

From the Guest Editors: Advocating for Writing and Well-Being

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Why Well-Being?

When we originally proposed a special issue of *Composition Studies* focused on writing and well-being, we called for work that highlights research and pedagogical approaches designed to understand the nature of and increase well-being in writing programs through writing and writing instruction. We hoped to advance dialogue about how to develop truly inclusive and supportive instructional practices that foster well-being for all participants in writing programs: undergraduate students, instructors (both faculty and graduate students), staff, and administrators. The response to the call for proposals was enormous: we received over ten times the number of proposals we would be able to publish in the special issue, underscoring the interest in and the timeliness and relevance of talking about well-being in writing classes and writing programs.

Leaders and educators in higher education are increasingly concerned about student, faculty, and staff well-being, especially for historically underrepresented and underserved populations. While these concerns were certainly prominent prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they rose to a fever pitch in the wake of lockdowns, immediate moves to long-term online learning, limited socialization and community-building, lack of access to childcare and other support, and difficulties in access to healthcare and needed resources—especially for students, faculty, and staff from historically underrepresented groups. The urgent need for a clear focus on mental health and well-being on university and college campuses became clear, and approaches to address physical, mental, and emotional well-being on campus have become prominent topics in higher education publications such the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*. Organizations such as AAC&U are hosting workshops and special sessions to address well-being on campus.

We hosted the inaugural Conference on Writing and Well-Being in January 2020, two months before the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdowns that transformed higher education later that year. We were inspired by the unique position of writing studies scholars to participate in and lead efforts to develop effective strategies for improving well-being for students, instructors, staff, and administrators—even before the pandemic. We had no idea how timely and significant that first conference would be; for nearly all of us in attendance, it was the last in-person conference we attended before the world changed.

Bill Macauley hosted the second annual conference online in January 2021 at University of Nevada-Reno, and we hosted a third annual conference in a hybrid format at the University of Arizona in January 2022. For many participants, and certainly for those of us organizing, the conference community became a way to discover innovative ways to approach this new teaching and learning environment and to retain hope in our students, in ourselves, and in the potential power of writing to heal, build, and change.

Connections between Writing and Well-Being

Writing courses, whether in the first year, upper-level, or writing across the curriculum programs, are some of the few academic spaces through which nearly all undergraduate students pass. Writing courses are also learning spaces where students often share what is troubling them, where they are known on a first-name basis, and where they can explore writing practices that give them an avenue for self-expression.

The need for pedagogical approaches in critical first year and upper division courses that build upon students' strengths and develop their sense of belonging is significant. Calls to operationalize socioemotional learning's (SEL) strengths-based approaches have prompted some scholars to propose over the past two decades that there is a "socio-emotional health crisis" in the United States with estimates ranging from 25-50% of high school students engaging in high-risk behaviors. At the heart of this crisis is "a breakdown in the caring aspects of students' lives ... [with] emotional distance in school relationships with teachers and the school community" cited as major contributing factors (Peterson and Seligman 407).

Research in well-being, SEL, and educational psychology shows that intentionally-designed writing activities can and do promote well-being (Neff, Pennebaker), but writing scholars whose approaches are as varied as Daly and Miller, García de Müeller, Inoue, Kryger and Zimmerman, and Kynard have shown that our pedagogical and assessment practices in writing classes often do more harm than good. So, how do we promote and sustain well-being through writing and in classes that teach writing?

In writing studies, Inoue's scholarship has demonstrated the need to develop antiracist assessment practices because our historical approaches to teaching and assessing writing have been built upon white supremacist assumptions about language. In second language writing, scholars such as Paul Kei Matsuda have long called for approaches to teaching writing that assume linguistic diversity is present in writing classes. Models that use strengths-based approaches (Miller-Cochran) can provide a way to draw on students' knowledge and experiences to learn while also increasing their well-being. Kathleen Kryger and Griffin Zimmerman as well as Jay Dolmage have also called for

pedagogical approaches that are inclusive of all writing students, regardless of their (dis)abilities. Writing students, especially first year writing students, stand to benefit significantly from a writing curriculum rooted in inclusive, intentional strengths-based approaches that promote student well-being.

One helpful model for doing such work appeared at the 2019 Writing and Well-Being conference. There, Stacey Cochran combined research in writing studies with that of Martin Seligman, especially the PERMA framework that Seligman outlines in his 2011 book *Flourish*, to design an approach to well-being specifically for writing courses. Drawing on the scholarship that supports the habits of mind in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* and the extensive work in higher education on socioemotional learning, Cochran put Seligman's work in conversation with Ryff's six-factor model for well-being and Neff's self-compassion theory. The resulting model outlines the pillars of long-term, optimal social and emotional health for a teaching and learning context. PREMISE is an acronym that stands for:

Positive Emotions

Relationships with Others

Engagement

Meaningful Experiences and Goals

Identities (autonomously endorsed)

Self-Compassion

Efficacy and Environmental Mastery (Cochran)

Much of the empirical research on well-being in the past had been conducted using writing prompts with participants, even though the scientists are not writing specialists (e.g., Emmons and McCullough; Neff; Snyder; Ryff). The PREMISE model builds on the findings of these past studies, putting them in conversation with current research in writing studies and education. This is one example of the kind of interdisciplinary, mutually-informative scholarship that writing studies offers to—and gains from—interdisciplinary work on faculty, staff, and student well-being.

This Issue: Well-Being in Writing Programs

The scholarship included in this special issue establishes multiple connections between writing and well-being and provides guidance for promoting well-being that is inclusive of all students, teachers, and staff. The perspectives include those of teachers, administrators, graduate students, and undergraduate students, and many of the pieces provide models that can be adapted for

other contexts if readers are interested in trying approaches to writing instruction that are designed to promote well-being.

Cover Art

Our cover was illustrated by Chandrima Chatterjee, an artist from India who has collaborated with us before by providing illustrations for the Conference on Writing and Well-Being program. When describing her cover design for the special issue, she explained that she has shown a student who is writing to self-express, to explore introspectively, and the student's writing is visible through the shadow of her shape on the writing surface. The foliage coming from her head signifies that writing practices can lead to growth and well-being, and the background silhouette in the window represents a university, where these practices can take shape. And finally, the hands supporting the student are indicative of a community of care that needs to be built in and around spaces in higher education to support students, faculty, and staff.

The Articles

We have included eight articles that address a range of approaches and areas of focus for well-being in writing studies, writing classes, and writing programs, to include rethinking the goals and objectives of writing classes; considering issues of equity, inclusion, and positionality in discussions of well-being; and providing examples of and instructions for a wide range of pedagogical approaches rooted in well-being. The first two articles in the special issue provide a foundation for the discussions of well-being that follow. Robert Yagelski and Daniel Collins set the stage for the special issue by rethinking the goals of writing instruction by placing well-being at the center, while Kimberly Thompson, Zachary Singletary, Tracy Morse, and Abigail Morris suggest a new approach for writing instructors and administrators that is grounded in empathy and self-care.

Two articles focus specifically on the support and well-being of racially marginalized students. Tieanna Graphenreed and Mya Poe draw on scholarship from Black critical geography, genre studies, and trauma-informed pedagogy to demonstrate how writing instructors can fulfill commitments to antiracist pedagogies. Charles McMartin, Eric A. House, and Thomas Miller describe how culturally-engaged approaches such as hip hop pedagogy can support students' personal well-being and collective wellness as they develop social resilience.

Two articles share narratives and data about the experiences and well-being of instructors in writing programs, specifically instructors who are in more marginalized positions in writing programs. Stacey Cochran, Sydney Sullivan, Sally F. Benson, Michelle Silvers, and Nick Halsey focus on graduate student instructors and non-tenure track faculty by sharing their experiences with a

collaborative learning community developing curricular approaches that support well-being. Emily Jo Schwaller reframes graduate student instructors' resistance to teaching writing as acts of well-being in her analysis of their shared experiences in a longitudinal study.

Our final two articles provide tangible examples of how writing instructors can design courses that support student well-being. Drawing on the work of disability studies scholars, currie and Hubrig model how instructors can design courses to be flexible while also respecting the labor of the instructors themselves. Angela Muir and Paula Mathieu provide examples of writing that draw on contemplative pedagogy to support student well-being.

The Course Designs

We are incredibly grateful to Guest Assistant Editor Jamey Rogers, a faculty member in the Writing Program at the University of Arizona, who edited the contributions in the Course Design section. Heather Martin provides a course design for a class at the University of Denver where students explore academic research on the connections between writing and wellness. Yilong Peng, Turya Nair, and Michelle Hagenimana describe a course in the health professions where students work with patients in palliative care. The students are paired with a hospice patient with whom they craft a memoir based on interviews with the patient, intended to be shared with the patient's family after their passing.

The Where We Are Contributions

Our three contributions in the Where We Are section provide examples of ongoing initiatives designed to support student well-being. Ti Macklin, dawn shepherd, Mark Van Slyke, and Heidi Estrem describe Boise State University's high enrollment, high impact (HEHI) writing courses that are designed to support the well-being of students, graduate instructors, and their faculty mentor. Cathryn Molloy describes the establishment of the Neurodiversity Celebration Collaborative at James Madison University and the impact it has on the well-being of students who are often marginalized because of mental health and/or disability statuses. Cynthia Trejo, Angela Labistre Champion, Stephanie Celaya-Serventi, and Alexei Marquez chronicle the development of their graduate writing group designed to support Latina graduate students working on their dissertations during the pandemic.

The Book Reviews

Guest Assistant Editor Josie Portz, a graduate student at the University of Arizona, edited the book review contributions in the special issue, and we are incredibly grateful to her for her work. The two book reviews include a review

by Stephanie Loveless of Tomie Hahn's *Arousing Sense: Recipes for Workshopping Sensory Experience* and a review by Erika I-Tremblay of Shawna Shapiro's *Cultivating Critical Language Awareness in the Writing Classroom*.

We hope that the scholarship in this special issue provides readers with ideas, motivation, and support for designing writing courses and writing programs that increase the well-being of students, instructors, staff, and administrators. And most of all, we hope that reading this special issue contributes to your own well-being in a positive and meaningful way. We certainly can attest to how working with the authors included in the issue and the editorial staff of *Composition Studies* has positively contributed to ours and inspired us to continue developing scholarship and instructional resources focused on connections between writing and well-being.

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