

## Anti-Racist Futures for Publishing in Rhetoric and Composition

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When I think about where we are (and will be) as a discipline, I think about what and who we publish. For me, this particular story starts with the field's most prominent listserv, once known as the WPA-L, which has had a long history of delivering high volumes of mundane activity into email inboxes (calls for papers, job listings, requests for resources or advice), punctuated by the occasional firestorm of controversy. In spring 2019, a particularly strong conflict erupted in response to Asao Inoue's CCCC chair's address about White language supremacy in writing programs (Flaherty). Exchanges on the listserv soon laid bare the reality that the list had long been a space in which Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in the field did not feel welcome and, moreover, revealed how inequities in the broader field's norms around knowledge creation have contributed to the erasure of diverse ways of knowing and making. That is, the conversation—particularly in the backchannels like #WPAlistservfeministrevolution that spilled out onto Twitter and Facebook—soon centered on the overwhelming Whiteness and male-ness of our field's publications and citations.

I remember watching this conversation play out and feeling a hinge point, a real coalescence of energy around the goal of re-seeing and undoing some of the exclusions of our field's knowledge creation practices. For too long these inequities have been felt by those excluded from the table but underacknowledged, especially by those in power.

A quick search of the *Composition Studies* (CS) archive illustrates the point. I performed a search in *CompPile*—where the full CS open-access archive is indexed—using the database glossary terms and/or keywords *article-writing*, *scholarly-article*, *publish*, *citation*, *racism*, *anti-racism*, *diversity*, *African-Am*, *Latin-Am*, *Asian-Am*, *Native-Am*, and *whiteness*. This search turned up a number of articles, course designs, book reviews, and Where We Are essays investigating teaching practices that encouraged difference and countered racism.

Here are a few of my pedagogical findings:

- A course design in 1999, Helen Fox's "Un-teaching Racism" (from issue 27.1), helps students to understand how they are shaped by racism and White supremacy, as well as racism's institutionalization.
- A 2016 "Where We Are" forum (from issue 44.2) hosts essays on how HBCUs and their writing programs can fulfill activist functions (e.g., "Creative Disruption and the Potential of Writing at HBCUs" by Alexandria Lockett and Sarah RudeWalker) and devel-

op FYC curricula that counter the privileging of Standard English for academic and professional success (e.g., “HBCUs and Writing Programs: Critical Hip Hop Language Pedagogy and First-Year Student Success” by Brian J. Stone and Shawanda Stewart).

- Two other “Where We Are” fora: “The ‘Global Turn’ and its Implications for Composition,” which focused on transnationalism (in issue 44.1), and “Latinx Compositions and Rhetorics,” which focused on Latinx identities and practices and decolonialism (in issue 45.2)
- An article in 2019, Edward Hahn’s “Reviewing Writing, Rethinking Whiteness: A Study of Composition’s Practical Life” (from issue 46.1), that turns an antiracist lens to the mundane practices associated with reviewing writing in the classroom.
- Two articles that encourage linguistic diversity in composition classrooms, one in 2016, “Teaching for Agency: From Appreciating Diversity to Empowering Student Writers” by Shawna Shapiro, Michelle Coz, Gail Shuck, and Emily Simnitt (from issue 44.1 on Composition’s “Global Turn”), and another in 2019, “Encouraging Languages other than English in First-Year Writing Courses: Experiences from Linguistically Diverse Writers” by Alyssa Cavazos (from issue 47.1).

Looking over these findings from my search of the archives, I’m struck by how recent most of these pieces are, almost all of them published in the last six years. These results also suggest that, while we are acknowledging the influences of race on our classrooms, programs, and institutions, our previous work has been limited when it comes to reflecting on our own professional practices.

Indeed, previous to the summer 2021 special issue of *CS* (which focused exclusively on supporting BIPOC faculty in the discipline), I could only locate one *CS* article that directly addresses the institutional racism behind our scholarly knowledge-making: the methodological argument in Aja Y. Martinez’s 2014 award-winning article, “A Plea for Critical Race Theory Counterstory: Stock Story versus Counterstory Dialogues Concerning Alejandra’s ‘Fit’ in the Academy” (issue 42.2). Martinez notes the systematic exclusions that Chican@s have experienced from higher ed and argues for the necessity of story for making space for their lived experiences. She writes, “narratives counter to these majoritarian or stock stories, then, provide people of color the opportunity to validate, resonate, and awaken to the realization that we ‘haven’t become clinically paranoid’ in our observations and experiences of racism and discrimination within the institution (Villanueva, “Memoria” 15)” (Martinez 51).

When I served as an editorial assistant for *CS* from 2013 to 2017, we made an intentional effort to include diverse perspectives, bodies, and knowledge-making approaches in the journal. (Along with editor Laura Micciche and my fellow editorial assistants Kelly Blewett and Janine Morris, I reflected back on these experiences and imagined other practices for moving forward in this work in “Editing as Inclusion Activism.”) I recall huddling together in front of the journal’s booth in the CCCC exhibit hall, discussing which sessions we would be attending that day and how we would encourage presenters doing good work to submit to the journal. Naively, I thought it couldn’t be that easy to encourage submissions, but I was wrong. We were shocked at how powerful a simple invitation (“this work sounds interesting, you should consider submitting it to the journal for review”) was at bringing in new work.

More editorial teams and journals are now asking, what else can we do to invite folks to the table and help them to feel they belong? We need not only to bring the work in, we need to help it find its way to publication, too. Our editorial team began suggesting deadlines for revise and resubmit manuscripts, to underscore the fact that it was an invitation to send the work back and not a rejection. Laura also developed the role of a *CS* editorial consultant, whose “primary task is to work with authors of color who submit manuscripts of great promise and who wish to receive another level of support before resubmitting their work for review” (Blewett et al.).

Another critical development is *CS*’s recent adoption of a guide for anti-racist scholarly reviewing practices, adapted from the heuristic put forward by a coalition of technical communication journal editors in April 2021. (I should also note that several other journals, special issues, and presses have adopted anti-racist editorial policies based on this same document.) The new *CS* guidelines provide recommendations for reviewers regarding authors’ uses of citations (which may purposefully be “non-canonical”) and ask reviewers when suggesting work to choose pieces by multiply-marginalized and under-represented scholars. These guidelines recognize capacious approaches and the potential for non-traditional sources like personal experiences, email correspondences, and blog and social media posts. And finally, they outline expectations for proactive and clear communication regarding the review process, state explicitly the expectation that the editorial advisory board be a diverse collection of scholars, and pledge specific improvements to editorial practice.

The imperative to make our publications and discourse more diverse has only grown more urgent amidst broader calls for anti-racist work in our classrooms, curricula, writing programs, and professional organizations. How will *CS* and other journals in rhetoric and composition continue this work 50 years from now?

## Works Cited

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