly colonial and colonizing universities we have today. The University of Waterloo, situated on the Haldimand Tract,²⁵ is a prime example of the colonial schools that paperson (2017) asserts "have a tradition of harboring spaces of anticolonial resistance" (p. 1); it is my goal here to explore the areas and aspects of UW that subvert its colonial and capitalistic agenda in ways that illuminate other forms of labour and value that are too often written off—or out—of UW's narratives.

²¹ See the University of Waterloo's webpage on "Rankings and Reputation" (2020c) for more.

²² This expression is rather oxymoronic here, as many people are unaware that UW even offers arts courses, so great is its emphasis on its STEM programs.

²³ For more enrollment-related statistics, see "Student Headcounts" (2020a) on the University of Waterloo's website.

²⁴ In this paper I will refer to Yang as paperson, for consistency's sake.

²⁵ Traditional Indigenous land that was "promised to the Haudenosaunee of the Six Nations of the Grand River, and are within the territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee peoples" (Faculty Association, n.d.).

paperson (2017) sets up his analysis in terms of the three tiers or types of university. Although I have included a key excerpt from the section in question on my diagram, his concepts of the first, second, and third university warrant some elaboration and contextualization, particularly as they relate to the “optimistic grammar” that Packer and Stoneman (2018) discuss. The first university champions charging fees, granting degrees, accumulation through dispossession, and expansion (paperson, 2017, p. 37); it is highly concerned with its image, the job market, and the economy. It is important to note that, technically, UW in its entirety *is* the first university, and prides itself on this reputation. The buildings I have highlighted on my poster (predominantly administrative or STEM-related) are those that I feel are *most representative* of this first university mentality—the ones key in “charging fees and granting degrees,” in keeping the capitalistic and economic aspects of the institution alive and well. These buildings are also those most responsible for emphasizing, publicizing, and spectacularizing UW’s progress, as I will discuss below. Their very presence demonstrates the progress UW has made, or at least appears to have made, with the shiny new buildings funded by the university’s many illustrious alumni and sponsors. The first university also champions financial prestige and progress, enabled by the sacrifices of students who go into debt in order to “progress” their own lives and careers. It purports to offer advancement and success, in exchange for a few years of hard work and many thousands of dollars, framing this enterprise as a largely positive and character-building undertaking that will put UW graduates ahead of the competition.

The second university is centered around the liberal arts, critique, reflection, self-actualization, critical consciousness, and nostalgia (paperson, 2017, p. 42). While this so-called “pedagogical utopia” may seem to escape a lot of the pitfalls of the first university, it still has a hidden curriculum that reinforces these same values and goals (p. 43). There are certainly some instances of this type of university on UW campus, although they are largely kept separate or cordoned off, as if in an attempt to keep the physical unity of the first university intact (i.e., the affiliated “liberal arts” university colleges are all separated from the rest of campus by Laurel Creek²⁶). This university champions a different form of progress, but one that is still predicated on linear notions of progression and improvement. Its emphasis on critique indicates a belief that things are improving overall as we move away from the issues of the past and become more “woke” (even if this wokeness does not lead to direct action or change).

The third university is focused on decolonialization—it is interdisciplinary, transnational, transformative, and radical, filling the gaps left by the first two universities (paperson, 2017, p. 43). If it teaches first world curricula, it is out of necessity alone (p. 44). At this point in time, instances of the third university are not yet easy to determine at UW, because it does not enjoy the same level of publicity or official status that the first and second universities are granted. The third university can be found in what David Sibley (1995) calls “zones of ambiguity,” which are spaces of tension, transgression, intersection and transformation (pp. 32–33). These spaces are also key loci of institutional critique wherein the possibility for radical refigurings of the

²⁶ The affiliated university colleges are actually inaccessible by car from the central Ring Road that encircles main campus; they can only be reached by entry points along Westmount Road, which borders the westmost side of campus.

institution might exist. Because of its ephemeral and sporadic nature, the third university cannot operate with the same logic of progress that informs the other two universities; rather, it seeks to create change, disturbance, or rupture, spanning out in all directions rather than trying to forge ahead in a direct path toward its goal of decolonization.

It is important to note that the project of mapping the different universities is a difficult one, both in terms of discerning the proper sites of each university and due to the fact that different areas and aspects of UW are constantly changing (not only in terms of physical locations, but also faculty members, students, budgets, etc.). Thus, the selections made here are not concrete or indisputable; they are simply my evaluations and estimations of UW at this moment in time.²⁷ Overall, I hope that mapping out the different universities and their clashing values, methods, and goals will help to deconstruct UW's first university façade by illuminating some potential spaces of the third university and highlighting the importance of countering the notions of progress that are driving this institution forward (but not necessarily towards anything better). I also hope to encourage anyone reading this to start investigating the sorts of narratives privileged in their own institutions, to think about the ways that progress and prestige are signalled in (or "mapped" onto) certain spaces, faculties, programs, etc. Such an investigation will also necessarily draw attention to the areas and aspects that universities seek to hide or ignore, particularly those that bely systemic inequality or discrimination perpetuated by the very structures of the institution.

The First University Self-Promotes

As noted above, the University of Waterloo is a prime example of the first university. Its focus on engineering, science, mathematics, business, and entrepreneurship is clear from the sheer number of buildings dedicated to such pursuits.²⁸ The key buildings that represent the first university mindset are: William G. Davis Computer Research Centre (DC), Douglas Wright Engineering Building (DWE), Centre for Environmental and Information Technology (EIT), Energy Research Centre (ERC), Central Services Building (CSB), Science Complex (SC), Physics (PHY), Mathematics and Computer Building (MC), Ira G. Needles Hall (NH), Mike and Ophelia Lazaridis Quantum-Nano Centre (QNC), William M. Tatham Centre for Co-operative Education and Career Action (TC), and Velocity. The more recently constructed buildings (like the QNC) are physical reminders of UW's progress; the beautiful new buildings made of glass and metal signify architectural refinement (from the ugly "1960s brick" of the older buildings) and exude wealth as they flaunt the successful labours of UW's alumni, who are able to sponsor such costly projects.²⁹

²⁷ Some locations may also be home to more than one type of university, depending on the different functions or activities performed therein.

²⁸ This focus is also emphasized in UW's finances: based on the 2016-2017 data on UW's total operating revenues, Science (14%), Mathematics (19%), and Engineering (22%) comprised a total of 55%. Arts provided 14%, Environment 5%, and Applied Health Sciences 5% (University of Waterloo, 2017).

²⁹ It is, of course, these buildings that are highlighted on official University of Waterloo brochures, posters, advertisements, etc., as well as on campus tours.



Figure 2: The First World University.

[Text Transcription: "The first world university is the academic-industrial complex: 'research-ones' preeminently, but also commercial universities and any other corporate academic enterprise... characterized by an ultimate commitment to brand expansion and accumulation of patent, publication, and prestige." (paperson 36)]

Image Description: The key buildings that represent the first university are highlighted in yellow on the map of the University of Waterloo campus. They include: William G. Davis Computer Research Centre (DC), Douglas Wright Engineering Building (DWE), Centre for Environmental and Information Technology (EIT), Energy Research Centre (ERC), Central Services Building (CSB), Mathematics and Computer Building (MC), Ira G. Needles Hall (NH), Mike and Ophelia Lazaridis Quantum-Nano Centre (QNC), William M. Tatham Centre for Co-operative Education and Career Action (TC), the Science Complex (SC), Physics (PHY), and Velocity (the on-campus startup hub). The main campus residences (REV, MKV, V1, and UWP), which house out-of-town and international students and are thus crucial for sustaining UW's enrollment rates, are also highlighted. The map shows that the majority of the buildings on campus, especially everything related to STEM and to research, are part of the "first university." Several of these buildings are quite new, particularly the Quantum Nano Centre, Science Complex, and Needles Hall's recent addition.]

UW's emphasis on wealth is also evidenced by the buildings dedicated to co-op, start-ups, and research, which represent its connection to the corporate world and fixation on capital gain. Administration buildings like Needles Hall highlight the other side of UW's finances: the charging of fees and the granting of degrees. This aspect of UW's progress narrative involves the exchange of money for a degree, and by extension, a career; paying the university for an education is assumed to be a necessary step to progressing further in life. Thus, while the university accumulates vast amounts of wealth (thereby progressing its own capitalist agenda), students are made to feel that they are also progressing towards a promising career. UW's many residences (indicated on the map as REV, MKV, V1, and UWP), which are necessary for housing the influx of first year students, especially international students, operate within the first university structure as well. They are little more than expensive prison cells that enable students to come from far away in order to partake in UW's "unique" scholastic opportunities, offering little in the way of support or community. Much of the suffering and isolation that students endure is framed as a necessary part of the educational journey at Waterloo, which students must progress through in order to obtain their degree. The unacceptable levels of student suicide at UW,³⁰ as well as the lack of adequate mental health services,³¹ attest to the unrealistic standards set by the university of performance "at all costs" —with the costs sometimes being the very lives of its students.

Lastly, the first university is the place where progress is publicized, where we see the "affirmative function" of Packer and Stoneman's (2018) "optimistic grammar" (p. 2). The material published by UW, from [future student brochures](#) to its [alumni magazine](#), is resolutely focused on achievements, advancements, and breakthroughs; everything that comes out of UW is illuminated with a rosy glow, while anything that is less than amazing—such as UW's aforementioned suicide rates or the "inexplicable" and persistent discrepancies between female vs male professors' wages³² —is left out, even actively suppressed. Statistics, which supposedly support UW's claims to greatness, are sometimes intentionally skewed or based on data that is not available to the general public. This is perhaps the most daring and dangerous

³⁰ Exact numbers on the suicides are difficult to unearth, although this is not unique to UW. Peter Goffin (2017) explains that: "In a survey of Ontario's 20 universities, *The Star* found that only about half keep any kind of formal statistics on the number of student suicides. Of those universities, several track only suicides that occur on their campus, meaning that any deaths that occur at a student's off-campus residence or their family home does not get included in their tally." Based on a review of online news articles, in 2017 there were two suicide deaths on UW campus within two months; 2018 and 2019 each reported one student suicide. Liz Monteiro's 2018 news article from the *Waterloo Region Record* reported that there were, in total, "about 10 deaths by suicide of university students" between 2012 and 2018 (last par.).

³¹ Meredith Powell (2018) discusses the barriers to suicide prevention and mental health support in her dissertation on institutional mental health rhetoric (see in particular Chapter 4 of *Talk, Body, Performance: Mental Health Rhetoric in Corporate, Government, and Institutional Settings*). Powell notes that: "The University of Waterloo approach to seriously mentally ill students is to get them off campus immediately, directing all students to call 911 in event of a mental health crisis. When students have serious mental illness, they are locked in cells under bright hospital lights for 24-hour emergency observation if they are deemed a risk to themselves or others" (pp. 156–7).

³² See Paola Lorrigio's 2016 article "University of Waterloo hikes salaries of female faculty after gender pay discrepancy found" for more details on this controversy.

aspect of UW's narrative of progress, because these public forums are so prone to rhetorical manipulation or exaggeration. A building is a building, and a degree is a degree – but a press release is a written representation of a state of affairs that cannot be easily or concretely corroborated. Through public mediums such as alumni magazines, press releases, webpages, and even presidential emails, UW is able to construct and maintain a narrative of progress and positivity that reaches far beyond the borders of campus. As such, proclamations of Waterloo's achievements and "excellence"³³ are only one side of the coin, intended to deflect attention away from the less positive ongoing issues that have plagued this institution for years.³⁴

The Second University Self-Congratulates

In general, spaces of the second university are those where courses in the Arts are taught: Arts Lecture Hall (AL), Hagey Hall (HH), Modern Language (ML), and East Campus Hall (ECH). The second university is also found in the affiliated university colleges—Conrad Grebel (CG), Renison (REN), St. Jerome's (STJ), and St. Paul's (STP). These colleges place more of an emphasis on community and camaraderie in their residence halls, and tend to offer more liberal arts-style courses (St. Jerome's, for instance, provides "a liberal education, transformative experiential learning opportunities, and a nurturing but challenging learning environment that allows students to flourish as whole persons") (St. Jerome's, n.d. par. 1). While at the end of the day they still collect fees (that are, admittedly, somewhat higher than main campus residences) and grant University of Waterloo degrees, the colleges seek to mitigate the overwhelmingly atomistic and capitalistic atmosphere on main campus.

Dana Porter Library (LIB) is also highlighted as part of the second university because, although libraries can support the goals of all three universities, they tend to be sites of conventional learning that takes place in a vacuum rather than in the real world; people can read all they want about revolution, indigenization, critical race theory, etc., but reading alone does not necessitate change or action. Additionally, while campus libraries can house thousands of texts, these texts generally convey information that falls within a certain range of "acceptability" and thus they perpetuate the status quo, or at least don't directly challenge it. Another instance of the second university is the Centre for Teaching Excellence, with its focus on pedagogy training and student-centered learning methods (oddly enough, the CTE is located in the Mathematics and Computing Building). The Graduate House (GH) also demonstrates elements of the second university, as it provides a place for graduate students and faculty to meet and cultivate relationships, to share food and time together that is not strictly dedicated to academics or

³³ Excellence, for Bill Readings (1996), is a term that "has the singular advantage of being entirely meaningless, or to put it more precisely, non-referential" (p. 22), which enables it to "function as a principle of translatability between radically different idioms" (p. 23). It has become a buzzword within the university, used as a positive "catchall" that has no overarching guidelines, criteria, or limits. Because of its mutability and transferability, "excellence" is a perfect tool for rhetorical manipulation, because it can be applied to many different aspects of the university (from parking services to faculty accolades to students' entrepreneurial endeavors).

³⁴ A quick trip to the Dana Porter Archives clearly demonstrates that UW has been dealing with issues of racism, sexism, discrimination, and inequality since its founding in the late 1950s.

business (as opposed to the Food Services locations spread out across UW which serve the sole purpose of keeping students going through long days on campus).

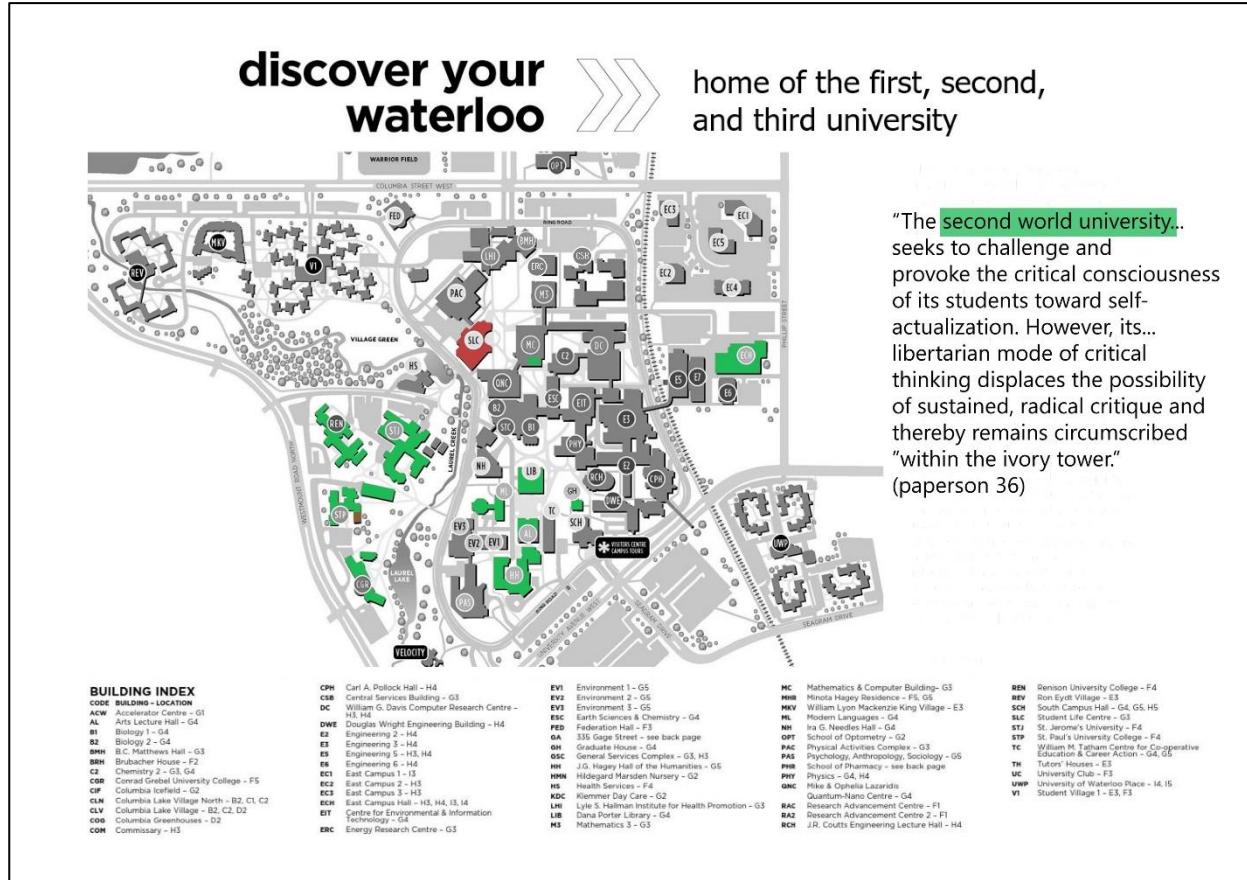


Figure 3: The Second World University.

[Text Transcription: “The second world university... seeks to challenge and provoke the critical consciousness of its students toward self-actualization. However, its... libertarian mode of critical thinking displaces the possibility of sustained, radical critique and thereby remains circumscribed ‘within the ivory tower.’” (paper 36)

Image Description: The key buildings that represent the second university are highlighted in green on the map. They are generally affiliated with the faculty of Arts, and include: Arts Lecture Hall (AL), Hagey Hall (HH), Modern Language (ML), and East Campus Hall (ECH), Dana Porter Library (DP), the Grad House (GH), the Centre for Teaching Excellence (located in MC), and the affiliated university colleges—Conrad Grebel (CG), Renison (REN), St. Jerome’s (STJ), and St. Paul’s (STP). These buildings tend to be separated from the first university buildings and are for the most part located around the edges and older areas of campus. The affiliated university colleges are “across the creek” from main campus and actually cannot be accessed by car from the central Ring Road running through campus; the only entry points are along Westmount Road, which borders the west side of campus.]

Although perhaps more varied in scope than the first university (at least from my selections), I would argue that these spaces also support conventional notions of progress, even as they subvert conventional expectations of labour and productivity. The second university tends to focus more on unquantifiable learning goals, such as critical thinking and other so-called “soft skills.” Thus, the sort of labour that occurs within the second university is much less tangible (and thus recognizable) than that which occurs in the testing labs, workshops, and computer hubs of the first university. However, the notions of progress and development are still highly prevalent, although not in the monetized, technologized, or objectified forms valued by the first university. paperson (2017) notes that, “[a]t least ideologically, the second world university *is committed to the transformation of society through critique*, through a deconstruction of systems of power” (p. 41, emphasis added). There is a firm belief in the second university that, by deconstructing the “bad” systems of power, it can replace them with “good” ones. This sentiment is, again, informed by rhetoric’s “affirmative function” that “preserve[s] a world of meaning, one in which material reality is not blindly cruel and indifferent but welcome, reassuring, and kind” (Packer and Stoneman, 2018, p. 2). It assumes that, if people are more informed—if they perform the necessary psychological and emotional labour to ameliorate their awareness of their positionality and perspective—they will make choices that are fairer, kinder, and even decolonizing.

As paperson (2017) points out though, the second university is a “pedagogical utopia” rather than a driver of change. Although it wants a world wherein “professor ceases to profess, where hierarchies disappear [and] all personal knowledges are special” (p. 42), in the end this is a naïve (if well-intentioned) goal informed and sustained by a foundational belief in people’s boundless ability to progress and grow. This is not to say that personal growth is not a good thing in itself; it is important for all students to develop and grow as a result of their education. The issue with the second university is, for paperson, that this pedagogical utopia is a surrogate for genuine action and change. The mental labour, which manifests in eloquent essays, impassioned poetry, affirmative action mandates, and reading groups (to name a few examples) does not make it into the “real world.” Porter et al. (2000) call attention to the dearth of active institutional critique in their field when they ask: “Where do we find instances of institutional critique in [rhetoric and composition studies]? Nowhere, yet—at least not fully articulated examples” (p. 626).³⁵ Far from remaining in the realm of ideas or inspiration, institutional critique must be a “fundamental pragmatic effort” (p. 625) that works through disciplinary reform (p. 617), classroom critique (p. 616), and administrative amendment (p. 614). In essence, Porter et al. are calling for a movement towards the third university, which requires and is indeed predicated on labour—not the forms of labour that are prized by the university as an institution, but rather the invisible and often underappreciate labours that go into challenging and reforming institutions from the ground up.

³⁵ What they do find, they say, are “projects that reveal dimensions of institutional study, where the institution is an important if not central component of the study and where the researchers form of institutional revision” (2000, p. 626).

The Third University Self-Actualizes (and then Self-Destructs)

As I warned in my introduction, it is often hard to pinpoint spaces of the third university; as paperson (2017) notes in his conclusion, it is constantly assembling, constantly in a state of coming together, and yet also constantly “expiring” or losing its foothold (p. 52). In this sense, it does not subscribe to the same notions of linear progress that undergird the first and second universities. It is used to backsliding, having to change tack and move laterally; it is adaptable and resilient, and will not be stopped even when particular avenues are shut down or altered. paperson also notes that the third university “assembles decolonizing machines out of scrap parts from colonial technology. It makes itself out of assemblages of the first and second world universities” (p. 53). Essentially, it must use elements of the first and second universities in new ways, taking advantage of various loopholes or situations to push its decolonizing agenda; it does not aim for progress, as such, but for change, disruption, and rupture. It recognizes that “change” is not always necessarily for the better, but that change in some form must occur in order to decolonize the university. It also recognizes that changes are not permanent (as linear narratives of progress would suggest) but can fall apart or disperse as their need expires or new avenues arise.³⁶ Thus, it also implicitly recognizes the importance of individual and collective labouring towards a common goal of decolonization, although this labour is often difficult and unacknowledged (and even challenged) by the institution where it takes place.

In UW’s case, the third university is most likely to emerge in the “zones of ambiguity” across campus where students and faculty are working to effect change, decolonization, and solidarity. The only stable and constant location of the third university is the Indigenous Student Centre at St. Paul’s College. This is a space “premised on understanding, respect, and trust, as well as a recognition of and sensitivity to the different cultural values and rights of Indigenous peoples and cultures” that “facilitate[s] the sharing of Indigenous knowledge and provide[s] culturally relevant information and support services for all members of the University of Waterloo community” (Indigenous Student Centre, n.d.-b, par. 1-2). While it is not necessarily pushing for radical change, the Indigenous Student Centre is certainly not utopian or nostalgic in the way the second university is. Rather, it represents a decolonial space wherein members of the Indigenous community are welcomed and respected.³⁷ It is also a space where many if not all of the individuals have experienced the ill effects of “progress,” either firsthand or through generational trauma.³⁸ Working with/through this trauma is indeed a kind of “invisible labour”

³⁶ A prime example of this is Pu'u Huluhulu University in Hawaii, which has emerged as part of the “ongoing encampment protesting efforts to construct the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) at Mauna Kea”; its goal, according to Dean Itsuji Saranillio, is to “inspire and further demonstrate to all of Hawai’i, and the world, the power of Indigenous movements to create meaningful alternatives to an unsustainable U.S. colonial system” (Boggs et al., 2019, p. 26). This “university” is not a permanent or perfect solution, but it is a phenomenal example of the possibilities of the third university to deliver a decolonizing education in the most unexpected places; although it will likely cease to exist once its “usefulness expires” (paperson, 2017, p. 52), it will still have positively affected the lives of all those who were able to receive an education while protesting against the TMT.

³⁷ For an example of how Indigenous learning and teaching methods have been successfully integrated into a wider institutional setting, see Sheila Cote-Meek’s (2019) “The Age of Reconciliation: Transforming Postsecondary Education.”

³⁸ As the wealth of literature on the subject attests, modern Eurocentric conceptions of progress (in which Indigenous peoples were construed as “barriers” to civilization that had to be destroyed or assimilated) have had

that must be performed within the university—labour that requires constant energy and communal support in order for students to be able to engage with and withstand the colonial institutional system.



Figure 4: The Third World University

[Text Transcription: “The third world university defines itself fundamentally as a decolonial project - as an interdisciplinary, transnational, yet vocational university that equips its students with skills toward the applied practice of decolonization.” (paperson 36).

Image Description: The key buildings that represent the third university are highlighted in red on the map. They include the Indigenous Student Centre at St. Paul’s College (STP) and the Student Life Centre (SLC), which is the “home base” for many of UW’s clubs. These two locations are spaces where students and faculty are working to effect change, decolonization, and solidarity through means that run counter to the agenda of the first university. They are, notably, housed within other buildings that are part of the first or second universities, indicating that UW does not allocate permanent space to the third university.]

“The third world university defines itself fundamentally as a decolonial project - as an interdisciplinary, transnational, yet vocational university that equips its students with skills towards the applied practice of decolonization.”
(paperson 36)

disastrous effects on Indigenous peoples around the world. As such, they have little reason to support the traditional and straightforward notions of progress perpetuated by modern-day society.

I have also identified the Student Life Centre (SLC) as a space of the third university because it is the designated home (or at least the symbolic home) of many clubs on campus that might serve as catalysts for the third university.³⁹ While some of these clubs still work within a capitalistic framework (i.e., focused on raising money, requiring fees, connected to larger outside organizations), they are still challenging the status quo of the first university and what it stands for. The club that appears most in line with the third university is the Socialist Fight Back Club, which aims to “build a base for revolutionary politics on the campus and in the community, and to highlight the importance of collective and militant methods of political action among the workers and students. The main goal of [this] club is to educate and to organize” (Socialist, n.d., par. 1). However, there is certainly space in the other clubs to generate real change and action where it is needed most as well, especially ones like RAISE and the General Equality Club that are focused on issues within UW specifically.

It is interesting to note that these clubs (as zones of ambiguity), which do not have physical “homes” on UW campus, are defined by people rather than set spaces.⁴⁰ This speaks to the third university’s reputation as a “machine that produces machines,” a machine that “assembles students into scyborts” (paperson, 2017, p. 53). A scyborg, paperson explains, is “the agentive body within the institutional machinery.” Its agency “is precisely that it is a reorganizer of institutional machinery; it subverts machinery against the master code of its makers; it rewires machinery to its own intentions. It’s that elliptical gear that makes the machine work (for freedom sometimes) by helping the machine (of unfreedom) break down” (p. 55). This is an accurate description of the members of the clubs at UW that seek to create change or reform by reorganizing structures within the institution or on a broader scale in terms of laws, rights, or economies.⁴¹ These members are not “autonomous, unplugged individuals” but rather part of “a plurality [that] only occasionally becomes singular when a condensation of machines produces intentionality,” as clubs do when they exert their collective labour, energy, and power to achieve certain goals (p. 55). The issue with scyborts in a university context, however, is that they are constantly flowing in and out of the “machine”—students may have to leave their clubs because of coop terms, particularly busy semesters, or graduation. In this sense, the clubs as decolonial machines are constantly being disassembled and reassembled in different ways, and thus their conception of “progress” is more fragmented, fleeting, and incomplete. Although this certainly does complicate the process by which change can be imagined and enacted, it also means that new opportunities, individuals,

³⁹ The clubs noted here, pulled from UW’s comprehensive list of clubs and teams (2020), cover a range of causes and concerns: Because I am a Girl (helping girls attain equal access to education and rights), Black Association for Student Expression, Breaking Barriers: Cross-Cultural Mental Health, Fossil Free UW, General Equality Club, Habitat for Humanity, HanVoice (advocating for North Korean human rights), International Justice Mission, P.A.I.N. Canada (improving living conditions, health care, and stigmatization for individuals living in poverty and addiction), RAISE (Racial Advocacy for Inclusion, Solidarity and Equity), Socialist Fight Back Club, and World Vision UW (providing access to clean water, education, healthcare, etc.).

⁴⁰ The fact that the third university on UW campus is relegated to interpersonal relations or “nomadic” clubs that do not have permanent spaces could be UW’s way of stopping potentially inflammatory or oppositional groups from becoming fixtures on campus, suggesting that the first university actually fears the third, since the third produces messages that conflict with the positive and progressive image UW tries to put forth.

⁴¹ In either the immediate community, like P.A.I.N., or on an international scale as with HanVoice.

and initiatives are constantly arising, constantly adding fuel to the fire of institutional decolonization.

Conclusion

As Porter et al. (2000) note, it is with micro-level critiques that “[w]e can begin to locate agency”; indeed, “constructing institutions as local and discursive spaces makes them more visible and dynamic and therefore more changeable” (p. 621). Locating agency is crucial not only because it reveals the types of labour that often go unsung in a capitalist institution like the university, but also because it highlights who is promoting which narratives and ideals for which purposes. The first university champions a narrative of progress, productivity, and positivity in order to attract new students, take their money, and send them into the working world; the second university promotes a less ostentatious version of progress, but one that still prizes the positive potential of critical and liberal studies over action; the third university rejects all reductive and linear views of progress, instead envisioning it like a circuit board that can be lit up in any number of ways for any amount of time along many different paths. The third university knows that decolonization is not an easy or straightforward process, but that it must be striven for nonetheless. The third university also knows that all forms of labour, even those unrecognized by the university administration—the last-minute scrambling of temp staff to pull together a course syllabus, the thankless daily work performed by cleaning and maintenance workers, the activities and protests arranged by student organizations, the lobbying for more equitable pay or policies, etc.—is what allows the university to function in the first place, and thus also what enables the university to be changed and challenged.

As my diagram of UW campus reveals, this institution is not a hopeless and monolithic “money machine”—or, more accurately, it is not *just* a hopeless and monolithic money machine.

Universities are never static, never stable, and their course forward is never set in stone. Beneath the blithe assertions of positivity and progress, beneath the critiques from armchair philosophers and well-meaning liberal arts scholars, there exists a third university that resists such utopian projects. The scyborgs that construct and comprise this third university take the first and second universities and turn them back on themselves, highlighting their flaws and inconsistencies, their vulnerabilities. In doing so, they also highlight that progress is not always positive, that change is not permanent, that lip service can never replace genuine action. The third university is not here for the good press or the bonus paycheck – it is here to decolonize education and destroy the narratives of progress that have (mis)guided our educational institutions and practices for far too long.

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Shannon Lodoen is a doctoral student in the Department of English at the University of Waterloo. She completed her Honours BA in English Literature and Rhetoric at the University of Waterloo (2016) and her MA at Western University's Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism (2019). Her main areas of interest are rhetoric, semiotics, and discourse analysis, with a special focus on how narratives of progress (technological, national, social, etc.) are rhetorically constructed and disseminated by dominant groups in society.

Foolery, Refusal and Possibility

On Labor Relationalities at Predominantly White Institutions

Yanira Rodríguez, Sophia Sunshine Vilceus, Laquana Cooke,

Emily Aguiló-Peréz, Sherri Craig, Jason Vanfosson, Tim Dougherty,

Ben Kuebrich, and Michael Burns, West Chester University

Refusal includes but also means more than upholding our right to say “no” when asked to do extra labor. Developing an ethos of refusal at times means refusing the University (Grande), that is, not re-inscribing as norm capitalist labor practices that privilege productive performance above quality of life. Refusing also means rendering visible and divesting from the faulty logics that normalize these practices. These capitalist labor practices are undergirded by a rhetorical machinery that by repetition through white bodies at PWI’s, coerces compliance.



Refusal turns us towards new ways of relating and reimaging what ends we do the work we came to do.

[Click on image to access the site.]



Emily Aguiló-Peréz is an Assistant Professor of English at West Chester University. Her interest include Children's literature, Girlhood studies, Latinx studies, Children's culture(s), Popular Culture



Michael Burns is an Associate Professor of English at West Chester University. His interest include African American Rhetorics, Composition and Rhetoric, Rhetoric and the Built Environment, Teaching Non-traditional College Students



LaQuana Cooke is as Assistant Professor of Digital Humanities at West Chester University and the Director of iCamp Media Academy. Her interest include Generative STEM Education, Digital-Based Learning, Games Studies, Critical Literacy and Pedagogy



Sherri Craig is an Assistant Professor of English at West Chester University. Her interest include First-year Writing, Professional & Technical Writing, Writing pedagogy and curriculum design, Black experiences in the university, Ancient and contemporary public rhetoric



Tim Dougherty is an Associate Professor of English at West Chester University. His interests include Histories of Rhetoric, Cultural Rhetorical Theories, Intersectional Feminist Rhetorics, Critical Ethnic and Settler Colonial Studies, Irish issues



Ben Kuebrich is an Associate Professor of Journalism at West Chester University and the co-host of This Rhetorical Life podcast. His interest include Community Journalism, Rhetoric for Social Justice, Popular Education, Podcasting



Yanira Rodriguez is an Assistant Professor of Journalism at West Chester University. Her interest include community writing/publishing, cultural production; the underground press, multimodal/multigenre compositions; women of color feminisms



Sophia Sunshine Vilceus is an English Instructor at West Chester University, and the author of "Late Conversations with my Late Mother" and "The Last Pew: Journeying Back"



Jason VanFosson is an Assistant Professor of English at West Chester University. His interest include Children's and Young Adult Literature and Culture, Comics Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Road Literature

Digital Literacy as a Form of Free Labor

Malaka Friedman, North Carolina State University

Abstract

Invisible labor within the academy unfortunately is not a new concept. There is a general understanding that when it comes to navigating the spaces of academia students need to “pay their dues” by working hard both within and outside the classroom spaces. Students, staff, and faculty are expected to have an understanding of the required skills needed to function within the ever-changing space of academic institutions, even when the guidelines for those skills may not initially be apparent. This invisible labor does not account for gaps in some of these skills, particularly when it comes to an understanding of digital literacy skills within academia. Furthermore, the work to have these skills becomes a form of free labor that is regularly expected from all members of the academia in order to succeed when it comes to taking courses, teaching, and conducting research. This paper argues that digital literacy is a form of free labor (Terranova, 2004) that is not only expected, but also required to continue to function within the digital economy of the United States academic sphere regardless of barriers that may prevent such a fluency from occurring. This expectation and assumption prove further to be a dangerous assumption that affects individuals through a pipeline effect as they move from undergraduate students to potential graduate students to potential instructors.

Keywords: Free labor, digital literacy, invisible labor, academia.

Education and Digital Literacy

Back to school lists are a common practice within America’s public school system. Parents and guardians take their children to stores with a specific list that tells them their child will require a notebook, pens, glue sticks, and a box of tissues for the upcoming year. This practice is ubiquitous that by the time these students move on to higher levels of education that do not require lists, students know what types of materials are required of them. Within the walls of the academy, however, these lists are then replaced by materials requested by the instructor of a course through the syllabus and bookstore (pending if their instructor placed their request in time). Again, the materials are unsurprisingly and contain items such as blue books and pens, depending on the subject. Essentially there are a lot of lists for education and yet every single one will be missing something essential: digital literacy.

Digital literacy is an abstract concept that has been defined by many and in a variety of ways. Paul Gilster (1997) defines digital literacy as revolving around the idea of “mastering ideas, not

keystrokes." In comparison, digital literacies can also be defined as referring "to the practices of communicating, relating, thinking, and 'being' associated with digital media" (Jones & Hafner, 2012, p.13). Both statements hold true to the nature of digital literacy as often it is one thing to have the tool of a computer itself, it is another to know how to use it for the communication processes necessary to excel within the academy. And yet it is not something that is inherently taught across the board to all students despite its importance. With the advancement of technology within education there now exists an assumption that all students have the knowledge of what it takes to compete on these diverse platforms in order to secure not only a good education, but also a good job post-graduation. The truth is actually further from that reality entirely. The labor that goes into digital literacy itself is not noted as it covers a broad area of socioeconomics, geographic, racial, and other divides that extend beyond general notions of the digital divide.

The digital divide of how is able to access technology has been explored in previous scholarship over time and has led to a variety of perspectives as to how institutions and other entities intend to improve the digital literacy of students. Often when reflecting on issues with capitalism in institutions there is an inclination to focus on the tangible financial aspect. Christopher Newfield acknowledges that same facet when discussing how institutions have been responding to markets in the 1970s and 1980s, specifically when it came to how technology was implemented on college campuses. Newfield (2016) notes how the wiring of campuses to support the needed technology at that time was essential as "Any university that failed to wire, rewire, and dewire would have fallen behind in perceived quality of service and become uncompetitive" (p.150). This competitiveness would lead to implementation of massive open online courses (MOOCs) that were used as a way to "fix" budgetary concerns of institutions. What these courses did not fix, and what was acknowledged by supporters of these corporations, was how online courses further damaged individuals who were already at a disadvantage by the current institutional system due to issues of race, gender, socioeconomics, and geographic system inequalities. Newfield found in their research that companies that follow these formats only serve to make racial disparity worse while also affecting nontraditional students and lower-income students (p.246). While Newfield's research did not specifically look at the role of digital literacy in these instances, it can be inferred that should individuals who struggle with digital literacy would be further disadvantaged by an institutionalized system that was meant to reach them. It is further assumed that universities require these students to be more active in their own labor production at a distance when it comes to knowledge of navigating the necessary skills to access all the various platforms, technologies, etc. that they need in order to pass their online courses. Newfield's work also helps to support this notion that universities themselves care more about the production of degrees than necessarily the skills needed beyond the academy and within it. They in essence become similar to David Noble's (1998) notion of digital diploma mills; mass-produced for the sake of it rather than to create essential knowledge skills (in this case digital literacy) that would affect students in the long run.

While Newfield considers how institutions themselves have intended to address the need for digital literacy, government programs themselves have attempted to close gaps for issues with

digital literacy. Intervention programs geared towards targeting students in regions that are deemed lower in socioeconomic status have led to initiatives such as by the Clinton administration that intended to close the digital divide by providing resources to students. Providing technology to students however does not solve the issue of digital literacy, namely how students are expected to develop their own digital literacy. Sadly, this trend has continued to governmental practices today, with the 2017 National Educational Technology Plan Update noting how providing technology appears to be the main focus for programs. When support for learning how to use digital literacy is noted, it is only through the presence of HIVE networks (a possible reference to how the Internet itself is often viewed as a hive network) that are created through an initiative by the Mozilla Foundation that call for the community itself to become involved in developing the digital literacy of students. Spaces are noted such as libraries, museums, schools, after-school programs and individuals like educators, designers, and artists are referenced as possible ways to involve digital literacy lessons to students (p.17). However, this often overlooks the fact that getting access to these spaces often falls to benefit individuals with ready access rather than being an equal distribution for all individuals. Issues of space and this expectation raise additional questions about the types of labor that are expected from students when it comes to developing their digital literacy and what this labor can be called, as in fact the work that some students do to “catch up” is in of itself a form of invisible labor.

Free Labor, Academic Labor, and Digital Literacy

Terranova defines free labor as “simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed, and exploited” (2004, p. 74). In the context of digital technologies this type of labor takes a different form as often there is the notion of the society-factory model when it comes to how digital economies work. Evaluating how the internet has affected this definition is essential to consider as though it may not as apparent, class does play a role in the type of knowledge economy that students experience when understanding how digital technologies and communicating with them impact their own knowledge and potential social capital. Furthermore, when considering digital literacy as free labor there needs to be consideration of the fact that it is in essence unwaged labor. Brown (2014) breaks down five main facets of unwaged digital labor to include the following: its inherent autonomy, its exploitative nature, instances of resistance and struggle, its intrinsically collaborative and cooperative nature, and its biopolitical impact on the constitution of subjectivity (p.695). Digital literacy itself carries all five facets, but in particular its ability to be exploitable. Brown notes how digital labor is exploitative due to the low value itself (and how that digital value is determined, mind you) is directly generated by the content created by users. Digital literacy and having an understanding of it as such allows education institutions to explore options of distance learning and making vocations themselves within academia vocational and thereby even more exploitable (Bratich, 2008, p. 120). Value itself is then taken up by capitalist systems already in place in the institution by prioritizing certain programs for classes and the need for specific types of technology itself due to the type of digital content that students are expected to produce. That being said there are some scholars who view issues with the exploited nature of digital labor need to be reevaluated to consider how unwaged digital labor needs to instead be reframed as digital reproductive labor, in doing

so acknowledging that there is a type of labor being produced that affects the boundaries of personal and work lives (Pencolé, 2018).

When considering the role of the spaces, especially as they blur, we need to consider the types of labor that exist within the domestic sphere. In Silvia Federici's chapter "Wages against housework" from her book *Revolution at point zero: housework, reproduction, and feminist struggle*, audiences can note how women are often exploited within the domestic space both at that time and even now consistently. In particular, Federici notes how housework has become a "natural attribute of our female physique and personality," making it an expected form of labor that is assigned to women to create a form of biopolitical labor (p.16). And yet a defining attribute of college students entering institutions today is that they possess some form of knowledge with regards to digital literacy. This expected attribute often takes the form of required materials for courses themselves at an institution level, but also at a course level. Take for instance the statement on computer requirements put forward by North Carolina State University:

NC State **does not require** you to have a computer, but your college or department may have a requirement or specific recommendation; Most professors **expect** you to have access to a computer, either a personal one or a lab computer; We **strongly encourage** you to have one. (NC State Office of Information Technology, 2020; emphasis in original)

This statement, meant to be more of a recommendation than guidance, is often standard for most universities. It does inherently make an assumption of not only the technologies students already possess, but also the types of spaces that students do have access to. This discussion of space speaks to Fortunati (2011) when they discuss how the outsourcing of labor has often led to a "machination of the domestic space" via technology (p. 426). Fortunati breaks down the various types of technology into three categories: means of transportation, domestic appliances and sewing and cooking machines, and mass media, ICTs, and new media. These different machines are used to reinforce the idea that machines have always existed within the domestic space, specifically women's bodies, and have led to an outsource of emotions and labors for workers. In some ways this perspective is important to consider as it is not as surprising that a new form of labor, in that of students learning digital literacy skills in personal spaces, but that does not mean it is necessarily an assumed right that all students get.

Digital Labor Within the Academy

There are several economic students that students, staff, and faculty must navigate when existing within the institution realm. There is the digital labor that they must navigate, while also the aspect of academic labor it inhabits, and the more daunting knowledge labor. All three are intertwined and build off one another, which can be seen throughout history. Allmer (2019) notes that education's role as a means to get out of poverty has always involved the role of the institution in labor politics. The individuals who participate within this system in some ways embody the class of the proletariat, where united they can create a communist society but are inherently oppressed according to Marx. These workers are directly producing value by producing some form of knowledge that can be then used by universities for various means (Allmer points to an amusing Chomsky and Foucault reference where a student called out

Chomsky for the hypocrisy of him being based at MIT while being aware of its connection to the Vietnam War).

So how does digital media and digital literacy fit within this structure? Digital media has only worked to reduce the perceived labor cost for institutions by expanding the ways universities function when it comes to teaching, recruiting, inviting more international students, and creating satellite campuses in pursuit of a cost-effective model. This model establishes a class hierarchy of who benefits from digital literacy knowledge in the long run, namely the universities themselves. The best summation of how students themselves are affected can be summed up by Noble (1998) where they remark “the poor get a computer, the rich get a computer and a teacher.” Students within this system are viewed more as workers within this system, where learning of digital literacy can only occur if their socioeconomics will allow it.

For undergraduate students, gaining digital literacy skills from the onset of college proves to be difficult even before they apply to the university system. Current digital literacy educational initiatives often call for the role of schools, libraries and other community spaces to help assist students, but the translation of that into action is not as straightforward. That is why the work done by Robinson and Gran (2018) is important to consider as they evaluated the emotional labor that California students felt attempting to apply for college. Often students had to resort to using spaces on their own time that infiltrated their view of the domestic, an area that Aristotle argues needs to be protected from the state (p.1416). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who were lucky enough to have access to a home computer experienced issues with spatial privacy, as their families were aware of what colleges they were applying for and what types of digital literacy skills they were attempting to learn when it came to applying for assistance such as FAFSA. Students had to further explain themselves to their family members as to why they were using their free time to attempt to expand these skills when their families were dismissive of their educational goals. Students who did not have a computer at home and instead had to seek out libraries with computers also experienced these issues of spatial privacy, namely when it came to gatekeepers who controlled the amount of time allotted to students to use computers themselves. Students would often have to disclose that they were attempting to apply for college in front of library patrons, in addition to having patrons view their digital communication. Of course, this only the process of applying to college itself and having the knowledge of how to do so. Simply having access to the technology, itself did not help with questions regarding letters of intent or applications themselves. Students within this study often had to seek out individuals who possessed the digital literacy skills of how to fill out electronic forms and navigate these online networks.

The difficulty in acquiring digital literacy extends beyond Robinson and Gran’s (2018) study once students arrive at institutions. Often computer classes are not required at various institutions and when they are it is merely a review of Microsoft Office. Students are expected to engage with multiple learning management systems (LMS) to complete their work, while also completing their coursework themselves. It also does not help that with a shift of technology in the New Economy in the 1980s and 1990s for universities that there is also a shift towards universities catering more towards industries, specifically because industries are aware of how

universities that were “rich in human and knowledge capital” could benefit industries themselves (Newfield, 2008, p.9). With this shift there is now that expectation as well that students know how to navigate these networks to build a social network to retain social relations that could impact their future, furthering notions of this type of digital labor being unwaged (Fuchs, 2018). All result in digital literacy skills becoming a form of social capital that students themselves are expected to understand and produce. This acquisition of these digital literacy skills extends to graduate students within the academy, who are then instructed to produce more knowledge underneath the umbrella of academic labor for the purposes of informational capitalism that benefits institutions (Briziarelli and Flores, 2018). Graduate students and also instructors themselves are then expected to possess the digital knowledge and literacy skills to not only assist students, but to also help them further navigate these systems when they themselves face a declining academic job market since the 1990s recession (Newfield, 2008, p.142). Perhaps that is why some institutions are now attempting to offer graduate certificates, such as the University of Rhode Island, in digital literacy. These certificates however do little to solve the issue at hand of the current United States university system that continues to exploit the digital literacy skills students have, while neglecting those who do not match up to each institution’s standards.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, it becomes a question of who is currently benefitting from the current infrastructures of universities and the types of free labor they are demanding from students. To an extent, it seems not much has changed from previous reports found by Selfe (1999), for instance, that note how white men usually benefit in education systems when it comes to gaining access and understanding digital technologies. We truly exist now in an “age of information” and “knowledge society” within America, where those who are unable to match academic technology expectations are let down (Newfield, 2008, p.125). It further does not help how students are not able to build their digital literacy skills by not being able to access the tools they need. Fortunati (2011) notes how “Technology...is both very difficult to realize and furthermore is aimed at a section of the population with limited purchasing power inside the family” (p.430) which only serves to reinforce notions of how class plays a part into developing digital literacy skills.

There is now a question when it comes whether students within academia a choice have when it comes to obtaining these digital literacy skills deemed so important. If we are to consider the new trend of Silicon Valley schools who choose to go “low tech” the answer is yes, there is still a choice. But this reality of choice in some ways may truly just be an illusion. We are now at a stage of society where we are becoming cyborgs, merging of both the animal and machine to create less of a duality when it comes to our own technology. To take this Haraway (1991) perspective into account is to note that there is no longer a choice, that like the industries currently driving the need for digital literacy that these expectations do not care for taxonomies as much as the ability for students to continue to produce knowledge at their own expense. All that truly matters is if the cyborgs that inhabit these spaces are able to install the newest

update of digital literacy skills needed to function or if those who are already at a disadvantage will be deemed obsolete by the same system meant to help them.

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Malaka Friedman is a Ph.D. student in the Communication, Rhetoric and Digital Media program at North Carolina State University and the current Graduate Extension Assistant for the Hill Library Makerspace. She is also a member of Making Space, which works to provide a series of talks and workshops to confront bias and systemic barriers to inclusion within STEM fields, and a member of the Virtual Martin Luther King Jr. (vMLK) Project Team. Originally from Albuquerque, Malaka has worked in teaching in various contexts including: high school, college, and continuing adult education courses. Malaka's research

interests have been impacted from what she has learned from her students, particularly the challenges facing students when it comes to accessing the necessary tools to complete their education. Subsequently, her research interests include digital literacy, access to digital technologies, digital divide, transfer rhetoric, online/hybrid instruction, multimodality, and digital/media ethnography.

¿Libertad de cátedra?

Examining the Visibility of Plausibility

Sarah V. Seeley, University of Toronto Mississauga, Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy

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Abstract

This article examines the cultural circumstances and labor paradigms that shape language-focused teaching and learning at a Colombian university. Drawing on transcripts from interviews conducted during 2019, I present the voices and experiences of faculty who teach English language writing and oral communication. They give voice to the phenomenon of invisible labor by drawing attention to the question of plausibility. Interviewees indicate that their work is shaped by tensions regarding the plausibility of English language coursework. On one hand, there is the issue of making English academic writing culturally plausible for their students. On the other hand, there is the issue of making this course work professionally plausible. In what follows, I illustrate how these two strands of performative labor shape faculty experience. Because there is a distinct divide between the types of language classes taught by contingent vs. non-contingent faculty, I further suggest that the former group is disproportionately tasked with enacting both types of labor.

The histories and circumstances of the global hegemony of English have long been a focus of research across the social sciences and humanities. For instance, sociolinguists examine the valuation of language variation and critique discursive constructions of social inequality. Linguistic anthropologists have similarly given much attention to the interrelationships between language, ideology, and power across a variety of geographic regions. Further, work bridging the study of language and political economy has focused on the material conditions that shape linguistic choices (Gal 1989; Irvine 1989; Woolard 1985).

Shifting valuations regarding linguistic choices and language variation are often shaped by the social limitations and affordances that come along with specific employment contexts. For example, the literature on language labor has examined communication technologies as experienced across diverse service economy contexts (e.g., Rahman, 2009; Cameron, 2000;

Duchêne & Heller, 2012). In regard to university institutionalization, Bonnie Urciuoli's work has been influential (2003, 2009, 2014). In their review of the literature on language labor and management, Urciuoli and LaDousa have suggested that, "conceptualizing 'the language part of work' entails conceptualizing the worker and the social world into which the worker fits, a world defined by capitalism" (2013, p. 180). In the present case, conceptualizing the "language part of work" entails conceptualizing the professor and the social world into which the professor fits. This world is, of course, defined by capitalisms that create cultural and pragmatic inconsistencies regarding academic freedom, or *libertad de cátedra*.

This article examines the cultural circumstances and labor paradigms that shape language-focused teaching and learning. Drawing on transcripts from interviews¹ conducted during 2019, I present the voices and experiences of faculty who teach English language writing and oral communication at a Colombian university that I'll refer to as La Universidad.² They give voice to the phenomenon of invisible labor by drawing attention to the question of plausibility. Interviewees indicate that their work is shaped by tensions regarding the plausibility of English language coursework. On one hand, there is the issue of making English academic writing *culturally plausible* for their students. On the other hand, there is the issue of making this course work *professionally plausible*. In what follows, I illustrate how these two strands of performative labor shape faculty experience. Because there is a distinct divide between the types of language classes taught by contingent vs. non-contingent faculty, I further suggest that the former group is disproportionately tasked with enacting *both* types of labor.³

Cultural Plausibility: "Academic writing may not work the same way here in Colombia"

Writing in regard to Colombian higher education, Blanca Yaneth González Pinzón has suggested that, "reading and writing did not always appear to be matters associated with the process of acquisition and development of the language. In many cases, we find them linked with different daily and cultural activities of the peoples" (2010, p. 122). Indeed, the ideologies that perpetuate the globalization, and iconization, of English don't account for local cultural contexts. It is also notable that these ideologies often shape what might be considered unlikely contexts: writing and language learning programs. The presupposed value of English language proficiency has the potential to reify harmful language ideologies like standard American English, neutral global English, and the like. Such valuations also solidify intellectual inconsistencies, which shape the day-to-day work of language-related teaching and learning. In

¹ The names of all participants have been anonymized. This research was approved by the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute IRB. Approval #1794. This article is based on transcripts totaling just over 19,000 words.

² Interviews were conducted in English. Transcript excerpts embedded as audio files have been run through voice changing software to protect research participants' anonymity. Transcript excerpts presented in the text have been pruned for readability and utilize the following conventions:

- : elongated speech
- – self interruption

³ A Spanish language translation of this essay follows.

this case, interviewees teach English language academic writing, and they often draw attention to the cultural and professional inconsistencies that characterize these endeavors.

This section focuses only on the work of cultivating cultural plausibility. The following transcript excerpts all relay details associated with teaching English academic writing to students who are enrolled in La Universidad's foreign language teacher training (FLTT) program. As such, the question of professional plausibility is not an issue in these cases. As Sofía stated in her interview, these students "know they need this. They know they cannot be mediocre teachers." We will, however, see that these students still require their teachers to do the labor of cultivating cultural plausibility.

One interviewee, Carolina, is particularly concerned with co-constructing meaning with her students.⁴ When asked to what degree she would characterize her work as invisible, behind the scenes labor, she replied by discussing the emotional labor that comes along with negotiating writing tasks that are meaningful for her students in their own cultural contexts. Further, she seems to frame this preoccupation in contrast to larger programmatic ideologies:



The ideologies of writing are very conventional in the sense that they tend to follow theories about writing that have been developed in English speaking countries. I see a big influence of theories that were developed in English speaking countries. To me, that is, of course, important, but it's also problematic. We have very different realities here. There are many dynamics of academic writing that I don't think my students have developed, for example, through secondary schools—in Colombian schools. And the tendency has been to think that the students are not good at writing, to think they're not good writers, to focus on what they lack. But I do think that we haven't looked at the fact that we have a different cultural background here, that we have a very strong oral tradition. These kinds of programs that follow this logic of academic production miss out on looking at our local picture: who our students really are and what they need. Of course, this leads us to question what kind of academic writing, whose academic writing, and what for. I think there's a lot of work to do there.

And so, the work of reconciling institutional or programmatic expectations with one's own cultural traditions, local context, and teaching philosophies becomes an added layer within the experience of teaching English academic writing. This layering involves meeting programmatic outcomes in student-centered, plausible ways. Such tasks are often driven by relatable, transparent teacher-student communication, so in some sense, this labor is deeply visible. It is often at the forefront of how students see their professors and their education. For example, Andrés recounts the perspective of one of his students:

One of my students in Academic Writing this semester said something like, "you know, we're trying to learn how to write academically in English. This is a foreign language for us, and we don't even know how to do it in Spanish. We don't know how to write academically in Spanish: in our mother tongue." Since they don't feel this need for

⁴ In what follows, the speaker icon indicates audio available in online version.

writing academically in their first language, they don't care about writing academically in English.

Andrés and his colleagues, then, must actively build this plausibility in their classrooms. It becomes an element of their overarching class narrative. Other interviewees also reflected on having these ongoing conversations with their students. For example, Sofía also draws attention to the cultural inconsistencies her students experience:

 For them, it's like this: no matter what you're writing about, you get creative. I guess the only reason for this I can think of is that we just don't write in our own language that much. And when we do, it's in a very particular way. I can tell students, "Hey, we don't use slang in our academic papers." Then I'll be reading the papers, and they've written as they'd speak, and I'll think: "but I said no. Why are you still doing this?" I guess culturally, we just don't get it.

Note Sofía's pronoun use in this last sentence. Instead of locating "the problem" squarely with the students, she echoes the perspective expressed by Carolina above. Rather than focusing on what the students "lack," Sofía conceptualizes the reticence to engage with the conventions of English academic writing as a cultural matter that shapes *collective experience*. Sofía's words do, however, imply that there is, nonetheless, a correct way to be "gotten." Andrés similarly weighs in, noting that his students

 believe academic writing is something they have to do, but they don't understand why. They don't understand the purpose of academic writing, and this is also something you have to cope with. It's like a burden. I have to convince my students that the course is important for them. I have to do it strategically.

Yet, in another sense, cultivating this plausibility is not necessarily a part of the job description. For example, Carolina draws attention to the fact that her program uses theories of writing developed in English speaking countries as a baseline of knowledge. Insofar as these theories are regarded as a sensible, obvious, or one-size-fits-all body of knowledge, the struggle to reconcile them with local or individualistic cultural circumstances may be completely overlooked when it comes to top-down assessment mechanisms. Andrés, for example, illustrates how faculty and student experiences are shaped by the long arm of university assessment and ranking procedures:

 I think the program is trying to teach students to write academically to be able to become not only teachers, but also researchers and writers so they can share their knowledge, experiences, etc. I think this is because universities are ranked based on their publications. There is pressure—there is institutional and political pressure. This also comes from the government, like the Ministry of Education issuing these policies about how to rank journals, how to rank universities, how to rank research groups. I think we are kind of trying to have our [undergraduate] students respond effectively to these policies, so we have this burden. It's a load. It's a heavy load. It's a personal burden.

It is evident that, at least in Andrés' view, institutionalization and governmentalization push the faculty toward labor enactments that are, if not unique, highly nuanced. This "layering" of efforts appears to be very visible for Andrés. While it is unlikely that the work of cultivating cultural plausibility would be explicitly rewarded, or "seen" in an institutional sense, La Universidad clearly benefits from the nuanced labor that is being enacted by Andrés and his colleagues.

Professional Plausibility: "Why do we have to do this? Why are you forcing us to?"

Here I change gears to illustrate the work of cultivating professional plausibility. Whereas the previous section presented interviewee's thoughts on educating students who are enrolled in the foreign language teacher training program, here we will consider the circumstances associated with teaching English to students who are enrolled in other programs and schools across the La Universidad campus. As Sofía has noted, "When you go teaching in other faculties, the students are like, why do we have to do this? Why are you forcing us to?" In the case of educating students campus-wide, we will observe how the issues of professional and cultural plausibility dovetail to compound labor expectations.

Official communications from La Universidad describe the purpose of their foreign language initiatives as promoting multilingualism and linguistic diversity. While La Universidad continues to employ faculty who specialize in teaching and translating a range of foreign languages, an English for everyone policy has been in place for several years. This policy requires all undergraduates to successfully complete five English courses in order to meet their foreign language graduation requirements.

In the past, students had been able to choose from a variety of languages to satisfy these requirements. For example, faculty indicate that many students in the School of Law pursue graduate work in Italy, so languages like Italian and Portuguese are more professionally beneficial than English. In such cases, the English for everyone policy ignores students' professional needs by explicitly iconizing English as *the* foreign language. Drawing on her experiences teaching students across the campus, Sofía indicates that, "they are just learning English for general purposes, and they are like: why?"

What's more, a small percentage of students at La Universidad are native speakers of one of the nation's many indigenous, or ancestral, languages. This means they are already studying in a second language when they pursue higher education in a Spanish language context. The English policy, however, disavows their linguistic realities by explicitly assuming that all students speak Spanish as a first language. Requiring such students to complete five English classes is, in effect, requiring five classes in a *third* language. In fact, faculty report that approximately 10% of the undergraduates enrolled at La Universidad are indigenous, and approximately 3% of them are bilingual in their own languages. In the past, students could certify Spanish as a second language for graduation purposes, but this new language policy changed everything. Now it must be English.

Sofía further problematizes this policy:



The fact that they just have this language policy for everyone says a lot about what they believe language is about, and what bilingualism is about, in a country where we have like 60 or 70 indigenous languages. Students who come here with their own language and their own bilingualisms are not being valued.

Of course, institutionalized limitations on linguistic diversity and students' language choices are also deeply imbricated in the faculty experience. Since these limitations come in the form of campus-wide requirements, they amplify pre-existing faculty labor hierarchies through their impact on course loading, curriculum, and general faculty security. These are circumstances that can be tracked across national borders. For example, the American Association of University Professors indicates that, as of 2015, "non-tenure-track positions of all types now account for over 70 percent of all instructional staff appointments in [U.S] American higher education." The AAUP also notes that "contingent appointments are often clustered in programs with very high levels of predictability—such as freshman writing courses that are required for all students."

Faculty at La Universidad similarly indicate that the English for everyone policy is enacted across the campus almost entirely through a reliance on contingent labor. With approximately 30,000 undergraduate students enrolled and a five course per student graduation requirement, this is not terribly surprising. Sofía indicates that



Full time [non-contingent] teachers focus on teaching mainly here in the foreign language teacher training program. Rarely will we take some classes in different Schools. When we do that, we get paid in addition to our salary, so they don't tend to like that we take extra courses anywhere else. Those teachers who are paid by the hour, are the ones who mainly teach the classes in the rest of the university. In general, most of our teachers are adjunct teachers. Way more than 50% [hold contingent appointments].

Whereas Sofía draws attention to this labor model in order to problematize it, Maritza feels that this hierarchy is immaterial, that the experiences of teaching are necessarily similar for all faculty:



I don't think that there is a difference between what, for example, full time faculty do and adjuncts do. No. I think it's the same program, and so they all have to comply with it, whether they are full time or lecturers or adjuncts. They have to just follow the program.

If the work of teaching can be understood as a series of asocial, apolitical enactments, then perhaps Maritza's suggestion is accurate. It does, however, seem clear that other faculty—people like Carolina, Andrés, and Sofía—do experience their work in social and political terms. What's more, faculty who teach across the campus (outside of the FLTT program) confront the work of cultivating professional plausibility *in addition to* cultural plausibility. In this way, it is not merely a matter of following the language program guidelines. These interviewees consistently foreground the multiple layers of invisible labor at La Universidad. Faculty work

both within and against cultural inconsistencies to make English academic writing plausible within a Spanish language context. The contingent faculty majority similarly works within and against cultural inconsistencies as they try to make English academic writing professionally plausible to students who may have absolutely no professional stake in learning that language.

Interviewees indicate that some programs, like medicine or administration, previously had their own English programs that followed an English for specific purposes model. In contrast, the new policy works from an English for general academic purposes perspective. Interviewees noted that *libertad de cátedra* doesn't apply in these contexts. Sofía notes that "it's more restrictive." Andrés suggests that "it's different." The exact degree—and the specific experiences—of this restriction and difference is something to be explored in future research. All signs, however, point to the fact that, at La Universidad, discussions around labor tend to be focused on the time investment involved with teaching—especially offering feedback on student writing at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. This is highly visible labor. Yet, interviewees consistently pushed our conversations toward the more intangible elements of their work: cultivating cultural and professional plausibility.

Conclusion

All of these circumstances may be interpreted as an example of the degree to which diversity is foregrounded in Colombia's national project. As Sofía has suggested, "They mention it. It's beautifully written in the policies, but when it comes to the implementation, everyone's exactly the same. Everyone comes from the same academic background. Everyone should just learn this language [English] because they all learn it in high school, but it's not really like that." Schools, teachers, and students across any given national context face uneven access to resources. The Colombian context is no different than, for example, the United States context. One does not, unfortunately, need to look very far to see how North American language policies can flatten diversity, oppress "non-standard" voices, and otherwise perpetuate racist ideologies. Even though North American academics are employing many of the same theories of reading and writing within the largely English-speaking contexts of their original production, they should similarly be regarding them in terms of their contextual limitations and affordances.

The globalization of English may be regarded as a map whereby individuals are socialized and slotted into institutional hierarchies comprised of "idealized performances" (Goffman, 1956, p. 23). Because higher education is often experienced in highly performative, emotion-laden, and hierarchical terms, universities constitute obvious sites for examining the discursive constructions of power that underwrite "professorial" subject positions. Andrés persuasively illustrates his experience of teaching English academic writing at La Universidad, indicating: "It is not invisible for me. I can see it, and it's very demanding." The question of what types of labor are visible to whom remains a complicated one. Whereas this work of cultivating cultural and professional plausibility *may* be visible to students in their individual classrooms, it is *certainly* visible and tangible for the faculty themselves. In contrast, the visible/invisible

dichotomy does not seem to stretch to fully account for the institutional perspective. Instead of been seen or unseen, this type of labor is simply presupposed. It is not hidden. It is demanded.

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Sarah Seeley is an Assistant Professor in the teaching stream at University of Toronto Mississauga. She teaches first-year writing as a member of the Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy. Sarah holds a Ph.D. in anthropology, and her research interests include language ideology, writing pedagogy, and academic labor practices. Sarah loves to cook and craft, and she practices yoga daily.

¿Libertad de cátedra?

Examinando la visibilidad de la validez

Sarah V. Seeley, University of Toronto Mississauga, Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy

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Las historias y circunstancias de la hegemonía global del inglés han sido durante mucho tiempo foco de investigación en las ciencias sociales y las humanidades. Por ejemplo, los sociolingüistas han examinado la valoración de la variación del lenguaje y critican las construcciones discursivas de la desigualdad social. Los antropólogos lingüísticos también han prestado mucha atención a las interrelaciones entre el lenguaje, la ideología y el poder en diferentes de regiones geográficas. Además, el trabajo que combina el estudio del lenguaje y la economía política se ha centrado en las condiciones materiales que dan forma a los usos lingüísticos (Gal, 1989; Irvine, 1989; Woolard, 1985).

Las valoraciones cambiantes con respecto a las elecciones lingüísticas y la variación del lenguaje son a menudo formadas por las limitaciones sociales y las posibilidades asociadas con el contexto específico de empleo. Por ejemplo, la literatura sobre el trabajo del lenguaje ha examinado las experiencias con las tecnologías de comunicación en diversos contextos de la economía de servicios (por ejemplo, Rahman, 2009; Cameron, 2000; Duchêne y Heller, 2012). La investigación de Bonnie Urciuoli sobre la institucionalización universitaria ha sido influyente. (2003; 2009; 2014). En su revisión de la literatura sobre el trabajo y la administración del lenguaje, Urciuoli y LaDousa argumentan que “conceptualizando ‘la parte del lenguaje del trabajo’ implica conceptualizar al trabajador y al mundo social en el que encaja el trabajador, un mundo definido por el capitalismo” (2013, p. 180). Esto significa conceptualizar a las profesoras y los profesores y su mundo social. Por supuesto este mundo está definido por capitalismos que crean inconsistencias culturales y pragmáticas con respecto a la libertad de cátedra.

Este artículo examina las circunstancias culturales y los paradigmas laborales que configuran la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del lenguaje. A partir de las transcripciones de las entrevistas¹ realizadas en 2019 presentaré las voces y experiencias de los docentes que enseñan escritura

¹ Los nombres de todos los participantes se han anonimizado. Esta investigación fue aprobada por el Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, aprobación # 1794. Este artículo se basa en transcripciones que suman un poco más de 19.000 palabras.

en inglés y comunicación oral en una universidad colombiana a la que me referiré como La Universidad.² En este caso, los docentes discuten el fenómeno del trabajo invisibilizado y llaman la atención sobre la cuestión de la validez. Los entrevistados indican que su trabajo está formado por tensiones con respecto a la validez de los cursos de inglés. Por un lado, está la cuestión de comó hacer que la escritura académica en inglés sea *culturalmente válida* para sus estudiantes. Por otro lado, está la cuestión de hacer que este curso se sienta *profesionalmente válida*. A continuación, ilustraré cómo estos dos tipos de trabajo performativo impactan la experiencia del profesorado. Existe una clara división entre los tipos de clases de idiomas impartidas por profesores contingentes y no contingentes. También analizo cómo el grupo de los profesores contingentes se ve desproporcionadamente cargado de llevar a cabo *ambos* tipos de trabajo.

Validez cultural: “La escritura académica puede no funcionar de la misma manera aquí en Colombia”

Al escribir sobre la educación superior colombiana (originalmente en inglés), Blanca Yaneth González Pinzón sugirió que “leer y escribir no siempre parecían ser asuntos asociados con el proceso de adquisición y desarrollo del idioma. En muchos casos, los encontramos vinculados con diferentes actividades cotidianas y culturales de los pueblos” (2010, p. 122). Está claro que las ideologías que perpetúan la globalización y la iconización del inglés no tienen en cuenta los contextos culturales locales. También es notable que estas ideologías a menudo dan forma a lo que pueden considerarse contextos poco probables: la escritura y los programas de aprendizaje de idiomas. El valor supuesto de la competencia en el idioma inglés tiene el potencial de reificar ideologías lingüísticas dañinas como el inglés americano estándar, el inglés global neutral y similares. Estas valoraciones también solidifican las inconsistencias intelectuales, que dan forma al trabajo diario de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje relacionados con el lenguaje. En este caso, los entrevistados enseñan escritura académica en inglés y a menudo discuten las inconsistencias culturales y profesionales que caracterizan estos esfuerzos.

Esta sección del ensayo se centra sólo en el trabajo de cultivar la validez cultural. Estos extractos de la transcripción se relacionan explícitamente con la enseñanza de la escritura académica en inglés a los estudiantes que están inscritos en el programa de formación de maestros de lenguas extranjeras. Por esta razón, la cuestión de la validez profesional no es un problema para ellos. Como dijo Sofía en su entrevista, estos estudiantes “saben que necesitan esto. Saben que no pueden ser maestros mediocres.” Pero, como veremos, estos estudiantes aún requieren que sus profesores hagan el trabajo de cultivar la validez cultural.

Una entrevistada, Carolina, está particularmente preocupada por la construcción conjunta de significado con sus estudiantes. Le pregunté si ella caracterizaría su trabajo como invisible o

² Las entrevistas se realizaron en inglés. Los extractos de las transcripciones se han recortado para facilitar la lectura y utilizan las siguientes convenciones:

- : habla alargada
- auto interrupción

detrás de escena. Ella respondió discutiendo el trabajo emocional involucrado en hacer que la escritura en inglés sea culturalmente significativa para sus estudiantes. Además, enmarca esta preocupación en contraste con ideologías programáticas más amplias:

Las ideologías programáticas de la escritura son muy convencionales en el sentido de que tienden a seguir teorías sobre la escritura que se han desarrollado en países de habla inglesa. Veo una gran influencia de las teorías que se desarrollaron en los países de habla inglés. Para mí, eso es, por supuesto, importante, pero también es problemático. Tenemos realidades muy diferentes aquí. Hay muchas dinámicas de escritura académica que no creo que mis estudiantes hayan desarrollado, por ejemplo, a través de las escuelas secundarias, en las escuelas colombianas. Y la tendencia ha sido pensar que los estudiantes no son buenos para escribir, pensar que no son buenos escritores, centrarse en lo que les falta. Pero sí creo que no hemos analizado el hecho de que aquí tenemos un trasfondo cultural diferente, que tenemos una tradición oral muy fuerte. Este tipo de programas que siguen esta lógica de producción académica se pierden de mirar nuestra imagen local: quiénes son realmente nuestros estudiantes y qué necesitan. Por supuesto, esto nos lleva a cuestionar qué *tipo* de escritura académica, *de quién* es la escritura académica y para *qué*. Creo que hay mucho trabajo por hacer allí.

Y así, el trabajo de conciliar las expectativas institucionales o programáticas con las propias tradiciones culturales, el contexto local y las filosofías de enseñanza se convierte en una faceta adicional de la enseñanza de la escritura académica en inglés. Este trabajo adicional implica alcanzar resultados programáticos de manera que sea creíble y centrada en el estudiante. Esto a menudo implica una comunicación transparente entre profesores y estudiantes, por lo que este trabajo puede ser profundamente visible. Puede estar a la vanguardia de cómo los estudiantes ven a sus profesores y su educación. Por ejemplo, Andrés relata la perspectiva de uno de sus estudiantes:

Uno de mis estudiantes de Escritura Académica este semestre dijo algo como “ya sabes, estamos tratando de aprender a escribir académicamente en inglés. Este es un idioma extranjero para nosotros, y ni siquiera sabemos cómo hacerlo en español. No sabemos escribir académicamente en español: en nuestra lengua materna.” Como no sienten esta necesidad de escribir académicamente en su primer idioma, no les preocupa escribir académicamente en inglés.

Entonces podemos ver que Andrés y sus colegas deben construir activamente esta validez en sus aulas. Esto debe ser parte de su narrativa general de clase. Otros entrevistados también reflexionaron sobre tener estas conversaciones con sus estudiantes. Por ejemplo, Sofía también analiza las inconsistencias culturales que experimentan sus alumnos:

Para ellos, es así: no importa lo que escribas, te vuelves creativo. Creo que la única razón por la que puedo pensar es que simplemente no escribimos tanto en nuestro propio idioma. Y cuando lo hacemos, es de una manera muy particular. Puedo decirles a los estudiantes, “oye, no usamos jerga en nuestros trabajos académicos.” Luego leeré los periódicos, y escribirán como hablan, y pensaré: “pero dije no. ¿Por qué sigues haciendo esto?” Supongo que culturalmente, simplemente no lo entendemos.

Nótese el uso del pronombre de Sofía en esta última frase. En lugar de ubicar “el problema” directamente con los estudiantes, ella se hace eco de la perspectiva expresada por Carolina arriba. En lugar de centrarse en lo que los estudiantes “carecen,” Sofía conceptualiza la reticencia a comprometerse con las convenciones de la escritura académica inglesa como una cuestión cultural que da forma a la *experiencia colectiva*. Las palabras de Sofía implican que hay, sin embargo, una forma correcta que debe aprenderse. Andrés comenta de manera similar:

[Mis estudiantes] creen que la escritura académica es algo que tienen que hacer, pero no entienden por qué. No entienden el propósito de la escritura académica, y esto también es algo con lo que tienes que lidiar. Es como una carga. Tengo que convencer a mis alumnos de que el curso es importante para ellos. Tengo que hacerlo estratégicamente.

En otro sentido, cultivar esta validez no es necesariamente una parte de las tareas oficiales del docente. Por ejemplo, Carolina llama la atención sobre el hecho de que su programa utiliza teorías de escritura desarrolladas en países de habla inglesa como base del conocimiento. En la medida en que estas teorías se consideren como un cuerpo de conocimiento razonable, obvio o de aplicación universal, la lucha para conciliarlas con las circunstancias culturales locales o individualistas puede pasarse por alto por completo cuando se trata de mecanismos de evaluación de arriba hacia abajo. Andrés, por ejemplo, ilustra cómo las experiencias de los profesores y los estudiantes están formadas por el largo brazo de los procedimientos de evaluación y clasificación de la universidad:

Creo que el programa está tratando de enseñar a los estudiantes a escribir académicamente para poder convertirse no solo en maestros, sino también en investigadores y escritores para que puedan compartir sus conocimientos, experiencias, etc. Creo que esto se debe a que las universidades están clasificadas en función de sus publicaciones. Hay presión, hay presión institucional y política. Esto también proviene del gobierno, como el Ministerio de Educación que emite estas políticas sobre cómo clasificar las revistas, cómo clasificar las universidades, cómo clasificar los grupos de investigación. Creo que estamos tratando de hacer que nuestros estudiantes [de pregrado] respondan de manera efectiva a estas políticas, con lo cual tenemos esta carga. Es un peso. Es un peso notable. Es una carga personal.

Es evidente que, al menos en opinión de Andrés, la institucionalización y la gubernamentalización empujan al profesorado hacia una configuración de sus actividades profesionales que, si bien no es única, sí es muy peculiar, muy matizado. Esta “estratificación” de esfuerzos parece ser muy visible para Andrés. Si bien es poco probable que el trabajo de cultivar la validez cultural sea recompensado explícitamente, o “visto” en un sentido institucional, la universidad claramente se beneficia del trabajo matizado que están realizando Andrés y sus colegas.

Validez profesional: “¿Por qué tenemos que hacer esto? ¿Por qué nos obligas a hacerlo?”

Ahora examinaré el trabajo de cultivar la validez profesional. Mientras que la sección anterior presentaba las opiniones de los entrevistados sobre la educación de los estudiantes que están inscritos en el programa de capacitación de maestros de idiomas extranjeros, aquí consideraremos las circunstancias asociadas con la enseñanza del inglés a los estudiantes que están inscritos en otros programas y escuelas en todo el campus de la universidad. Como ha señalado Sofía, “cuando vas a enseñar en otras facultades, los estudiantes piensan, ¿por qué tenemos que hacer esto? ¿por qué nos obligas a hacerlo?” En el caso de educar a los estudiantes en todo el campus, ilustraré cómo los problemas de validez profesional y cultural complejizan las expectativas laborales.

Las comunicaciones oficiales de la universidad describen el propósito de sus iniciativas de idiomas extranjeros como la promoción del multilingüismo y la diversidad lingüística. Si bien la universidad continúa empleando profesores que se especializan en la enseñanza y la traducción de muchos idiomas extranjeros diferentes, ha habido una política de inglés para todos durante varios años. Esta política requiere que todos los estudiantes de pregrado completen cinco cursos de inglés para cumplir con los requisitos de graduación.

En el pasado, los estudiantes podían elegir entre diferentes idiomas para satisfacer este requisito. Por ejemplo, los profesores indican que muchos estudiantes de derecho realizan trabajos de posgrado en Italia, por lo que idiomas como el italiano y el portugués son más beneficiosos profesionalmente que el inglés. En tales casos, la política de inglés para todos ignora sus necesidades profesionales al valorizar explícitamente el inglés como el único idioma extranjero aceptable. Sofía comparte sus experiencias enseñando a estudiantes en todo el campus: “solo están aprendiendo inglés para fines generales, y piensan: *¿Por qué?*”

Además, un pequeño porcentaje de estudiantes en la universidad son hablantes nativos de uno de los muchos idiomas indígenas o ancestrales de la nación. Esto significa que ya están estudiando en un segundo idioma cuando cursan estudios superiores en un contexto de idioma español. Sin embargo, la política de inglés rechaza sus realidades lingüísticas al suponer explícitamente que todos los estudiantes hablan español como lengua materna. Requerir que estos estudiantes completen cinco clases de inglés es, en efecto, exigir cinco clases en un tercer idioma. De hecho, los docentes calculan que aproximadamente el 10% de los estudiantes de pregrado en La Universidad son indígenas, y aproximadamente el 3% de ellos son bilingües en sus propios idiomas. En el pasado, los estudiantes podían certificar el español como segundo idioma para graduarse, pero esta nueva política de idiomas cambió todo. Ahora debe ser el inglés.

Sofía problematiza aún más esta política:

El hecho de que tengan esta política lingüística para todos dice mucho sobre lo que creen que es el idioma, y de qué se trata el bilingüismo, en un país donde tenemos como 60 o 70 idiomas indígenas. Los estudiantes que vienen aquí con su propio idioma y sus propios bilingüismos no están siendo valorados.

Por supuesto, las limitaciones institucionales de la diversidad lingüística también están profundamente entrecruzadas con las experiencias de los profesores. Estas limitaciones se presentan en forma de requisitos para toda la universidad y amplifican las jerarquías laborales preexistentes a través de su impacto en la carga de cursos, el plan de estudios y la seguridad general del profesorado. Estas son circunstancias que se pueden observar en diferentes países. Por ejemplo, en los Estados Unidos, la Asociación Estadounidense de Profesores Universitarios indica que, en 2015, el 70% de todos los nuevos trabajos de enseñanza universitaria en los Estados Unidos *no* son empleos de planta o de carrera (tenure-track). Esta organización también afirma que “las posiciones contingentes a menudo se agrupan en programas con niveles muy altos de previsibilidad, como los cursos de escritura de primer año que se requieren para todos los estudiantes.”

Los profesores de La Universidad indican de manera similar que la política de inglés para todos se lleva a cabo en la institución casi por completo mediante empleos con contratos de corto plazo. Con aproximadamente 30.000 estudiantes de pregrado matriculados y un requisito de graduación de cinco cursos por estudiante, esta situación no es sorprendente. Sofía indica que,

Los maestros de tiempo completo [no contingentes] se enfocan en enseñar principalmente aquí en el programa de capacitación de maestros de idiomas extranjeros. Raramente damos clases en otros programas. Cuando hacemos eso, nos pagan además de nuestro salario, por lo que no les gusta que demos cursos adicionales en ningún otro lugar. Esos maestros a quienes se les paga por hora, son los que principalmente imparten las clases en el resto de la universidad. En general, la mayoría de nuestros maestros son maestros adjuntos. Más del 50% [tienen trabajos contingentes].

Sofía analiza este modelo laboral para problematizarlo. En contraste, Maritza siente que esta jerarquía es irrelevante, que las experiencias de enseñanza necesariamente son similares para todos los profesores:

No creo que haya una diferencia entre lo que, por ejemplo, hacen los profesores tiempo completo y los que no lo son. No. Creo que es el mismo programa, por lo que todos deben cumplirlo, ya sea de tiempo completo, o profesores no permanentes. Solo tienen que seguir el programa.

Si el trabajo de enseñanza pudiera entenderse como algo asocial y apolítico, entonces tal vez la sugerencia de Maritza sería precisa. Sin embargo, parece claro que otros profesores—personas como Carolina, Andrés y Sofía—entienden su trabajo en términos sociales y políticos. Además, los profesores que enseñan en el resto de la universidad (fuera del programa de formación de maestros de lenguas extranjeras) confrontan el trabajo de cultivar la validez profesional *además* de la validez cultural. Por esta razón, no se trata simplemente de seguir las pautas del programa de idiomas. Estos entrevistados constantemente indexan las experiencias de trabajo invisible en La Universidad. El profesorado trabaja dentro y en contra de las inconsistencias culturales para que la escritura académica en inglés sea plausible dentro del contexto del idioma español. La mayoría del profesorado no permanente también se ocupa de estas inconsistencias culturales a la vez que intenta hacer que la escritura académica en inglés sea

profesionalmente plausible para unos estudiantes que tal vez no tengan absolutamente ningún interés profesional en aprender el idioma.

Los entrevistados indican que algunos programas, como medicina o administración, anteriormente tenían sus propios programas de inglés que seguían un modelo de inglés para propósitos específicos. En contraste, la nueva política funciona desde una perspectiva de inglés para fines académicos generales. Los entrevistados indican que la libertad de cátedra no se aplica en estos contextos. Específicamente, Sofía señala que “es más restrictiva.” Andrés sugiere que “es diferente.” El grado exacto—y las experiencias específicas—de esta restricción y diferencia es algo que debe explorarse en futuras investigaciones. Todos los indicios apuntan al hecho de que, en La Universidad, las discusiones sobre el trabajo tienden a centrarse en la inversión de tiempo involucrada en la enseñanza. Específicamente, los profesores se centran en el tiempo que lleva ofrecer comentarios de calidad sobre la escritura de estudiantes de pregrado y posgrado. Esta es una labor muy visible. Sin embargo, en nuestras conversaciones, los entrevistados llevaban el tema hacia los elementos más intangibles de su trabajo: cultivar la validez cultural y profesional.

Conclusión

Todas estas circunstancias pueden interpretarse como un ejemplo del grado en que la diversidad se pone en primer plano en el proyecto nacional de Colombia. Como dijo Sofía, “lo mencionan. Está bellamente escrito en las políticas, pero cuando se trata de la implementación, todos son exactamente iguales. Todos provienen de la misma formación académica. Todos deberían aprender este idioma [inglés] porque todos lo aprenden en la escuela secundaria, pero en realidad no es así.” Las escuelas, los maestros y los estudiantes tienen un acceso desigual a los recursos en los contextos nacionales. De esta manera, Colombia no es diferente, por ejemplo, a los Estados Unidos. Desafortunadamente, no es necesario mirar muy lejos para ver cómo las políticas lingüísticas de América del Norte pueden aplanar la diversidad, oprimir las voces “no estándar” y perpetuar las ideologías racistas. A pesar de que los académicos de América del Norte están empleando muchas de las mismas teorías de lectura y escritura dentro de los contextos de habla inglesa de su producción original, también deberían considerarlas en términos de sus limitaciones contextuales y posibilidades.

La globalización del inglés puede considerarse como un mapa mediante el cual los individuos se socializan y se posicionan dentro de jerarquías institucionales formadas por “actuaciones idealizadas” (Goffman 1956, p. 23). Debido a que la educación superior a menudo se experimenta como performativa, emocional y jerárquica, las universidades constituyen lugares claros para examinar las construcciones discursivas del poder que suscriben las posiciones de los sujetos “profesorales”. Andrés ilustra persuasivamente su experiencia de enseñar escritura académica en inglés en La Universidad, indicando: “No es invisible para mí. Puedo verlo, y es muy exigente.”

La cuestión de qué tipos de trabajo son visibles para quién sigue siendo complicada. Mientras que este trabajo de cultivar la validez cultural y profesional es *posiblemente* visible para los

estudiantes en sus aulas individuales, *ciertamente es visible y tangible para los propios profesores*. En contraste, la dicotomía visible / invisible no parece extenderse para dar cuenta de la perspectiva institucional. En lugar de ser visto o invisible, este tipo de trabajo simplemente se presupone. No está oculto. Se exige.

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Maintaining the Institution

Understanding the Invisible Labor of Single Moms

Alex Hanson, Syracuse University

The first time I felt ashamed of being divorced and identifying as a single mother, I was in the office of a graduate school administrator. We were talking about how to better support student parents, and I had left my parental status ambiguous. Towards the end of our conversation, she mentioned a Facebook page for moms who lived in a suburb near my university's city—"I could connect you with them, but they're mostly married, affluent women, so I'm not sure how helpful that would be." It was one sentence, uttered over three years ago that left a lasting impression. Before that, I had never felt ashamed of my parental status, even with the threat of the motherhood penalty (Correll, Benard, and Paik, 2007). This is partially due to my identity—I'm white, able-bodied, and cisgender; my stigma is different than a single Mother-Scholar of Color (Hernández-Johnson et al. 2019). This is partially due to the single mom faculty members in my program who showed me there's nothing to be ashamed of. And this is partially due to a mentor who encouraged me to be open with my graduate program about the limitations that navigating a divorce and single parenthood created. Even though stories of concealing maternal identity as a form of self-protection exist throughout much of the scholarly narratives on mothering experiences in academia (Schell, 2002; Schnitzer and Keahey, 2003; Evans and Grant, 2008; Monosson, 2008; Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2012; Téllez, 2013), I knew maintaining such invisibility came at a cost—a "self-erasure" that is "destructive" to one's sense of self and spirit (Herrera and Mercado, 2019, p. 165). I also knew that maintaining "maternal invisibility" (Lynch, 2008, p. 596) requires invisible labor.

My program was supportive of me as a single parent. They granted me extensions when I couldn't finish seminar papers on time. They didn't penalize me when I had to miss class because I was abruptly moving out of the house I shared with my ex-husband. They helped me apply for fellowships and forwarded me emails about financial support for student parents. They made sure I had a teaching schedule that worked with my personal life. Even so, being open about my parental status involved labor—I had to craft professional emails and conduct one-on-one conversations communicating my needs all the while deciding what to disclose, what to conceal, to who and when. I also found myself connecting with and wanting to offer support to other single moms, in and out of academia.

Through my own experience as well as survey responses and interview conversations¹ with other single moms in academia, I learned that when single moms are open about their parental identity, they find themselves trading one kind of invisible labor for another. They go from

¹ I interviewed seven single moms in academia over the course of a semester.

concealing their own identities, to supporting women who share theirs. Such invisible labor is often necessary for single moms to feel valued, supported, and understood when institutional systems, structures, and policies in higher education fail to consider those with marginalized identities.

In this article, I explore how single moms choose to conceal or disclose their identity, and make visible the invisible labor that comes with being an openly single mom. Using *testimonio*, I share the stories of five single mothers in their voices. Like *testimonio*, the stories these women share are a “crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (Latina Feminist Collective, 2001, p. 2). I use direct quotes from interview participants, as their stories are told to “remove a mask previously used as a survival strategy,” and I urge others to enact social and systemic change (Reyes and Rodríguez, 2012, p. 527). In telling their stories, I use an interactive approach that encourages readers to think and engage critically with these women’s words.

The section “Being Open,” consists of a series of quotes from single moms sharing how they decided to be open about their single mom identity. At the end of each quote is information about the participants (name, academic rank, and brief description of single mom identity) that provides context and also acts as a guide for the analysis that occurs in the “Conclusion” section. After each quote is a section of bolded text, which reveals the invisible labor these single moms engaged in due to their openness. Specifically, this invisible labor often involved supporting others with marginalized identities on their campuses. As readers can see from the women’s voices, this invisible labor is something they embrace but remains unrecognized by their academic institutions. When read in sequence, these quotes move between the decisions these women made and the invisible impacts of those decisions. I encourage readers to explore this article in the way that works best for you, as there is no singular approach to reading these stories.

Being Open

“I’m not ashamed of it [being a single mom]. It’s part of my identity, and it’s also information about how I have to move through the world and the type of decisions I have to make. I feel for people who are in that situation where they have to be quieter about it, and maybe I should be quieter about it. Maybe it won’t serve me well in the long run, but I just don’t, that’s just not how I move through the world.” —Becky, tenure-track faculty, divorced mom with 50/50 custody of two children

My students who have children will often seek me out. I don’t think I have any single parents right now, but we do have folks who have unexpected pregnancies during their time here, and we have folks who have decided to have children, and so I do think that they seek me and our one other faculty member who has children out in ways that they don’t seek out other faculty members. I had a student who had a baby, and I said, “listen, you just let me know, you can use my office to pump, and if I am in there, I will leave.” She’s talked to me a

lot about motherhood and stuff like that. I like being able to offer that to some of our students.

"I'm really open with it [being a single mom]. One of the things I've always struggled with in academia and other places is this illusion of having my shit together. Like everything is fine, my path is completely clear, there are no obstacles. I know that I really thrive when I see, especially other women, tell me that their life goes to hell sometimes, this is how it happened, this is how I come back from it, and this is what I learned from it. I've been very vocal about the separation, the divorce, circumstances with them, the custody battle." —Julie, non-tenure track faculty, divorced mom with sole custody of two children

I make myself known on my alma mater's Facebook page for students. I've voluntarily reached out to other students who I know are single parents and have said, "If you want to talk about it, I've been through what you've gone through. I'd be happy to talk about it again." I also teach as an exercise instructor at the local community center, and have been open with my students there, about it, and have had some mothers come to me who are on the cusp of a separation asking questions like, "what is it really like, just being you and the kids in the house?"

"I just didn't think too hard about it [being a single mom], and was just like this is what's happening, I can't be at X or Y thing because I'm a single parent now; I was always very up front about that. That may be because I will just say whatever controversial thing I'm thinking, and then afterwards be like, maybe I should have reeled that back in a little bit. I'm also one of a tiny handful of openly queer faculty on this Southern campus. My daughter is trans, and this is a well-known fact." —Amy, tenure-track faculty, divorced mom with primary custody of one child

I do push back. At the beginning of this year, the Dean of faculty sent an email (or his secretary did) that there was a mandatory meeting for anyone going up for second or fourth year review to meet with the Dean. It was scheduled for a Monday at 4:30 p.m., and I just emailed back to the whole list, "Could we do this not at 4:30? Because that's not doable for me," and there were several other parents in the group and one other single mom, and luckily they offered a second meeting time. It was a lack of consideration. All of our faculty meetings used to be at 4:30, and I started a campaign to get that changed, and ultimately it was changed, which felt like a real coup for me. So all of the queer students come to me; all of the trans students come to me, too. I love doing that work, but it's not something that goes into the service tracker that's like this shared spreadsheet that we all have; it's not seen.

"I became open about being a geographically single mom after a really bad experience I had. I took on a contract for a full-time job. My kids were 2 and 4 at the time. It was my first full-time job since getting my Master's, and I was so excited. I was going to have my own office. It was at a community college, which is 6 and 6. Basically, I had to go and be a geographically single mother. I didn't tell the chair. I made a friend who really helped me out. I was a newer teacher, a newer professor. I was trying to contain all this because I wanted to be the perfect new faculty member. Towards the end of the second semester, I went to my chair, and I said, 'This is

where I'm at, this is why I'm falling apart.' He said, 'Why didn't you tell me from the beginning? My experience has been very similar.' That was kind of my lesson learned: I need to say up front what my needs are. I've learned that this community, it takes a village." —Katherine, Doctoral candidate transitioned to non-tenure track faculty position, geographically single mom with two children

I was thinking I would plan my work around the days that they were in daycare and do all this. This is just unbearable for faculty. My husband ended up getting a job that was voluntold, and he said he was going to be gone 300 days out of the year. He was gone, deployed. I didn't tell the chair what I was struggling with, what was going on. My friend who helped me was a first-year, didn't have any kids, wasn't married. It was rock bottom for me. I couldn't do it. I wasn't answering student emails. I wasn't getting there. My children were acting out, acting up. My son started biting people in preschool, and I imagine from all of my anxiousness and all of my anxiety. I felt out of control, and I've never felt so out of control. I just remember I was screaming at the kids; it was a horrible, horrible time for them and for me. I was like, "what? What? I've just been barely able to hold myself together." It was awful. I just remember thinking, "I will never do that again." I recently met a widow at my university who was thrown into being a single mom three years ago. She told me, "I never imagined somebody like you would understand where I'm coming from." All we did was talk about our kids and the guilt we feel and what goes on. That was probably the first connection I've made here with someone who I can relate to as a geographically single mom. We both emailed each other afterwards about how great it was to meet someone who we could connect with and to have somebody to just be able to talk about what we're experiencing. I told her, "Call me when I'm on campus for coffee if you feel like you just had a bad day with the kids the day before and weren't the mom you wanted to be, and we'll just have a coffee for half an hour and talk it out." For a single mom, part of this community is just having some sort of connection with someone that understands your position.

"I was very open and candid about being a single mom. I thought, 'This is just who I am. Of course I can talk about this.' I feel like that shouldn't be a mistake, but it was a mistake for me. Now, I do not tell people I'm a single mom until I know them well. I don't even mention I have a kid. When I talked with the director of the program, she asked me what my experience had been like my first year, and I told her about how I almost quit the program and didn't want people to have the same experience I did. When I told her that now I don't talk about being a mom, don't even say I have a kid, she told me, 'Yeah. Don't. Don't say you have a kid. I have two kids. We're in a male dominated field; you can't because they don't have the same respect for mothers that they do for other things, so if you need to leave because you've got to pick up your kid, you say, I have another obligation. I'm leaving now.' She goes, 'You don't talk about your kid. You don't say this. You are firm, and you say that you've got another obligation. It could be work, it could be whatever, but you've gotta go, and it's none of their damn business. That's how you have to be in this field.'" —Kelly, doctoral candidate, divorced mom with primary custody of one child

I was offered half an assistantship, and before I accepted, I told the faculty, "I'm a single mom, I am happy to take on this half of the assistantship. I'm not going to be able to be on campus all of the time. I was told that this was a lot of work from a distance, which I am totally capable of doing." They were like, "oh yeah, of course. We love your little son." They said, "the only requirement is that you bring him in to come visit us." One day, the faculty I was assisting had a meeting. I couldn't be there, and they knew that. On the day of the meeting, I got four emails that I didn't see until later because I do a million things. The emails asked, "where are you?," "why aren't you here?," "when can you get here?" The last email said, "As the wife of a pilot, I understand what it's like to be a single mom because he's gone all the time. If you need help keeping track of your assistantship hours, let me know." When I went to talk to the faculty member who wrote that last email, who was also on my dissertation committee, I told her I was not comfortable with my status as a parent being part of the conversation. I had told her from the beginning my constraints. I did that to protect myself from something like this happening, and I don't know why it was still happening. I told her, I do have my hours. I do have my hours every week. She told me, 'It's like you don't care about your career at all. To be honest, I don't even know if you should be in this program right now.' She told me, 'Maybe you should come back later when you know how to prioritize your career, over, well, sorry, you've already told me that I can't talk about him.'" I definitely don't tell them about my divorce or anything like that.

One semester, the director of my program came up to me, and said "Hey, did you meet the new student?" She said, "You're both also single moms! She's African-American, a speech therapist." I was like, "Okay. You could have just told me she was a speech therapist, and I would have remembered." She goes, "And for obvious reasons, I want her to succeed. I was just wondering if you could reach out to her and talk to her about being a single mom." I was like good intentions are there, but let me unpack this; there are so many things wrong with this. Number one: FERPA; you can't tell me that she's a single mom, that's not your business to tell me. You can come up and say, "Hey, you know, there's another single mom in the cohort, and would you mind me giving her your contact information?" I would be like, "Yeah! Sure! Absolutely, give it to her." I felt like I got to that point where they were asking me to support another student because they're like, we never really believed that you could succeed as a single mom, now that you have, can you teach someone else how to? I would really, honestly prefer to teach them how to better support single moms, rather than teaching her how to navigate all their bullshit.

I actually had another mom who's not a single mom message me, who's in the program, she had a kid since she started the program, and she's like, "I don't know how you do this. I don't feel like I'm supposed to be here," so that seems to be a theme. I told her, "We need moms to be researchers. You're doing qualitative research, and you're talking to people, you're talking to moms, and you're talking to families. You've got to be a person to be able to connect with other people, and if you're only a researcher and nothing else, I don't know that those people are always that great of qualitative researchers. I think that we need different kinds of people doing research, like different kinds of people in academia. Being a mom is part of who you are; it's a good thing, an asset. I know we go into these classes with these

dudes who have done all of these randomized control trials, and everyone talks about how great they are, but their research is not the only research. I know that sometimes in our program we feel that way because that's how they're treated, and our research is treated as not prestigious, not great, but it's really important. I think that being a mom is an asset." She said, "That really changed my perspective on things because I was just basically feeling like I didn't belong here, and I shouldn't be here." I think it's not just single moms that are feeling that way, but I think it's also moms who are married who are feeling that way because another mom who is married said a similar thing. When new students come in, the director says, "Would you mind taking them out to lunch because I really think you'll be able to help them," or "This student's thinking about joining the program and I really think that it would be great for you to talk to them." When people ask me what the program is like, I tell them, here are some experiences I've had because you need to know what it's like, and also if you decide to do it and someone treats you like shit, then it's not because you're a bad person. I'm not negative about it because there are positives about the program, but I am honest with people and realistic about it.

Conclusion

Many single moms in academia experience a sense of isolation and/or loneliness.² They are aware of the absence of single parents in higher education to relate to, the lack of understanding from faculty, administrators, and colleagues, and they recognize their "otherness" because single moms seem few and far between. They feel like those who have no experience with their circumstances do not support them, and that there is a lack of understanding about how it is different to be single with children versus coupled with children. They notice when parented colleagues in relationships avoid talking about children with them, especially when those colleagues are complaining about workload. They feel excluded by colleagues because as single moms, they're not "an intact family." Given the loneliness and isolation single moms face, it's not surprising that some would opt to keep their parental status hidden; however, as evidenced by the single moms whose stories are shared in this article, being open creates the potential for the development of a community and support system that does not exist within institutional systems and structures. It also comes with a fair amount of invisible labor, the kind that is not included on a CV or in a tenure and promotion review letter. But it should be.

The invisible labor that results from single moms being open about their identity benefits the academic institutions these women are a part of; it maintains the institutions. Their "laboring presences make universities legitimate—without them, [universities] can, and do, burn" (Tuck and Yang, 2018). Their invisible labor supports students and colleagues across the university, as well as members of their local communities. We see this in Katherine's connection with and offering support to a colleague at her university, the change Amy made to the faculty meetings on her campus, the support Julie offers to students in her community center exercise classes,

² Based on survey responses from 103 single moms from STEM, Social Sciences, and the Humanities, across academic ranks, and representing five different countries including the U.S.

the listening ear and pumping space Becky offered to a student, and Kelly's emotional and mental support of mother graduate students. The embodied knowledge these single moms have informs the unique type of support they are able to give (Wilcox, 2009). Academia at the university, organizational, department, and programmatic levels needs to validate this work, which means recognizing *and* rewarding it for tenure and promotion, as well as considering this labor in hiring decisions. Including this labor on CVs, as well as in letters for review and application should be viewed as an asset rather than a detriment. Such invisible labor is essential to the retention of students, faculty, and staff of marginalized identities. If academia does not recognize this labor, it risks losing valuable members of the academic community, not only scholars in the present, but also in the future.

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Alex Hanson is a Ph.D. candidate in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric at Syracuse University, where her research focuses on the experiences of single mothers in higher education. In addition to the experiences of single mothers, her research interests also include feminist rhetorics, institutional rhetoric, language politics, and writing program administration. Her work has appeared in *Composition Studies* and *Xchanges*, and is forthcoming in *Writers: Craft & Context*.

Book Review

Sounding Land and Sea: Listening for Unheard Voices in Tiffany Lethabo King's *The Black Shoals*

King, T. L. (2019). *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Introduction

Genuine listening, if we can ever achieve it, is a challenging and unending effort. *The Black Shoals* does not let up the challenge but demands that we strain harder, eyes peeled and ears cocked for voices and narratives buried beneath a dense history of articles, images, and sound bites. Tiffany Lethabo King gestures toward what to listen for, and if we follow, we inevitably hear three distinct currents: discourse supporting white colonialist history, counter-discourse illuminating Black and Indigenous histories, and if King's suggestion of a conversation and a new lexicon goes heeded, a continuing discourse shared by Black and Indigenous communities that has made no bets about its independence. I am still listening, and it hurts.

Contribution

King views multiple depictions of Black and Indigenous identities as objects for revisioning: novels, film, sculpture, cartography, and graffiti. Her approach of analyzing multiple modes and reading bodies as multimodal compliments Vega's work on the curation of aural experiences. In King's adoption of the shoal as her operative metaphor and thereby recurring image throughout *The Black Shoals*, she responds to Goeman, Somerville, and Diaz's efforts interest in the adherence of land and water to the lives of Indigenous peoples.

King contributes to "discourses of Black conquest that rupture the humanist tradition and hegemonic hold of White settler colonial studies" (p. 18). Her interaction with the notion of *conquest* puts her into conversation with Sylvia Wynter and Hortense Spillers, articulating the idea that conquest predates Columbus (p. 19). King's analysis of "[Revisiting Sycorax](#)" and her interview with artist Charmaine Lurch finds a home with Rachel Jackson and Phil Bratta's (2020) discussion of curated experiences that highlight the colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples in "Decolonial Directions." Similarly, Romeo Garcia (2018) highlights counterstories called *corridos* that counter Texas's colonial history with the voices and stories of Indigenous peoples in "Corrido-ing State Violence."

King's primary contribution to this conversation with *The Black Shoals* is her call for Black and Indigenous communities to begin a conversation, and the language she suggests for beginning

that conversation. She offers an opportunity whereby “Black studies attempts to engage Native studies on ethical terms that unfold in new spaces” (p. 10). King’s engagement with Wynter’s concepts of Man₁ (*homo politicus*) and Man₂ (*homo oeconomicus*) serves to “enflesh” (p. 100) the unheard narrative that King seeks to amplify. The oppressive dangers of humanism, even liberal humanism, and the registers of “humanity” established and engrained by that ongoing lexicon, are unveiled and speak volumes in King’s elucidation of Man₁ and Man₂.

Overview

The Black Shoals opens loudly on the 2015 defacing of a Boston statue of Christopher Columbus with the words “Black Lives Matter.” King points to the expression of both Black and Native voices in this act of resistance. She connects Columbus’s exploration with colonization of the Americas and eventual enslavement of Black peoples in the interest of British and American expansion. Chapter 2 treats cartography as a form of writing the human. Building on Katherine McKittrick’s concept of “[B]lack Atlantic livingness,” King asserts that William Gerard De Brahm’s 1757 map of South Carolina and Georgia represents an effort to suppress life and activity of Black and Indigenous peoples through a language and a false history of peaceful discovery, expansion and settlement (p. 76).

The porosity of indigo-stained bodies comes under the microscope in Chapter 4. King zooms in on the cartouche of Black bodies processing indigo on de Brahm’s map, rereading the cartouche as a “spatial imaginary” alongside Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (p. 116). Chapter 4 continues the analysis of Dash’s narrative in multiple iterations alongside Miles’s *The Cherokee Rose*. King discusses the common experience of subjectivities shared by Dash’s and Miles’s Black and Native characters. Histories of shared violence can be the basis of a new conversation, given the porosity of both parties: “Porosity provides an analytical opening to bring bodies of literature about Black and Native erotics, sexuality, and decolonialization together to have a conversation about Black and Indigenous relationality that can exceed the notion of coalition as a conceptual and political space of impasse” (p. 143).

Chapter 1 begins with the defaced Boston statue; Chapter 5 ends on triumphant Sycorax. King’s analysis of “Revisiting Sycorax” and her interview with Lurch demonstrate that the new conversation championed in *The Black Shoals* is being put into the public arena in a way that invites a plethora of audiences to listen.

A Multimodal Structure

The structure of *The Black Shoals* feels like of a series of shoals. The shoal is both land and water, a textural theme reflected in the progression of ideas. Particular concepts and images, like indigo-stained bodies, fluidly connect each chapter to the next, yet we get mired in each chapter, our feet deep in the sand as we crook our ears listening for the sound of silenced voices. Across the book, King’s analyses and the conversations she moves through are haunted by the porosity, fugitivity, and fungibility of Black and Indigenous bodies, and we never stray far from them. We move from the original disruption of Columbus’ symbol and the associated

narrative to a discussion of conquest that is informed by and part of that narrative. We zoom in simultaneously on de Brahm's map and Black bodies in Chapter 3, entering the skin's stained pores so that we may become intimate with the oppressed body, listening from inside.

Chapter 4 extends the intimacy of Chapter 3 to include eroticism. The whole of the oppressed body comes into focus. By the end of Chapter 4 we see embodied symbols of the potential union between Black and Indigenous peoples, and we can hear the voices they exercise and give rise to. King hears hope in children's hybrid languages (p. 166). Finally, in Chapter 5, we wind up in a museum hall viewing "Revisiting Sycorax," which both calls us reconsider Black and Indigenous bodies and to rethink the traditional heuristics through which we consider not just Shakespearean art, but in a greater sense, all of white settler colonial history and studies. The full scope of "Revisiting Sycorax," as King invites us to see, feel, and *hear* it, cannot easily be grasped but for the imaginative and treacherous path that is *The Black Shoals*.

The Multimodal Shoal

As both land and water, the shoal is sustainable yet malleable. It is multimodal and ambiguous. King says that Black bodies, the objects she analyzes, even the book itself are shoals. She writes, "Black bodies are sites of instability. The tremors and movements of muscles in action are at once motions of laboring bodies, captivity, and debasement, as well as possible maneuvers and contortions that escape totalizing violence" (p. 138). By imagining peoples, places, bodies, and objects as shoals, King reframes them in such a way that they become both solid and liquid – malleable, but somehow still concrete. While rewriting, she allows us to remember the other writings that have shaped them with other histories and other rhetorics. King's method of revisioning texts does not ignore former readings. On the contrary, it works with them to demonstrate alternate possibilities. She encourages us to hear new voices and new narratives that have been there for some time but have not been recognized in academic or public discourse.

King invites us into the space of the imaginative so that we may see not just new ways of reading but the reality of multiple, conflicting narratives that constitutes an ongoing rhetoric— one that echoes communities' histories as the objects of violent oppression and at times manifests violently. We experience multiple modes of seeing and listening to the same text at once. King's counter-analysis of de Brahm's map is particularly engaging. King writes, "Yet counter-cartographies that enflesh flat spaces and embed Indigenous stories and place-making into the map are geographies that need to be used in tandem with archival spatial records to craft more critical cartographies" (p. 100).

Conclusion

The Black Shoals is a guide to listening differently. This can be difficult when we have been swimming in pools of colonialist history and continental philosophy. King argues that our "Cartesian epistemes" keep us from other ways of seeing (p. 115). She states her strategy outright: "I read for Black life in the depths of indigo plantation degradation." By performing

deliberate readings—revisionings—against the grain, King seeks ways to disrupt dominant White colonial discourse while turning up the volume on narratives that many of us never knew existed. She shows us new ways to listen, necessarily difficult but by no means impossible.

— Michael David Measel, Clemson University

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Michael David Measel is a Graduate Instructor of Composition and Rhetoric in the English Department and Clemson University. He is a Ph.D. candidate in the Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design in Clemson's English Department. His research emphases are in Burkean studies and sonic rhetorics, with a focus on music and rhetoric. Michael highlights the rhetoric of music alone and across linguistic modes and encourages embracement of sonic rhetorics in Rhetoric and Composition studies. He has published in *KB Journal* and *Quills & Pixels*, and he has a forthcoming article in *Pre/Text*.



The *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*

Submissions Guidelines

Following the lead of other journals like *Kairos* and *Present Tense*, all submissions should follow APA style for in-text citations and references with the sole exception of critics' names that appear in the body of the essay. Full names should be provided the first time they are referenced. All work should be emailed to journalofmultimodalrhetorics@gmail.com.

For alphabetic texts, two versions should be submitted, one that includes your name and institutional affiliation, the second with all identifying information removed. Please use .doc or .docx files. For videos, podcasts, and webtexts, please remove as much identifying information as possible.

Once your work has been accepted for publication, please provide a short author's biography (no more than 100 words) and a picture of the author(s) as a jpeg or gif. If you would prefer to not use a picture of yourself, please send a Creative Commons image or a personally-authored one of your choice.

JOMR is published twice a year, in Spring and Fall.

Discussions (Essays)

Essays should range between 3,000-7,000 words excluding references and endnotes. Longer works will be considered, but please keep in mind that online presentation doesn't lend itself well to overly long works. If you would like to submit an essay as a series over several issues, please contact the lead editor. Authors should ensure that hyperlinks are current as of submission. Video essays and podcasts should be between 10-20 minutes and include captions (videos) and transcriptions. Webtexts must be hosted by the author.

Dialogues (Interviews)

Interviews can be submitted as podcasts, videos, or verbal transcripts. They may include one-on-one conversations with scholars, teachers, critics, or artists, or they may be roundtable-style discussions.

Demonstrations (Artistic Displays)

Artistic displays can take any number of forms to showcase original compositions including but are not limited to photography, paintings, songs, and slideshows. Composers use these media to tell stories, compose “arguments,” or draw attention to issues of vital political and cultural significance in ways that standard essays cannot.

Distributions (Digital Data Collections)

Content may take the form of a textual compilation, a song or video playlist, social media “storytelling,” or any other multimodal assemblage. Each collection should be curated around a central theme and advance an argument of social, political, or cultural importance in a para-rhetorical manner. For example, the [Black Lives Matter Playlist on Spotify](#).

Deliberations (Policy and Public Documents)

Matters of public policy and other developing issues that require "living" documents may be submitted. These texts are not published in any specific journal issue but maintained in their own section. They may be updated by the authors as needed, with notes indicating dates of revision.

Reviews

JOMR welcomes reviews of books or other texts that are no older than two years. If you are interested in reviewing older texts, please see our guidelines for the Re-Views section. Reviews should be between 1,000-1,500 words.

Re-Views

This section is dedicated to revisiting older essays, books, or other media whose influence continues to resonate within current scholarship. These works can focus on multimodal theory specifically, or they may be works that speak to cultural practices that engage multimodality. Submissions should encourage readers to consider the material in a new light or explain its ongoing significance to rhetorical studies. If you are unsure about submitting to this section, please email the section editor at journalofmultimodalrhetorics@gmail.com with any questions or concerns.

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