

NARRATIVE 10.

COLLEGIALITY AS TRANSCENDENCE BEYOND THE TASHIP

Matthew Sansbury

Clayton State University

My professional identity began to take shape during my time as a teaching assistant (TA) at Georgia State University, and I am extremely grateful for the TAship in rhetoric and composition because it made me the professor I am today. Personally, I identify as a cisgender, gay man who grew up a preacher's son in the Deep South and overcame unique challenges long before graduate studies. The TAship, however, allowed me to be myself at work. I could celebrate my identity openly without reprisal, research my community without shame, and model this newfound acceptance in the classroom. In fact, the most empowering professional moments I have experienced involve students trusting me with their own conflicting identities. The TAship also afforded me the skills necessary to craft my professional identity, which exists at multiple intersections: rhetorician and compositionist, teacher and researcher, literacy sponsor and beneficiary, print enthusiast and digital mentor.

TAships can be grueling at times with limited funding, precarious living situations, and long hours split between work, graduate studies, and professionalization; however, I found many opportunities to amplify my own identity and professional interests, and—for me—the path to these affordances was collegiality. I formed incredible connections with fellow TAs as we exchanged ideas, hosted gatherings, cooked meals, carpoled to conferences, and covered one another's classes, giving me a sense of stability early in the program. I understood quickly that they were my first colleagues, a term becoming increasingly important. I also joined supportive regional and national organizations like the South Atlantic Modern Language Association and the Graduate Student Standing Group at CCCC. These communities fostered my growth as a professional while recognizing the conflicting identifying experiences of a TA.

Collegiality was the way I ultimately pushed out of my TA mentality to craft a professional identity. Partway through the TAship, I realized that my professors and advisors were beginning to see me as a colleague, which I attributed to my

gregarious nature, but purposefully breaking through the TA ethos proved to be quite a challenge; however, once I did so, the rewards quickly materialized: publishing with mentors, serving with academic organizations, and teaching beyond first-year writing. Collegiality became the thread that holds together my professional identity, and in 2019 I graduated from my Ph.D. program and accepted a position as assistant professor at Clayton State University.

Having transcended the TAship, I am currently pondering the realities of pandemic pedagogy as a new professor, but my thoughts are never far from those formative days as a TA. With fresh experience serving on a search committee, I know undoubtedly that the profession—from TAs to Ph.D.s—seeks colleagues. The best advice I could give TAs is to start acting like a colleague until they feel like one; the process will reassure them, fellow TAs, current advisors, and future search committee members who hold open the doors of our profession, waiting for new colleagues to enter.