

PROGRAM PROFILE 9.

NEGOTIATING PLURAL IDENTITIES THROUGH TRANSFER AND INCLUSION: PROGRAM REVISION AT BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

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In this program profile, multiple voices from doctoral students, represented by different fonts, describe how two concurrent program revisions align to support students in reconciling identities as conscripted labor and emerging scholars, while also supporting students' evolving personal identities. This multi-voiced narrative includes seven third- and fourth-year doctoral students in the doctoral program in rhetoric and writing studies (R&WS) who hold funded assistantships and two doctoral faculty who lead the UWP and R&WS. Their polyvocal interactions explore the impact of curricular revisions that emphasize writing transfer through writing about writing (WAW), empirical research and leadership, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. After featuring the voices and experiences of graduate students, the profile ends with the voice of program faculty detailing the context of the program revisions.

REVISING FIRST-YEAR WRITING: A FOCUS ON WRITING TRANSFER THROUGH WAW

Coming into the program, I thought I had a clear idea about what teaching writing should look like. The WAW curriculum and focus on transfer completely changed what I believed writing could accomplish and how I approach writing. Instead of teaching “skills,” I adjusted my curriculum to support students in new and

1 Vielstimmig is German for “many-voiced.” For the first name, we generated an anagram using the first two letters of each authors' name. We decided on Adel Kenton Marram or Adel for short. We were inspired by Kathleen Blake Yancey and Michael Spooner's “Textuality, Collaboration, and the New Essay,” written as Myka Vielstimmig.

unfamiliar contexts. I wanted assignments to help them think about writing, value writing, and understand what writing could do for them. Now, we read, talk, and write about writing. I learned to help my students connect with writing. Additionally, writing has a new meaning and value in my life. I'm no longer worried about tackling new genres, as often happens as a graduate student. Instead, I'm excited to use what I know about writing to learn and experience new genres. I've grown more as a writer in my four years of doctoral study than in my undergraduate and master's coursework together, which is no doubt supported by the introduction of WAW and the values that accompany it in my life (Morgan).

It shapes how I teach and talk about writing. WAW helped me understand that writing is a researchable subject, and we teach the *writer* NOT the *writing*. WAW and transfer make it easier for me to talk about writing and the exciting possibilities of meaning making within writing processes. I never thought about writing as making choices before entering this program. But since discovering those choices, it helps me as an instructor and a creative writer. I've come to understand my process as a poet who deals in words and wants to understand words. Rhetoric and writing studies (R&WS) helps me embrace the interdisciplinary nature of poetry and writing studies (Annie).

Before coming to BGSU, I used to give students freedom to choose nearly any topic they liked for their writing assignments. While I learned a lot about a wide variety of topics, there was much less focus on understanding writing. My time with WAW and writing transfer helped me to not only show students how writing is connected to their majors, their future dream jobs, and even their hobbies, but it also helped me connect my researcher and teacher identities. My dissertation focuses on the reading transfer practices of alumni. I now help students learn how to approach reading assignments, providing strategies that transfer to different disciplines and life outside of school (Travis).

Coming into this program I quickly realized that WAW and transfer fit well with my previous experiences teaching writing and helped me better understand and explain why FYC doesn't work as a general skills course. Learning about the WAW focus in the university writing program (UWP) also made me more excited to teach at BGSU because I love writing and rhetoric scholarship. WAW gave me authorization to fully teach my subject instead of trying to fit writing instruction into a course where students chose other content as a focus (Rachel).

REVISING DOCTORAL EDUCATION: A FOCUS ON EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND LEADERSHIP

The R&WS program's focus on empirical research helps me grow not only as a researcher, but also as a teacher, practitioner, leader, and collaborator. Through

the UWP curriculum, I learned about WAW research and to guide my students through empirical, writing studies-focused research projects. In our composition instructors' workshop, I completed my own small-scale empirical study on imposter syndrome, graduate students, writing, and mentoring, which is now the focus of my dissertation topic. This project also gave me the tools to engage my students in their own empirical WAW research projects. By completing this project, I was a better prepared and more empathetic instructor when engaging my students in their research projects. Our program also has the Words Change Worlds Collaboratory (W²C²), a collection of faculty-led, collaborative studies of writing at work in the world. Research studies affiliated with W²C² are collaborative, long-term, impactful, and learning-oriented. After joining these research teams, I grew as a collaborative researcher and leader through faculty and peer-to-peer mentorship. Many of these projects gave me the opportunity to lead others through small stages of the larger project, while also receiving mentoring and feedback. I learned how to create surveys, interview protocols, informed consent forms, and other IRB requirements, valuable experiences which transferred to my dissertation research, my teaching, and course research projects (Emma).

Coming into the program, my background focused heavily on literary and textual analysis. I had no idea that an English-related field could involve empirical research, but I have to say that it completely changed the trajectory of my career in an impactful and positive manner. Since starting the doctoral program, I've been able to work with almost all of our faculty members on different research projects, gaining a ton of experience with different research methods and data analysis techniques. Just as Emma described, most of these projects were involved in the W²C² initiative and helped me to become a collaborative researcher who enjoys everything having to do with research methods. As a fourth-year doctoral candidate, I've now conducted two individual empirical research projects on the topics of contract grading and dual-credit student experiences, along with a number of collaborative projects. No matter where my career takes me, I've learned that being a strong researcher and utilizing the findings to improve my own pedagogical practice is a skill that cannot be overlooked. I'm constantly utilizing empirical research to shape my curriculum, grading practices, and instructional strategies. Even more so, empirical research is something that I promote to my own students. Although I've taught composition courses before, they have never been as engaging or meaningful as they were once I had my students begin conducting their own empirical research. Doing empirical research has shown me that I can teach empirical research, which only enhances the mission of our first-year writing courses here at BGSU (Morgan).

I can relate to Morgan's experience as I also came from a literary background, and the collaborative research I've done with others in the program has shown

me how complex rhetoric and writing as a discipline can be. The research I've participated in on student attitudes toward writing in particular has not only shown me this complexity, but it also helped me improve as a writing instructor. Prior to that, my teaching felt disconnected from my research with a literary focus. The research I engaged with prior to BGSU had no connection to what I brought into the classroom. But now, with the focus on empirical research, I feel like my identities as a teacher and a researcher work together (Travis).

Coming from a literary studies background as well, I was also overwhelmed by the idea of doing empirical research. In my first discussions with faculty about the various research projects they were doing, I realized how much more empirical the research focus was in this program and knew that would be a really exciting but also slightly terrifying challenge. Throughout my coursework, I did several mini studies, or pilot studies, that allowed me to explore questions I was interested in while also giving me low stakes opportunities to practice setting up and conducting research. Because of my initial discomfort with empirical research, I intentionally focused my coursework projects on empirical research rather than falling back on the familiarity of textual analysis. The support I've received from my dissertation chair and other faculty with developing my knowledge and practice of research methods has been invaluable. This program has led to a great deal of growth for me in my confidence in and knowledge about empirical research (Rachel).

Speaking from prior experience, I've never been particularly involved in the development of programs or their operations. What a surprise—I'm now an RSBS officer, a co-chair of the 21st Century Englishes Conference, and a member of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee. It's such a wonderful thing: I've never felt so at home until I studied in both of the rhetoric and writing communities (MARW in Findlay and here in BG). In my heart, I truly believe that I am in the place which can help me effect positive change (Krys).

A FOCUS ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS ACROSS PROGRAMS

One of my favorite classes was with Dr. Chad Iwertz Duffy. We worked with a community partner and performed an accessibility audit. From that course, I learned the importance of conversations about access and disability. Because of our program's efforts to focus on access, I think about how buildings are designed, how bodies are oppressed and excluded, and the changes we can make in the writing classroom to create sustainable and inclusive spaces. Before this program, I never knew about screen readers or how to write an image description. I also have found a new passion in plain language and will be presenting at

4Cs 2022 on the subject. I feel more comfortable participating in conversations about access. It's an area where I can be an ally, inform other people, and help make change. I'm excited to learn more about access and inclusion in our program and from our field (Annie).

Well, where do I start? It's because of the R&WS doctoral program's focus on the aforementioned values that attracted me to the program to begin with. Chiming in with Annie, Dr. Duffy is a superstar who consistently helps shape my research outlooks. Furthermore, I wouldn't be here if it weren't for the program's dedication to equity in access. As I continue to face challenges accessing traditional modes of instruction, each faculty member has made it very clear to me that they will always accommodate my needs as I learn more about my changing abilities. Now, that's what I call dedication. What's more—I'm never made to feel like a burden. Rather than doing the bare minimum to check the basic boxes to avoid some audit, faculty and staff are genuinely concerned with the wellbeing and progress of their students (Krys).

I may be echoing what Annie and Krys have already said, but I learned so much in Dr. Duffy's class on accessibility. As Annie said, there were workshops on screen readers, image descriptions, and captioning. It has helped me so much in my assistantship as department webmaster and social media person. I'm able to make things accessible for everyone who visits our site. It's also made me more capable of making my personal social media accounts more accessible (Laura).

Coming into the program at BGSU, the most imperative question I had for research and study was: can writing be taught equitably without privileging white culture and epistemologies? It was in my TA training course with Dr. Baird that I first encountered Asao Inoue's work on antiracist writing assessment that would be the foundation of my research trajectory. Not only did Dr. Baird introduce me to antiracist assessment scholarship, but all the faculty throughout my coursework then nurtured this interest and helped push me forward to continuously build that trajectory throughout my time in the program. Dr. Nickoson's writing program administration class especially helped challenge and advance my understanding of antiracist writing program and assessment work (Rachel).

One of the biggest impacts that being a part of the R&WS doctoral program has had on me is the development and support of a community of friends, scholars, and peers. Prior to this program, I came from a program that was not nearly as connected. Now, community is a daily experience. We collaborate often and well. We engage in mentorship opportunities. We learn from those who have come before us and those that follow us in the program. We value the time and effort that is required of being a member of the program and understand that, sometimes, other non-academic obligations must come first. There is never a doubt that we are supported as researchers, teachers, *and* people. As I prepare to

graduate and leave the program, I hope to build that same sense of community at whatever institution comes next (Morgan).

I 100% agree with you, Morg. I moved to Bowling Green from another state, and I knew zero people in Ohio. I felt really good about the rhetoric and writing studies program, but it absolutely blew my (already high) expectations out of the water. One experience that sticks out is how encouraging faculty and classmates were of my passion for communication through art. Doodling, painting, and mixed-media art are a large part of my identity. When taking classes, I would doodle as a form of taking notes—it's how my brain makes sense of information. The fantastic mentors I had in this program really pushed this part of my identity to the next level. Now, I create arts-based representations of the research I engage in and use arts-based methods to gather data. Professors started to encourage this engagement when I was still taking classes, and I was lowkey nervous about what classmates would think of my alternate projects. However, they were so darn uplifting and encouraging; my professors' and classmates' attitudes helped me believe in myself as a rhetoric and writing studies scholar-artist (Emma).

The support from faculty is amazing, even in a non-academic sense. I will always be grateful for the ability to bring my daughter to classes with me when she didn't have school. One such time was in Sue Carter Wood's Rhetoric and Public Memory class. We took a "field trip" to the one room schoolhouse on campus. My daughter was with us that day and would raise her hand when Dr. Sue asked questions. She called on my daughter to answer questions as if she were a member of the class. It was great! (Laura)

I agree with Laura. I was nervous about starting a Ph.D. program as the mother of small children. Once on campus, I was incredibly relieved at the amount of support my faculty and classmates showed for me as a parent. I found that several of my other classmates were also parents and I was encouraged to include my family in program events (Rachel).

A MULTI-VOICED NARRATIVE DESCRIBING TWO CONCURRENT PROGRAM REVISIONS

After formally merging with the English department, the UWP, BGSU's first-year writing program, completed a curriculum revision in Spring 2018, featuring a WAW approach that encourages writing research among undergraduate students. Two elements support doctoral students in negotiating plural identities:

1. Central to the UWP's curriculum revision is the threshold concept "writing is an activity and object of study." As TAs, doctoral students teach

undergraduates about writing by sharing writing studies scholarship and positioning students to be researchers of writing. At its foundation, WAW is a transfer-focused pedagogy. Recent definitions of transfer recognize the value of prior writing knowledge and encourage its adaptation. Mentoring structures encourage doctoral students to engage prior writing knowledge and attend to identities' construction.

2. Housing UWP in the English department, alongside R&WS, created several administrative positions, including an assistant director and three program assistants. These positions bring UWP in close alignment with the mission of the doctoral program, which emphasizes cultivating leaders who shape conversations about writing.

Independent of the UWP, BGSU's Doctoral Program in R&WS completed a years-long revision effort in Spring 2020. To keep pace with trends in the discipline, evolving job markets, and the professional commitments of current faculty, the revision set out to reimagine the program's mission and, in turn, the core experiences students encounter in their course of study.

1. A distinctive feature of the reimagined mission is an emphasis on cultivating leaders who possess the intellectual frameworks, practical experience, and public consciousness necessary "to be leaders advocating for the power of rhetoric and writing to change worlds and impact public good as researchers, teachers, program directors, and writers" ("Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Writing Studies").
2. Core experiences supporting that mission throughout the curriculum and co-curriculum include regular encounters with administration, community engagement, diversity, history, mentoring, research methods, teaching, technology, and theory. The program also shifted to focus on empirical research methods to help future leaders develop support for narratives about writing they will share with multiple stakeholders.

Central to both revisions is a focus on diversity, inclusion, equity, and access. For example, one of the primary ways UWP and doctoral faculty are practicing antiracist pedagogy is through labor-based grading contracts. Acknowledging the ways in which traditional grading practices are racist, many UWP faculty have instituted labor-based grading contracts in FYW, and even doctoral faculty have instituted them, with some courses, like research methods, requiring students to keep labor logs.

Historically, UWP and R&WS have maintained a practical association but not a philosophical one. The recent merger of the UWP with the English department alongside R&WS promised a philosophical rapprochement, reinforcing

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core experiences across programs and thus enhancing support for the negotiation of conscripted, scholarly and personal identities.