

## Creating Space for Emotion in the *Composition Studies* Archive

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Fear, anger, frustration, anxiety, worry, compassion, empathy, exhaustion—these emotions and more have marked and shaped our administrative and pedagogical work over the past two years, and, of course, we're not alone. Writing teachers and administrators across the country have attempted to create a community of support for our students and ourselves as we've faced a terrifying global pandemic, a hotly contested presidential election, as well as injustices, violence, and protests related to race, gender, sexuality, and gender expression. Now too we watch a world at war. The emotional toll the past two years have had on us and our students is evidenced by articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed* such as "Covid-19 Has Worsened the Student Mental-Health Crisis" (Brown and Kafka), "Faculty Members are Suffering Burnout" (Pettit), "How to Manage through Emotional Exhaustion" (O'Grady), "Academe, Hear Me. I Am Crying Uncle" (Anonymous), and "Honoring Ourselves and Each Other Through Burnout" (Godbee). We're exhausted and burnt out; our emotions are at frayed edges, as we've seen and experienced the need to create space for those in our communities to mourn, to breathe, to rest, to recover, and even to hope for a better future.

As writing program administrators, we've (Lexi and Jess) paid especially close attention to how we can support writing teachers and students. The program we direct at the University of Maryland is a large one: 60+ instructors teaching over 2,000 students per semester in 120 sections of English 101: Academic Writing. As we've worked to support this large community of students and teachers over the past two years, our administrative focus has been guided by principles of antiracist pedagogy, empathy, resilience, and community building, and we've prioritized instructional support based in social and linguistic justice, critical thinking and reading, reflection, and communicating across difference. Learning more about trauma-informed pedagogy has become a key concern for us.

The invitation from Kara Taczak and Matt Davis to take stock of the *Composition Studies* archive gave us the opportunity to explore how its trove of articles from 1972 to the present speak to our current circumstances. As we perused the archive and contemplated the journal's impact on the field, articles that meditated on the emotive dimension of teaching and administration resonated powerfully with us. Thus, here, we spotlight just a few articles from the *Composition Studies* archive that make space for us to engage with emotion, and we track lines of conversation within the journal that fortify our convic-

tion that attention to emotion must be a critical part of writing, teaching, and administration, especially now. Our goal is to consider how *Composition Studies* has laid the groundwork for centering emotion in our pedagogy in a way that supports our administrative and pedagogical exigencies over the past two years.

Not surprisingly, *Composition Studies* is at the cutting edge of this conversation with recent scholarship that engages the pandemic and its emotional effects on us, our students, and our classrooms. In her 2021 article, “Pandemic Pedagogy: What We Learned from the Sudden Transition to Online Teaching and How It Can Help Us Prepare to Teach Writing in an Uncertain Future,” Jennifer Sheppard conducts a survey of writing instructors in which instructors articulate “a plea for attention to personal/professional well-being,” indicating a desire for an ethic of care and empathy in the teaching and administration of writing courses (61). Carrie Hall also investigates how emotions—specifically, duress—impact the writing classroom in her 2021 essay, “How am I Supposed to Watch a Little Piece of Paper?: Literacy and Learning Under Duress.” Here, Hall interrogates the complex relationship between literacy and duress, exploring the strains duress places on focused attention. Critically, Hall speaks to and broadens our pandemic experience, explaining “Even without a pandemic, experiences that tax attention—like poverty and trauma—disproportionately affect students of color, disabled students, LGBTQIA+ students, and women, due to societal influences like homophobia, poverty, misogyny, transphobia, sexual violence, police brutality, and institutional racism” (16). Referencing Asao Inoue, Hall cites paying attention as one way to better comprehend how students can be affected by duress: “in order for students to pay attention, they must be paid attention to. We should assume our students are making meaning, though that meaning may not always be immediately clear” (16). Hall argues that we can pay attention to our students by employing empathy to better understand how duress affects students’ attention and that we should use this understanding to inform how we craft flexible assignments, schedules, and syllabi (22). Ultimately, Hall posits that instructors should incorporate pedagogical tenets that accommodate students under duress—a practice that will serve students well both during and beyond the pandemic.

Our current exigencies have not been the only catalysts to consider attention to emotion, of course. Arguments in favor of valuing students’ well-being and emotions can be tracked to early issues of *Composition Studies*, formerly known as *Freshman English News*. As early as the 1970s, editors and writers were developing an ethic of care for instructors and their students. Clearly, there were elements of stress and frustration in these early years of our discipline when teachers felt isolated and diminished by the lack of support they received from their universities and the need for greater community and conversation across institutions. Such feelings are indicated in titles like Merle Thompson’s “Let’s

Be Human about Behavior” (1972), Andrea Lunsford’s “How to Combat the Freshman English Blues” (1976), and Maurice Hunt’s “Preventing Burnout in Teaching Assistants” (1986).

Donald Murray’s 1981 essay, “The Politics of Respect,” stands out to us because he meditates on respect as an emotion necessary for effective teaching, learning, and writing program administration. Murray guides readers not to dismiss students, their ideas, or their writing, but instead to deeply engage and value students’ intellectual growth and to extend respect for what instructors may dispel or trivialize. Murray explains that a major problem composition instructors face is students not having self-respect for their own ideas. We must, Murray claims, “respect our students’ potential so they can begin to believe they have potential, and through the work with us earn self-respect” (1). Importantly, Murray goes on to turn this message on its head to consider the fact that faculty may not feel respected given composition instruction’s low status in many universities. Murray calls for respect for these instructors and the important courses they teach, asserting, “If faculty who actually teach Freshman English are going to be able to respect their students they must be respected themselves and respect themselves” (1). Murray establishes that student, instructor, and administrative respect is vital for a successful first-year composition course.

Twenty years later, Kia Jane Richmond builds on Murray’s call for respect in her 2002 essay, “Repositioning Emotions in Composition Studies.” Here Richmond considers how scholars, teachers, and administrators should respect, rather than minimize or ignore, the place of emotion in composition pedagogy and makes it her work to invite more conversation around the role of emotion in our field. Richmond explains that “composition, historically, has challenged the validity of emotions” in an attempt to “legitimize itself in the academic community” (69). She recalls her own training:

I was taught, during my training as a secondary educator and in my courses on pedagogy in composition, that a student’s emotional well-being is not as important to my teaching (or his/her learning) as his or her intellectual development. I believe, however, that this attitude toward students suggests an educational philosophy that emphasizes humanistic education without wanting to view its participants as (fully) human” (Richmond 78-79).

Her goal in this essay is to center emotions and the attendant relationships they enable in the writing classroom. Richmond calls instructors to invite students to interrogate the ways emotions shape the work of the classroom,

recognizing and reflecting especially on how emotions impact their writing processes (75).

Richmond also underscores the need for teachers to interrogate our own emotional impact on the classroom by contemplating how the emotions we circulate affect both learning and teaching (76). Instructors should reflect on how shifting attitudes toward students can potentially encourage or discourage their writing process and product as well as their writerly identity. Richmond spurs scholars to deepen our thinking on this score and continue pursuing the connections between writing and emotion, explaining “Further opportunities for research exist in the areas of intuition, spirituality, fear, and health,” as well as mental health (Richmond 77). Scholars have indeed responded to her call, with *Composition Studies* articles by Sally Chandler, A. Abby Knoblauch, and Amy Williams contributing to the conversation Richmond helped to sustain and invigorate.

As we, too, take up Richmond’s call, realizing now how important these investigations should be for us in 2022, one emotion we want to turn to and cultivate is hope. And, once again, the *Composition Studies* archive helps us to consider how. In her 1986 essay, “Ground of Hope: The Freshman English Class,” Mary Savage inspires readers to see opportunities for hope in the work we do. Savage reminds us of the “transformational potential” (25) that lies in our classrooms, for it is here that we teach students “to enact change and challenge power” (24). Through Savage’s lens we are emboldened by the feelings of hope we need to face our contemporary contexts; we must have hope to do the work we want to do: to create pedagogies invested social and linguistic social justice, embedded in careful and critical reading, invested in communicating across difference. For, as Savage makes clear, the first-year course provides the “ground for hope . . . [b]ecause it is through language that we learn how to mean and be in the world, it is also through *learning how we learn to mean* that we may come to have choices about how we will be in the world” (27, emphasis original). In this time of strife and emotional turmoil, we take a moment to dwell on Savage’s reminder of first-year composition’s “transformational potential” and echo her emphasis on seeing hope as a key element of first-year composition (25).

Since its inception, *Composition Studies* has pushed the field to consider the role of emotions in the writing classroom. Murray, Savage, and Richmond, along with all the scholars in conversation with them, helped lay the groundwork for writing instructors to center the range of emotions students and teachers experience in the classroom. We see respect and hope as especially important emotions to call on and cultivate as we try to facilitate more empathetic teaching during the difficult times we face. A focus on respect and hope for students, instructors, and administrators has helped us through these

past two years of sickness, stress, and burn out, and—as Hall demonstrates—will continue to aid us in supporting students under duress. As we persevere, we especially hope the significance of emotions remains a foundational element of our composition pedagogy and administration and that *Composition Studies* will help to make it so.

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