MAPPING BOUNDEDNESS AND ARTICULATING INTERDEPENDENCE BETWEEN WRITING CENTERS AND WRITING PROGRAMS

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Abstract

This essay argues that institutional ethnography, a methodology LaFrance and Nicolas (2012) describe and advocate for in writing studies, provides a means by which writing center scholars can add to their maps of how their writing center programs coordinate with other writing programs at their institutions. From these maps, we can better articulate what writing center work is and what it is not, advocating for an institutional culture of interdependence. The essay extends the findings from a local institutional ethnography to add insights from multiple institutions. The findings suggest that writing center administrators may advocate for our work not only by arguing for parity with other writing programs, but also by communicating with others within the institution to align our internal narratives with external images. In addition, the findings imply that methodologies such as institutional ethnography are critical for examining the radical relationality central to writing center work.

In their 2012 *College Composition and Communication*'s *(CCC)* article arguing for institutional ethnography in writing studies, Michelle LaFrance and Melissa Nicolas speak to the way that all writing programs are "intricately bound up with institutions" (130). Despite this boundedness, they note "few researchers have explicitly examined how our most common practices emerge in relationship to the institutional locations that situate, compel, and organize them" (130). They challenge those of us in writing studies to begin to study our programs in relation to our institutions, specifically through the systematic method of institutional ethnography (IE). IE, they argue, not only adds "to the sophisticated toolkit available to researchers in writing studies," (143), but also, because of its grounding in standpoint theory and its concern with understanding, "[has] the potential to shine a light on how our institutional realities shape what we do and how we do it, as we seek out possibilities for reinvention, intervention, and reform" (144). Specifically, LaFrance and Nicolas note that IE "resonate[s] with other active conversations in the field," including "attempts to understand the ways that writing studies research and writing instruction continue to be situated within and against traditional English departments and curricula" (144).

My foray into IE, which began in 2014 with a local study, began with such a question about how my writing center was "situated within and against" our English department, and more specifically the first year writing program at my institution. I had become aware of a disconnect between the way I understood the work of the writing center in relationship to our first-year writing program and how some of those teaching in the first-year writing program understood our work. My use of IE to understand the situatedness of the writing center with the first-year writing program heightened my understanding of how our boundedness occurs not just at the macrolevel of our institutions (for example, with the mission of our institution or with upper administration or legislative bodies), but also at the microlevel (for example with other sites/programs of writing on our campuses). I knew, however, because of my experience at my previous institution where the Writing Center and Department of English acted independently from one another, that other institutions might perceive the boundedness and coordination of work between sites of writing differently.

LaFrance and Nicolas liken the effects of IE, which, despite always being situated in the local, can inform the greater conversation of writing studies, to skipping stones, noting that

> IE has offered us multiple ways to understand the connections between work practice and the conditions that relate to those practices. Each point of contact with IE creates its own series of ripples, some overlapping and encircling the first, others forming new patterns, just as our institutional situations, while always highly personal, also exist in relationship to a broader and shifting array of discourse. ("Institutional Ethnography" 145)

I understood that expanding my study to focus on the relationships of writing programs at multiple insitutions could provide a deepened understanding of the coordination of writing programs within an institution. Such a study would deepen my understanding of how work is coordinated between the writing center and other writing sites at my institution, and strengthen my ability to advocate for my own local writing center. In addition, broadening the study would

contribute to the larger conversation: writing centers working to understand and advocate within their own institutional situatedness. In the following essay, I offer my findings from an institutional ethnography, in which I began to map local writing centers and their relationships to other writing programs at their insitutions. My hope is that my "point of contact" with IE will create "a series of ripples," adding to the broader discourse of and advocacy for institutional relatedness of writing centers for writing center administrators. This research serves those advocating for writing centers and for writing programs at insitutions of higher education, acknowledging that none of us work in isolation from others.

The relationship between writing centers and other writing programs as a topic of study is not a new one.[1] Many times, however, we look at each individual site as unique rather than at the effects of the coordination between the two. Michelle Miley and Doug Downs use the metaphor of force fields to describe how writing centers and writing programs exert influence upon one another. In physics, multiple force fields may exist within a given space. Although each of these force fields are separate entities, when they come into contact with one another, they "resonat[e] or harmoniz[e]" with those other fields (27). As they come into contact, they necessarily shape the others. Like force fields, writing centers and the other writing programs at an institution (first-year writing, Writing Across the Curriculum, other writing centers) have unique influences and forces that they exert within their institutional space (40). IE, with its specific focus on the materiality of work, provides a productive lens through which to add to our understanding of how writing centers coordinate their work with the other writing programs within their institutions. Doing this will allow us to map how the relationships between sites of writing produce the work of teaching and learning writing.[2] Dorothy E. Smith, the founder of IE, argues that each institutional ethnographic study can add to the "maps" created by previous studies (*Institutional Ethnography* 219). In addition, IE adds to other studies of work cultures both within writing center research and within professional and technical communication.[3] As I worked through this research, for example, my findings corroborated with, added to, and were enhanced by studies like Lori Salem's; Harry Denny and Anne Geller's; Nicole Caswell, Jackie Grutsch Mckinney and Rebecca Jackson's; and LaFrance and Nicolas's own institutional ethnography of writing center directors ("What's Your Frequency").

In *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors*, Nicole I. Caswell, Jackie Grutsch McKinney, and Rebecca Jackson speak to the value of identifying and studying both the "shared positions" that exist across writing centers (qtd. in Caswell 169), as well as positions that are not shared. They argue that finding both similarities and differences helps us to "move toward disciplinarity" (169), and to advocate more effectively for our writing center programs. I believe IE, what Smith describes as "a method of inquiry" (*Institutional Ethnography* 10), that "does not. . . depend on large-scale projects" but rather "as it describes and analyzes the workings of one aspect. . . extends its capacity to see and go further" (219), provides a valuable means for finding both the shared and the unique positions in which writing centers exist within institutions. Smith (qtd. in Smith) argues that rather than replicating one another, each IE study adds to our knowledge:

> [S]tudies that appear to be dispersed and fragmented can be seen as focused on a common object. . . . Generalization from a particular study is not a matter of populations or even just the forms of standardization and generalization that institutions themselves produce and reproduce; it is more important, an effect of the phenomenon of the ruling relations themselves – that they are interconnected in multiple ways as well as deeply informed by the dynamic of capital accumulation" (219).

As we add to our knowledge through examining both our shared and local practices, we begin to better articulate our discipline to ourselves and to others.

This article extends my local institutional ethnography (Miley, "Looking Up"), in which I became more aware of the boundedness of my writing center with the other writing programs at my institution. With internal grant funding, I visited three additional institutions, focusing my study on how these writing centers coordinate their work with the other writing programs at their institutions. In the following sections, I give a brief overview of this multi-institutional IE. I then articulate my findings from those studies, specifically focusing on findings that provide insights into how those of us in writing centers can advocate for a culture of "interdependence," which I define as a recognition of both the boundedness and need for coordination of work with the unique purpose of work that each site for writing provides. I argue that interdependent programs value reciprocal relationality and a recognition of equal value. I contrast "interdependence" with "dependence," acting under the belief that one's work exists only because of another's, without recognition of the unique purpose of each, and "independence"—a lack of recognition of

how one's work coordinates with (affects or is affected by) others within the institution.[4] I conclude with the mapping of my own institution as an example of articulating boundedness of writing centers to other writing programs within our institutions as a means of creating a culture of writing and a recognition of interdependence within our institutions.

Using Institutional Ethnography to Add to the Maps of Writing Center Work

Institutional Ethnography, a methodology developed by Canadian sociologist Dorothy E. Smith, seeks to uncover

> *how things happen*—what practices constitute the institution as we think of it, how discourse may be understood to compel and shape those practices, and how the norms of practice speak to, for, and over individuals. (LaFrance and Nicolas, "Institutional Ethnography" 131)

Institutional placement of writing center administrators and of writing centers themselves have been a topic of great interest in writing center scholarship,[5] but LaFrance and Nicolas note a gap in our scholarship's understanding of "how our most common practices emerge in relationship to the institutional locations that situate, compel and organize them" (130), how both the material work that we do and our understanding of that work is shaped by our institutional relationships with other people, other programs, other institutions within the academy.[6] Smith's definition of "institution" as "those complexes of relations and hierarchical organization that organize distinct functions—hospitals or, more generally, health care; universities; welfare; corporations; and so on and so on" (*Institutional Ethnography* 206) is an important one, as the institutional influences that act upon us are not always readily apparent. Rather, they are often hidden forces existing within the complex web of those working within what we often define as a static "institution." Institutional ethnography provides a "theory" of "how research does or should proceed" (Liggett et al. 51).

As I have experienced it, institutional ethnography comes close to what Theresa Lillis, drawing from Blommaert, terms "deep theorizing" (355). Unlike other forms of ethnography, Smith notes that IE begins in the local, material actualities of the work people are doing, and then looks "upward"

> to realize an alternative form of knowledge of the social in which people's own knowledge of the world of their everyday practices is systematically extended to the social relations and institutional orders in which we participate. (*Institutional Ethnography* 43)

Rather than drawing specific conclusions, the overall aims of institutional ethnography are to produce "maps" of the complex relationships that constitute and are constituted by our institutions, thus building knowledge of how work is articulated by, with and within institutions (51). Institutional ethnography does not seek to find a "monologic interpretive scheme" (160), or come to a universal theory. Rather, institutional ethnography embraces the dialogic and the multiple experiences and knowledges that may exist within an organization. LaFrance and Nicolas frame institutional ethnography in this way:

> As a form of critical ethnography, IE does not seek to generalize about or to understand the "structures" commonly found at similar institutional locations. Rather IE asks ethnographers to focus on individuals and to understand their personal experiences *as uniquely responsive* to the social organization of institutions. ("Institutional Ethnography" 134)

The findings of an institutional ethnographic study do not necessarily reveal "truths." Rather, they allow us to draw maps, maps of the intricate relationships that define our work in our universities. These maps can then guide us as we advocate for writing centers as sites of research and learning.

Although the design of an institutional ethnographic study may differ according to the resources of the researcher, the study often begins in identifying an experience in an individual's everyday practice (the standpoint). From this standpoint, the researcher begins to identify and explore "some of the institutional processes that are shaping the experience," and then "investigate[s] those processes in order to describe analytically how they operate as the grounds of the experience" (DeVault and McCoy 20). The methods or tools of investigation that institutional ethnographers typically rely on—methods like interviews, observations, surveys, focus groups and textual analysis—explore the language of the institution and those doing the work of the institution. Smith argues that in the language of these work documents, the coordination of the embodied work of the individual in relation to the institution becomes visible. It is in the "talk" and the "texts," the products of language, that people can coordinate activity ("Incorporating Texts," 65-68, 79-86).

Since all IEs, even a cross-institutional one, start from a particular standpoint, I started my local study from the standpoint of my position as a writing center director. From that position, I began reaching outward

to the perceptions of writing center work that other faculty and administrators have in my own institution, and how those perceptions articulated with the actual texts defining what I understood my work to be. I conducted interviews with administrators, colleagues, and former writing center employees. I began each interview with the question (or a close variation of the question), "What do you perceive as the work of the Writing Center?" I also analyzed the "work texts" of the writing center: job ads, grant proposals, external review documents, and articles published about the work of the writing center at my institution. A central finding from that study was that the Writing Center I now directed, a Writing Center I had been hired to provide a new vision for, had begun as a central component to a first-year writing program that included large lecture classes and individual meetings with writing center tutors. One interviewee even described the Writing Center as the "composition program."

From this original inquiry, and because of my previous experience with a writing center that functioned as a Writing in the Disciplines program, I began to develop a deeper awareness of the importance of the relationships between writing programs at institutions. With funding from an internal grant, I had the resources to add to my original institutional ethnographic mapping of my local institution. I had funding to travel to three additional institutions and, because of my interest in how the writing center coordinates with other writing programs, decided to choose institutions with writing center ties to Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), ties to other writing centers within the institution, and ties to first-year writing. My goal was to explore, through IE, the relationship between writing programs at institutions beginning from the standpoint of those in the writing center.

The first institution visited was an R-1 institution well-known for its writing across the curriculum program. I chose to visit this institution because of the strength of its WAC program, as one of the job duties I had received upon my hire was to develop a writing across the curriculum program at my institution. Having come from a previous institution where the Writing in the Disciplines program was housed in the Writing Center, I was interested to see how an institution with two separate programs understood the work of each. Specifically, how did a strong WAC program within the institution shape the perception of the work of the Writing Center both within and outside the Center? At this site as with all, I began my interviews with the Writing Center Administrator. I also interviewed the former Writing Program Administrators (WPAs), the Director and Assistant Director of WAC, and the Associate Provost over WAC and the Writing Center.

The second institution I visited was quite different from the first: a community college with a strong student writing center, a strong community writing center, and a developing writing across the community program. While the Community Writing Center is housed under the Provost's Office, the Writing Center, an older entity, is under the Department of English. I chose this institution because I was interested in how the culture of a Community College might shape the work of the Writing Center and because several people at my institution have an interest in developing a Community Writing Center at our institution. Again, I was interested in how the different writing programs shaped the work of one another. What does it mean to have a university writing center *and* a community writing center in the same institution? How does the work of one writing center shape the perception of the work of the additional writing centers specifically among staff, faculty, and administrators? Here, I interviewed the Writing Center Administrator, the Community Writing Center Director, and the Associate Dean over the writing programs.

Finally, I chose an institution similar to my own, both in location, in mission (land grant universities), and in population. This writing center is located within the English Department, and although it is a university writing center, it serves primarily the first-year writing program.[7] I was interested in this writing center because of the similarities it has to the original conception of my own center. I had some idea of how my writing center was shaped by its relationship to first year writing. I wondered how the understanding of the work of the writing center I visited was shaped by its relationship to its first-year writing program. Because of the timing of my visit, I was unable to interview any faculty or administrators other than the Writing Center Administrator and tutors. Although this site did add to my mapping of writing center work, I focus in this article on findings from the first two sites.

I began all of the interviews with the same question I used to begin the interviews at my own institution: What do you understand as the work of the Writing Center? In addition, I asked the interviewees how they understood the work of the other writing programs within their institutions and how that work intersected with their writing centers. Since IE recognizes the importance of texts in coordinating our work with others, I gathered the textual documents available to me: marketing materials, mission statements, and administrative handbooks.

As one might expect, I found that the actual work of the writing centers I visited varied across institutions, shaped by institutional placement (under the English Department versus under the Provost's Office, for example), by job classification (faculty or professional staff), and by institutional classification (R-1, community college, land grant). In three of the four institutions (including my own), the work of the writing center was also articulated as a direct response to its origins or to the story of how it was created. As Lori Salem notes, writing centers do not get created just because a band of faculty argue for its existence; "broader forces" at work "shap[e] how the institution respond[s] to their efforts" (16).[8] Despite the articulation of writing center work being strongly situated in the local contexts and institutions, shared patterns of how those of us in writing center work can begin to coordinate our work within/with our institutions, began to emerge, as did insights into how writing center administrators can begin to understand, articulate, and coordinate their work as interdependent with other writing programs.

Intricately Bound: Insights for Developing Interdependence

When Miley and Downs use the metaphor of force fields to describe the relationship between writing centers and writing programs, they acknowledge both the boundedness of our programs and the unique work each site performs, arguing for a recognition of the interdependence of our programs. Each of us necessarily affects the other. Recognizing that in "collaboration," often times one entity is subsumed by the other, and that in "reciprocity" the interdependence of programs may not be recognized, Miley and Downs argue for a recognition of both the "independen[ce] and interdependen[ce]" of writing programs (40). I, however—and I cannot assume I am alone—have not experienced the recognition of interdependence of writing programs as the norm within our academic institutions. The metaphor of the academic silo more accurately reflects what I have heard articulated. In my writing center work, I have been at institutions both where the writing programs assume complete independence and where one program has become completely dependent on another for its survival.

Here, I define "independence" as acting independently without a recognition of how one's work coordinates with (affects or is affected by) others within the institution. Prior to joining my current institution, I was the Assistant Director of Writing in the Disciplines, a program housed in the Writing Center. The rest of the staff and I understood our work included helping faculty across the university provide effective writing instruction. Because the Writing Center was the only writing program that served the entire university, and because the Writing Center was not only physically and institutionally outside the English Department but also politically distanced from the work of the Department, I understood our work to be that of partnering with faculty to further the writing development of students in departments across the university *almost in exclusion* from English.

At my new institution, however, my home department as a faculty member and as the Writing Center Director is the English Department. Still, my understanding when I began my position was that the Writing Center's work centered on supporting student writers from all areas of campus. The description of the work I would be doing included developing a peer tutor program and working with writers across campus. The list also included developing a WAC initiative. What it did not include was specifically supporting first-year writing courses. I soon learned that some of the non-tenure track faculty teaching first-year writing understood writing center work differently. Based on an institutional writing center design from the 1980s, they understood the writing center as specifically supporting first-year writing, as I found in my previous study ("Looking Up"). In fact, one former Writing Center staff member I interviewed described the writing center as it began as equated with first-year writing: "[T]he idea was that this one-on-one work that would happen with your teacher. . . would happen in the Writing Center. . . it was composition. It was the Center for Composition" (personal interview). Although the institutional mandates for each of the writing programs have shifted the coordination of this work over time (for example, the Writing Center's mission to serve an experimental writing program has now shifted to serving student writers university-wide), the perceptions of other laborers within the institution of what each program does and how those programs relate to one another are shaped by both past and present institutional structuring. This experience led to my definition of "dependence": acting as though one's work exists only because of another's without recognition of the unique purpose of each.

When I turned my study to the institutions beyond my own, my map of writing center work had been informed by my work experiences. I had experienced how the work of the writing center can both be understood by a lack of coordination with other writing programs (a sense that the writing center works independently and is not influenced by the other writing programs), and by a total dependence on or

serving of the other writing programs (a sense that the writing center exists to serve the other writing programs rather than offering value apart from those programs). Having seen how the work of the writing center shifts with what I am calling independent and dependent models of writing program coordination, I specifically wanted to understand how the perception of the work of their writing center coordinated with the other writing programs at the institutions I visited. I had seen how the force fields of each program intersected with the others, but I had not yet experienced them harmonizing. Could writing centers develop interdependence with other writing programs on campus, each recognizing both their own purpose and their mutual reliance on one another to develop cultures of teaching and writing on campus, neither totally dependent on the other for their existence?

Finding Balance: The Importance of Parity Amongst Administrators

Two of the sites I visited articulated a conscious knowledge of the boundedness of the sites of writing at their institutions. At both, I heard from writing center administrators and writing program administrators a desire for interdependence. One writing program administrator described the necessity for the writing programs (first-year writing, WAC, and writing center) to be able to act as a "unified political entity," educating the institution about writing collectively rather than separately (personal interview). She argued that when sites of writing work together with purpose, they can better advocate for the both funding and the expertise that they need, strategically planning and developing a "system" of writing at the institution. She noted that as institutions grow and as they become more dependent on external funding, developed systems of writing with coordination of writing directors become more necessary. At her institution, sudden growth and change in faculty and personnel had created instability within the system, an instability that had affected the balance of the writing programs. One imbalance I noted was in the difficulty in differentiating the work of the WAC program and the Writing Center amongst those outside writing.

Although the administrators of the WAC and Writing Centers both articulated their division of labor as WAC serving the faculty and the Writing Center serving the students, both also communicated overlap in their programs that often led to confusion amongst faculty. One assistant director noted that faculty on campus could not tell the difference between the Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum, so requests for one program often landed in the other's office. This same assistant director within the Writing

Across the Curriculum program described the writing center work as "enmeshed" with her work (personal interview). Her use of that word stood out to me. "Enmeshed" indicates an entanglement of programs, an inability of one program to extract itself from the other, a lack of boundaries indicating where one program begins and another ends. Miley and Downs warn against ignoring the boundaries between programs:

> Without recognition of the unique and individual fields both partners bring, the collaborative possibilities can quickly move from two working together to an unequal power relationship, like that of buyer to seller, or academic unit to student service. (36)

The same assistant director later noted, with gratitude, that the Writing Center could do the "grunt work" of writing (personal interview). Her comment reminded me of Michael Pemberton's metaphor of the "arranged marriage" between writing centers and WAC programs (117). I wondered how others on campus could understand the two programs as equal and interdependent if one of the assistant directors within the WAC program did not. How else was this inequality communicated in institutional understandings?

One indication that the Writing Center was not understood as "equal" program to the other writing programs was the status of the Writing Center Director.[9] Despite the clear delineation of labor that each of the directors of the programs articulated, a delineation that was echoed by the other administrators and faculty with whom I talked, the writing center was the one writing program at each of the institutions not directed by tenure-line faculty members. At the four-year institutions I visited, in fact, the status of the directors of each program seemed to reflect the status of the programs within the institution and the perception of the work of the writing center among the other administrators with whom I spoke to. As Harry Denny and Anne Geller note in their study of positionality of writing center professionals, "how one might gain disciplinary identity and status through work in writing centers remains a question almost no one seems to be able to answer" (99). At the institution described above, the other writing program administrators noted this disparity (including the writing center director). As one administrator noted, the lack of parity amongst writing program administrators and writing center directors had led to a lack of stability in the writing center directorship. This lack of stability had led to difficulty creating the "unified political entity" the writing program

administrators hoped for. And yet, studies like Denny and Geller's and Caswell, Grutsch McKinney's, and Jackson's suggest job titles (staff or faculty, tenured or non-tenured) do not always indicate satisfaction with work, nor does job title indicate intellectual labor. Something more than job title parity was at work.

Articulating to One Another What Our Work Is— and Is Not

Despite the lack of institutional parity amongst administrators (the Student Writing Center administrator holds the title of "coordinator," while the Community Writing Center has the title "director"), a "unified political entity" was a visible reality at the second institution I visited. Here the work of the Student Writing Center was understood as interdependent with the work of the other writing programs, including the Community Writing Center, on campus. The lack of parity within the job titles, although creating some imbalance higher up in the institution (noted by the Associate Dean), was offset by the constant communication and respect between the writing program administrators and upper administration directly over writing. Specifically, the administrators communicated a clear understanding of their force fields—both the uniqueness of each program and the interdependence on one another. The specific purpose and worth of each writing program was clearly articulated by all administrators. In fact, the Associate Dean over all of these programs took time to note the importance of each writing program articulating with the others, but having separate, particular missions and purposes. When asked about the relationship between the Student Writing Center and Community Writing Center, both with one another and with the institution, he noted, "[B]oth developed conceptually out of our thinking about the function of writing or various forms of literate practice for individuals and groups of people. . . both emerged out of certain conceptual understandings that we have been developing over quite a long period of time" (personal interview). Because the writing programs came out of the articulation of the institution's vision for writing and literacy, the intellectual work of both Centers emerged from their mission. And because those in the institution continually shared this mission with one another, they each understood how the work of their own programs coordinated with the work of others on campus. In the sharing and theorizing together came clarification of work.

The Student Writing Center administrator stated the importance of remembering each specific mission for each program very wisely. After commenting that he had narrowed the mission of his writing center, he stated,

> I like very specific missions. I see it all the time. . . . You get somebody where they really, really—they want to be all things to all people, and it makes sense because it attracts money, it looks cool, but it just becomes unwieldy. Where you are trying to run WAC through a Writing Center, trying to run a Writing Fellows program through a Writing Center—I can see the Writing Center, a Student Writing Center or what we do, as a place where something like that can start, but it shouldn't stay there, it should be split off, because the mission gets too [messed up]. . . . So that's what I always have to keep that focus. . . to say ok, how does this relate to our primary purpose because it's way too easy to get lost off in the neverneverland. . . . [W]hat does the Writing Center really do? What are we doing here? Why are we doing this? (personal interview)

Communicating the purpose of each writing site and making sure that each stayed focused on its mission was a central component in developing interdependence of the writing programs at the universities. That communication of purpose was important not only to upper administrators but also to the directors of the various writing programs. When a program loses sight of its primary mission, one administrator noted, that program loses track of its purpose (personal interview). It is in the lack of specific purpose that perceptions of writing center work become misaligned with others in the institution.

I find the wisdom in these administrators' acknowledgements of communicating both what the writing center is and what it is not to be particularly valuable as we coordinate our work with others. In *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers,* Grutsch McKinney asks us to think more widely about the possibilities for writing center work than what she calls the "grand narrative" of writing centers, that "writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing" (11). Grutsch McKinney argues that the "inflexibility" of our grand narrative "obfuscated[s] material realities, perpetuated[s] subpar conditions for writing centers and writing center professionals, and restricted[s] the subject of writing center theory and research too narrowly" (91). Using narrative theory, Grutsch McKinney argues that what we tell about our work

matters in the understanding of writing center work both within our centers and within our institutions.

My findings corroborate Grutsch McKinney's claim. I was surprised by the number of interviewees who were not writing center scholars (or even within writing studies) across all institutions who attributed their understanding of writing center work to their conversations with specific writing center scholars. For example, at my own institution, the Strategic Proposal grant out of which grew the possibility for my faculty line, as well as the development of a peer tutor program, was authored by my colleague who, before my hire, had acted as both the WPA and Writing Center Director. When I asked him what he understood the work of the writing center to be, work that he also believed was not happening in the Writing Center in place at the time, he attributed his perception of work to Michele Eodice. Both my colleague and Michele had been at Kansas State University at the same time. My colleague noted,

> I learned from Michele about the professionalization of the field. . . about the scholarship, about the ways that someone trained in the discipline could really affect an interesting place, really create an interesting space that was dynamic and exciting. (personal interview)

From the narrative Michele told of the potential of writing center work, he began the process of changing the narrative and the institutional structures of the Writing Center at our institution.

At another institution, a faculty member in the Department of English attributed her understanding of writing center work to Melissa Ianetta. She stated that because of Ianetta, she knew that writing centers were not just the "dumping ground" for first-year composition, nor were they the purview of first-year composition. "The Writing Center," she said, "isn't just outsourcing for what we can't do in the classroom" (personal interview). Like my colleague, this faculty member understood the intellectual work that can occur in the writing center *because of* the narratives of writing center scholars and because of those writing center scholars doing the work of that narrative.

At the Community College I visited, the Associate Dean talked extensively about how the directors of both writing centers had shaped the culture of writing at the institution through conversations both within the English Department and beyond. He noted that together they "attempt to address and promote the way we think about writing in matters such as agency and so forth—across the institution" (personal interview).

These faculty and administrators tell a narrative of writing center work that places it as a site for research and learning within the institution, a placement that is important in understanding writing center work not as serving other writing programs but as working with other writing programs on campus to produce knowledge about writing and writing processes. In addition, the research and learning occurs not just in the scholarship of the writing center professionals, nor just in the learning that occurs for the students who use the center. Rather, the narrative writing center professionals tell that others within the institution understand, the one that shapes perceptions of our work, is one that includes the scholarship and the learning of the peer tutors. I heard this same narrative from the coordinator of the writing center at the community college. He noted the importance of peer tutor programs not simply for the writers with whom they worked but also for the "long term impacts on their education and careers" (personal interview). My colleague's narrative of the writing center as a place of learning also tied directly to the work of the peer tutors:

> When the Writing Center turned into an educational space for everyone who was in it, for me mentally, I realized that this was one of the primary arguments that Michele Eodice had made about Writing Centers: It was the tutors, the students, the director who inhabited this as an educational space. . . it was a place where learning was going in all sorts of directions. (personal interview)

Implications
Implication 1: Advocating for Parity Between Administrators and Programs

From the IE study of these institutions, I have come away with findings that speak to how those of us in writing center work can advocate for greater interdependence with other sites of writing at our institutions. From these findings, I offer three implications for writing center administrators and scholars. My first implication corroborates LaFrance and Nicolas's findings from their IE of writing center administrators and job titles. I did find that lack of parity in the job status of directors of various writing programs across institutions does lead to different understandings of what work is valued, and can indicate a lack of understanding of these writing sites as interdependent. This finding will not surprise anyone, and those of us advocating for writing center work should continue to advocate for parity with other writing program administrators. As we advocate for parity amongst administrators, we advocate for parity between our programs.

Implication 2: Communicating Our Work Outside Writing Centers

The second implication corroborates both with Grutsch McKinney's findings (*Peripheral Visions*), and with Brenton D. Faber's. Grutsch McKinney argues that writing center administrators should critically examine the "grand narrative" that we tell of our work. Faber notes that when the internal narratives within an organization do not align with external images, organizations become distressed. He argues that "organizational change is the communicative process of realigning the organization's discordant narratives and images" (39). Advocating for writing centers depends not only on the internal narratives we tell, but also our communicating those narratives to those outside of writing center work so that our perceptions can come into alignment with the perceptions of others. The work of the writing centers at our institutions is impacted by the communication of our work—and by the lack of our communication. The interviews I conducted across a variety of institutions revealed that our telling of what we perceive our work to be, and then exemplifying that work through our own scholarship, is essential to changing the perceptions of others at our institutions.

At the same time, coordinating our work with and alongside others at our institutions means that we must always listen to what work our institutions need for us to do. We must then communicate what we can do, what we cannot do, and what might be done better in coordination with other writing programs. The wisdom of the Coordinator of the Student Writing Center sticks with me: as I think about the narratives these scholars tell of writing center work, I note that those who develop interdependence are explicit in stating what work the writing center does, and what work other writing programs are better equipped to do. Developing interdependence means acknowledging when something is outside of our field of influence. Because of the mindset institutional ethnography has given me, I find myself testing my perceptions of work against other narratives to ask, "What does the institution needs from us? Is this something the Writing Center can or should provide? How can our work better coordinate with other programs? Is my vision the best vision for supporting students?"

The Director of the Community Writing Center I visited gave me a document that guides her work as she collaborates across communities. I believe these principles articulate well the need for writing center professionals to not only tell our narrative of writing center work, but also to listen to how our work coordinates with others in the institution. The document lists the following principles:

- [B]ecause all writing is, at some point, a collaborative act, the CWC is a collaborative environment on all levels.
- [C]ollaborations should always be guided by our partner in learning and focused on developing new writing knowledges.
- [O]ur programming should be responsive to community requests and inquiries; the CWC does not determine what the community's writing needs and desires are.
- [W]e should not take any political or philosophical position in a writing partnership; rather we focus on writing instruction only.

The principles listed above are in a document given to all collaborators entering into partnership with the Community Writing Center. These include those in the larger community who come to the CWC asking to partner with them to develop new literacy programs for high school students, for marginalized populations, for the elderly, and for others. The director of the CWC mentioned several times how important it is to provide those documents that define our work in writing for the institution and for those with whom we are collaborating. By doing so, we not only communicate our understanding of work to others, but we also keep our purpose/mission/understanding of work in focus.

Implication 3: Valuing IE as a Methodology for Critically Examining Relationality

The third implication from this study corroborates LaFrance and Nicolas's ("Institutional Ethnography") and Miley's ("Looking Up") call for adding IE to our toolkit for writing center research. Because of its grounding in standpoint theory, beginning with the understanding of those doing the material work of writing centers and mapping "up," IE provides a critical lens through which we can understand our radical relationality and boundedness to other worksites within our institutions. As we "shine a light on how our institutional realities shape what we do and how we do it, as we seek out possibilities for reinvention, intervention, and reform" ("Institutional Ethnography" 144), we actively lay our maps, one on top of the other, letting our local maps add to the greater landscapes of our discipline, to create new ways of seeing and to develop interdependence with others within our communities.

By nature, writing centers are radically relational, interdependent sites, intricately bound to those with whom we work and to our institutions. Although

institutional ethnography begins in the individual material experience of work—because it asks the researcher to understand how that individual's work coordinates with other work within the institution—the researcher can map the perceptions of work as a wider landscape than the individual perspective. This is perhaps the greatest benefit I see for those of us in writing center work. Although our work is relational work, our narratives of how the institution misperceives us, how others just do not understand what we do—thinking that we are a "fix-it shop" or only work with developmental students, for example—can lead to a victim narrative. As a methodology, institutional ethnography insists on radical relationality, an awareness that our work exists interdependently with others. Through the coordination of our narratives, we resist falling into the victim role and better advocate for ourselves and for others.

Conclusion

In her 2015 National Conference on Peer Tutoring and Writing keynote, Jackie Grutsch McKinney challenged those of us in writing center work to do more qualitative research. Qualitative research, she says, provides the "best methods to study writing ecologies" and to uncover "the messy realities" of our work, allowing them to be "captured and documented" ("On Elephants"). Institutional ethnography, a methodology that asks us to imagine the radical relationality of our work, to begin in the material experiences of labor, and to "look up," provides the deep thinking necessary to begin systematically mapping those ecologies. My research study began with my own "looking up" to realize that my perception of writing center work, shaped both by my own knowledge and experience and by the work documents I had been given, did not match the perceptions of others within my institution. Through interview and textual analysis, I was able to map how those perceptions came into existence. I then extended my study to additional institutions, creating a more intricate map of the how writing center work coordinates within our institutions, and, more specifically, how we can develop interdependence with our institutions and with the other writing programs at our institutions.

Throughout my study, over and over, I heard the importance of telling our narrative of what writing center work is and what it is not. In addition, our narratives of the actual work we do must be coordinated with the needs of our institutions and must be coordinated with other narratives of work at our institutions. By using IE to map our work, we can better articulate what we understand our purpose to be

and better articulate our programs as interdependent. I end this article with a personal application of how I have used this mapping at my own institution. Last year, I was contacted by our development office. They had a potential donor interested in helping STEM students become better writers at our institution. Because of my IE research, because I had seen the importance of recognizing the boundedness with other writing programs, I knew that ultimately, for the Writing Center to better support STEM students, our institution needed to better support writing in the STEM curriculum. I created a map of the programs for the donor to illustrate how I envisioned the different writing sites on campus working together to create a culture of writing for our STEM students (See Fig. 1 in Appendix).

I wish I could tell you we received a donation to support a full-fledged Writing Across the University program as I hoped for. We did not. I wish I could tell you everyone I speak to now understands the interdependence of writing programs. They do not. More do than previously, however, and we did receive funding for an Assistant Director in the Writing Center to assist me in building relationship with STEM faculty, faculty grants for those willing to work with us to begin developing upper division writing intensive courses, and funding for technical writing, which is a part of our General Education program. These are steps. I hope they are steps toward a recognition of the importance of the different writing sites in supporting writing throughout our students' experiences. As I continue to use the maps in conversations with our President, Provost, Deans, and faculty, narrating how the work of writing sites coordinate with one another and with the institution to create a culture of writing at our institution, I am narrating our boundedness, our interdependence. And I am listening. Through these maps, my hope is that those of us within writing and within our institution become a "unified political entity," "promoting the way we think about writing in matters such as agency. . . across the institution" (personal interviews).

Notes

1. For example, see Alice Myatt and Lynée Gaillet's (2017) *Writing Program and Writing Center Collaborations: Transcending Boundaries*, Jane Nelson and Garner, M. (2001). "Horizontal structures for learning," or Michael Pemberton's (1995) "Rethinking the WAC/Writing Center Connection."
2. For a more in-depth overview of institutional ethnography as methodology, including how it differs

from other forms of ethnography, see LaFrance and Nicolas's (2012) "Institutional Ethnography as Materialist Framework for Writing Program Research and the Faculty-Staff Work Standpoints Project," or Michelle Miley's (2017) "Looking Up: Mapping Writing Center Work through Institutional Ethnography."

3. For ethnographic studies of workplace culture in professional and technical writing, see Jim Henry's *Writing Workplace Cultures: An Archaeology of Professional Writing* (2000), and Brenton D. Faber's *Community Action and Organizational Change: Image, Narrative, Identity* (2002).

4. In an early draft of this article, one reviewer noted a hesitancy in using the terms dependent, independent, and interdependent, noting that in reality, programs most likely continually shift through these positions. I appreciate their comment. It is right to acknowledge that these positions are rarely static. I believe, however, that by acknowledging how our work coordinates across programs, and by advocating for interdependence, we move towards a more conscious articulation of what each program offers, towards greater reciprocity, and towards better advocacy for all writing sites at our institutions.

5. Recent examples of studies examining institutional placement of writing centers and/or writing center professionals include Harry Denny and Anne Geller's (2013) "Of Ladybugs, Low Status, and Loving the Job: Writing Center Professionals Navigating Their Careers," Michelle LaFrance and Melissa Nicolas's (2013) "What's Your Frequency?: Preliminary Results of a Survey on Faculty and Staff Perspectives on Writing Center Work," and Lori Salem's (2015) "Opportunity and Transformation: How Writing Centers are Positioned in the United States."

6. Writing centers, with their roots in social constructivism, are particularly attuned to our boundedness with institutions and individuals. IE provides a methodology for us to study a particular aspect, how work gets done within our social webs.

7. All interviews and campus visits were conducted between October 2014 and May 2015.

8. The creation story of one of writing centers I visited is that one individual, still directing the Center twenty plus years later, went to the then Chair of English and simply said, "We need a writing center." The interviews from this institution, however, revealed a much more complex origin, one that situates the student writing center emerging "out of [the institution's] thinking about the function of writing or various forms of literate practice for individuals and groups of people" (personal interview).

9. At the time I visited, the Writing Center Director was relatively new. Although the institution had talked about creating a tenure line for the Director when the previous administrator left, they had decided against it. The Director was therefore in a professional rather than faculty position.

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Appendix A

Figure 1: Map of Writing Programs Developed for Donor

Provides support to faculty from across the disciplines in developing and teaching writing intensive courses integrated into disciplinary content courses. (Currently not an official program.)

Writing Across the University

Provides a foundation in writing through general education courses:
- WRIT 101: College Writing I
- WRIT 201: College Writing II
- WRIT 221: Intermediate Technical Communications

Writing Acros the University curricular support

Creating a Culture of Writing for Students

Writing Across the University student support

Gen Ed Writing Program

CORE Writing student support

Writing Center

Provides support to student writers through one-on-one tutoring, writing groups, workshops, class presentations, and course partnerships.