

FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

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There is, perhaps, no more popular (or contested) representation of the unique challenges faced by students at Two-Year Colleges than in the television sitcom *Community* (created by Dan Harmon), which follows the lives of a number of community college students, administrators, and teachers, as they navigate Greendale Community College. Based on Harmon's personal experience attending community college, *Community* offers a humorous yet critical lens into the lives of students who attend community colleges including their motivations, their life experiences, and their diversity.

Yet, there are a number of fallacies built into *Community*'s depiction of these students' experiences at Greendale.¹ Namely, there is not nearly so much community or engagement in community college as the show suggests. In the show, the main characters meet and become friends while studying for a Spanish class. In place of systematized tutoring (there appears to be no tutoring center at Greendale), these students take it upon themselves to learn the language and guide one another through the fantastical lesson plans of the erratic Señor Ben Chang (Ken Jeong). Although at least one of the group members, Shirley Bennett (Yvette Nicole Brown), has two children, and another, Britta Perry (Gillian MacLaren Jacobs), has an off-campus night job, these characters seem to have a large amount of personal time to get into hijinks, meet at the study table, and bond. The students appear to attend classes all day, and are, for the most part, financially secure. Pierce Hawthorne (Chevy Chase) is a millionaire who at one point supports Annie Edison (Alison Brie) as she struggles to pay rent. Britta depends intermittently on her wealthy parents. Shirley starts her own on-campus business. Abed Nadir (Danny Pudi) and Troy Barnes (Donald Glover) live in a college dorm and don't have off-campus jobs; Abed's father even pays his tuition. Even the main character, Jeff Winger (Joel McHale)—who loses his job as a well-paid lawyer due to forging a college degree—and who is, at one point, homeless and living in his car, remains materialistic and predominately financially solvent in the show. Importantly, he manages to pay for course credits, the books he carries, the stylish clothing and accessories he wears, and the expensive smartphone he continuously uses. The students in

Greendale invest in the social and political life of the school. They demonstrate help-seeking and self-efficacy skills from the beginning of their enrollment at the college. The business of daily life infrequently interferes with school.

The reality of many community college students is far different. A 2017 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) report shows that work obligations account for a lot of community college students' time: about half of respondents (n=97,420) work more than 20 hours a week (University of Texas Austin 4). Additionally 50% of respondents (33% who are women and 17% who are male) (n=97,224) report having children living with them (University of Texas Austin 4). TYC students' commuting time is also incredibly high due to lack of car access and poor public transit infrastructure. At my former institution, Bristol Community College, 67.7% of students commute between 1-5 hours a week (University of Texas Austin 8). TYC students spend more time working off-campus, caring for dependents off-campus, and commuting to and from campus than they do on campus.

The time that community college students spend off-campus working, caretaking, and commuting are not the only differences in the fictional representations of *Community*. In reality, tutoring is also quite different; it is more systematized, less consistently attended, and predicated on a top-down hierarchical model that often merges different types of tutoring in "learning commons" or "academic learning center" models. Perhaps the only point of connection between the show's fictional community college and a real-world community college is in demonstrating how tutoring (informal or otherwise) can serve as a communal space in which peer tutors, students, faculty tutors, adjunct tutors, instructors, deans, and other administrators all intersect.

I open this introduction with a fictional representation of Two-Year Colleges that stands in sharp contrast to this special issue of *Praxis*, which is the first that is fully devoted to Two-Year College writing center assessment and praxis. The contributing authors come from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and are writing about community colleges and writing centers located all across the United States. One of the

main premises of this issue is that it is imperative to conduct local research and assessment, particularly at the Two-Year College level—single-lens representations (fictional or otherwise) cannot do justice to the wide variety of Two-Year Colleges operating in the United States. Community colleges are idiosyncratic and often develop in relationship to the communities they serve. Writing centers, similarly, are deeply heterogeneous. At Two-Year College writing centers especially, as the articles in this issue suggest, heterogeneity profoundly affects the everyday work of writing centers, from staffing to tutor identities, to tutoring models, to assessment practices.

The authors in this issue will take up familiar concerns: writing center efficacy (Geist and Geist; Griffiths-Hickman et al.; Pfrenger et al.); staffing models and needs (Reglin); tutor identities and impact on writing center labor (Bright); the value of peer tutors in WC contexts (Gardner); diversity in the writing center (Robertson); and a RAD assessment of student perceptions of writing centers (Giaimo). Although the topics in this issue are applicable to most writing center work, Megan Baptista Geist and Joshua Geist make the crucial point that “Writing centers—and perhaps especially writing centers at two-year colleges—are not interchangeable” (9). Many of these articles draw heavily upon their localized contexts in their assessment and research, providing a TYC “twist” on some fairly well-covered topics. For example, Jill Reglin identifies a threat to writing center work in the form of administrative decisions that outsource tutoring to for-profit companies, a move that is popular at many TYCs and that further complicates staffing and training models. Alison Bright’s piece on cultivating professional writing tutor identities indicates the need for more research about training for professional tutors, as it is common practice to employ a “wide variety of tutors,” with varying educational experiences at TYCs (1). Pfrenger et al. analyze the effect that compulsory WC attendance has on students in remedial writing courses at Kent State Columbiana, where 81% of students need some kind of remediation (1-2). And, although the argument for employing peer tutors has been all but put to bed as general “best practice” for writing center staffing models, Clint Gardner’s piece leads the call for hiring peer tutors in TYC WCs, despite hurdles like recruitment, training, and retention.

The shared concerns of four-year-college writing centers and TYC writing centers suggest that there is a vital connection between these two kinds of institutions, yet there is not enough collaboration or cross-talk between two- and four-year colleges, particularly their writing centers. At the same time,

there exists within two-year college writing centers—and perhaps in writing centers more generally—a uniqueness factor that is often overlooked in scholarship. The authors in this issue identify varying factors, institutionally and demographically speaking, that uniquely affect TYC writing centers. Taken as a corpus, these articles are a response to the dire need for TYC writing center administrators to conduct local and replicable programmatic assessment. Uniqueness, however, is not synonymous with inapplicability to other settings. Researchers can design studies that take into account local culture and demographics while developing methods that can be replicated in other institutional contexts. Applicability hinges on replicability, as two articles (Giaimo; Griffiths-Hickman et al.) in this issue demonstrate. Replicable methods are critical to successful writing center assessment. Yet, as a field, we rely heavily on research and praxis that comes out of four-year writing centers and that is only intermittently replicable. Additionally, research in four-year writing centers often has vastly different staffing models, training models, tutoring models, funding models, etc. While more cross talk between institutional types ought to occur, there needs to be institutionally specific replicable research and assessment coming out of two-year college contexts.

TYC writing centers provide community where there is little and research where there might once have been only past practice. The dynamic between tutor and client might be a far cry from the camaraderie shared by Harmon’s cast of lovable yet functional misfits, but writing centers are effective in fostering a community of support, which contributes to positive student learning outcomes, as all of the articles in this issue note. TYC writing centers and their research can be pivotal in effecting positive change in the institution and in learning outcomes; however, “home grown” assessment is critical in determining what effect, if any, our centers are having on writers and the broader institution.

To conclude, this issue could not have gone forward without the tireless efforts of the editorial team, Jamie, Alejandro, and Sarah, as well as the team of reviewers for the submissions. Thank you to all who have worked to bring this issue to publication; it was truly a team effort.

Notes

1. See Moltz for further details.

Works Cited

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