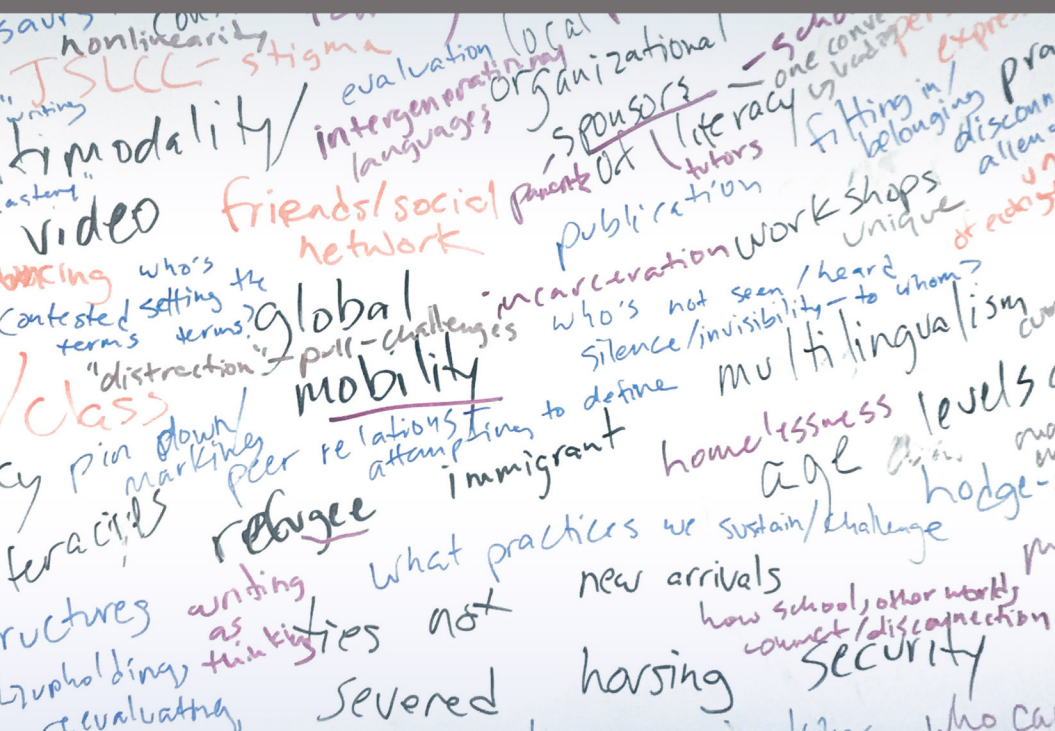


# Transfer in an Urban Writing Ecology

REIMAGINING COMMUNITY COLLEGE–UNIVERSITY RELATIONS IN COMPOSITION STUDIES



**Christie Toth**

with Joanne Castillo, Nic Contreras, Kelly Corbray, Nathan Lacy,  
Westin Porter, Sandra Salazar-Hernandez, and Colleagues

## CCCC STUDIES IN WRITING & RHETORIC

*Edited by Steve Parks, University of Virginia*



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## FOREWORD

FIVE YEARS AGO, DR. CHRISTIE TOTH arrived in Salt Lake City. I met her first at a dinner during her on-campus visit, and then, a few months later, at a local brewery where she had asked a group of Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) faculty to meet with her. I didn't quite know what to make of Christie: a *scholar of two-year college writing studies*; and I didn't quite know how I felt about my profession being the subject of her research. Christie was kind, certainly, and respectful, as she moved and spoke with enthusiasm and possibility, but I was leery, nonetheless. I didn't trust the University of Utah ("U of U") to do right by SLCC.

As this book sweepingly documents, my initial response to Christie's entrance into SLCC's institutional ecology was not surprising. Relations between two-year colleges and their four-year or university "partners" are often tenuous and can break down into suspicion and disregard if not tended with care. Readers will know that this dysfunction is not isolated to the local; it has long shaped the fields of composition and writing studies, despite its being called to account from time to time (see all entries by Andelora in Works Cited).

So, I kept to the side, while Christie built relationships with my colleagues in the English, Linguistics, and Writing Studies (ELWS) department. They sought to take on the two-year-to-university transfer problem—also revealingly documented in this book's chapters—that deepens inequities in higher education. This was the heart of the institutional web, a space my years in community writing had taught me to avoid so as not to be "subsumed by it" (Dobrin and Weisser). My work, former and current, has long resided in the "'gaps' and 'fissures' of the social terrain in order to support 'alternative' alliances and collective possibilities" (Parks, *Gravyland* 32). Christie, and the others in this book, were headed

to the center of the web, to its “connective spaces” where the strands meet: “the intersections and ‘crossroads’ that require change . . . [and call] forth possibilities” (Rousculp, *Rhetoric* xvii). They sought to change how students moved through, and too often got stuck in, the connective spaces of institutional transfer.

In the pages that follow, you’ll read how they did it. Not only did the students and faculty from the SLCC ELWS and U of U Writing and Rhetoric Studies departments change their relationships and pathways, they did so in a way that, I believe, is replicable for other institutions. Certainly, local moments of fortune and good timing have played and continue to play a part in their success, as they must in all efforts to reshape structures, but the SLCC–U Partnerships in Writing Studies is more than a newly formed strand in the institutional web. Rather than being subsumed by that web, the principles that emerged from their work now serve as the foundation for other SLCC–U transfer projects that are currently underway. This authentic partnership has transformed the web itself.

A few months ago, I met with Christie at a hole-in-the-strip-mall to eat and talk about her manuscript. I now know what to make of her. She’s not only a university-based scholar of two-year-college writing studies; she is the embodiment of interinstitutional functionality and potential. I invite all of you, regardless of which web you navigate (two-year, four-year, or university), to enter this book with trust, and to learn from Christie, the students, and the SLCC and U of U faculty colleagues here in Salt Lake City.

Tiffany Rousculp  
Professor, Salt Lake Community College  
Summer 2022

## START HERE: REIMAGINING RELATIONS

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT COMMUNITY college transfer. I was not a transfer student, nor am I currently employed at a community college: I'm a tenure-track faculty member at a research university, which means I'll have to work to earn some readers' trust. Taking up a long intellectual tradition among two-year college<sup>1</sup> writing faculty, I'm seeking to challenge the university-centrism of composition studies. This goal is born of my broad ambivalence about the academy and my specific frustrations with this would-be discipline. I'm frustrated by the persistent underrepresentation of two-year colleges in its knowledge making and their near-invisibility in most of its graduate programs. I'm frustrated by the frequent marginalization of two-year college faculty in its professional spaces. And I'm beyond frustrated—I'm angry—about how it often fails to meet its responsibilities to two-year college students, both before and after they transfer. This book amounts to a case study of my attempts to address these inequities from my position as a professor in a department of writing and rhetoric studies.

When I first began studying composition at Portland State University in 2006, my goal was to teach at a local community college, and all my subsequent academic labor has been shaped by that aspiration. I interned at Portland Community College, researched the writing experiences of community college transfer students for my master's thesis, and went on to adjunct at Clackamas Community College and later Diné College, the associate's- and bachelor's-degree-granting tribal college founded as Navajo Community College where I did dissertation research. In 2009, I entered a doctoral program at the University of Michigan (UM) still planning to teach at a community college. At UM, I worked on research teams investigating the post-transfer experiences of community college students and developed a study of two-year

college faculty professional engagement that connected me with mentors in the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA). When I went on the job market in fall 2013, however, I followed the path laid out by my graduate program and applied for positions at four-year institutions. That choice involved complex emotions and competing values, but it was grounded in a sincere belief that challenging the disciplinary marginalization of two-year colleges required committed university-based colleagues. The focus of this book—the writing experiences of community college transfer students—is thus the nexus of the career I thought I was pursuing over a decade ago and where I find myself working today.

*Transfer in an Urban Writing Ecology: Reimagining Community College–University Relations in Composition Studies* emerges from teaching and research I undertook with many collaborators between 2015 and 2021, my junior faculty years in the University of Utah’s Department of Writing and Rhetoric Studies (WRS). I’ve experienced these years as a fraught experiment, an uncertain attempt to enact disciplinarity in ways that account to and for two-year colleges. At the national level, I’ve worked with TYCA colleagues on white papers and position statements, research projects, and professional development resources. I’ve sought to produce scholarship useful for making change at both local and disciplinary levels and tried to amplify two-year college voices in professional spaces where they might otherwise be ignored. Over these years, I’ve also become committed to researching, teaching, developing programs, and writing with community college transfer students.

As a scholar, I am primarily in conversation with *two-year college writing studies*—or, as Darin Jensen, Emily Suh, and Joanne Baird Giordano are teaching me to call it, two-year college *literacy studies* (Suh and Jensen; Jensen and Giordano)—a transdisciplinary field to which I am intellectually responsible and in which I am always a guest. Sometimes I’ve been a lousy guest, most often when I have failed to maintain awareness of how my interactions are being shaped by my privileges as a middle-class white woman in a tenure-track university position. In their introduction to *Working toward*

*Racial Equity in First-Year Composition* (DeLong et al. 4–6), Taiyon Coleman and colleagues discuss my failed 2016 attempt to coedit a collection on race in two-year college writing instruction. They refrain from naming me directly, but I owe them the accountability of a public apology. I am sorry, which does not undo the harm. At the time, I thought I was using my position to advance the conversation they initiated in their article “The Risky Business of Engaging Racial Equity in Writing Instruction.” However, through a series of whitely missteps exacerbated by my position at a university, I perpetrated academic colonization. I failed to navigate the racialized power dynamics of cross-sector scholarly publication ethically, and my failure reinscribed harmful community college–university relations in composition studies.

Six years later, I hope I’m wiser. I’m certainly slower, more cautious about publication, more circumspect about what and how I might contribute to conversations in two-year college literacy studies. I am aware that my scholarly collaborations with TYCA leaders do not automatically confer trust, nor do they make me an insider. I have counterhegemonic commitments to community college writing instruction that sometimes feel unwelcome in university spaces, but two-year college colleagues might understandably suspect that my interest is academic careerism. Because of who I am and who currently employs me, I must have a more compelling reason to write than “There’s a gap in the literature.” One way I have acted from this awareness is by focusing on inequities that can only be addressed through collaboration between community college and university colleagues. Transfer is one such issue, as is the status of two-year colleges in disciplinary knowledge making and graduate education.

This book chronicles—and, I hope, enacts—what I think I’ve learned so far about community college–university relations in composition studies, and what those relations mean for the students who move between our institutions. Along the way, my collaborations with community college faculty and students have shaped my reasons for staying at my university, as well as my understanding of the responsibilities stemming from that choice.

While I'm not always comfortable with where my path has brought me, my journey-so-far leads me to believe that valuable work can be done from this position, and there is much work yet to do.

#### A CHRONICLE OF "HIGHER" EDUCATION

Here is the story we tell in this book. In 2014, I joined the faculty of the new WRS department at the University of Utah ("the U"). Shortly thereafter I began working with several faculty colleagues and a team of students from Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) to expand writing-related opportunities for transfer students. In 2015, the team conducted a mixed-method study of transfer student writing experiences at the U. This research helped us develop a local portrait of the unique capacities SLCC transfer students bring to writing and institutional barriers hindering their ability to achieve their goals.

Through this research, we identified two groups of SLCC transfer student writers to whom our interinstitutional disciplinary community had distinct responsibilities: those transferring into any U major and those pursuing a WRS degree. To address these responsibilities, we developed two new writing courses. The first is WRTG 3020: Write4U, a "writing-in-and-against-the-disciplines" course for transfer students in all majors that fulfills the U's upper-division writing requirement. The second course, WRTG 3030: Writing across Locations, is a co-taught summer bridge course for SLCC students considering the WRS major, minor, or certificate in professional and technical writing. Launched in 2016–17, both courses take an antideficit approach informed by the framework for *transfer receptive culture* developed by critical higher education scholars Dimpal Jain, Alfred Herrera, Santiago Bernal Melendez, Daniel Solorzano, and Iris Lucero. The courses value transfer students' identities, languages, literacies, and rhetorical capacities while encouraging critical transformation of disciplinary discourses dominated by white, colonial ways of knowing and languaging. Both courses are offered for free to prospective transfer students at SLCC.

Courses alone, however, cannot dismantle the barriers many transfer students face. Countering the inequities of community



college transfer requires a combination of academic, social, and material support. Since 2017, we have developed a support program for SLCC students transferring into the WRS major, minor, and certificate called Writing Studies Scholars (WSS). With input from dozens of transfer students and funding from local foundations, WSS now provides the following:

- Pre- and post-transfer advising and mentorship
- A \$2,000 transition scholarship
- Additional completion scholarships as needed
- A free one-credit study group each semester
- Monthly get-togethers, workshops, and online events
- Paid opportunities to work as co-researchers, co-teachers, and program co-developers
- Career coaching
- A network of WSS alumni

WSS has fostered a more diverse student community in WRS, become part of the department's institutional profile, and influenced transfer initiatives in other departments. Some Writing Studies Scholars have become forceful advocates for transfer students, influencing U policies and practices.

Supporting transfer students required reimagining how we related to one another across institutions; reimagining those relations has changed our local disciplinary ecology in ways I could not have anticipated at the outset. In 2018, for example, SLCC colleagues launched a stand-alone AS degree in writing studies. This program fosters community and enables WRS to connect with prospective students much earlier in their educational journeys. In 2019, SLCC changed the name of the “English” department to “English, Linguistics, and Writing Studies” (ELWS). Our collaborations have created new research and teaching opportunities for U graduate students, facilitating multiple dissertation projects and leading to the development of our Community College Professional Apprenticeship program in 2019–20. We have also developed a range of collaborative faculty professional development activities,

including interinstitutional reading groups and an online symposium on interinstitutional transfer and writing centers.

In 2022, the story is still being written. The COVID pandemic intensified the material and emotional strain on already overextended transfer students, particularly immigrants, students of color, LGBTQIA+ students, students with disabilities, and students with family caretaking responsibilities. The Salt Lake Valley's rapid population growth has fueled a crisis-level housing shortage and skyrocketing cost of living; enrollments at SLCC are down while the U scrambles to serve a record number of admits. The outcome of the 2020 elections created an opening to improve funding structures for postsecondary education, but economic uncertainty and the looming midterms make much-needed reforms unlikely. We face massive turnover among staff and administrators at both SLCC and the U who were key supporters of our disciplinary transfer collaborations. Perhaps the publication of this book marks the end of the beginning of our attempt to reimagine community college–university relations in the Salt Lake Valley. Understanding that beginning requires examining specificities of our local institutional and disciplinary contexts.

#### COMPOSITION AT THE U

The U is the state's "flagship" research institution, and, as administrators often remind us, now a member of the PAC-12 and the Association of American Universities. It attracts a growing number of students from out of state and is pushing to increase undergraduate enrollment from twenty-five thousand to forty thousand by the end of the decade. With its new Utah Asia Campus (UAC) in South Korea and microcampuses elsewhere in Asia, the U is seeking to establish itself as a global research university. My first day on the faculty was WRS's first day as an independent department. Our story has been shaped by the resources and constraints of an R-1 institution striving to elevate its status in the academic "marketplace," as well as the possibilities of a new department figuring out what it might become.

WRS evolved from the University Writing Program (UWP), which was established in 1984 to oversee first-year writing and

came to offer upper-division courses supporting student writers across the disciplines. UWP was an independent unit led by faculty appointed to the departments of English and Communication. Over the years, several prominent composition scholars were associated with UWP, including Susan Miller, Tom Huckin, Maureen Mathison, Raúl Sánchez, Jay Jordan, and Casey Boyle. In 1993, UWP began offering interdisciplinary master's and PhD programs in rhetoric and composition admitted through English, Communication, or Education. During the 2002–03 academic year, the UWP established the University Writing Center and a minor in literacy studies. It launched the WRS major and a revamped minor in 2013. The U has a long history of composition studies, but new disciplinary possibilities emerged through the 2010s.

The independent WRS department was approved by the University in 2014. That fall, we had twenty-five undergraduates in the major, four tenure-track faculty, and seven career-line colleagues. By 2021, we had grown to nearly one hundred majors, more than half of whom were transfer students, with ten tenure-line faculty and eight career-line colleagues. This larger faculty is more diverse—racially, culturally, linguistically, and in interdisciplinary expertise. We offer the WRS minor at the UAC, the major at the U's Sandy campus, and the new certificate in professional and technical writing on the main campus. Our graduate programs are now fully under our department's auspices, and we are working toward offering our major online and at the new joint SLCC-U facility at SLCC's Herriman campus. The department is “always in the process of becoming” (Syverson 6); what we are becoming is being shaped, in part, by our relations with SLCC.

When WRS launched, there were already longstanding relations between the English departments at SLCC and the U, and those histories came with baggage. Most notorious was “The Great Credit Grab of 1997,” which took place when the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) shifted from quarters to semesters. During that process, the U English department renumbered several 2000-level courses to 3000-level, which meant those courses could no longer be offered at SLCC. This move, a “grab” for student credit hours, signaled skepticism about the rigor of SLCC courses and took

away literature courses SLCC faculty enjoyed teaching. Memory of the Great Credit Grab, compounded by other slights and insults, animated SLCC faculty members' resentment of university elitism for decades (Ruffus and Toth).

Until 2016, when USHE began pushing for transfer system-wide "pathways," there was little incentive at either institution to bridge these rifts. By state mandate, the required first-year writing courses—ENGL 1010 and 2010—articulate across all public institutions, but each college or university has freedom to design curriculum relevant to its mission, students, and degree offerings. While Eli Goldblatt might suggest that such conditions work against "deep alignment" of regional writing curricula (84), this autonomy enabled composition studies to flourish at SLCC in distinct ways.

#### COMPOSITION AT SLCC

SLCC enrolls more than thirty-four thousand students across ten campuses and high school programs, and its faculty have long engaged critically and creatively with knowledge making in composition. Its longstanding Writing Certificate of Completion—now the Writing Certificate of Proficiency—focuses on professional writing. Since 2014, Tiffany Rousculp has headed the Writing across the College initiative to support the writing practices of SLCC faculty and staff as well as students ("Everyone"). Beginning in 2015, full- and part-time SLCC writing faculty and students have worked to create OpenEnglish@SLCC, a locally responsive Open Educational Resource organized around department threshold concepts in writing used by composition faculty across the country (Blankenship et al.; Jory)—we use selections from OpenEnglish@SLCC in several courses at the U.

SLCC faculty have also made Salt Lake a national hub for writing center studies. They established one of the first community college writing centers, now called the Student Writing and Reading Center (SWRC), which has been directed by Clint Gardner since 1990 (Gardner, "Centering"; "Our"; Gardner and Rousculp). In 2001, Rousculp cofounded the Community Writing Center (CWC), subsequently directed by Andrea Malouf, Melissa Helquist, and Kati

Lewis, which provides writing coaching for community members, facilitates workshops with community partners, and publishes community writing (Rousculp, “Connecting” and “When”; *Rhetoric*). Both writing centers are staffed by SLCC and U students who develop programming and present at conferences. In 2008, Lisa Bickmore and Charlotte Howe launched SLCC’s Publication Center, where students can gain experience with a range of print and digital publishing technologies. The Pub Center supports an annual cycle of student-authored publications and in 2018 hosted a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute on the history and future of the book. Through these programs, SLCC students have more hands-on writing-related opportunities than most lower-division undergraduates at the U.

SLCC faculty are also highly engaged in the regional and national composition community. They fill key leadership roles in TYCA-West and regularly host its annual conference. SLCC faculty have been officers in National TYCA, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and they also participate in the International Writing Center Association (IWCA), the Coalition for Community Writing (CCW), the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, the Rocky Mountain Writing Center Association, and the Rhetoric Society of America. They have published in composition collections and journals, and Rousculp’s 2014 monograph, *Rhetoric of Respect: Recognizing Change at a Community Writing Center* was published by SWR and won the IWCA Outstanding Book Award. SLCC has received four TYCA Outstanding Programs in English awards and two CCCC Writing Program Certificates of Excellence. In sum, there has been a lot of composition studies happening at SLCC for a long time, much of which would not have been possible in the academic culture and reward structures of a research university.

#### IT TAKES AN ECOLOGY

Despite striving for global status, the U is still a commuter campus dependent on transfer students—the majority of whom come from

SLCC—to constitute a third of its undergraduates. As I discuss in Chapter 3, SLCC transfer students account for a disproportionate share of Latinx, Black, Native American, and Pacific Islander undergraduates at the U. However, transfer from SLCC to the U declined through the 2010s, even as the region’s population grew, the Salt Lake Valley became less predominantly white, and SLCC’s student body became more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse.

The reasons for this decline are complex. A robust local economy attracted some students into the workforce. Transfer rates to the U have also been impacted by the growth of Utah Valley University (UVU), a community college-turned-university in neighboring Utah County. I have deep respect for UVU’s access mission, but it receives less per-pupil funding from the state than does the U, it has lower degree-completion rates, and its alumni network does not offer the same connections to local, national, and transnational power structures. Declining transfer from SLCC to the U means students in the Salt Lake Valley, a growing percentage of whom are students of color, might be diverted away from the best-resourced transfer destination in the region. Supporting transfer students has been a priority of the U’s Center for Equity and Student Belonging (CESB), TRiO Program, Dream Center, and School for Cultural and Social Transformation (TRANSFORM). However, these efforts have not always received the recognition or resources they deserve. Some academic units on campus have looked down on transfer students; many have taken them for granted.

My collaborators and I have sought to hold the U accountable to its oft-stated goal of being “the University *for* Utah.” While I don’t think global and local commitments are inherently at odds, I want to ensure that the U’s aspirations don’t foreclose access to the state’s best-resourced public institution for the diverse residents of the Salt Lake Valley. Many local students enter postsecondary education via SLCC, and many more would come to the U if they could afford it and felt welcome. I want WRS to play a meaningful role in *broadening* local access to the U, particularly for low-income and working-class students, immigrants and their children, and communities of color long structured out. My own commitments

matter little, however, in an elitist academic culture that calculates value based on how many students an institution recruits from afar or turns away. Fortunately, several converging factors helped create favorable conditions for reimagining our interinstitutional disciplinary relations around a shared commitment to expanding educational opportunities for community college transfer students.

The first was the fresh start we got WRS. Credit articulation for first-year writing courses is the usual exigence for interactions across two- and four-year English departments. Those interactions often devolve into turf battles over curriculum and enrollment. Becoming a new department created a different basis for interinstitutional collaboration. While WRS is responsible for first-year writing, it was no longer existentially concerned about maintaining enrollment in 1010 and 2010. To survive as a department, it needed to grow the major, and SLCC was fostering interest in writing among many prospective students. The benefits of major-based partnerships were reciprocal. A clear “pathway” to WRS provided exigence for SLCC colleagues to create a new AS degree in writing studies. That degree became an opportunity to develop new 2000-level writing courses at SLCC that articulated into the WRS major: a gratifying reversal of the Great Credit Grab.

The second factor was supportive leadership and faculty colleagues at the U. Essential to reimagining our disciplinary relationships were three consecutive WRS department chairs who “got it”: Maureen Mathison, Jay Jordan, and LuMing Mao. Also essential were WRS faculty who contributed directly to teaching and mentoring WSS students: Jenny Andrus, Nona Brown, José Cortez, Samah Elbelazi, Kendall Gerdes, David Hawkins-Jacinto, Tracey Daniels-Lerberg, Joy Pierce, Natalie Stillman-Webb, Jon Stone, Hua Zhu, and especially Romeo García. Leaders in the College of Humanities Dean’s Office like Taunya Dressler, Diane Harris, and Stuart Culver, as well as Office of Undergraduate Studies (UGS) leaders Marti Bradley, Anne Darling, and Jim Agutter, provided funding and visibility for our transfer programs. By the time Ruth Watkins assumed the U presidency in 2018, with “transfer student success” as part of her institutional “roadmap,”



our interinstitutional disciplinary partnerships were already well underway.

The third factor was the vision and grace of my SLCC faculty colleagues. Particularly key were Brandon Alva, Lisa Bickmore, Chris Blankenship, Anne Canavan, Nathan Cole, Jennifer Courtney, Clint Gardner, Jerri Harwell, Charlotte Howe, Justin Jory, Kati Lewis, Alice Lopez, Stephanie Maenhardt, Andrea Malouf, Bernice Olivas, Tiffany Rousculp, and Stephen Ruffus. They mentored me through my many mistakes, advocated for our partnerships with their administrators, helped me navigate unfamiliar college bureaucracies, introduced me to their students, and invited me to campus events. They taught, presented at conferences, and wrote with me. Much of this labor was beyond their job descriptions and institutional reward structures; they redefined their professional roles to encompass these partnerships.

The fourth essential factor was the labor of staff at SLCC and the U who helped us connect with and support students. At SLCC, academic advisors Sidney Brown, Philip Asosike, and especially Luz Gamarra helped many students find our transfer programs. The staff and student organizations in SLCC's Office for Diversity and Multicultural Affairs (ODMA) allowed us to table at events and shared information about our programs. At the U, we relied on WRS academic advisor Lisa Shaw, Transfer Center advisor Terese Pratt, and CESB advisors Paul Fisk and Martha Hernandez. Paul and Martha helped many, many transfer students in WSS navigate oppressive bureaucracies. Alonso Reyna Rivarola and Xris Macias at the U's Dream Center and Brenda Santoyo at SLCC's Dream Center provided essential mentorship and advising for DACA and unDACAmented students in our programs. Over the years, staff in the U's Women's Resource Center, LGBT Resource Center, Center for Disability and Access, Student Success Coaches, TRiO, Office of Undergraduate Research, MUSE Scholars Program, and Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion also supported WSS students. College of Humanities Internship Coordinator Ned Khatrichettri and Career Coach Megan Randall became the WSS career team, and Donna Ziegenfuss and Dale Larson created dedicated library

resources for transfer student writers. Mark St. Andre and Beth Howard in UGS were important institutional advocates, and College of Humanities Development officers Lindsay and Lexie Kite were fierce and ambitious fundraisers. WRS Administrative Manager Polly Light managed program finances, and WRS executive secretaries Andrea Pischnotte, Kris Hirschbeck, and Kelli Borrowman provided logistical support. These colleagues were essential collaborators in the intellectual and programmatic work this book documents.

Finally, students were key agents in reimagining our local disciplinary ecology. Every transfer student who participated in these programs contributed to shaping them. Many played formal roles on the transfer team: reading and discussing scholarship; helping design studies; collecting and analyzing data; presenting to campus leadership and at conferences; creating recruitment materials; connecting with prospective transfer students; building web content; designing curricula; co-teaching courses; working with peers in the summer writing studio; advocating for transfer students on the U campus; communicating with donors and community partners; supporting one another; telling me when I was messing up; pushing our departments to do and be better. They also wrote with me, both as coauthors and by offering feedback on parts of this book that tenure criteria required I write “alone.”

Some of these student collaborators appear elsewhere in the book, and some are only named here, but burying them in the acknowledgments feels wrong: Katherine Allred, Tanya Alvarado, Natalia Anderson, Rita Anderson, Jem Ashton, Jarrod Barben, Sabita Bastakoti, Emily Beck, Jake Becker, Joanne Castillo, Nic Contreras, Kelly Corbray, Lisa Donaldson, Illise Ellsworth, Margarita Lafarga, Russ Fugal, Angie Gamarra, Kimberly Gamarra, Cassie Goff, Michael Goodman, Heather Graham, Kayden Groves, Cristina Guerrero Perez, Keyon Hejazi-Far, Kate Henderson, Victoria Hunter, Winnie Jenkins, Nathan Lacy, Oti Langi, Jose Loeri, Anthony Magro III, Rachel Mills, Joseph Moss, Matt Nepute, Lupita Porras, Wes Porter, Sam Rivera Aguilar, Sandra Salazar-Hernandez, Claudia Sauz Mendoza, Davor Simunovic, Jacque

Thetsombandith, Adi Tolentino, Rebecca Trusty, Andrea Valverde, Stephanie Weidauer, and Yazmín Zarate Sandoval. Several graduate students also made essential contributions to our transfer programs: Charissa Che, Shauna Edson, Nina Feng, Nkenna Onwuzuruoha, and Justin Whitney. This ecology of collaborators shaped the possibilities for reimagining disciplinary relations. Without them, there would be no book, and, really, no reason to write one.

#### PATHS THROUGH (AND BEYOND) THE BOOK

*Transfer in an Urban Writing Ecology* is an experimental text that combines student writing, personal reflection, and academic analysis to make meaning ecologically. It includes a polyvocal chapter coauthored with students; three chapters single-authored by me; textual artifacts and images; and reflections, responses, and mini-essays written by me, students, and faculty at both SLCC and the U. The book is arranged as three parts, with individual chapters separated by interstitials that open with a student-authored text, followed by my commentary on how that student's intellectual work contributed to our collective projects and the (now-graduated) student's 2021 response. "Part I: Polygraph" theorizes the ecological framework that has emerged through our collaborations. "Interstitial I: Nic's Theory of Mentorship" presents Nic Contreras's 2016 essay "Down the Rabbit Hole," a foundational influence on my approach to collaborative research with transfer students. It is followed by Chapter 1, "Composing Salt Lake's Writing Ecology," coauthored by me and six student co-researchers: Nic, Sandra Salazar-Hernandez, Westin Porter, Kelly Corbray, Claudia Sauz Mendoza, and Nathan Lacy. Taking up Rousculp's conceptualization of Salt Lake as a writing ecology, we tack between our individual, emplaced literacy experiences and scholarship in composition studies. The chapter cycles through six themes emerging from our consideration of Salt Lake's writing ecology: *relations, identities, valuing, motion, difference, and change*. We suggest decentering academic institutions in conversations about transfer to consider how our ecology is being continuously co-constituted through the mobility of students, their writing across

and beyond schools, and the lands on which we live and learn. In this ecological frame, writers at SLCC and the U are already interrelated. The question becomes how we cultivate our relations with intent to counter inequities and make positive change.

“Part II: Transfer-Conductive Disciplinary Ecologies” alternates between interstitials featuring texts by transfer student coauthors and single-authored chapters written by me. Each chapter takes a different methodological approach to the question of community college–university relations in composition studies and how we might reimagine those relations to expand opportunities for transfer students. “Interstitial II: Nate’s College Calculus,” opens with an artifact from Nathan Lacy’s college decision making that frames a discussion of the systemic inequities of transfer as an impetus for reimagining community college–university relations. It is followed by Chapter 2, “A Discipline Worth Being,” which situates this project within composition’s disciplinary turn. Observing that traditional notions of disciplinarity have marginalized two-year college faculty, I argue that composition studies must discipline differently. I historicize this argument through an examination of a century of fraught relations between two- and four-year composition faculty. I discuss recent efforts among two-year college faculty to assert a more inclusive disciplinary vision, culminating in the recent teacher-scholar-activist (re)turn, which calls on university-based composition scholars to enact solidarity with two-year college colleagues. I identify implications of these histories for reimagined relations in Salt Lake.

“Interstitial III: Claudia’s Theory of Writing” presents Claudia Sauz Mendoza’s essay “Reflexión” and describes how she shaped the pedagogical and political orientation of our transfer programs. It is followed by Chapter 3, “Toward Transfer-Conductive Writing Ecologies,” which puts critical higher education studies in conversation with scholarship in composition. I take up the concept of *transfer-receptive culture* and suggest a discipline-specific contribution: *transfer-conductive writing ecologies*. Such ecologies cultivate collaborative disciplinary relations across institutions that facilitate the physical, intellectual, and discursive mobility of

community college students. Transfer-conducive writing ecologies honor the diverse rhetorical capacities students bring from their personal and community experiences, embracing an antideficit orientation with a commitment to expanding educational opportunities for transfer students on something closer to their own terms. This chapter presents findings from our mixed-method study of transfer student writing experiences at the U that shaped the collaborative programs we developed.

“Interstitial IV: Joanne’s TYCA-West Keynote” presents Joanne Castillo’s speech “The Work beyond Access” and discusses what she taught me about reimagining local disciplinary relations to enact broader institutional change. It is followed by Chapter 4, “Pathways and Ecologies,” which describes the interinstitutional initiatives we developed to create a more transfer-conducive Salt Lake writing ecology. I discuss how we built on the findings of our local study and made strategic use of statewide policies pushing for transfer “pathways.” I narrate the emergence of our two transfer writing courses and the WSS program. The first four years of these collaborations produced unanticipated ecological change at the U, at SLCC, and within the discipline. Based on our experiences, I suggest that a university writing department operating from reimagined relations with community college faculty and students can use the affordances of disciplinarity to make meaningful change.

Part II concludes with “The End of the World as We Know It.” Reflecting from the vantage point of summer 2021, I take stock of our collective work. In 2020, the network of relations and material resources we cultivated helped WSS students weather the academic disruptions, economic challenges, and emotional difficulties of the COVID pandemic. However, it also made clear that persistent inequities in community college transfer cannot be countered by small, privately funded programs like WSS. We must consider how we can use our interinstitutional disciplinary relations—our writing ecology—to advance policies that enable all transfer student writers to thrive.

“Part III: Emergent Principles for Partnership” resists textual closure by presenting a collection of short essays by SLCC and U faculty, graduate students, and transfer students. In 2018, we

developed an interinstitutional vision statement: *Articulating SLCC-U Partnerships in Writing Studies: Reimagining Relations, Making Change*. This document identifies seven “Principles for Partnership” to guide our collaborations: *recognize inequities, be colleagues, value difference, center students, address material conditions, educate for social justice, and engage with communities*. Part III contributors respond to these principles—extending, complicating, and challenging them, and exploring implications for our local writing ecology and the futures we might imagine for composition studies. In ecological fashion, Part III grows beyond the print book in a living webtext. We are continuously expanding our collective thinking through new essays by faculty, staff, and student collaborators at <https://transferwritingecology.lib.utah.edu>.

#### NOT THE DESTINATION

This book is not the end of the path. It exists because I had to produce a tenure monograph, although we ended up calling it a “polygraph” because it seemed neither honest nor advisable to write such a book alone. I wouldn’t have produced a book if that weren’t the price of staying in my uncomfortable position. In 2017, as we were drafting Chapter 1, Nate offered what still seems to me like the best articulation of our project. “This book,” he wrote, is

but a byproduct of the real work that was done to make tangible differences, however large or small, in the lives of those we’ve interacted with during our research. I’m certainly proud of the work that went into it and hope it will be useful in some way to those who take the time to read it, but this book is not the goal, not the solution, not the thing that made change. However, like a long-term deposit, maybe it will be doing the work for us when we’re busy spinning plates elsewhere.

By the time you’re reading this, we’ll all be spinning other plates. This book is one push in a collective effort to reimagine community college–university relations in composition studies, our small contribution to the ongoing process of co-constituting a discipline worth being.





**PART I:  
POLYGRAPH**



# Interstitial I: Nic's Theory of Mentorship

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## Down the Rabbit Hole

IT'S THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL IN THE new country. I'm sitting on the frame of my dad's bike and trying to memorize how to say "Hola, mi nombre es Nicolas" in English. As I look at the road ahead I feel the wind whipping my face. I keep expecting to see the school around the next corner, or the next street. I don't know what it looks like. I don't know how far away we are from it, or from home. I'm trying my hardest to mouth out the words my dad taught me a few minutes earlier, words I heard only the night before, and keep the same rhythm throughout the sentence—I don't want people to know that I don't know a sixth word in English. That means no mumbling. No stuttering. No long spaces in between any of the words. Nothing that might indicate that I have to think about saying my own name. I figure, if I say this one sentence just right, they'll have no basis upon which to doubt me.

That was sixteen years ago.

Since then, I've moved five more times. I've learned how to relearn. I've learned how to move through new spaces. I've learned that if you ask the right questions, you'll get the right answers. I've learned that the right words can do a lot of that work for you. You just have to find them.

Early on in my life, perhaps even that same day on the bike, I realized that words have a great impact on our world (both internal and external). It's the reason we had such a hard time with the word "mentor" while writing this. It's the reason we have a problem with this rhetoric of deficit that surrounds community colleges and transfer students. It's the whole reason I'm in this **business** field to begin with. You see, some people think transfer students might not

be as good as other students. That we stand still, unsure of where we are or where we should go, in a state of paralysis, or crisis, or something. I think it might be quite the opposite. I'm not a big fan of absolutes, but I think we all *know* where we're going, or, at least, where we *aren't* going. My life's made it obvious that, if anything, you're not anywhere for very long. Things do make a lot more sense once you realize where you've been, however.

For example, a few days ago I was in the Salt Lake County Jail facilitating a creative writing workshop. Flash fiction, I think. Now, I don't know if what I do is mentorship—I wouldn't even really call myself a teacher—but I think explaining what I do there will help illustrate my point.

Every week I go to the jail and do my best to help our students understand and learn the day's material. The challenge is that no two classes are ever the same. Every week I go in there are different students. There's a different guard on duty (some nicer than others), and a different workshop to teach. The participants' lives are just as convoluted and strange as mine. And yes, there's transfer happening even here, in these holding units. Our students are moved around, they switch cells, pods, roommates, even facilities sometimes. Nevertheless, my job is more or less the same every week.

I go in, with my tote bag full of golf pencils, paper, and our curriculum, and I do my best to teach the workshop and explain materials as best I can to that day's class. I ask questions (as I've been taught to do by the Community Writing Center) and facilitate conversation. I use everything in the room to gauge what and how things need to be said to create the learning environment I'm looking for. Essentially, I try to meet them in the middle—wherever that is. This means I have to understand my position in relation to theirs. I don't always find their "bicycle story," but I know that some version of it is there, and that's good enough for me. I walk into these workshops with a simple idea in mind: that I can do something good for these students, as long as I work in conjunction with them, and not from a position of power. Not that I always have that position either—I've learned that too. Whether it's a good day at the jail, or a bad one, my time with these men and women always gives me something to take home.

It's amazing what happens when we leave our egos behind and approach each other as two travelers should—with understanding. We live better. I'm humbled by the knowledge my students bring, and they by mine. It's reflexive. It creates dialogue and mutual respect. It also means I am constantly revising my analogies, my linguistic choices, my curriculum—my entire approach, really—to better fit the students of the day. I do the same thing in my other classrooms—the ones at the college and university. I mean, it's the nature of the place, right? Or of the job? The beast, maybe.

Truth is, I often struggle to find the right metaphor for transfer. Are transfer students pinballs ricocheting across the educational board? Or are we more like commuters with great knowledge of the public transit system? Does that make literacy sponsors pinball wizards or bus drivers? Our research team has a joke about us all being rabbits in lab coats—you know, transfer students studying transfer students. That might be the most appropriate metaphor. I think that effectively makes me both the joker and the punchline, too. And while it can be hard explaining our study to people I meet, I never get angry. Just as I never get angry when people ask me where I'm from. I just find it funny. People I meet know I'm not from here, whether I be at the university or on the street by my house. I can tell by the way they ask. "Where are you *from*?" they say. The joke is: I don't know anymore. I've moved around so much that I can only identify with transfer really. Ironically, it's been the only constant in my life: living in between places, between the lines. It can get confusing, but I think it's probably because I haven't found the right words yet. As I mentioned, that's part of the game.

The important thing to remember here is the goal. It's simple: help someone learn something new in a way that is engaging—and, if possible, fun. I find that this works best when I use my knowledge in conjunction with theirs, and I've learned that from my own mentors. It's in those rare moments where two people stop and share with each other that knowledge is made, that a connection sparks—whether it be in a jail or in an office. I find that you learn more about yourself through your other (I have Jacques to thank for that). No two paths are alike, as my coauthors have shown,

which is why my favorite mentors, the ones who have helped me the most, have been the ones who stop to listen, assess, and adapt—it strikes me that they must be transfer students too, in a way. It inspires me to do the same with the people I meet.

As I journey through the academy, and the world at large, mentors find ways to bridge people and situations together. Sometimes they help you make sense of an assignment; sometimes they help you make sense of your life. Sometimes they put you back on that bike. All I can hope for is to do the same with my work. Essentially, I become that bridge, and I think that's really what our study and work is all about. We're working hard to connect two schools and their students who have been wading the waters of transfer alone.

I think that's what makes this study so important. It provides sponsorship to us, transfer students, and also serves to bridge the socioeconomic barriers between these two schools—effectively creating more opportunities for future transfer students. Building this bridge is huge because it is a step in a direction that, although some would say is obviously beneficial, has rarely been taken. I never quite understood why; I saw both of these schools as part of the same group. A group dedicated to providing students with the best education possible—if you're reading this, that group probably includes you. So, why shouldn't we work together?

I hope our words will make clear that transfer can be positive. And also, that it can be negative. But that's not really the point. The point is understanding—understanding that you just might find yourself back on that bike tomorrow and that there're rabbits walking around in lab coats today. Get it?





*Christie Toth, Emily Beck, Shauna Edson, Nic Contreras, Wes Porter, and Nate Lacy at TYCA-West 2016 in Las Vegas. Photo credit: Charissa Che.*

Nic Contreras wrote “Down the Rabbit Hole” in fall 2016 as part of a collaboratively authored essay titled “Traveling Together: Rewriting Transfer Student Literacy Sponsorship.” His coauthors included four members of our transfer research team—me, Nate Lacy, Wes Porter, and Shauna Edson. The team spent the 2015–16 academic year researching transfer student writing experiences at the U, but this essay, written by invitation for the inaugural issue of the e-journal *Mentoring across Disciplines and Cultures*, was our first effort at composing together.

We developed our initial ideas as a presentation for TYCA-West in Las Vegas and spent the remainder of the semester writing and revising together. Even as we wrote ourselves into new and deeper relationships, the 2016 presidential election heightened longstanding dangers faced by Nic and other students who were denied access to US citizenship. Composing together amid that cataclysm deepened my awareness of my many privileges and subsequent responsibilities to these fellow travelers.



I am, in varying ways, different from my student coauthors, and many of those differences have conferred unearned, compounding advantages over the course of my life. I was born a citizen of the United States, the white cis daughter of two career military officers. I grew up in late-twentieth-century military communities with well-funded schools. I scored high on assessments that privileged my family's white, middle-class languaging and literacy practices, and I attended a private liberal arts college right after high school. While I no longer identify as straight, I've been married to a white cis man since 2009. I have a terminal degree and a job with health insurance. While those advantages have put me in the institutional position to “mentor” transfer students, my coauthors are the experts on the phenomena we have researched and written about.

Our academic collaborations are fraught with the risk of white saviorism, so let me say this as clearly as I can: *Being white and middle-class makes me bad at this work*. There is much I don't know, and there are many reasons for students—particularly working-class students, BIPOC students, undocumented students—not to trust someone who looks and talks like me. The purpose of our transfer projects is not to magnanimously grant community college students access to an elite university education, but rather to try to change the structures of that education in deep collaboration with students who are marginalized by academic “business as usual.” As Dimpal Jain and colleagues write in *Power to the Transfer*, “In terms of policy and practice as related to transfer, students of color should not merely be consulted; rather their voices should be an integral part of the decision-making process” (24). My student coauthors have been integral collaborators researching and voicing transfer student writing experiences, developing supports that counter the inequities they face, and making institutional change. This book could not, would not, and should not have been written without them.

As Nic observes, the phrase “rabbits in lab coats” became a running joke on the team. To me, the joke signaled my coauthors' awareness of the power differentials between researcher and researched as well as between professor and student, heightened and complicated by our other differences. It foregrounded the

sometimes uncomfortable in-betweenness of the roles we were negotiating from our different positions. I worked hard to be vulnerable: to acknowledge my power and privilege in this situation as well as the limits of my perspective and the fact that I screw up. During our research team meetings, I did the best I could to create spaces for everyone to speak, and to listen with intent, often functioning as the whiteboard note-taker so everyone could see—and, if necessary, correct—what was emerging through our conversations. While I didn't delude myself that it was possible to set aside the power asymmetries inherent in our positions, I strove to stay open to being changed by what these students knew, said, and wrote. And Nic's theorization of mentorship in "Down the Rabbit Hole" did change my understanding of what we were doing together: I felt, and feel, a keen responsibility to live up to his ideals. In our best moments, I hope our research team approached his vision of "dialogue" and "mutual respect," that we used our knowledges "in conjunction" with one another.

In some ways, that vision bumped up against the university's model of "undergraduate research," a competitive "opportunity" in which students learn to think, act, and write like professional academics. Nic's essay nudged me to self-consciously reject the replication model and prioritize the relationship-building aspect of our work together. As we grew and adapted, we found ways to involve everyone who said they wanted to be on the team, no application required, and valued their contributions in whatever form they took. These students' coursework, alongside-school responsibilities, and personal well-being were more important than "research," and our collective priority was supporting their efforts to achieve their goals. Roles on the team were flexible and open to ongoing negotiation: the important thing was sustaining our connections.<sup>2</sup>

One of my greatest trepidations throughout this project has been the risk of exploiting my co-researchers—all first-generation college students, many of them students of color—for my own professional gain. I could not disentangle this book from my tenure requirements and the fact that my future as a university

professor hinged on its publication. From the outset, I was open with my student coauthors about how our work together fit into the reward structures of the academy, how the neoliberal university commodifies intellectual labor and operates on a self-serving star system, and how I stood to benefit from our projects. I shared my discomfort and anger regarding that reality. I have tried to ensure that, whether the book ever made it to print, the work that went into it benefited SLCC transfer students: those who co-researched and coauthored the book, and those who came after.

Academically, the benefits for students included much of what is typically associated with undergraduate research: the learning that comes with reading and discussing published scholarship, collaboratively designing and conducting research, presenting at conferences, writing and revising together, and engaging in many critical and metarhetorical conversations along the way. Involvement in the project also contributed to students' efforts to complete their degrees. Student co-researchers had the option of enrolling for undergraduate research credits, which moved them closer to graduation and, in some cases, enabled them to carry enough credits to qualify for financial aid. We used university funds to travel to conferences in Houston, Las Vegas, Portland, Boulder, Louisville, Pittsburgh, and Reno. The conferences weren't always welcoming (or, frankly, interesting) to undergraduates, but they were an opportunity to raise the visibility of community college transfer in disciplinary spaces. More importantly, traveling and presenting together strengthened the students' relationships with one another.

The relationships students formed with one another were in many ways more crucial than their relationships with me. They created a loose but mutually sustaining community, supporting one another in and beyond classrooms in which they might otherwise feel isolated or minoritized. This community of co-researchers was the kernel for the Writing Studies Scholars program discussed in the preface and Chapter 4, which aims to cultivate and extend such relationships across SLCC and the U. As Nic writes, students became the bridge. They showed me that my job was to help

create the conditions under which they could forge and sustain connections with one another, and to engage my faculty colleagues in the never-complete work of becoming a department in which all students can feel as though they belong.

In feedback on a draft of this interstitial, Nic told me to hit this point hard: I always sought to ensure that student co-researchers benefitted *materially* from their contributions to these projects. Most were paid hourly wages for their labor, first through the U's Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP), MUSE Internship Program, and a University Teaching Grant, and then through foundation grants, at which point I was able to raise their pay from twelve to fifteen dollars an hour. When the first external grant arrived in 2017, we awarded all still-enrolled transfer students on the team two-thousand-dollar scholarships. With the help of colleagues across campus, I found ways to secure additional scholarship funding for those who needed it to complete their degrees. I've tried to use what social and cultural capital I possess to support these co-researchers' academic and professional goals. I've written letters of recommendation and served as a reference for scholarships, employment, and graduate school. I still send them position announcements. They have reciprocated by sending me opportunities from their workplaces to share with current WSS students.

I've also tried to ensure that proceeds from this research benefit transfer students long-term. I promised the team I would donate all income associated with our work—speaker fees, honoraria, awards—to a department scholarship fund for SLCC transfer students. That promise holds for any royalties from this book. I allocate a percentage of my salary to that scholarship fund, an amount that increases with merit raises, tenure, and promotion. Those funds support transfer students in our department who do not qualify for federal financial aid, including undocumented students and those who have exceeded their lifetime aid eligibility.

I've made mistakes in our co-researcher relationships. Those mistakes were often born of the limitations of my experiences and perspectives as a middle-class white woman. Some were exacerbated by the stresses and chronic overextension of junior faculty working

conditions, by my complacency when things seemed to be going well, and by misplaced trust in a few colleagues. When I've recognized these mistakes or when students were willing to say something, I've apologized, sought to make amends without burdening them with my emotional processing, and done my best to change. I'm sure I've made other mistakes that my student collaborators chose not to call out. This reality of our power dynamics—that because of my positionality I won't always be told when I've hurt someone—haunts me. I hope that uncertainty has made me more vigilant.

I never wanted anyone involved in this project to feel like a rabbit. My best indication that we've approached Nic's vision of "making knowledge in conjunction with one another" is where we are today. According to a 2015 Transfer Process Working Group, 65 percent of transfer students at the U graduate within six years, a figure that aligns with national statistics for community college transfer students at public universities (Jenkins and Fink). Nationwide, Black and Latinx<sup>3</sup> students who transfer from community colleges complete bachelor's degrees at about half the rate of white students (Shapiro et al., *Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates by Race and Ethnicity*). Between spring 2017 and spring 2021, all student coauthors of this book graduated with bachelor's degrees, and all have stayed in touch with one another and with me. Well into their post-graduation lives, they have come back to the table to revise and edit this book. Some continue to write in support of program grants, some regularly connect me with prospective students. Most still live in the Salt Lake Valley, and all have gone on to endeavors—teaching, youth mentorship, student or social services, graduate school—that resonate with the work of this book.

#### FROM NIC IN 2021

Truth be told, I was hesitant to touch any of this old writing anymore. Even rereading it can be disorienting, almost nauseating. I feel embarrassed at my optimism when I read what I wrote and my attempt at imitating the tone of the Vonnegut novel I'd just

finished reading. The fact is, I can't change what I wrote all those years ago (and I'd rather not anyway), but when Christie offered me this spot as an addendum of sorts, I figured the least I can do is contextualize and clarify some things that have changed since then.

Right off the bat, one glaring error in this piece is that I thought I'd read enough deconstructionist theory that I was free from all these structures and systems at play. I say in the original piece how I could meet people with this knowledge (inside a jail of all places) and not be influenced by my position of power, as if those things weren't already present in the room when I walked in. This was something I learned later on, that even though you might not believe in hierarchies or systems of oppression or race or what-have-you—that doesn't mean they aren't still there, affecting everything you see before you even see it. It's something I expressed to Christie this past year. I made sure to tell Christie and I'll tell you too, reader, that simply because you place value on your students' words, their ideas, or their wholeness as people and listen to them doesn't mean others will. I know there were and still are many people who will look at the work our team attempted to do and scoff at it. That's fine; it's to be expected.

The second thing I'd like to address is how optimistic I was back then—or at least, how optimistic *this version of me* reads. To be fair, I think I was young and simply excited about writing anything at that point. I remember looking around at what other folks were doing and feeling inspired. I wanted to show what I could do and how I might theorize my viewpoint of the world I'd seen so far in a fun and creative way and not as some identity (Latin American, immigrant, etc.) that was placed upon me. I resisted, and I often still resist, the task that so many times feels like an obligation to me as a member of a minoritized group, to write one-dimensionally about my woes and share “my story,” explaining again and again what it might mean to folks who so many times won't remember or won't understand it even after I've gone to such lengths. Instead I opted to write something that made sense and felt validating for me. I won't apologize for that.

However, in the years since the writing of the piece, I have admittedly felt less like a traveler and more like a fugitive. Looking back, my life as an undocumented immigrant in this country has always felt this way, no matter who was president—but I thought that idea might be harder for the reader to relate to. Nowadays, though, I've become more comfortable with the idea of using my voice to speak in ways that might make *others* less comfortable. This is in part because the United States' flirtations with fascism and its unapologetically inhumane and self-serving actions as a world power have made it very clear to me that the work that follows must actively disrupt the status quo for things to change. If this work is to lift the voices and the peoples that have been ignored, then those who would hold our backs to the wall can no longer be suffered merely for comfort's sake. They must be disarmed and made to see that they are victims of this oppressive system, too. I think that for the changes we'd like to see take place in academia and in the world—are they not the same?—we must hold one another accountable in uncomfortable, yet loving ways, if at all possible. I hope to still meet travelers where they may be, but I think I'll carry the colloquial “big stick” with me just in case.

And that's it, really. That's all I want to say for now. Being tied to any piece of writing for too long starts to feel like wearing a ball and chain, or in my case like carrying around a time capsule that maybe you'd just rather keep buried. I feel sort of like a relay runner who's been holding onto this baton for too long, running and running, waiting for the person I'm supposed to hand this off to. I'm ready to pass this on.

There is this comment at the beginning of “The Art Spirit” where Robert Henri refers to art as “Signposts towards the future . . . towards greater knowledge.” That feels like what we were trying to do with all this writing. I'm hoping that once this book is published, we can nail this post down and keep walking forward. This was never about me, I feel, so I try not to be too attached to it anymore. And I mean that in the best way possible! Our work and ethos always appealed to me because it felt so contrary to the normal hierarchies of the institutions we belonged to. We always

talk about “not pulling up the ladder behind you” on our team. I am thankful to have found a place and a group of people who were concerned with undoing the very nature of academic work, and instead promoting something different and new, some way forward for the people in the back who were still making their way.

I think my team would agree that we were always and still are dedicated to the idea that if we could somehow help pave a way forward from where we are now, or at least leave some breadcrumbs behind to show how we'd come to be here, someone else might follow behind and continue where we left off. As with all art, I can only hope this book and the writings I was able to help co-create might propel you forward into some action, further down the rabbit hole you might be peering into, contemplating whether you should jump in. Just as a bike ride or maybe some book you read in college might have led you here, so I hope that what I've written will lead you to write whatever story and (in this way) whatever future you see when you close your eyes at night. After all, *this* only ever was a dream we dreamed up one afternoon and now it's a book. Maybe you're on some college campus reading this, or in some room without any windows, but I want you to know we were there once, too.

And so, I want to finish my addendum to this time capsule with the hope that it may help the reader forward, and that way—at least for the near future—I won't have to read it or talk about it any longer. I'm someone else now, somewhere else now, further down the road from this signpost, and I'd rather not have to come back every year to check whether it's still here. You, my friend, can feel free to do whatever you like with this after you're done. Maybe you can see to it that the wind doesn't knock it down. Or maybe you'll want to put it all out of your mind and forget about it.

Either way, here you go—I think I'm done with this now. It's your turn to carry it on.





## Composing Salt Lake's Writing Ecology

### TRANSFER ORIENTATION

*AS WE WROTE THIS CHAPTER, it became clear that our references to various parts of the Salt Lake metro area held meanings, values, and ironies for us that would be lost on readers unfamiliar with our region. Phrases like “up on the hill” and “down in the valley” appear throughout, and they represent more than just topography. They describe the social geography of the Salt Lake Valley, a geography that is what Nedra Reynolds calls “the where of writing” (176) for transfer students moving between SLCC and the U. Such phrases signal location, but also decenter the U, which is perched on the edge of the valley “bowl.” Inside that bowl are swaths of wealth and poverty, privilege and marginalization, laid out along five hundred square miles of gridded streets whose numbers locate you relative to another imagined center: downtown’s Temple Square, four miles west of “Emigration Canyon.” This northeast corner of the valley the Eastern Shoshone call co’kar-ni is where, in 1847, thousands of white Latter-day Saint settlers and at least three enslaved Black men first arrived on Shoshone, Goshute, and Ute lands that were, at the time, still claimed by Mexico (Q. Taylor). We can only sketch an impression of the physical environment of the Salt Lake Valley and the social and material relations it co-constitutes (see *Ríos*, discussed below). However, we hope this sketch will orient you, help you glimpse the complexity of our local writing ecology.<sup>4</sup>*

*Salt Lake City lies southeast of the Great Salt Lake, between two mountain ranges mapped with settler names: the Wasatch to the east (given much attention by hikers and skiers), and the Oquirrh to the west (whose attention comes primarily from the Kennecott Utah Copper Corporation). Those mountains nearly converge at the southern*

*end of the valley. At the northern end, the Wasatch jut west, cornering downtown, with neighborhoods spreading north and east into the foothills that contain the state capitol and tiers of wealthy households. On one foothill, the university's large white "U" is visible from vantage points across the valley. On the other side of that spur of mountain are the refineries and rail yards of North Salt Lake.*

*By and large, the further east you live along "the Bench"—the stretch of foothills along the base of the Wasatch that includes, at its northern end, the U campus—the higher the elevation and the wealthier you and your neighbors are likely to be. If you live further west, past I-15 and the railroad tracks, you are in communities like Rose Park, Glendale, West Valley City, Taylorsville, and Kearns, where you and your neighbors are more likely to be working-class, immigrants, and/or people of color. Go far enough west, past the airport, and you hit the refinery town of Magna, which sits at the base of the Oquirrh Mountains, just south of the tailing ponds and landfill. Up on the hill, the U offers a breathtaking view of this bowl. On good days, it's breathtaking because you can see the entire valley, the Kennecott Garfield Smelter Stack beaconing like a lighthouse where the Oquirrhs meet the rapidly receding Great Salt Lake. On bad days it's because the valley's natural inversion effect traps particulate matter from vehicle emissions and refineries, resulting in air quality so poor you can't see downtown.*

*The ten campuses of Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) are spread across the valley, all close to or west of I-15. The main Taylorsville-Redwood campus is located ten miles southwest of downtown, the geographical center of the bowl. These locations facilitate access, particularly for communities on the west side. They also mean that, for the 54 percent of SLCC transfer students who head to the U each year ("SLCC"), their physical trajectory is from "down" in the valley to "up" on the hill. Although the U is the state's flagship, it is also an urban commuter campus. Most students live off-campus, and about a third of U undergraduates are transfer students of some kind.*

*The U's location sends mixed messages about access, particularly for those in the western part of the valley. University Neighborhood Partners offers community-based programming on the close-in west side, and a small satellite campus in Sandy, a prosperous bedroom community at*

*the south end of the valley, offers general education and high-demand major courses. However, on the main campus, where most students complete their coursework, parking is expensive and in short supply. U students have free access to the Utah Transit Authority (UTA), and those who can live or park near the light-rail system ("TRAX") have a direct line to campus, but UTA service is often inadequate and potentially unsafe for students who live or work beyond the more expensive close-in neighborhoods. The U's relative inaccessibility maps onto the inequitable social geographies of the Salt Lake Valley, and for some transfer students, navigating those geographies can be an uphill climb. Despite the challenges, their physical and rhetorical movements between home, work, campus, and community enact the metro area (see Edbauer). These students are agents in the Salt Lake writing ecology: before, during, and after transfer.*

*Now that we've oriented you to where we are, we will orient you to who and how we are, and why we've chosen to write this chapter the way we did. "We" are Nic Contreras, Sandra Salazar-Hernandez, Westin Porter, Kelly Corbray, Claudia Sauz Mendoza, Nathan Lacy, and me (Christie Toth). I am a junior faculty member in the U's Department of Writing and Rhetoric Studies (WRS), and the rest of the team are SLCC transfer students who majored in WRS and dedicated time and energy to this project over the last seven years. Nic, Sandra, Wes, and Nate have been part of the project from the beginning, working on our 2015–16 study of transfer student writing experiences at the U. Claudia and Kelly joined the project the following year, when we were piloting the writing courses we developed based on that study.*

*When we started drafting this chapter in 2017, the student members of our research team ranged in age from twenty-two to thirty-eight; I was thirty-four. We came back together to revise in summer 2019 and again in summer 2021. All six student coauthors are in the first generation of their families to attend college. Wes and Nate graduated from the U in spring 2017, Nic in spring 2018, and Claudia in spring 2019. Sandra graduated in fall 2019, and Kelly in spring 2021. Nic identifies as Hispanic/Latino, Claudia as American-Latina, and Sandra as Mexican American. Kelly is Black, and Wes, Nate, and I are white. Nic and Claudia immigrated as children from Argentina and*

*Mexico, respectively, and Sandra, Wes, Nate, Kelly, and I were born in the United States. Nic, Claudia, and Sandra are bilingual in English and Spanish. All seven of us are cisgender—four women, three men. Three of us identify as bisexual or queer.<sup>5</sup> Two of us are neurodivergent, and some of us have histories with trauma and other struggles with physical and mental health. We note these intersecting identities here, but in our individual sections we each made our own choices about how to represent ourselves.*

*This chapter begins theorizing interinstitutional writing transfer by putting our individual experiences and perspectives in conversation with disciplinary scholarship. It establishes context for the findings and programmatic developments presented in the chapters that follow. This structure is an enactment of the kind of ecological orientation we're seeking to advance. As Kristie S. Fleckenstein and coauthors assert, "All knowledge is always situated. This realization is a prelude to diversification: a commitment to increasing the range of perspectives, the ranges of voices, speaking in any one study" (401). Our writing experiments with such diversification in form as well as content. It is nonlinear and thematically recursive. Influenced by cultural rhetorics methodologies (Powell; Powell et al.), we seek to constellate our perspectives on writing, transferring, and co-researching here in Salt Lake. We lay these perspectives alongside each other to see how they "ping," as we took to calling it, and what they contribute to our understanding of community college–university relations. In the process, we encourage readers to reimagine those relations ecologically.*

*Our methods for composing this chapter were iterative. We began by reflecting on our study findings, our personal experiences, and ecological theories in writing, rhetoric, and literacy studies. For our collaborative presentation at the 2017 CCCC convention in Portland, Oregon—the homelands of the Multnomah, Clackamas, and Cowlitz and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde—each team member composed a reflection on the writing ecology of Salt Lake from their vantage point. After the conference, we systematically reviewed our pieces for recurring themes that seemed central to our emerging ecological understanding of transfer student writing experiences. The themes that surfaced were relations, identities, valuing, motion, difference, and change.*



*Justin Whitney, Kelly Corbray, Sandra Salazar-Hernandez, Shauna Edson, Nate Lacy, Wes Porter, Claudia Sauz Mendoza, Nic Contreras, and Christie Toth at CCCC 2017 in Portland. Photo credit: Jay Jordan.*

*I drafted passages discussing each theme in relation to scholarly literature on writing, rhetoric, and literacy ecologies, then brought those drafts back to the group for feedback and revision. These passages thus “sound” more like me (specifically, the “me” produced through my academic interactions). I took on much of the labor of scholarly reading and synthesis because I had the immediate professional pressures and the privileges of training and time. However, every use of the term “we” in these sections has been reviewed by the entire team—most recently, during the copyedit stage of the publication process in summer 2022—and, when necessary, reworked until every coauthor was satisfied. Each coauthor revised their individual section in response to team conversations throughout 2017, reviewer and editor feedback in 2019 and 2021, and during copyediting in 2022. Although these revisions extended over more than five years, we drafted this chapter before the rest of the book. In some ways, it now feels like an artifact, but the intellectual and interpersonal connections it enacts became the heart of the project.<sup>6</sup>*



*Charissa Che, Wes Porter, Darin Jensen, Nic Contreras, Sandra Salazar-Hernandez, Claudia Sauz Mendoza, and Nate Lacy in Portland's Chinatown during CCCC 2017. Photo credit: Christie Toth.*

*This chapter's representations of Salt Lake's writing ecology are inevitably partial, reflecting our embodied experiences and perspectives. However, we hope our approach counters what Fleckenstein and colleagues call "the distortions of a singular account" (389). Like the Salt Lake Valley itself, our stories are not neatly reconcilable, but they are interconnected. They demonstrate the diverse and co-constitutive nature of the writing ecology we inhabit. They are emplaced, but also suggest negotiations transfer students might be undertaking in other settings. Ultimately, we believe our work demonstrates why inquiring into transfer students' experiences matters. We hope it encourages others to consider how they might collaborate across institutional, professional, and disciplinary differences to center transfer students' experiences and interests.*

Nic

Let me be clear: I do not trust you. I don't mean this to be offensive, nor should you take this statement personally. Simply put, my life has taught me that mistrust, or doubt, is possibly the best way to

generate knowledge and remain safe. My distrust of institutions and authority figures stems from my childhood, and, for reasons I'll explain later, I am wary.

This is all sort of uncomfortable for me. See, I can't see your face right now, reader. I am not sure where you live. I don't know where you grew up or where you went to school. I don't know whom you voted for in the last election or even what your favorite album of all time is (my own way of getting to know someone). I can't look you in the eyes nor feel you out in any way, so I don't really know how to play my cards. I don't know where to begin. Though it is not my first time addressing academics, professors, or strangers, this all feels so much more permanent, so I choose my words carefully:

You, reader, most likely belong to the academy, a place that prides itself on its ability to be critical, even of itself. However, you and I both know there is a bubble there; it exists around the university and protects everything inside. I feel it when I walk on your campus. It keeps everything Steady Eddie and safe. A friend of mine once told me, "If there's ever a time where you start to feel comfortable, that's when you're fucking up." What she meant was that the moment you think you've got it figured out—you don't. That's when accidents happen. And for me that's where a lot of the blame lies. It is in the hope that I can unsettle you, then, that I write this—if only so that you, too, will see my dilemma.

Now, my story begins at the CWC. If you don't know the CWC (the Community Writing Center), it's situated on the plaza of downtown Salt Lake's City Library. Begun in '01 by SLCC English professor Tiffany Rousculp, it's a center that focuses on promoting literacy in the community. It's also where I worked all through college. It's the place where I learned about community work and, really, where I was introduced to academia. It was there that I met many of the people who now compose this research team. It was there where we first met Christie. If you'd told me when I met her that I'd be helping to write a part of her book later, I'd have laughed my ass off.

I recall receiving an email about this "research opportunity" back in the late spring of 2015. Apparently, some professor at the



University of Utah was looking for writing students to help with some project. I figured I'd at least listen to what they had to say—even if things didn't pan out, it'd be good to know someone up on the hill before I transferred there in the fall. I only hoped my short time at SLCC and the few months I'd spent at the CWC had prepared me to answer her questions—or whatever it was she wanted from us.

When the day finally came I was still nervous about what I'd have to say on the subject of “writing.” This was back when I thought you had to have infallible truths to present to the world if you were going to be an academic. I was surprised, however, when Dr. Toth walked into the center. She didn't look stuffy, or old. She wasn't wearing a tweed coat as I knew all professors did. She insisted we call her Christie before she got right to business.

The lady spoke at what felt like a hundred mph. She dropped academic verbiage I was still trying to learn to pronounce. I wish I could tell you exactly what we talked about that day; it had something to do with transfer students, I'm sure. All I remember is feeling my brain strain as we worked at connecting the dots between the ideas Christie threw on the whiteboard and the ones we had in our minds about the university and “research.” There was lots of head scratching on our parts and enthusiastic outbursts from Christie when we presented our half-baked notions of what we thought we were dealing with. I'm thankful that our meetings nowadays are at least somewhat more coherent.

I bring all this up because, as I look back, something crucial happened in that moment. Up until then, academia, in my eyes at least, was a world removed from the rest of reality. But here was this university representative, a person, who was taking time to come listen to *us*. I can't stress enough how valuable that is. I'd seen little of academia, and as a first-gen student I had (and still have) a very limited understanding of this world. In high school, we'd been assured that college professors wouldn't care about us. When I arrived at college I learned that advisors and student services were also very much on the same boat. The message I received was “We help those that help themselves,” which isn't much help at all; it feels more productive to bang your head against your desk.

During my first few years of college, I asked few questions and figured out what I could on my own. I was used to it. I grew up undocumented, and, early in life, I developed a deep mistrust of institutions and anything that was associated with the state. When I was a kid, places labeled *secure* by most to me spelled out *warning*. I knew it only took one ICE agent at your door for the whole jig to be up—everything we'd worked for gone, all of us cuffed and deported. So, I got good at playing my cards close to my chest, and I got even better at reading the signs and figuring things out for myself. Mostly, I was scared.

I flew under the radar, which kept me safe. It wasn't until recently that I realized it also kept me silent. This "game" kept me in the shadows where I wouldn't be found out, but it also did nothing to move me out of that place, to improve or change my situation. I mistrusted everyone. Who would turn me in? Who would help me? I waited for someone to make themselves available, to present themselves as trustworthy, but nobody did. I got by like that for a long time. I got really good at my bluff. In retrospect, I see now that it's all a gamble. Being undocumented is a lot like going to college or being a writer; you're building something and you're not sure that it's going to last or lead to anything, but you take the risk anyway.

It was no different that day at the CWC, but we all came back the week after, so we must've felt something. I think we saw that Christie seemed genuinely interested in what we had to say and bring to the table. I know I saw the project as a way to make a place for us at the university, to begin inquiry on this issue and begin to provide access for other students like ourselves. If anybody could speak to transfer experiences we could, and if we wanted to change things, we needed to be involved in the work.

This is similar to one of the first lessons I learned at the CWC. Our manual states that the CWC cannot "know what a community needs or wants without entering into full and mutually beneficial partnership with that community." The idea being that for a community resource to serve its community well, it must not presuppose or diagnose what a community needs without

consulting the people it plans to work with. This Freirean approach is inherently collaborative and dependent on dialogue.

We took a similar approach with our project. In our meetings, our team would discuss what we thought needed to be done. We talked about transfer issues and the writing ecology of Salt Lake and what affordances and constraints it produced for students who were transferring to the U from SLCC. Together, we used our diverse experiences to shed light on different areas of the ecology and the transfer experience. One of the first things the research team did was interview students who, just like us, had transferred to the U.

We listened to how these students talked about their experiences navigating between schools. To this day, I see those trajectories as I would routes on a map—the interviews, classroom field notes, and student writing we've collected as a sort of traveler's log, with us performing a road worker's role, examining the structural integrity of the transfer bridge, looking for any confusing signs, potholes, or blocked entrance ramps we could fix or reopen. While we mapped the movement of student writers around town and across campuses, we also recognized the way our movements were already affecting the ecology by creating opportunities for transfer students to engage with professors and research, offering a form of representation for future transfer students, and helping to bridge a longstanding rift between two major educational institutions in our valley.

Working on this project has made it clear to me that it *is* possible for institutions of higher ed to work with their community members—if they want to. I think the project itself proves how working *with* transfer students can provide them with opportunities and access that help them succeed. I won't pretend our work didn't affect our own transfer experiences. I also won't pretend our project is perfect. I still don't trust institutions; I know better than to trust those who hold the power to hand it over willingly. I realize that just because it's possible for institutions to do this kind of work doesn't mean they will. I'm even skeptical of our team's ability to do anything truly radical for the disenfranchised if we are under the umbrella of an institution that has been complicit in their marginalization.

I don't think there's anything wrong with being skeptical, though. It can be productive. It can be generative. It's kept me on my toes, and probably saved my life more than once. If you let go of the doubt for too long you find yourself doing "amazing" self-congratulatory work—too much blowing smoke, not enough looking in mirrors. I will mistrust you all in the academy to keep us from falling into that very same trap of comfort, and *that* is not a bluff. However, I also know you have to take a chance on something if you want to make it, so that's what I'm doing. I'm writing to you all in a leap of faith—I'm trusting Christie, because she says you're good for it. And I hope that she's not wrong.

#### RELATIONS

*Our thinking about relations is informed by the literature on writing ecologies and Indigenous rhetorics of relationality, scholarly conversations that have sometimes come into conflict. We first encountered the concept of Salt Lake as a writing ecology through the ecology itself—specifically, SLCC professor Tiffany Rousculp's book Rhetoric of Respect: Recognizing Change at a Community Writing Center. Rousculp draws on ecological theories of writing to locate the CWC within the larger "ecosystem" of Salt Lake (16). In her analysis, the CWC functioned like an "organism" that "developed distinctively within the particulars of Salt Lake" (22), its "discursive ecology" shaped by and shaping the ecology of the city (128). Rhetoric of Respect offered theory grounded in the intellectual work of SLCC faculty and the community writing framework Nic, Sandra, and Wes brought from the CWC. We adapted Rousculp's ecological vision as we began tracing writing-mediated relationships connecting SLCC and the U to one another, to communities across the valley, and to places and people(s) beyond Salt Lake. Once we began looking for ecological connections, they were everywhere.*

*The concept of writing ecologies has a complex genealogy. Rousculp draws the notion of discursive ecologies from ecocomposition, first articulated by Christian Weisser and Sidney Dobrin in the early 2000s. Ecocomposition puts insights from ecocriticism and environmental rhetoric into conversation with scholarship in writing studies,*

particularly the work of Richard M. Coe and Marilyn Cooper. Coe suggested that composition is an ecological phenomenon, calling for a scholarly focus on “systemic interrelations instead of analytic separations” (237). Cooper went on to define writing as “an activity through which a person is continually engaged with a variety of socially constituted systems” (367). Weisser and Dobrin extended Cooper’s use of the term “ecology,” arguing for, in Weisser’s words, “place and location as a critical category (alongside race, class, gender, and culture) in understanding how texts are created and distributed” (69). As we investigated how transfer students negotiate and adapt literacies across the Salt Lake Valley, place emerged as a critical category indeed.

Although we encountered writing ecologies through Rousculp and ecomposition, we have also been influenced by what Dobrin calls the “second ecological turn” (16), a “post-ecomposition” (3) development using ecological frameworks to conceptualize writing as “dynamic,” “fluctuating,” “spatial, relational, and complex” (2). This turn brings together ecomposition’s focus on sociality, discursive systems, and place with insights from complexity and network theory. Scholars in this “new materialist” vein have drawn attention to the material, transitory, and emergent nature of writing and rhetorics as they are produced, distributed, and circulated over time (Dobrin). In this theoretical turn, “[t]he term ecology becomes a vehicle to unpack the complexity, interconnectedness, fluidity, and motion of discursive networks” (Weisser 70). Chris Mays sums up these complexities as “the ways writing works in, through, and on a diversity of environments, objects, discourses, materials, ideologies, cultures, technologies, genres, and so on” (568). We came to appreciate how the concept of ecology sensitized us to the complexities and dynamism of transfer students’ writing experiences, and the ways those experiences are shaped by emplaced relationships.

The term also helps us account for the embodied, material nature of our relationships as co-researchers and coauthors. In “The Importance of Harmony: An Ecological Metaphor for Writing Research,” Fleckenstein and colleagues present an ethical argument for researching writing with an ecological orientation:

*An ecological way of researching directs the researcher’s gaze to relationships, including the researcher’s own active involvement*

*in and contribution to the researcher ecosystem. . . . An ecological orientation to research fuses the knower, the known, and the context of knowing. . . . Thus, the interdependence of an ecological orientation includes active participation in the multiple linkages of the research web. Interdependence hauls back into the research process—or acknowledges what has always been there—the disorder and complexity of what Thomas Newkirk calls the wet, messy, rowdy elements like feelings, intuitions, and bodies: heart, mind, and guts. (395–96)*

*This orientation has been useful as we work to understand writing transfer between and beyond SLCC and the U. It encouraged us to embrace the messy, rowdy disorder of bringing our own hearts, minds, and guts to bear on a complex experience in which most of us were personally immersed. Fusing the knower, the known, and the context of knowing has helped us consider how enacting this project together is reshaping our interinstitutional relations.*

*However, we are also aware that the writing ecologies in question are shaped by social inequities bound up in coloniality, and that such structures have shaped the literature on writing ecologies, as well. In “Writing Wakan: The Lakota Pipe as Rhetorical Object,” David M. Grant points to new materialist scholars’ failure to acknowledge longstanding Indigenous traditions of relationality. Grant counters by examining the chanupa as a material artifact of Indigenous rhetorical practice that operates within the Lakota ontology of mitakuye oyasin. This term is often translated as “everything is related” (68), i.e., part of an “interrelated network” in which “relations are reciprocal” (72). This network is “in dynamic flux” and “continual motion” (69), affirms the “tensions and attractions” of “difference” (72), and is subject to “changes through the disturbance and reordering of its relations into a new, emergent order” (74). This Lakota ontology long predated parallel insights in the writing ecologies literature, and, as Grant asserts, “Given legacies of cultural appropriation, genocide, and outright theft, indigenous scholars have reason to be suspicious of work that comes so close to their own” (62). For us, the appeal of an “ecological” orientation lies in its foregrounding of emplaced relations in the adaptation of writing knowledges across contexts, institutional and otherwise. My*

own greatest misgivings spring from concerns that the term occludes Indigenous knowledge of the nature and implications of these relations.

I have agonized over whether this baggage means we ought to abandon the term "ecology." As a research team, we have also wrestled with its connotations of scientism and the risk it might activate discourses of social Darwinism that naturalize rather than take responsibility for patterns of exclusion, marginalization, and exploitation. And, indeed, some Indigenous rhetorics scholars have opted to eschew the term. For example, to recognize the land-based literacies of Indigenous migrant farm workers from Central America, Gabriela Ríos works to "shift the ontological presuppositions inherent in the term 'ecology'" in favor of

an Indigenous concept of relationality that is similar to the notion of ecologies—of networked relationships existing among various human and non-human objects—however, this indigenous concept relies on a relational ontology at the level of kinship quite literally. . . . Indigenous relationality recognizes that humans and the environment are in a relationship that is co-constituted and not just interdependent. Additionally, Indigenous relationality recognizes the environment's capacity to produce relations. (64)

We take Ríos's ontological critique of the term "ecology" seriously. We also heed Grant's observation that one key "difference between new materialist projects of descriptive power and indigenous materialisms of being" is "responsibility to sovereign constellations" (83). Ecological theories of writing do not presuppose an ethic of responsibility rooted in peoplehood and place that extends to human and more-than-human communities.

Grant helps articulate conditions under which we might employ the term "ecology" while attending to these shortcomings. He concludes new materialist and Indigenous scholarship can "work together or even in harmony," provided one is willing to "carefully articulate one's projects, be clear about relations, and take note of ontological assumptions" (83–84). Our project is to understand and strengthen relations between SLCC, the U, and the valley in which we live to better and more equitably support transfer student writers. Through careful and critical consideration, we have embraced the project-specific affordances of the

*term "ecology" for foregrounding our indebtedness to the place-based work of SLCC faculty like Rousculp and for affirming difference within complex and dynamic local systems that include but also extend beyond conventional academic spaces. We are operating from the ontological assumptions that our relations within this ecology are produced by place and entail responsibilities. We have sought to attend to Indigenous histories, continued presence, and futures on this land, but recognize we are not engaging with the land and our respective responsibilities to it in ways Shoshone, Goshute, Ute, and other Indigenous scholars might.*

*We arrived at these premises by constellating our own emplaced, embodied experiences and knowledges with scholarship in composition and Indigenous rhetorics. In "Careful with the Stories We Tell," Lisa King, Rose Gubele, and Joyce Rain Anderson write, "Indigenous rhetorics are the memories, the memoria, so to speak, of this land. . . . Recognizing and engaging Indigenous rhetorics is in part how we begin to reason together" (15–16). I am striving to make the terms of our engagement explicit. Although they acknowledge the importance of tribally specific knowledges, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz and Malea Powell suggest that co-constitutive relations with land are broadly Indigenous ontologies. As they explain:*

*Imagine a kind of four-part layered web that situates the body in a particular place across historical time, rooted in cultural practices that arise from—and are responsible to—a land base. This orientation to that set of relations, and the responsibilities that arise from maintaining "right" relations, then forms the ambiguous boundaries of something we call Indigenous rhetorical practices. (148)*

*Without making claims on or to specific tribal knowledge and practices, I acknowledge that my engagements with Indigenous rhetorics as they have been articulated within the academy have prompted our team to look to our emplaced relations and take responsibility for cultivating them in a more "right" way.*

*I don't think we're enacting what Shawn Wilson calls Indigenous research methods, although I have learned much from his discussions of relationality. Rather, I follow Scott Lyons's urging to learn from the*



*“cultural logic” of Indigenous intellectual work (211). In “Rethinking Responsibility,” Lyons writes, “[R]ather than sneaking into someone else’s ceremony, it would be better to consider the gifts that have already been given: for instance, the long and venerable history of Native writing, which has consistently depicted responsible living, and advocated for its importance to the world” (213). In my limited white settler understanding, I believe making visible how those gifts have influenced our team’s work is among my responsibilities.*

### Christie

When I arrived in Salt Lake as a professor, I already had connections to the region dating back to my undergraduate years. Both my parents were career military, and, growing up, I lived a lot of places: South Carolina, Hawai‘i, Maryland, Iceland, Chile, England, Germany. In the early 2000s, while I was earning my bachelor’s degree on Arosaguntacook, Wabanaki, and Abenaki lands in Maine, my family was stationed at Hill Air Force Base, thirty miles north of Salt Lake City on Eastern Shoshone lands. One upside of moving frequently is that you end up with friends in many ports. As it turned out, Chris Baczek, a buddy from the international school I’d attended in Chile, was an art student at the U. Whenever I was home from college, I would hang out with her in Salt Lake.

My ties to this place are already political. My father was the grandchild of Hungarian immigrants to Munsee Lenape lands in New Jersey, and he grew up bilingual in English and Spanish because his parents worked at Universidad de Puerto Rico, which is on Taíno lands. Thanks to his language abilities, we lived in Santiago—Mapuche lands—from 1995 to 1997 while he served as an exchange student at Chile’s Academia de Guerra Aérea. He called it “war college.” Baczek grew up in Salt Lake, but she spent those years in Chile because her father’s Utah-based mining company had business in the Andes. From the beginning, then, my Salt Lake literacies have been sponsored by American colonialism and militarism, complicit educational institutions and martial multilingualism, extractive industry and global capitalism. They were mediated through the social and material privileges of my

parents' ranks, their income, and our whiteness. Those literacies were entangled in my efforts to read, think, and write my way out of the military culture in which I'd been raised, efforts that became frantic in 2002, when my father left my mother and sister in Utah to help stage the invasion of Iraq I marched against in Maine.

In *Because We Live Here*, Eli Goldblatt writes, "I had grown up in the US Army, moving every couple of years with my family when my father was transferred somewhere new, and the idea that staying put was radical—and thus heroically productive . . . seemed appealing and true" (3). I'm wary of the discourse of heroism, but, like Goldblatt, my peripatetic military childhood fueled a personal interest and (vexed) political commitment to place. I entered the professional ecology of composition with a self-conscious resistance to the academy's dislocating pressures. I earned my master's degree in rhetoric and composition at Portland State University, an access-oriented urban institution with the motto "Let Knowledge Serve the City" emblazoned across its skybridge. I only decided to get a PhD when I realized I was unlikely to land a full-time job at a local community college. On Odawa, Ojibwe, Boodewadomi, and Wyandot lands at the University of Michigan, I followed my interest in open-admissions institutions that enable students to pursue their educational goals while staying in their communities. My dissertation was a study of locally responsive writing pedagogies at Diné College, a tribally controlled institution in Navajo Nation founded in 1968 as Navajo Community College.

I completed these projects under an apprentice's constraints. By necessity, the primary audience for most of my writing was faculty at four-year institutions, and I chafed under the university-centric paradigm. Like Ellen Cushman (and my father, whose childhood bred an abiding suspicion of academics), I felt a visceral aversion to "ivory tower isolation" ("Rhetorician" 11). I was galvanized by Cushman's call for rhetoricians to consider "the civic purpose of our positions in the academy, of what we do with our knowledge, for whom, and by what means" ("Rhetorician" 23). Like her, I wanted to be among the "agents of social change outside the university" ("Rhetorician" 7). I felt I wouldn't be doing real-to-me

work until I could collaborate with two-year college colleagues on projects that made concrete local change as well as contributions to composition studies.

My doctoral education deepened my misgivings about the academy's relationships with place. My community college research heightened my awareness that inequities surrounding institution type are built on an inverse relationship between local access and prestige that is not class-, race-, gender-, culture-, or disability-neutral. My time at the tribal college and my engagements with scholarship in Indigenous rhetorics taught me those inequities are embedded in structures of US settler colonialism (Riley-Mukavetz and Powell; Jackson). As Vine Deloria Jr. wrote, "Non-Indian Americans, not the Indians, are the real nomads. White Americans are rarely buried in the places they were born, and most of them migrate freely during their lifetimes, living in as many as a dozen places and having roots in and accepting responsibility for none of these locations" (254). This critique seems as true of the academy as it is of the military in which I grew up. Like Rebecca C. Jackson, I came to suspect that the neoliberal indifference university-based academia fosters toward *where* we work perpetuates a settler colonial disregard for local knowledges and relations. That disregard includes our relationships with and responsibilities to nearby community colleges.

I went on the academic job market in 2013 with no particular desire to work at a research university. What I cared about was location. I wanted to be close enough to Navajo Nation that I could maintain my relationships there, and I wanted possibilities for collaboration with community college colleagues on local projects. When the position at the U hit the job list, the importance of place outweighed my ambivalence about R-1. I already knew several SLCC faculty through TYCA and CCCC, and the U had a large transfer student population. Furthermore, there was an opportunity to help build a new department of writing and rhetoric studies that attended to community colleges from its inception. There was also a promise of life beyond academia: my old friend Chris Baczek still lives and makes art in Salt Lake. Of course, it was only through

many accumulated and largely unearned privileges that I had such a choice, and my body is an agent of colonization wherever I go on this continent, including the Salt Lake Valley. All the more reason to always be thinking carefully about what I am (and am not) doing here: why, and how, and with whom.

As I reengaged the Salt Lake ecology in 2014, I knew I needed to learn more about transfer students' experiences as they moved between the community college and the university. I wanted to undertake those investigations differently from the work at Michigan. I wanted to research *with* SLCC transfer students. I believed the project would benefit from their local knowledges, institutional experiences, and perspectives on everything from interview protocols to curriculum development. I hoped the project would also benefit my student co-researchers—that it would be a paid learning opportunity connecting them to resources, mentorship, and, perhaps, a stronger sense of community at the U.

I could not have anticipated how this work would force me to rethink my still-emerging scholarly identity, to de- and reconstruct notions of value I didn't know I held. I didn't predict how we would each, in our different ways, come to new understandings of our own mobilities, or how the political context in which we were laboring would unfold. Together, we have been co-constituting our relations with this place I have now lived far longer than anywhere else. What makes staying put “radical,” at least for *this* white nomad of the settler state, is deciding to accept responsibility for this place. Speaking of reflective knowledges made with the land, Deloria writes, “Our task is to live in such a way that the information we receive through analysis becomes—over the passage of time and through grace and good fortune—our experiences also” (251). With grace I rarely deserve, my Salt Lake co-researchers have allowed me to experience this place and the complex relations it co-constitutes.

#### IDENTITIES

*Thinking ecologically means considering the interactive, emplaced identity negotiations transfer students undertake. Stephanie Kerschbaum suggests that identities are emergent and relational. They are “always*

*in flux, always 'yet-to-be,'" she writes, "so they are never fully known or knowable entities, and knowledge about self only comes through encounters with others" ("Avoiding" 627). This conception of identity resonates with Grant, who suggests "the philosophical question to start with might not be 'Who are you?' so much as 'How are you?' In what way is your being?" (83). "How we are" in our relational, identity-producing encounters—including the myriad encounters involved in interinstitutional transfer—is always co-constituted with place.*

*In their argument for an ecological approach to composition, Dobrin and Weisser assert that "identity—and how it is manifested by discourse—is shaped . . . by our relationships with particular locations and environments" (567). Relational identities are produced in and by places that enact forms of inclusion and exclusion. Asao Inoue writes, "places may have important associations with particular groups of people who typically inhabit those places, identified by class, social standing, language use, religion, race, or other social dimensions. Work done in such places can be affected by these associations" (Antiracist 78). Not all writing-related identities engender the same kinds of social recognition or rewards, and these place associations mean privileged writing-related identities are not all equally accessible or attractive to everyone.*

*Place, identity, and writing are thus profoundly intertwined with social inequities. Salt Lake's writing ecology offers wide-ranging but uneven possibilities for identity-(re)shaping encounters. The U's location in the affluent and predominantly white foothills east of downtown, for example, does not produce the same identities as SLCC's locations in the more racially and linguistically diverse working-class neighborhoods to the west and south. Likewise, the CWC sponsors different identity encounters than either SLCC or the U, declaring through its motto and interior design that "everyone can write," although the identities produced in its spaces are also inevitably differential and constrained. And there are countless other sites throughout the valley, in and out of schools, where encounters are shaping writing identities in complex, often inequitable ways.*

*For us, an ecological orientation foregrounds the complex, emplaced identity negotiations transfer students encounter as they move between*

and beyond postsecondary institutions. Some of these negotiations are related to demographic categories Kerschbaum calls “visible and measurable”—and thus easily commodifiable (Toward 43). Community college students are more likely than those at most four-year institutions to be BIPOC, immigrants, older/returning students, students with disabilities, and/or veterans—all groups historically underrepresented in postsecondary education. They are also more likely to be first-generation college students, to come from low-income or working-class families, to have children, to be working full-time and attending school part-time. As they move through these various spaces and social situations, transfer students negotiate a range of in-flux and interrelated identities that have claims on their time, attention, energies, and money.

While university-centric research might characterize such claims as “interference” (Brittenham 527) or “environmental pull” (Bahr et al., “A Review” 488) that diverts transfer students from their studies, an ecological perspective recognizes that alongside-school identities are often embedded in relationships, forms of cultural participation, sources of motivation, and access to financial and other resources that sustain students as they pursue their degrees. For students from “nontraditional” backgrounds, coming into the identity of “college student” can be challenging. Popular media continue to project normative representations of a residential four-year college experience. As Wes and Nate suggest, transfer students may also have encounters that reproduce stigma associated with attending community college, even as they are grappling with identity and values conflicts produced by encounters in differently diverse and more self-consciously elite university spaces (Alexander et al.; Bahr et al., “A Review”; Toth et al., “Traveling”). Inoue argues that academic settings privilege what he, building on Pierre Bourdieu, calls a “local white racial habitus” in spoken and written discourse (Antiracist 92). This hegemonic, Inoue asserts, places unjust burdens on students of color, multilingual students, and first-generation college students as they negotiate identities as college writers.

Those who transfer must reconstruct their student identities first at the community college and then at the university, and they face additional

*negotiations as they enter specific disciplinary discourses (Mathison; Gere et al.; Toth et al., "Traveling"). These encounters can challenge students' conceptions of their own identities. Even when those challenges are ultimately beneficial (and not all are), students must still undertake the intellectual and emotional labor of this renegotiation. Depending on their circumstances, the time, energy, and support required to work through the conflicts that sometimes emerge can be a greater cost than some are willing or able to bear. All these experiences can shape transfer students' sense of belonging, their self-concepts as learners and writers, and their motivation to persist in postsecondary education. However, such experiences can also foster rhetorical awareness and knowledges students draw on as they face new academic, social, professional, and political challenges.*

### **Sandra**

In 2005, I was in fifth grade, attending Ford Boulevard Elementary. Mrs. Simpson gave my mom and me a small booklet during one of our parent-teacher conferences, and I remember it being a lot less attractive than the Goosebumps books I *did* read. I was not about to open up a book with the title "How to Get the Main Idea." That book was *not* made for me or to take home to my Spanish-speaking parents. This booklet remained unopened, but my mom has held onto it for many years. I think she has kept it as a keepsake from when we lived in East Los Angeles. Mrs. Simpson shared with me that she once visited the Great Salt Lake and how she went in the lake and walked around in it. I believe this was our only nonacademic conversation.

In the fifth grade, and probably a few times in primary school, I recall being moved temporarily and tested for my reading retention. The types of writing found in comprehension tests or those immersion programs in the early 2000s left me confused and downcast for some time. The composition tests in East Los Angeles and in Utah were not meant to aid but to fail me instead. They shared examples of situations I couldn't make connections with, that had nothing to do with my own reality and culture, which led me to believe that I was not good at English and therefore not good

enough for school. Not once did I think that there was valid writing outside of academic spaces. In school, that's where I was told what writing should look like. This writing remained inside the walls of my school. I did learn at an early age that I was not a writer.

My mother and I in unison, “. . . ocho por una . . . ocho, ocho por dos . . . diez y seis. Ocho por diez? Ochenta!” This chanting and memorizing was done on school nights over in our East Los Angeles living room. I learned to love math in third grade. Those moments are very important to me because here we were communicating with each other that the math language transcends spaces. Until that time I hadn't realized that something from school stretched over to my home and was accessible to both of us. I would walk home, underneath a freeway and past a McDonald's, two auto mechanics, and a bus station to get to my house. I walked this path every day and ignored what was obvious writing, like the graffiti on the side of the freeway, a seventy-nine-cent special for a large drink at McDonald's, the destinations the buses displayed or the name of the street I lived in. I didn't recognize that as writing, and so I ignored most of the writing around me for a long time.

When I was ten, my mom found a paper ad about free English Tutoring and signed me up immediately. Here is what I remember. My mentor was tall, white, and drove a white Chevy Impala. He would talk about the boring workbook on reading comprehension and point to it, and I sat there confused, trying to figure out how this related to me—at this time, it didn't. My writing tutor would drive from downtown LA, down to East LA and into the comfort of my home—with this knowledge that only made sense to him. My only memories of this part of my life are of my mom mopping furiously before the tutor arrived, a comment from him on how our bathroom was tiny, and me showing off my guitar skills by playing a piece of Cielito Lindo on an acoustic guitar during our very last session. I can't exactly remember how many sessions or weeks this lasted, but it didn't really help me any new skills to use in school or help with my understanding of writing.

During the first two years I worked at SLCC's Community Writing Center, I wanted to get a social work degree. But then I



realized that the writing and rhetoric department at the University of Utah actually talked about community, connection, local disparities, and gendered writing. The way our professors talked about systems and rhetorics sparked my interests. They kept me engaged and enraged at the same time because I was reading on how America became “America.” And it wasn’t and still isn’t good. I did not speak up a ton in class, but through our writing assignments we were given opportunities to talk about what mattered to us students.

With the WRS courses, I was given opportunities to problem solve, read writing from philosophers and writing from current professors who let us into why they teach what they teach. During my time with the CWC, we facilitated writing workshops in and around Salt Lake City where in one of my favorite writing groups I became known as the “writing lady.” Every week I had a one-hour slot reserved to talk about creative writing inside high schools, inside a refugee housing complex, a hospital, a youth shelter, and in jail. I’d be rushing over to one workshop after another. Most of the curriculum planning came from what I learned in my writing classes at the U and hanging out inside my car jotting an agenda for my workshop that started in five minutes. My 1996 green Toyota Corolla was my office.

I had many moments at the beginning of my employment at the CWC thinking, “What am I doing here? . . . I am not a writer.” There would be many times people would assume I had an English degree (which I did not have) or wrote for a living (never once had I written a poem). I was exposed to all kinds of community writing—people’s writing process, ideas, and writing related questions—or could just be there, present, to offer an extra pair of eyes on their writing. And so there I was—the unwriter talking about writing, seeing people struggle with writing, telling people that they shouldn’t worry so much about grammar.

So what now?

I encourage you to keep advocating and continue to support your students in composition. Choose a book that just got released and listed as the #1 *New York Times* bestseller. Talk to your students

about social injustice issues that they care about and actively participate in. Pick a book, pick a song, one of your favorites, or a show that's streaming that the kids are talking about now. Share career advice, too. Get creative. Make book copies for your students (if you can). Encourage your students to see that there is valid writing outside of academic walls. Here is my mantra. WRITING IS A SOCIAL PRACTICE. WRITING IS NOT AN ACADEMIC PRACTICE JUST FOR ACADEMICS. WRITING IS FOR EVERYONE. AND ANYONE CAN BE A WRITER.

#### VALUING

*An ecological framework has the capacity to decenter the U—and, for that matter, SLCC, and the entire academic enterprise—to situate transfer students' writing experiences within a more varied and complex ecology. In Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language, David Barton writes that “an ecological approach aims to understand how literacy is embedded in other human activity, its embeddedness in social life and in thought, and its position in history, in language and in learning” (32). Barton's emphasis on the social and historical situatedness of literacy reflects decades of research that questions the supremacy of academic ways with words. We might understand that trajectory as a disciplinary process of learning to value writing differently: to challenge received notions of what is good, desirable, and worthwhile, and to interrogate whose interests assessments of value serve.*

*Inoue calls for antiracist writing assessment that “struggles through the ways language comes to mean and be valued and how our bodies and environments affect that meaning and valuing” (Antiracist 81). For Inoue, an ecological orientation offers a way to understand writing assessment as embodied and co-constitutive of place and power:*

*[A]ll ecologies are associated with political activities, with the ways that people and environments affect each other and the interests that particular groups have to change or maintain a given environment or place. And so, ecology is always a reference to the political (or power) relations between people and their environments, between people in environments. (Antiracist 81)*

*Institutional assessment ecologies shape—and are shaped by—the ways languages, discourses, and writing are valued in local contexts. Such evaluations usually reflect the interests of dominant groups. Left uninterrogated and unchallenged, they reproduce the inequities that give rise to them. Transfer students—who are already more likely to come from groups disadvantaged by the ways languaging and literacies are valued at the university—enter these particular assessment ecologies midway through their college education.*

*Invoking the Freirean praxis of problem posing, Inoue argues for placing critical conversation about how writing is valued at the center of writing instruction, asserting “healthy writing assessment ecologies have at their core dialogue about what students and teachers know, how students and teachers judge language differently, so that students are also agents in the ecology, not simply objects to be measured” (Antiracist 84). Inoue’s ecological approach encourages teachers and students to see the power relations informing what we value and to recognize how privileging conventional academic literacies can devalue language practices in other parts of the ecology, thereby marginalizing the communities that practice them. He suggests teachers and students work together to understand “the complexity and holistic nature of assessment systems, the interconnectedness of all people and things . . . without denying or eliding linguistic, cultural, or racial diversity, and the politics inherent in all uneven social formation” (Antiracist 77). While Inoue is focused on first-year writing, we can extend his logic to the inequities transfer students experience in university writing-assessment ecologies.*

*Our collaborative research could be seen as a version of the kind of problem posing Inoue calls for, and, in our conversations together, we have often returned to the issue of valuing as it relates to community college transfer students. How do we develop resources and produce scholarship that challenge deficit discourses surrounding transfer students’ writing experiences—particularly reductive notions of “preparedness” that assume the primacy of conventional academic literacies—and instead value the knowledges, experiences, perspectives, and languages transfer students transform as they move across Salt Lake’s writing ecology? In considering these questions, we have found ourselves grappling with the material conditions that influence those transformations.*

*As an alternative to evaluating students' written performances based on a local white racial habitus, Inoue argues for classroom assessments based on labor, which "can be measured by duration, quantity, or intensity" (Antiracist 80). In his view, "to favor labor over the gifts of racial habitus sets up assessment ecologies that are by their nature more ethical and fair" (Antiracist 80). He asserts, "Labor is a more equitable and fair measure. Everyone has 24 hours in every day" (Antiracist 84). We find the notion of valuing labor over an inequitable notion of "writing quality" compelling, particularly when we consider that most transfer students are also workers. It does seem fair to "compensate" students in predictable ways for the labor they put into their schooling. However, based on our research and experiences, we question whether time is an equitably distributed resource.*

*As Kelly and Nate describe, many transfer students juggle demands like work, family caretaking, and community engagement and leadership. They might also be managing debt, physical and mental health issues, transportation or housing concerns, and/or mandatory engagement with government agencies (e.g., social services, immigration offices, community corrections). They don't have as many hours in a day to devote to school as traditional-age university students whose expenses are subsidized by family. We might seek to make visible and reward the intellectual and emotional labor (and often-hidden sacrifices and tradeoffs) transfer students undertake as they navigate interinstitutional writing ecologies. We might choose to value the labor of transferring and transforming prior writing knowledge, which researchers agree is a time-intensive and intellectually demanding task (Wardle; Driscoll and Wells), rather than ignoring the reality that transfer students might need to labor differently—often, harder—than their nontransfer peers in these transitional moments. Recognizing this labor might enable teachers to help cultivate the adaptability and rhetorical awareness interinstitutional transfer can foster.*

*We believe valuing such transfer labor helps achieve Inoue's goal of creating "a more equitable ecology, particularly for those who may come to it with discourses or habitus different from the dominant ones" (Antiracist 80). It furthers Cushman's call to recognize that "what counts as knowledge and evidence of this knowledge—what is valid—is to be found in all peoples' understandings and rhetorical struggles"*

*(“Decolonizing”). Transfer students might be uniquely equipped to question, critique, and challenge ways of valuing writing that have been naturalized in university settings. Such critical labor is something to be recognized, encouraged, and rewarded.*

### Westin

On May 10, 1869, thousands gathered at Promontory Point in northern Utah for the driving of the Gold Spike—the ceremonial merger of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railways to complete the first transcontinental railway system in the United States, constructed across Indigenous lands, largely through the labor of Chinese and Irish railroad workers. The site was not a destination, but a point in time and place that marked the rapid industrialization, mobilization, and ongoing colonization of North America. Local legend has it that the ceremony was delayed because the track carrying the Central Pacific engine with president Leland Stanford, who drove the final spike (and later founded the elite private university), was washed out by high springtime river in Weber Canyon, just outside of Ogden, Utah. The story goes that Stanford and his men began celebrating early, passing the time drinking, and, by the time they finally arrived at the event, Stanford was too drunk to drive the spike and missed several times.

A white Salt Laker by way of English American Latter-day Saint settlers and Italian American railroad workers, I grew up in that rural county of Morgan, Utah, Shoshone lands appropriated and settled by my Mormon ancestors generations before. A blip on the map of Northern Utah, Morgan County is now a valley of cattle ranches, dairy farms, warehouse steeples, and mink sheds all woven together by a single interstate and railroad track.

Years later I would bounce around the Wasatch Front from Dad’s to Mom’s house, a stone’s throw from the refineries and railyards of North Salt Lake where my parents labored, sustained their unions, and organized other workers. At night I would pry my window open and pray for breeze in the dry heat, while the too-close sounds of train whistles blew me awake, sometimes till dawn.

Like a lot of students, I began college a few years after high school, and took classes when I could afford them and work

around them. Friends and I pinged around different parts of the city: downtown to Sugar House, Riverton to Rose Park, working where there were jobs, and living where there were rooms. I was one of the lucky ones for whom college was a realistic possibility. There is a joke around town about attending JSLCC—Just Salt Lake Community College. The “just” acts as a strategic hedger to both define and apologize for your status as one who can just afford to attend the community college, while simultaneously not alienating those who can't afford any college. For nearly three years I attended SLCC, shuttling between satellite campuses in the valley, under the shadow of the maybe-someday University of Utah.

I found work at the SLCC Community Writing Center in those years, a nonprofit extension of SLCC that serves to “support, motivate, and educate people of all abilities and educational backgrounds who want to use writing for practical needs, civic engagement, and personal expression.” It was here that I met Nic, Sandra, and Christie, and, by extension, Nate, Kelly, and Claudia, as well as the other folks who have been part of this research team over the years.

The CWC became the Grand Central Station of our urban writing ecology, for me at least. It was the hub through which all tracks of the ecology I was traveling on at that time passed. Quite literally, the CWC is located at the heart of downtown Salt Lake City, and it is the most central point between several SLCC campuses and the U. TRAX, the light-rail train that networks the city, has one of its most popular stops across the street. Unable or unwilling to pay the outrageous price for parking at the U, I would continue parking at the CWC downtown and ride the train up the hill to class long after I finished at SLCC.

Having a hub like the CWC afforded me the opportunity to intersect with others. Other students, other writers, other residents of the valley—all key players. Those intersections revealed and provided access to other parts of the writing ecology. On a daily basis, I got to work with all kinds of writing and writers. I also got to work with all kinds of students, all of us coming from different places, going in different directions, but crossing paths, sharing a station temporarily. For nearly three years I worked at the CWC,

simultaneously completing my coursework at SLCC, transferring to the U, and moving through the city in different capacities. The CWC taught me that Salt Lake's writing ecology is constituted by the routes through which we are constantly moving. It is dynamic, situated in and shaped by time as much as by place. I'm privileged, lucky, to have been able to go to college, but was even more lucky to be able to work at the CWC while I did, and find faculty who were willing to embrace "nontraditionality" as resource rather than restriction. As you think about your own urban writing ecology—where the tracks lead to and from and what the whistles sound like—I encourage you to recognize students as agents of that ecology, regardless of the routes they took to reach your institutional hub.

Postscript from 2019: When I wrote and rewrote my section as I approached graduation in 2017, I was mostly scratching for a way to situate myself as a first-generation transfer student who might be able to offer a unique perspective to academics. Demographically speaking, though, I am in some ways the student you might be most familiar with: I am a young, white, able-bodied cis man. While those identities may not have determined my success, they did create safe spaces wherein I could fail. I could come to college mostly because my parents picketed, struck, and negotiated fairer wages and working conditions for blue-collar jobs. Their entrance to the middle class and the means by which they were able to build houses and raise a family came from the security of a unionized workforce—my mom in the Communication Workers of America, and my dad first in the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, then the United Steelworkers. Coming from that labor milieu gave me an understanding that the world spins askew on an axis of power and that the only thing anyone gets from the power brokers is what they're willing to fight for; understanding, too, that my parents fought from a place of considerably more privilege and safety than many nonwhite workers do.

Leverage. Both my parents, I believe, would have been humanities students had they gone to school. My mother gardens and my father reads. They instilled in me a love for language and

art as well as curiosity. College was the place for people with a love for language and art as well as curiosity. Not the refinery. Not the phone company. But leverage, real-world bargaining power, is what college was supposed to afford me. College, we thought, was the path by which one could circumvent the minefield of the American workforce. It's ironic that we never saw how the institution that granted me a diploma did so not entirely differently than did the industries that cut my parents' checks: by taking more than it gave.

I operate from an incredibly privileged position. And I wouldn't give up my education for anything. Already it has afforded me opportunities that I never would've had without it. My point is this: Universities are threshers. They take exorbitant amounts of money, labor, and intellectual contributions from students. And what is too often thought of as the "ability" to successfully navigate those threshers—to come out as the wheat, not the chaff—maps directly onto the kinds of capital that privileged identities like mine have to spend. If you are employed by a university, whether you like it or not, you work on behalf of the machinery that determines and separates wheat from chaff. Unless you don't. The work this book documents is a testament to the real power and responsibility you have to change those systems to more equitably serve and reward students—to give more than you take.

#### MOTION

*Just as an ecological orientation enables us to decenter academic ways of valuing, it also encourages us to decenter the U in our study of interinstitutional writing transfer. As Fleckenstein et al. argue, an ecological approach requires recognizing "that scholars [must always] draw a circle around the pertinent feedback pathways to delineate the span of the research ecosystem and that the circle is always mutable and permeable" (396). Given the interconnectivity of writing and the movement of feedback across ecological systems, we must make intentional choices about how we bound the scope of a study and be willing to rethink received boundaries that have limited our understanding of writing phenomena.*

*For example, Fleckenstein et al. argue, "the line circumscribing a research ecosystem can include the cultural and personal lives of*



*the students outside the classroom” (397). By redrawing the lines circumscribing the study of transfer student writers—by respecting what Rousculp calls the “wholeness’ of a person or collection of people” (Rhetoric xiv)—faculty can decenter the institutions that are the focus of their professional lives to recenter students and their movements within a broader ecology. This methodological choice has ethical dimensions. Deloria writes, “[T]he goal should be to allow the life-worlds to intrude into the world of systems and to make certain that institutions serve human beings, thereby eliminating the real possibility that institutions will completely dehumanize us” (186). Being willing to recognize transfer students’ movements beyond institutional systems keeps them—and faculty researchers—human.*

*Motion is key to the permeability of writing ecologies. Margaret Syverson suggests writing ecologies have “physical, social, psychological, spatial, and temporal dimensions. . . . [T]he social dimensions of composition are distributed, embodied, emergent, and enactive” (23). Jenny Edbauer builds on Syverson to assert that rhetorical ecologies are co-constituted through action and motion. As she writes, “We do city, rather than exist in the city” (11). Syverson and Edbauer help us see that Salt Lake’s writing ecology is always in process and being (re)made through our movements.*

*This orientation enables us to view SLCC and the U as what Wes calls hubs in the valley’s writing ecology. These hubs play important roles in the regional economy and function as key sites of literacy sponsorship (Brandt), but they are by no means the only places where transfer students are writing, either before, during, or after they move between SLCC and the U. Instead of the conventional conception of “vertical” interinstitutional transfer, which imagines students moving “up” from the community college to the university in one idealized, linear ascendance, an ecological model recognizes lateral, multidirectional mobility across and beyond these institutional hubs.*

*Students’ movements through our writing ecology are rarely linear. Many students “reverse” transfer from the U or other universities to SLCC, sometimes but not always with plans to return to a four-year institution. They “swirl” between SLCC and the U and/or other*

*regional universities. They stop out or drop out for a host of intersecting reasons: financial pressures or work schedules, family obligations, health issues, religious missions, boredom, burnout, uncertainty about their goals, and other personal needs or interests that take at least temporary precedence over school. They might complete a certificate or associate's degree at SLCC and not decide until years later that they want to pursue a bachelor's. When they are enrolled and not—and whether they ever complete their degrees—students compose for many nonacademic contexts and purposes.*

*Stuart Blythe calls for research on writing knowledge transfer proceeding from “an ecological mindset” (65). Such a mindset foregrounds the various forms of knowledge transfer students undertake as they travel their idiosyncratic literacy paths. They encounter writing knowledge through their formal postsecondary experiences, as well as in their families, workplaces, and other community contexts. They navigate these complex, ever-shifting writing ecologies in ways that make sense, meet needs, and are possible for them at a given moment in their lives. In the process, they acquire and adapt many different kinds of writing knowledge, with varying consequences, across and beyond institutions.*

*The Salt Lake writing ecology is co-constituted in no small part by the movements of transfer students—their bodies, their money, their ideas, their languages and literacies, and the materiality of their writing—across our institutions and the wider community. While that flow is never the same students or the same writing, their continuous movements connect SLCC and the U to one another and to the rest of the valley in complex, dynamic ways. Likewise, where faculty and staff at both institutions choose to put their own bodies, dollars, ideas, languages, and writing is also co-constituting the ecology. Their movements create—or fail to create—what Norbert Elliot calls “opportunity structures” for SLCC students, particularly those who are “least advantaged” due to race, class, age, gender, sexuality, language background, immigration status, disability, and other identities and experiences. The social justice implications of such mobility suggest that university faculty have a responsibility to get down off the hill and do city—or in our case, do valley—differently.*

**Kelly**

As Michelle Cleary states, “Overwhelming research on writing transfer assumes students move from grammar to high school to college to work in one uninterrupted progression” (661). When most people think of college students, what comes to mind is a bunch of late-teens and early twenty-somethings. I will admit, this is how I thought of students in higher education, right up to the day I finally returned to school to chase down my own degree at thirty-two. I now know people recognize their drive for education and choose to attend school at different stages in life, from those fresh out of high school to the empty nester pursuing an incomplete bachelor's or graduate degree.

My first attempt at a degree was at the age of seventeen, during my time in the Job Corps. My second was when I was nineteen, back in my hometown of Yakima, Washington. During my formative years, most of my interactions and associations were outside of my racial “category” of African American. As of the 2000 US census, the white population of Yakima was 68.8 percent and the Hispanic population was 33.7 percent, far outnumbering the 2.0 percent in the city of African American heritage (“Yakima”). What this meant to me, in terms of race relations and identity, was shaped by my reception and interactions in the places I frequented the most: home, school, and church. At home, racial inequalities were discussed as a factor of the past, whereas at school and church my race was rarely, if ever, mentioned. I spent my childhood in a training ground of “neutrality” and, though I was aware of my difference, I learned not to focus on it.

I moved to Portland, Oregon, at twenty-one, where I boomeranged from Mt. Hood Community College to Portland Community College and back again twice before settling into a job-to-job existence. What precipitated my movement between careers and schools was a number of things: boredom; the dissolution of a position; harmless irresponsibility (in my estimation at the time, anyway) which led to my termination from a couple of jobs; curiosity; impulsiveness; and feelings of failure when it came to my haphazard attempts at school. I have often wondered why I never

heard from the schools during the times I became truant, which always happened before I decided to quit. Is all the focus in these schools on admission and little or none on retention? Did it have something to do with assumptions teachers or advisors made about me? I am aware that my own tendency toward a neutral view of race does not change the fact that I am Black. I cannot change the truth that when people see me, they see first: Black, female, and obese. I know that all of these things about me are seen, and that I am judged often based upon the stigmas that are inextricably linked to all of the surface identities to which I am bound.

I know too that whether or not I choose to view the world and myself through a “color-blind” lens, I am being affected by these aspects of my embodiment, which I consider just parts of a whole and which society at large often prefers to separate and demonize. Or to champion, depending on the perspective from which they are viewed. Minorities attend two-year schools in disproportionately higher numbers than white students. Whether this is simply a matter of affordability or easy access to these types of schools, I cannot say. But completion rates among Brown minorities in two-year schools are eye-opening. The six-year associate’s degree completion rate of Hispanic students who began at a community college in 2012 was 35.7 percent, and for Black students was 27.5 percent. Bachelor’s-degree completion was even more rare, at 13.2 percent and 19.5 percent, respectively. These numbers are in comparison to the 48.1 percent community college and 26.2 percent bachelor’s degree completion rates of white students during the same period (“Community”). Are schools aware of the fact that a number of the students who enroll will not complete a degree and therefore turn a blind eye to students—particularly Brown students—who may only require a bit of encouragement to stay?

I bounced through a number of careers during my twenties and early thirties, from crowd management to residential aide to nanny to Certified Nurse Assistant to culinary school and some years working in kitchens. When I was attending culinary school, I continually heard the question, “So you want to be a chef?” and assertions like: “I bet you’d love to be on *Hell’s Kitchen!*” My answer

to these questions was always an emphatic “No!” The boredom I mentioned earlier was typified by my impulsive decision (facilitated by misleading recruitment and predatory lending tactics) to attend a career school out of a desire for knowledge of the craft, coupled with some small aspirations that one day I would possess the picturesque family I have always hoped to enjoy and the ability to wow them with the gourmet fare I had learned to create. In hindsight, I realize that I could have obtained similar knowledge through a much more financially feasible route: via a community college or hands-on in the workforce. The sad truth is that for-profit schools are just that: for the banknote, not the students who fill the seats. And I now know that for-profit schools aggressively recruit students of color—and particularly Black students—like me.

While completing my culinary education, and thus proving to myself that I *could* focus on school long enough to finish, I moved to Utah for a six-month externship. However, the Great Recession of 2008 had tanked the job market, which made my search for a position at the end of my externship daunting, and in the end unfruitful. This led me to return to my home state for what I assumed would be a few months, until I found a permanent position elsewhere. A few months became a few years, and after bouncing between culinary positions in and around Yakima, I eventually returned to the state of Utah, which I had fallen in love with, planning to return to school. I enrolled in SLCC in the fall of 2013, electing the pursuit of a Paralegal A.O.S. degree. Late in the game, when I realized that paralegals do much of the same work as does a lawyer, without the benefit of a lawyer's credentials or pay rate, I decided to transfer to the U, with the goal of eventually attending law school. As I began to speak with advisors at the U, it became evident that the advising I had experienced at SLCC was insufficient for my needs. Not only would the majority of the classes I had taken in my paralegal program not apply to my degree, but I had not been informed that all of the years I spent attending schools while not completing degrees would be counted in my grade point average, bringing it well below what was necessary for admittance to the university. After some research, I was relieved to

find that there was an admittance sponsorship program through the campus's Transfer Diversity Scholars program that allowed me to enroll in the spring of 2016.

In the fall of 2016, after an extremely rocky start at the U, I had a catalytic discussion during a class and came to realize that what I love the most about the law is drafting an argument or brief—essentially, the craft of the *writing* involved—and what I loved about culinary school (other than the great food) was developing amazing menus, then finding exciting ways to describe what I had created. So, I decided to focus my education on what I love best: writing.

Looking back now, I know that the path I took to higher education was a long one, unique to my life. The interconnectivity between each of my jobs, educational paths, interpersonal relationships and life choices I have made over time has carved out a distinct direction, and I now realize that self-improvement, whatever that may be, can take many forms and happens when a person is ready for it, not on society's timeframe. Because I know what it is like to look up one day and assess my life choices—everything from where I live to my career path—I realize that many adults who have pursued multiple interests make the same decision to return to school each day. According to the National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator, in the fall of 2014 27 percent of University of Utah students and 37 percent of Salt Lake Community College students were over the age of twenty-five. It is not easy to change direction in what could be considered the middle of a life, but people all over the country are doing just that.

By the age of thirty-three, I had not exercised my brain in an academic capacity for quite a long time, although I had done things like technical and medical writing, and some accounting and record keeping for work. I realized after I returned to school that what I remembered of being a student, the experience I expected to have, and the experience that I would have along this journey were very different things. Many challenges can arise when a person has been outside of traditional education for what can equal tens of years. Family, community engagement, religious

and political obligations, financial struggles, etc., can all compete with studying for priority. My path, through career *and* education, has been shaped by physical and mental health issues, as well as financial difficulties and all of the baggage that can come along with interpersonal relationships. My race probably also played a part in these experiences. Yet, these seeming obstacles can also provide resources. The rich life experiences of older students, especially those from diverse ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, can be a great addition to an institution's chorus of voices; and the challenges may be mitigated in part when curricula account for these rich backgrounds (see Gleason).

What diverse older students take back to their equally diverse communities when requesting assistance from friends, family, and coworkers brings the university to places where it may not normally go, like my oldest friend's living room as we discussed my studies. Or Facebook messages as I requested editorial assistance from my sister. This action of "transporting literacy" (Michaud 245)—a kind of ecological mobility—widens community awareness of the institution, but can also awaken universities to the need to create alternative methods of teaching and expand access for nontraditional and returning students through the creation of more options for communication and contact. Older and returning students are bringing with them a vast array of engagements within the local writing ecology. Writing is embedded in and shaping our communities, both in schools and outside of them. The differences in students' paths should be viewed not as a disadvantage but as a dynamic function of a changing ecology.

#### DIFFERENCE

*A key affordance of an ecological perspective is that it foregrounds the value—indeed, the necessity—of diversity. Barton asserts, "An ecological approach emphasizes diversity, and in the original biological senses of ecology, sees it as a virtue. Diversity is a source of strength, the roots of the possibilities of the future. This is just as true when applied to the diversity of languages and literacies" (32). Fleckenstein and colleagues draw on the concept of biodiversity to develop their ecological metaphor for writing research:*

*Beyond the economic and spiritual values of biodiversity, a multiplicity of life forms is essential for the resilience and productivity of ecosystems . . . because an ecosystem exists through its interactions. So, if the number of participants in an ecosystem (or the number of ecosystems) is eroded, the interactions are affected, and the intricate network of life destabilizes. (401)*

*In this metaphor, it is the quantity and diversity of interactions that sustain a healthy ecology, make it resilient and productive. This logic, Fleckenstein and colleagues argue, extends to “the complexity and messiness of twenty-first-century meaning making” (389). The more generative interactions we foster across a wide range of traditions and practices—the more relations we cultivate—the more robust and adaptive our writing ecology will be as we head into an unknown future.*

*We follow Kerschbaum in preferring the relational term “difference” over the commodified term “diversity.” Informed by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Kerschbaum encourages us “to see differences as dynamic rather than as static entities, as relations between people rather than individual traits, and as interactionally emergent, not as properties that can be bought, transferred, or sold” (Toward 55). Kerschbaum’s insistence that “difference, rather than being presentable through categories and remaining relatively inert across time and space, is dynamic, relational, and emergent” resonates with the literature on writing ecologies (“Avoiding” 623). As she argues, “Difference is not ‘out there’ waiting to be found and identified but is always coming-to-be through the here-and-now of interaction” (“Avoiding” 626). Thus, the differences that emerge through transfer students’ interactions at the university do not have static or inherent meanings. Their meanings are, rather, a function of what everyone involved in a particular emplaced interaction chooses to display (or has no choice but to display), what their interlocutors notice and choose to act upon (and the nature of their actions), and how all parties respond to these dynamics as the interaction unfolds (Kerschbaum, “Avoiding” and Toward). Difference is thus always being co-constituted within emplaced ecological relations.*

*The recognition that the meanings of difference emerge through interactions—that “diversity” is valuable, but its value is instantiated,*



*ignored, or undercut by how we make meaning of difference—invites us to push back against abstracted, monolithic, and purportedly neutral constructs of “academic preparedness.” It encourages us to embrace the plurality of languages, literacies, knowledges, and life experiences transfer students bring with them from their various educational pathways. In an ecological orientation, those experiences and social networks can be mobilized to support writing transfer and adaptation. As Syverson argues,*

*[I]n the process of enacting ourselves and our world, we use whatever resources we can bring to bear on our situation, including our past experiences, our present resourcefulness, and our interactions with others, which inevitably reflect their past experiences, as well. Writers (and readers) are notoriously opportunistic in the kind of bricolage that seizes upon any experience or interaction that can be useful for enacting their textual worlds. (72)*

*With their varying backgrounds and “nontraditional” trajectories, transfer students bring wide-ranging rhetorical “resources” that contribute to the writing “bricolage” we undertake in classrooms.*

*These differences may be helpful for fostering what Fleckenstein and colleagues call “critical self-awareness” (401). Inoue, for example, urges teachers to “create sustainable places that depend on local diversity for critical examination of writing and the habitus that produces that writing and readers’ expectations” (Antiracist 80). He argues that the “local diversities” within and beyond our campuses can help us interrogate how language and writing are valued in academic spaces (68). An ecological approach that understands difference as critical capacity rather than deficit aligns with principles of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies articulated by education scholars (e.g., Ladson-Billings; Paris; Paris and Alim). It can further the vision of CCCC’s statement on Students’ Right to their Own Language and calls to mobilize the cultural and political power of rhetorical difference put forward by generations of scholars of Black, Latina/o/x, Indigenous, Asian and Asian American, and feminist rhetorics. It can incorporate insights from recent disciplinary turns toward code-meshing and*

*translingualism (e.g., Horner et al.; Young and Martinez). Likewise, it can respond to decolonial critiques of epistemological universalism put forward by Indigenous and Latinx rhetorics scholars (e.g., Cushman, "Decolonizing"; Powell et al.; Riley-Mukavetz and Powell; Ruiz and Sánchez; García and Baca), encouraging us to recognize the local knowledges transfer students live, adapt, and transform. It furthers efforts in queer theory to deconstruct the normativities surrounding academic rhetorics, literacies, and educational paths (Alexander), and it advances calls in disability studies to broaden conceptualizations of "access" and "accommodation," to question the assumptions about neurological and sensory processing, bodily abilities, and time from which literacy technologies, pedagogies, and institutional spaces often operate (e.g. Yergeau et al.; Womack; Wood).*

*A critical ecological approach can recognize that difference is cultural, linguistic, discursive, epistemic, and embodied. That is, writers write—and are read—from bodies marked in complex and intersecting ways by socially constructed categories. Our embodiments interact with our environments, (re)producing relations that are often unjust, and this affects students' experiences moving across and beyond postsecondary institutions. As Syverson asks:*

*If writing and reading . . . are embodied processes, how should teachers think about the differences between a hungry student and one who is well fed, an exhausted student and one who is rested, a battered student and one who is well loved, a disabled student and one who is "normal"—and the whole complex range of physical conditions that lie between or among these poles? (188)*

*While Syverson's language is dated, her point remains: students experience differences in their embodied, material circumstances that shape their writing and can impact the time, space, attention, motivation, and money they devote to their academic pursuits.*

*An ecological approach enables us to see this kind of material difference and reckon with its inequitable consequences. Some people are harmed by their experiences in our writing ecology, and no amount of "grit" can counter those material injustices. However, without lapsing into bootstrap rhetorics, we might recognize that these experiences sometimes*

*also have the potential to foster resilience, or what our co-researcher Justin Whitney calls “callouses.” While painful, such experiences can motivate and inform rhetorical work. As Claudia suggests, writing offers ways to make new meaning from these experiences of difference to pursue personal and social change. Ecological orientations suggest that supporting transfer students is not just a matter of raising awareness or adapting pedagogy: it requires addressing material conditions that affect educational access and outcomes. It requires political labor that extends far beyond the syllabus, the department website, and the university’s development offices.*

*Finally, we believe our work together on this project evidences the value of difference within the disciplinary ecology of composition studies. As Fleckenstein and colleagues argue,*

*An ecological orientation to research emphasizes the need for research diversity: multiple sites of immersion, multiple perspectives, and multiple methodologies within a particular discipline and research project. . . . Traditional approaches to research have crafted a monoculture in which the identities of the researcher and the subject of research are carefully controlled and carefully separated. An ecological orientation destabilizes that monoculture, requiring researchers to consider who is empowered to ask questions and solicit answers, who can be the object of the study, who can be authorized to analyze the data, and who can conduct and report research. (401)*

*Our collaborative, constellated research—what Nic calls being “rabbits in lab coats”—complicates the monoculture with a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. Our team’s multifaceted identities and experiences, varying languages and literacies, and different investments in academic knowledge making have presented challenges, but they are, ultimately, a strength: a source of generativity and resilience. The meaningful differences produced through our interactions have invited a more diverse cohort of transfer students into the project and the WRS department. We hope our work challenges the research monoculture and contributes to enacting more just disciplinary ecologies.*

Claudia

It was my first semester at the University of Utah, where at a transfer student event an enthusiastic professor sold me on a class—"Write4U"—the then-pilot course for transfer students. Nic, the research assistant, emailed me to be a participant of the transfer student study being conducted for the pilot course. I thought: "I'll get a \$20 gift card to the University Bookstore for being questioned by a stranger for an hour. That's hella above my pay rate." Once in the interview I realized I had met Nic once before, about two years earlier. Back then we were both at SLCC and had only exchanged small talk. I vaguely remember him saying he worked at the SLCC Community Writing Center and my "who the hell needs writing" attitude.

The interconnectivity that allows transfer students to flow between academic worlds would later prove its value because agreeing to be interviewed for the pilot course—by someone who also spoke Spanish—was the beginning of my search for evidence to provide answers to the questions of my identity, ironically through the writing I felt so inadequate to do. "How long have you been here? You barely have an accent!" is the usual follow-up from people who don't know me and are determined to single me out, after they've asked, "Where are you from?" I tend to ignore those microaggressive questions, because asking where I'm from is the wrong question if you want to understand my writing in relation to this place. And I can't tell you about Salt Lake without letting you in on a little secret: I'm an infiltrator—my foreign words immigrate over the border and into the writing ecology of Salt Lake.

I'm driving—no, racing—with excitement to get my parents' garage, where I'm sure I'll find just the right piece of writing to share with you. I want to give you physical evidence—a textual artifact of my existence.

I got to the garage and began digging up dusty boxes of my dad's old notebooks, taxes, and bills that ended up going to collections. Despite spending hours looking I came up empty-

handed. Defeated, I went inside the house to try and explain to my parents this loquera thing I was doing for school, so I told them: "Esque estoy buscando papeles donde yo haya escrito de cuando vivíamos en Mexico." Mi Mama dijo, "Y para que los quieres? Si escribias en Espanol." I told her, "Esque es como evidencia de mi contribución a la escritura de aquí (SLC) fuera de la escuela y antes que llegáramos."

My dad pulled out photographs from his drawer. He saved those little windows into our world that my mom, my sister, and I would send him in the mail while he lived in Salt Lake and the three of us in Mexico. I remember sitting en la cocina with my mom, who would help me form sentences out of my longing to see my father. Now, as my parents and I sifted through these relics, I noticed my mother's eyes becoming teary, and she said, "Siento mucha nostalgia cuando me acuerdo que antes te podía enseñar a leer y escribir, algo que ya no pude hacer en Estados Unidos." My mom passed down her self-perception of inadequacy and powerlessness that comes with moving and learning a new language to me.

In 2002 my family left Guanajuato, Mexico, and resettled in Magna, Utah, a township famous for its drinking water, "rich in minerals." The open-pit Kennecott Copper Mine is our contaminated backyard, after all. I sat in the Magna library writing this very piece for you. I looked toward the Wasatch Mountains, surrounded by hiking trails and deer, where an emblematic symbol is carved. The symbol is one letter: "U" for the University of Utah, and I wondered if the U could see us from up there.

I have been struggling to connect the fibers of my experiences within the writing ecology of Salt Lake, even though I live here. The letters I sent my father in 1999 had materialized here, but in some ways I never did. The following questions loom over the rest of my paper: Why does academia need data to validate experiences? What evidence should I include to convince you my experiences

are real? For even I had to find evidence to believe my own writing existed. So who am I for you to believe? I can't find answers to questions and realized I don't need to. What I do now is make sense of why I ask and what is asked of me.

Within this text I've written myself out of SLC—always the outsider looking in, for various reasons, as my skin bears the colors of mixed ancestry: Toltec, Spanish, French, Black, or as my grandma would say, “Somos lo que quedo despues de toda la cogedera.” I'm used to being the outsider—an involuntary participant—but even more I let myself become a victim to my beliefs about beauty, intelligence, racism, and other self-deprecating notions that influence my idea of self as a not-writer. A person who is not and cannot fully be. The process of not being is continual, and a constant battle with myself, mitigated, in part, by how much I can actually bring into the classroom. Often I have had to leave my gender and ethnicity at the door. I come and go from all the places I inhabit, whether physically, or in dreams and desires of what could've been if I'd stayed in Mexico, where I didn't question my origins.

The initial shock of being forced to leave my home caused a part of me—call it my mind or spirit—to have stayed behind in that place where I used to belong. My body crossed over the border, and I had found artifactual evidence of myself here, but I have never consciously been a part of Salt Lake. I want to be here. I choose to stay here. No matter if my writing will always give me away. I have chosen to let go of my long-lost home so I can be *here*. The following passage comes from the in-between, another realm of existence that I inhabit in my language of nurture and in the form of verses, the way I've used to make sense of my story which at this point has had no beginning, middle, or end. I wrote a letter to my hometown “Cortazar” to unravel myself from it.

Querido Cortazar,

Hace ya más de 15 años me fui de ti, una niña solloza. Hoy regreso a platicar contigo como mujer porque despues de tanto tiempo te llevo dentro de mi, y quiero que sepas que aunque te deje, jamás me quise despedir.

Me pregunto si tu aun te acuerdas de mi. Si me extrañas si te hago falta y me necesitas. Y si regreso a ti me estarás esperando o te habrás olvidado de mi?

Porque debajo de este cielo compartido, yo a ti te extraño.

Si supieras que si pudiera volver aquel momento cuando me tuve que ir, si pudiera volver el tiempo jamás me hubiera separado de ti. But there's no going back and there's no pretending that we still speak the same tongue. If you let me go I'll always come back to you as you return to me in dreams.

In this parallel world  
Of my spectral existence  
Your borders are the labyrinth of my melancholy  
And your prose peace to my rebellion.  
Filling the void of your absence  
With foreign warmth  
I've let you go.

Ahora me pregunto quien se quedo contigo, y si eres feliz.

As I seek reconciliation between the places I've been in both physically and spiritually, I do so faced with the reality that there is no going back to my romanticized idea of "home" because that would mean a mother with two daughters living in a town where more and more dead bodies are appearing and people are disappeared. I returned about ten years ago now, at eighteen, and found myself ousted once more, faced with the sentiment of "Tu no eres Mexicana, ya eres gringa." Perhaps this was my saving grace—I realized I no longer had the privilege of living in ignorance. I knew it was time to let go, to fully embody myself again:

So I sat down to be interviewed about writing by another transfer student, who proved to be a reflection of the work I am capable of doing. At the time, I didn't understand why anyone wanted to ask questions about my connection to writing as far back to when I was a kid who didn't speak English. I didn't know someone cared. But after four months and three interviews I had collected \$60 worth of gift cards and picked up pieces of my life I never had the opportunity to reflect on. I had been writing all along in the United States and actually liked it—just not in school. With the little poems I would write in my basement to pass the time, helping my dad with his résumé to apply for jobs, proofreading my sister's essays, and teaching my mother to write in English.

Providing opportunities for students to reflect on the forms of writing that they've used outside of school, in other languages, or unconventional ways is crucial for our understanding the role that writing plays in shaping identities here in Salt Lake. It enriches the writing ecology of any place—by having multiple voices involved. I went from feeling inadequate, detached, impotent, to later finding unfilled niches, i.e. through this research project. One of the last questions Nic asked me was: "Do you feel like you belong at the University?" I answered, "Yes. I belong as an outsider, there are always outsiders, and we belong by not belonging." I'll always be an infiltrator to some, but I'll never be a foreigner to myself.

#### CHANGE

*In her book title, Rousculp pairs the ethic that emerged at the CWC, a rhetoric of respect, with the idea of recognizing change. An ecological*



approach helps her theorize discursive change over time in relation to place. Ecological theories of writing have long emphasized the inevitability of change. Cooper writes, "An important characterization of ecological systems is that they are inherently dynamic; though their structures and contents can be specified at a given moment, in real time they are constantly changing, limited only by parameters that are themselves subject to change over longer spans of time" (386). Writing ecologies are, in Syverson's terms, emergent—always "in the process of becoming" (6). Sometimes change emerges gradually, through the accumulating interactions of those within the system, while in other cases it can result from what Syverson calls a perturbation. In these situations, "some factor outside the system can trigger a perturbation that propagates, in which a change in the state of the relative activity of the components of a system leads to further changes of state either in the same components or in other components" (129). Grant identifies a similar ontology in the Lakota narrative of Taté's lodge, in which a "perturbance of a network" and the "decisions made by network actors" results in "a subsequent realignment or equilibrium" (75). Because of the complexity of ecologies, it is often not possible to predict which perturbations will lead to state changes, or what the resulting equilibrium will be.

The unpredictable, dynamic nature of ecologies is co-constitutive. In Inoue's words, "the ways that environments affect people are discursively, performatively, and materially, changing us as we dwell and labor because we dwell and labor in those places" (Antiracist 90). We are, in turn, always changing the environment through our actions, including our languaging. In this dynamic, Inoue sees possibilities for Freirean praxis, asserting that "the link between the world and the word is reflection that is action, which is labor, the engine of becoming and change, the engine of ecologies" (406). Change is inevitable, if not inevitably positive. Inoue suggests we can work together to understand our current relations and act collectively to create a writing ecology that is more just, fair, and healthy for everyone with whom we dwell.

Changes in our local writing ecology have real implications for the lives and opportunities of the transfer students within it. However, the actions of those students are also co-constituting that ecology at any

*given moment. Thus, transfer students and researchers, and transfer-students-as-researchers, have agency, albeit constrained, to reimagine and remake the writing ecology through their actions. As Fleckenstein and colleagues assert:*

*Rhetorically enacted, an ecological orientation offers teacher-scholars the hope of making a difference in the material conditions of one's reality. . . . [R]hetorically enacted, research is something that is undertaken for reasons that go beyond the motives of satisfying one's degree requirements or providing material for promotion and tenure considerations. . . . [R]esearch is undertaken so that new knowledge can be a difference that makes a difference. (406)*

*In this framework, research can be purposeful action that not only produces knowledge, but also changes the ecology in the process.*

*We have spent the last seven years working with transfer students and as transfer students, with teachers of writing and as teachers of writing, to remake our writing ecology. We have done so through public acts: proposals, presentations, publications, engagements with university communications that became contentious when we suspected our differences were being commodified. We have also done so through "everyday" rhetorical practices (Powell et al.) and what Cushman calls "the daily interactions when the regular flow of events is objectified, reflected upon, and altered" ("Rhetorician" 12). We have sought to recognize and tend to local interinstitutional relationships that were invisible or neglected, to forge connections, and to show what kinds of disciplinary relations are possible and why they might be desirable. We have done what we could to bring bodies and languages and knowledges and perspectives into academic spaces where they weren't acting before. And we have seen ecological change—small from a systemic view, perhaps, but not so small in our own lives or those of students we've met along the way.*

*In his Keywords in Writing Studies entry on "ecology," Weisser states that "an ecological conception of writing emphasizes complex adaptation and the constant motion of discursive systems" (68). If adaptation is central to writing, then transfer students may be better primed than*

*most for such discursive motion. They are, after all, defined by movement between academic institutions, and they often travel across many other borders to get there—political, socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, and gendered. Many do so under material conditions that demand adaptation for survival. They know change, and that knowledge can yield forms of rhetorical awareness that facilitates writing transfer. In line with Dimpal Jain and her colleagues' principles for creating a transfer-receptive culture, an ecological approach helps us appreciate the intellectual and rhetorical capacities community college transfer students bring "because they are transfer students" (253): because of their multifaceted identities and knowledges, their mobilities, and their experiences with and desires for change.*

*As teachers, students, and writers, as departments and institutions, we are all always in the process of becoming. But Indigenous rhetorics—the memoria of this land—remind us such change does not undo the emplaced histories and relations that came before (Deloria; King et al.; Powell). In Lakota ontology, "[p]rior orders still continue and have a lasting effect, yet the network as a whole progresses through cyclical states of becoming" (Grant 74). As we move into the future and new spaces, remaking our ecologies through our actions and responding as best we can to perturbations beyond our control, we also encounter and carry traces of prior ecologies making the here and now in which we dwell (Edbauer). Those ecologies are not gone, not lost, nor are they truly escapable. Whether we choose to recognize them or not, our relations persist across time and space, as do our responsibilities. An ecological approach helps us see that our relations will always be (re)writing us, even as we strive to (re)write them. This awareness may be our best resource for facing the inevitability of change.*

Nate

[Dénouement]

The week leading up to my graduation, I would walk out to the top floor of the parking garage at my job and consider how my life would soon be reorganized. Each day it became more apparent to me that the academic structure in which I had found some form of comfort was about to collapse around me. I would get angry when

I saw buildings on campus whose construction wouldn't be finished until after my graduation, knowing I'd never step inside them as a student. I'd think, "You aren't supposed to build things *after* I leave!" Like finishing a book and finding the world around you profoundly unchanged and indifferent to the emotional turmoil you'd just experienced, I found that the universe wasn't going to warp time and space to make the narrative of my graduation any more cinematic, and didn't seem inclined to rush in and wrap up unfinished storylines in my life.

I saw college as the only realistic means to alter the future I'd envisioned for myself based on the circumstances of my upbringing: a future of financial insecurity, no employment opportunities outside of manual or service labor, and genetic predispositions to substance abuse. As a child of teenage parents, and as a first-generation college student, I had no roadmap that led me through school, and, now having graduated, no clear path leading me to the more secure life I've been working toward. I'm not trying to paint my college experience as being uniquely harder than those of other students, because that certainly wasn't the case—as a “traditionally college-aged” (young), straight white man, I could comfortably visit campus day or night without anyone so much as batting an eye. I understand that my ability to pay for school hinged on an unusually high-paying job as a security guard where I likely benefited from being “traditionally military-aged” (young), white, and able-bodied, and the benefit of living with a roommate whom I could depend on to pay rent every month. While acknowledging my positionality and perspective is important, discounting my own experiences discounts the experiences of others with similar experiences, so I'll try to limit that here.

For a student with no economic safety net in place to soften the impact of failure, I took the safest route I could through college. Two years passed before I dared take more than two classes per semester while I worked full-time. My class schedule (and even my eventual selection of a major) was built to accommodate the job that paid for it. I quickly gave up looking for scholarships after I found that most required full-time enrollment, or hours of

essay writing that would be better spent working for guaranteed compensation. Splitting my time between work, school, and other activities created the sense that I didn't quite fit into any of the communities I was participating in—not quite a worker, not quite a student, but some sort of distracted amalgamation of the two.

When I was invited to be a member of this research team, it felt as if the university itself was reaching out to formally ask me to be a part of its community. I knew I couldn't give it all of my time, but I knew that without this solid connection between me and the school, I would continue to feel as removed as I had throughout my years at the community college. While it certainly didn't help the sensation of spinning plates, it managed to instill some much-needed confidence that I was capable of earning a bachelor's degree. One of the pitfalls of being a first-generation college student is being inherently untrusting of people who say you're capable. Are they saying that I'm just as capable as someone of a more affluent and educated background, or do they mean that I'm more capable than they think someone from my background would be? Are they even credible enough to know the difference? I've always feared, and assumed, that I'd merely managed to exceed their lowered expectations.

Two weeks after my graduation, the team reconvened to begin talking about how we might approach writing this chapter. Going on our third year of doing research together, and this being the book we'd been planning all this time, it felt too daunting a task to summarize our experiences throughout every iteration of this project on a few pieces of paper. Furthermore, I struggled with the notion that *this* would be the work that is recognized on our CVs: not our interactions with students over the years, nor our building relationships with faculty at Salt Lake Community College, or any other experience that wouldn't appear on paper. How could this be the paramount achievement of our endeavors, above all else?

I find this book to be but a byproduct of the real work that was done that made tangible differences, however large or small, in the lives of those we've interacted with during our research. I'm certainly proud of the work that went into it, and hope that it

will be useful in some way to those who take the time to read it, but this book is not the goal, not the solution, not the thing that made change. However, like a long-term deposit, maybe it will be doing the work for us when we're busy spinning plates elsewhere. We learned throughout countless meetings and hours spent writing that the best way to invoke change was by working directly with members of the ecology.

As the services offered to me as a transfer student weren't terribly useful, given how they seemed to only apply to the full-time, nonworking student, I want to make sure that the stuff I help create for others is actually useful to them. Receiving a gift you neither wanted nor needed is an exercise in patience; you're expected to feel grateful, yet you can't help feeling disappointed by the wasted gesture. Over the course of this project, I've read about and encountered researchers who felt they knew how to help "the community," without ever knowing its members by name. It seems to me that these disconnected researchers are doing more harm than good when speaking on the behalf of those they haven't met, whose voices are silenced through the very act of not being invited to speak for themselves. In thinking of our communities as living, breathing things, with kaleidoscopic values and resources, scholars can take accountability for our position in the ecology, and make interpersonal connections that remind us why the work is being done in the first place.

As we continue to speak to students, fellow educators, and academic peers, we are continually reconfiguring our position in the ecology and finding the areas that could best use support. Even the courses we've designed after years spent researching how to better facilitate interinstitutional transfer will need to be reworked and continually calibrated to meet the shifting needs of students and faculty. We've found that there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution to supporting students; the notion that there could possibly be one is laughable. As community members, we must be willing to adapt to our ever-changing landscape, and be willing to engage in new situations.



This book represents a deep and nuanced treatment of a student population that makes up an increasingly robust segment of higher education. As costs rise and dual credit and concurrent enrollment programs ramp up, understanding how those students navigate the cultural and bureaucratic transition between areas of the system gives valuable insight to readers.

– Holly Hassel, North Dakota State University

This book combines historical and mixed-methods research, writing with student and faculty colleagues, and personal reflection to urge, document, and enact more transfer-conducive writing ecologies. Examining the last century of community college–university relations in composition studies, it asserts that two-year college faculty and students have long been important but marginalized participants in disciplinary and professional spaces. That marginalization perpetuates class- and race-based inequities in educational outcomes. Countering such inequities requires reimagining disciplinary relations, both nationally and locally.

*Transfer in an Urban Writing Ecology* presents findings from research into transfer student writing experiences at the University of Utah and narrates the first five years of program development with Salt Lake Community College faculty and students, discussing the emergent, and sometimes unexpected, effects of these collaborations. The book offers the authors' experiences as an extended, imperfect case study of how reimagining local disciplinary relations can use writing and rhetoric studies to challenge pervasive academic hierarchies, counter structural inequities, and expand educational opportunities for students. Additionally, this book:

- addresses the relative absence of two-year colleges and their faculty and students in disciplinary historiography and studies of writing knowledge transfer;
- articulates disciplinary responsibilities for contributing to what critical higher education researchers call *transfer receptive culture*;
- offers precedent for faculty at two- and four-year institutions looking to foster more transfer-conducive writing ecologies; and
- presents a range of student- and faculty-authored perspectives on principles for partnership that have emerged from inter-institutional collaborations in the Salt Lake Valley.

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