Building Our Ideals into Program Structures: Democratic Design in Program Administration

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This article argues for a Deweyan "democratic design" approach to program leadership that builds programmatic ideals into leadership practices. To illustrate democratic design in practice, we draw from case studies of two partnership programs based in writing studies—a writing partnership between the University of Arizona and area high schools and a collaboration between Salt Lake City Community College and the University of Utah—that utilize community advisory boards and democratic processes to work toward stakeholder-oriented approaches to leadership. Through these case studies, we emphasize three core principles of democratic design, including stakeholder leadership, political vision, and epistemic equity, that can be applicable across a range of programmatic opportunities. For leaders in composition studies who see collaboration as central to their mission, democratic design can serve as a linchpin for aligning processes with values.

The changing landscape of composition calls for new approaches to leadership. As Tom Miller and Joddy Murray argue, many of our field's challenges might also spark opportunities to rearticulate leadership approaches to align with a civic vision of writing studies: critiques about the value of the humanities invite us to design research partnerships that demonstrate the power of rhetoric for the public good; broad expansions of adjunct labor call for the fostering of less-hierarchical structures for decision-making that include non-tenure-track faculty and local stakeholders; pressures to prepare graduate students for a greater diversity of careers offer an impetus to launch internship programs that allow students to work with community organizations and community colleges; and the increasing emphasis on student recruitment and retention invite faculty and administrators to build initiatives that cultivate student engagement through community-based learning. Composition faculty working in public partnerships have explored the potential of such community-based collaborations to foster more rhetorically-aware student writing (Barrett; Young and Morgan) and spark rich teacher development (Leon, Pinkert, and Taylor).

Yet public partnerships must wrestle explicitly with the ethics of program leadership, given the stark power dynamics that tend to privilege university stakeholders (Kannan et al.). When faculty coordinate engagement initiatives and broker partnerships with nonprofits, K-12 institutions, and community

colleges, effective and ethical administration requires conceptions of leadership that move beyond the simplistic view of one designated individual holding authority. Public engagement calls for coalitional approaches to collective action, methods for program decision-making that are responsive to power differentials, and mechanisms for creating accountability to constituencies inside and beyond the university—strategies that are important not only for community engagement and cross-institutional programs, but also for the many kinds leadership that composition faculty hold, such as administering writing programs, chairing departments, and coordinating WAC projects, among other possibilities.

While the subfields of writing program administration and writing center studies have hosted deep conversations about ethical leadership, we suggest that public partnerships offer another generative site for reflecting on leadership in composition and rhetoric. Leaders in community writing have called for moving beyond a rationalistic, transactional view of reciprocity, which has traditionally guided discussions of ethics in community engagement (Opel and Sackey). Scholars have proposed strategies for making community-based programs more attentive to less-powerful stakeholders, drawing on a range of frameworks including community organizing (Goldblatt), indigenous Filipino worldviews (Bernando and Monberg), Cherokee principles (Cushman), intercultural inquiry (Flower), and Scandinavian Participatory Design (Brizee and Wells). In this article, we extend this active conversation by drawing from John Dewey to introduce democratic design as a framework for conceptualizing a stakeholder-oriented approach to leadership. While many compositionists use terms like *democratic* to describe the aims of a class, a program, or the field at large, this term is notoriously hazy (Wan), and there is a need for more concrete discussions of what a democratic vision might mean in the context of writing studies leadership. Emerging from a study of two public partnerships grappling with stark power differentials, democratic design, as we describe it here, offers a deeply practical approach to ethical leadership that seeks to center the insights of those most impacted by a program or initiative. In this article, we offer a grounded approach to building these ideals into program structures.

John Dewey provides the theoretical inspiration for this model of democratic design. He posits that democracy is more than a governing system, but also a "social idea" that could permeate work, school, and everyday life (143). As he explains, democracy "consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs . . . [I]t demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common" (147). In other words, democracy as a social ideal means that people have opportunities to shape the structures they participate in, which requires recognition of

their capacities to contribute to the common good. Todd DeStigter reminds us that to Dewey, democracy is not a static goal, but rather an "end in view," an ongoing collaborative process. DeStigter writes, "Understanding an aim as an end in view means that people should think of going through the process of working toward a desirable end as part of the end itself" (15). He suggests that the end goals and the processes of a Deweyan approach should be seen as indistinguishable, as the activities of a group need to be characterized by the same values as the goals of the social project (16). The conception of democratic design for collaborative leadership we develop in this article emphasizes the need to build programmatic ideals into leadership practices.

In what follows, we illustrate democratic design through case studies of two partnership programs based in writing studies. Wildcat Writers, which we have each coordinated, is a high school-university writing exchange program in Arizona guided by an advisory board consisting of teachers from the participating high schools and university. The second case study examines a collaboration between Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) and the University of Utah ("the U") to coordinate a range of initiatives to better support students transferring from SLCC to the U in English studies. This partnership models collaborative leadership that includes undergraduate and graduate students, as well as faculty from both institutions.

We developed these case studies using transcripts of group interviews with stakeholders from the university and partnering organizations, co-authored documents by university and community representatives, and our own experience as coordinators of Wildcat Writers. For the first group interview, we reconvened five founding advisory board members from Wildcat Writers; in addition to the two of us, participants included high school teachers Taylor Johnson, Kate Street, and Maria Elena Wakamatsu. In a set of separate group interviews conducted via Zoom, we interviewed leaders of the SLCC-U partnership: one interview with Stephen Ruffus, the former English Department chair at SLCC, and Christie Toth, then Assistant Professor at the U, and one interview with Toth and Lisa Bickmore, a more recent English Department chair at SLCC. Conducting group interviews was important to allow for participants to build on each others' thoughts, illustrating the type of knowledge production we call for in the piece. With IRB approval,[1] the Wildcat Writers and SLCC-U collaborative interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded by both authors using Eclectic Coding (Saldaña). We use participants' real names, with their permission, as a way to honor their intellectual contributions.

The Wildcat Writers program and SLCC-U collaborative are grounded in different contexts and hold different goals, but they share striking similarities in their visions of shared, cross-institutional leadership structures that reflect Dewey's view of democracy. After introducing the case studies, we identify

and discuss key aspects of democratic design, including stakeholder leadership, political vision, and epistemic equity. Our goal is to consider these emerging themes as principles to consider not only for public partnerships, but also for collaborative leadership across a range of programmatic and institutional contexts. For those of us committed to Deweyan democracy, democratic design offers opportunities to integrate our ideals into leadership structures by actively engaging participants more deeply in the process.

Case Study 1 Introduction: Wildcat Writers Advisory Board

Wildcat Writers has supported high school-university writing exchanges for more than 20 years. Developed to promote college access pathways for minoritized students and offer college students opportunities to engage with communities outside the university, the program recruits teachers from secondary schools predominantly serving students underrepresented in higher education. High school and college writing teachers are paired to plan a linked curriculum in which their students work together throughout a semester. University classes include first year composition, advanced rhetorical theory and composition, creative writing, and professional writing. Projects range from feedback exchanges on writing to extensive youth participatory action research projects. While the program started with just a few teachers, it grew to support the participation of up to 30 teachers and 600+ students in some years.

Wildcat Writers is guided by an advisory board consisting of Wildcat Writers teachers from the high schools and university. When it started in 2009, there were five of us who met once a month to make decisions about the program: Which teachers should be paired? What grants should we apply for? What should we do when a partnership falters? How should we talk about our work with broader publics? As Wildcat Writers has grown, the advisory board has taken on a more prominent role. Advisory board members mentor partnership teachers, attend program planning meetings, help gather materials for class visits, and troubleshoot issues. In recent years, board members have also attended weekend-long visioning retreats, developed a handbook of effective practices which is updated and distributed to teachers each year, and launched a monthly newsletter. The Wildcat Writers advisory board functions to illuminate many of the possibilities and challenges of democratic design.

Case Study 2 Introduction: Cross-Institutional Leadership in the SLCC-U Writing Transfer Partnership

Writing faculty at Salt Lake Community College and the University of Utah have partnered to support students transferring from SLCC to the U in writing studies, which has also allowed them to strengthen both departments in

areas like enrollment, retention, and faculty development. University faculty member Christie Toth built relationships with faculty at SLCC and collaborated with transfer students from SLCC to conduct a study about how students experience moving from one institution to the other. This research led to a set of recommendations to support students transferring from SLCC to the U, including a summer bridge program open to any SLCC student considering the U's writing and rhetoric studies major/minor or certificate program in professional and technical writing. The summer course was developed to introduce students to the field of writing studies by having them learn from writing studies scholars in the region, involving faculty from both institutions as co-teachers. This locally sourced curriculum means students meet the writers of the works they read, allowing students to build a network of support from both SLCC and the U. The class is also facilitated with the help of one or more transfer students who provide mentorship.

The SLCC-U partnership has continued to grow and now includes an associate degree in writing, 300-level U classes taught on the SLCC campus, a community college professional apprenticeship program that places graduate students in community college classrooms, and a student advisory board. The partnership has also fostered an informal inter-institutional disciplinary community in which faculty and graduate students attend speaking events and participate in reading groups hosted by the partner institution. The brief narrative illustration we offer here does not fully capture the rich work happening in the SLCC-U partnership, and we refer readers to publications emerging out of that partnership to learn more about this impressive work (Ruffus et al.; Toth; Toth and Ruffus; Toth, Sullivan, and Calhoon-Dillahunt). In our discussion that follows, we focus on aspects of this partnership, along with the Wildcat Writers advisory board, that illustrate democratic design.

Democratic Design for Collaborative Leadership in Action

The Deweyan idea of democracy as a "social idea" reminds us of the rich capacity participants have to shape the programs, systems, and organizations that impact them. If the leaders of programs and initiatives in writing studies wish to seek democratic ends, we must build leadership models that incorporate these ideals. In this section, we explore the ways in which Wildcat Writers and the SLCC-U collaborative exhibit principles of what we call democratic design. As we explore the key themes of (1) stakeholder leadership, (2) political vision, and (3) epistemic equity, we can begin to see the ways in which these programs align their leadership processes with their stated values.

Stakeholder Leadership

Too often, Carrie Leverenz argues, program administrators assume a Rawlsian ability to make ethical decisions from behind the "veil of ignorance," attempting to understand a problem without taking into account the social location from which they see. She cites feminist philosopher Seyla Benhabib, who argues for processes that enable differing voices to engage in discussion, as it is impossible to anticipate the concrete realities of others' experiences absent their voices. In her call for more ethical WPA decision-making, Leverenz argues for program administration that directly involves representatives of impacted constituencies, especially when those constituencies have been marginalized. The democratic design framework we saw emerge from the case studies emphasizes such stakeholder leadership as essential.

In our conversation with the Wildcat Writers participants, high school teacher Maria Elena Wakamatsu described the advisory board as "an accountability system," a way to allow community stakeholders to have input into decisions that determine whether the program is serving their interests. Here, Wakamatsu offers a vision of accountability rooted in responsiveness to marginalized stakeholders rather than to powerful granting agencies, university administrators, wealthy donors, or promotion and tenure review committees. It would be "easier," she suggested, to focus on the university's priorities and rely on assumptions about the interests of community participants, but the range of advisory board positionalities aims to allow community interests to emerge in decision-making processes. Involving those impacted by a program in leadership functions to rework accountability into an ethical concept instead of a neoliberal mandate, along the lines of Shari Stenberg's call for feminist repurposing of austerity discourses. Wildcat Writers' commitment to accountability has inspired programmatic and procedural changes over the years, from small alterations of which nights and where to hold meetings to more substantial shifts in the application process and the professional development program.

The development of the SLCC-U bridge course is also an example of stakeholder leadership, as transfer students and faculty from both institutions had a significant role in developing the program. The project began with a study to better understand local transfer experiences, involving transfer students as research assistants compensated through the U's Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program. As Toth explained, the positioning of undergraduate research assistants transitioned to "thinking of ourselves as co-researchers" who conducted surveys and interviews of transfer students and collaborated to make recommendations, including the idea for a summer bridge course. Toth described to us the day the University faculty went to a faculty meeting at SLCC to propose this bridge course, which was originally designed to

be taught by faculty from the U. "The immediate response [at SLCC], I can remember the meeting really vividly, was, 'Wow! Why would you teach that course by yourself?'" The SLCC faculty rightly argued for leadership roles in the process for conceiving and implementing the bridge program. Since then, Toth has co-taught the course with different faculty members from SLCC along with student co-teachers who have transferred to the U from SLCC. An advisory board including students and alumni of the partnership has also been formed so "it's not just me [Toth] making those judgment calls or even us [SLCC and U faculty] making those judgment calls. That we have a body of students that we're responsible to and can vet those decisions with." This advisory board has offered important insights to improve student experience in the program, such as recommending a workshop on imposter phenomenon and a formal peer mentoring program for post-transfer students.

Writing about WPA work, Jeanne Gunner suggests that the increased communication that emerges through a collaborative leadership structure allows the team "to see and share perceptions about the program" from different perspectives, leading to triangulation and better responsiveness (257-258). Similarly, stakeholder leadership in Wildcat Writers and the SLCC-U collaborative creates space for a greater range of people impacted by a program to join in programmatic decision-making, allowing these programs to remain more responsive to participant interests. In fact, SLCC English department chair Lisa Bickmore warned against using the SLCC-U partnership as a model of what types of programs to adopt, rather than as an example of the importance of stakeholder leadership: "It would be easy to say, 'What we need is a *this*, a *this*, a *this*, a *this*, a *this*, we'll do it like *that*—like they did it at the U and maybe make some modifications.' But to me, one of the most powerful things about this model is that, by and large, we built it together." Creating opportunities for stakeholders to co-build, co-lead, and co-determine how programs are responding to the interests of marginalized stakeholders becomes an essential feature of democratic partnerships because of the opportunities for ethical accountability and responsive programming.

Political Vision

By prioritizing accountability to marginalized communities, both Wildcat Writers and the SLCC-U partnership seek to disrupt the way education typically works. The political nature of this work is strongly articulated in the words of Wildcat Writers board member Wakamatsu, a former community organizer of undocumented farm workers. Her statement is worth quoting in full:

> Whoever you recruit to an advisory board, they have to understand that this is a highly political program, because what you're talking about is about educating and empowering people, kids in Title I schools, okay. Poor kids. Empowering them so that they know and feel they belong in college and that they can do just as well as anybody else. That is a very political statement, and you know what? There are a lot of people out there in high schools and district offices who are afraid of those of us trying to do this . . . . People who don't believe that this is any business of the university and certainly not any business of a high school, because they're trying to bring up test scores. If it doesn't advance what they're doing with the Common Core or with the canned curriculum or with our assessment scores, it's like, 'No.' It's like, 'What the hell are you doing working on a college curriculum? Why do you have your kids working on that when they can't even pass the damn [state test]?' A lot of times, administrators don't see the end game.

Here, Wakamatsu uses a political lens to identify with powerful clarity how the status quo in education, with its focus on test scores and its assumptions about the capabilities of minoritized youth, denies certain groups college access. She recognizes that advisory board members—and the organization itself—must embrace this political vision that calls attention to inequality and attempts to intervene in structures positioning some students as less-than.

Higher education scholar Gina Ann Garcia has similarly argued for attention to the political nature of organizational structures in postsecondary education in her work studying Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs). Too often, she suggests, universities admit students from previously excluded populations yet continue to operate in the same way. Garcia argues that an educational organization must align its mission, governance, and community standards in order to serve minoritized students; for example, institutions should center those students' experiences in curriculum and include those from historically marginalized groups in pluralistic models of decision-making (137-139). This holistic approach recognizes the ways an entire organization needs to be aligned under a political vision in order to claim a justice-oriented mission.

For Wildcat Writers, changing the mission statement of the program was one such attempt at creating a justice-oriented political alignment. The program initially started as the "Service Learning Program," and the advisory board elected to remove references to service learning in program materials after discussion about the impact of this terminology. As high school teacher Taylor Johnson recalled, the service learning language reinforced a university-driven relationship in which the college students might think "we're provid-

ing a charitable thing" rather than engaging in a partnership. The status quo around community engagement often positions marginalized populations as recipients of service, sending messages to both community members and college students that reinforce hierarchies of worth and capability. The advisory board revised the mission statement to emphasize "reciprocal learning," codifying the program's aim of collaboration between secondary and college students (and their teachers). The political vision to see the inequalities perpetuated by normative educational dynamics and intervene through program design is a key role of the advisory board.

The SLCC-U partnership holds a similar political perspective. As Toth articulated, community colleges are often overlooked in state, disciplinary, and university priorities, and "if community colleges are invisible, ignored or denigrated, think about the students that are being ignored, rendered invisible, and denigrated in that process"—often first-generation and BIPOC students. Attention to hierarchies in the education system has become a cornerstone of the partnership, as expressed in its vision statement, which outlines seven principles guiding the initiative ("Articulating"). Two of these principles, "centering students" and "educate for social justice", exemplify the political vision of the SLCC-U partnership. The statement charges those involved in the partnership with a "moral obligation" to recognize "that the educational experiences and opportunities of students—particularly the often structurally disadvantaged students at SLCC—are more important than professional or disciplinary 'turf'" (6). This stance is important in the historical context of SLCC-U relations, as the institutions have often seen each other as competitors for credit hour production and teaching opportunities. In foregrounding marginalized students, the partnership seeks to take a clear-eyed look at inequities in the postsecondary system, which offers more status and more per-pupil funding to four-year universities: as the vision statement asserts,"ultimately, our work together is motivated by a shared commitment to challenging the social injustices reproduced by the educational system in which we labor and learn" (5). This explicitly political vision is also articulated in the value, "address material conditions," which will "require us to engage politically…to address the broader labor structures, *especially the labor conditions of contingent faculty,*" as well as factors that limit students' educational access (Toth, Sullivan, and Calhoon-Dillahunt 105, emphasis in original). The vision statement works to encourage political clarity in understanding the trajectories of inequality that shape the partnership context, from the marginalization of community college students to exploitative labor conditions for adjunct faculty.

We want to be careful to acknowledge that no education program can fully step outside problematic political dynamics. Moreover, marginalized communities have many reasons to distrust university intervention, as Indigenous scholar

Linda Tuhiwai Smith recognizes, and small changes like altering terminology or drafting a mission statement is only a start, given the work that must be done. Nevertheless, we see a political vision as central to developing leadership structures that seek to disrupt traditional power relations.

Epistemic Equity

A key component of bringing a political vision to program leadership is addressing whose knowledge is considered valuable *in all the practices and administrative levels of a program*. As adrienne maree brown argues, "How we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale," which means to us that a core principle must show up in specific practices and organizational structures from the highest level of an organization down to small interactions (52). In short, the work toward social justice must look like the world the work is trying to achieve. A core principle we argue is key to democratic design is challenging inequalities around knowledge production. In public partnerships, for example, knowledge is often conceptualized as flowing from the university to the community, a view that must be actively countered at every level of a program. Marginalized stakeholders are often not seen as credible knowledge-makers, a phenomenon philosopher Miranda Fricker calls "epistemic injustice." Fricker argues that institutions relying on a shared culture or an abstract commitment to epistemic justice may not succeed, and she suggests designating a subgroup responsible for upholding epistemic virtues. An advisory board can function as such a subgroup when it takes responsibility to shape power dynamics. Both Wildcat Writers and the SLCC-U partnership have created processes and protocols to foreground epistemic equity at all levels of programming.

In the Wildcat Writers program, the advisory board models the idea that all partners bring valuable knowledge to the program by distributing decision-making across the board, as discussed above. In addition, the board positions experienced high school teachers as "mentors" to both secondary and college instructors in the partnership. This attention to epistemic equity flows out from the advisory board to impact other programmatic levels. Board member Maria Elena Wakamatsu explained that when she mentors pairs of secondary and college teachers, she seeks to shape the knowledge power dynamics between the two. She stresses to the secondary teachers that they often have more expertise in areas such as classroom management and backward design than their college partners, frequently graduate students new to teaching. She shared, "When I tell high school teachers that they are more experienced than their [GTA] partner, they're always shocked. . .I say, 'You've gotta help them out . . .'" Here, Wakamatsu helps the secondary teachers resist hierarchies that position university knowledge as more valuable. The advisory board mentor's role is

not only to navigate practical matters but to set a tone of reciprocal learning between university and secondary teachers. A reflection protocol following a meeting further prompts teachers to discuss what they learned from the other.

High school teacher Taylor Johnson agreed that the teacher relationship sets the tone for the entire partnership, especially when the teachers help students to see that the "high school students also have something different to offer." Secondary students in Wildcat Writers are often intimidated at the idea of collaborating with a college student (Shah) and college students sometimes join the program with a hierarchical lens of "mentorship," views that have to be aggressively countered. As the board members argued, encouraging epistemic equity works best when that balance is modeled at multiple levels of a program, from administration, to teachers, to students.

Explicitly recognizing experiential knowledge is another way to promote epistemic justice in university-community partnerships and other programs. Rigoberto Reyes, a community organizer, notes that university representatives frequently exude "a certain know-it-all arrogance, not stopping to recognize that who better to know what the problems, issues, and priorities are than the people who are being directly affected by the problem" (2). In democratic design, credibility comes from hands-on experience in the program rather than the number of articles published, a high-status title, or political connections. The Wildcat Writers advisory board, for example, is different from executive boards in non-profits, which are often composed of people with connections to powerful spheres who may not have experience in the day-to-day work. When discussing what made the board effective, our interviewees stressed that board members must have participated in the program, "probably more than once," according to secondary teacher Kate Street, because this experiential knowledge is invaluable. Similarly, in the SLCC-U collaboration, Toth sought to involve transfer students as co-researchers in her exploration of how to smooth the transition from community college to the university. The experiential expertise of transfer students is also highlighted through their role as co-facilitators in the summer bridge course, as the SLCC-U partnership recognizes that successfully transferring to the university serves as a valuable qualification for teaching students about to undergo this experience.[2]

Honoring experiential knowledge also opens up pathways for wider ranges of stakeholders to participate as co-authors of program documents. When we asked Stephen Ruffus, formerly of SLCC, for suggestions for how to promote democratic knowledge exchange in the face of hierarchies between universities and community colleges, he suggested "writing those connections" through the co-creation of texts. For example, in addition to co-authoring the vision statement discussed in the previous section, SLCC and U faculty and students have collaborated on a variety of texts and publications, including a recently

published book (Toth). In our conversation, Toth referred to this book not as a monograph, but as a "polygraph" that includes co-authored and solicited mini-essays that feature a range of stakeholders in the SLCC-U partnership. SLCC English department chair Bickmore emphatically argued that this collaborative and relational model of scholarship shaped the dynamics of the SLCC-U collaboration, as it involved a university professor "ceding that territory" to the voices of others and co-developing the argument rather than "employ[ing] your labor to get to my idea" in a tenure-earning book. The writing process was built on an awareness of the rich knowledges held by community college students and faculty. The co-written texts in the SLCC-U partnership are therefore important not just for their content but for the process by which they were constructed, intentionally involving a variety of stakeholders in the drafting.

Similar to how high school teachers Wakamatsu and Johnson described epistemic equity as trickling down from the advisory board to teachers to students in Wildcat Writers, Bickmore outlined how honoring traditionally-marginalized knowledges through faculty co-writing has implications at multiple levels of the SLCC-U partnership. She explained that epistemic equity in her context often required challenging the limiting discourses that framed universities as where knowledge is made and community colleges where teaching occurs. These discourses have to be "decoded," with political vision, for the ways that they frame community colleges as "lesser institutions, there for students who can't 'make it' in better institutions"—which is really "another way of talking about race, class, and all the divides that our students live in and among." Demonstrating epistemic equity at the level of co-designing a bridge class or co-authoring a book, then, positions the community college as a place of knowledge production, which has the potential to impact students, "because it allows students to frame the work that they're doing when they come to community college as real intellectual work themselves." In short, pursuing epistemic equity at the highest levels of program administration and representation can impact a variety of stakeholders. As Bickmore argued, "Doing the work of decoding [those discourses], recognizing in each other the capacity for, the potential for, and the already-have-done-it-ness of knowledge-making is a way of harnessing something really new" in the state education system.

This stance echoes Dewey's commitment to democratic social organization by honoring the epistemic capacities of individuals to shape conjoint activity. As DeStigter suggests, a Deweyan approach to democracy as a way of life is as much about process as product. He explains that when individuals are engaged with each other in activity, "[they] begin to think of the activity in terms of the outcome, thereby defining and deepening the view of what they do and why they are doing it" (16). From this perspective, it is critical that the activities in which a group participates are characterized by the same ideals that describe

the intended aim. In other words, when a program claims to pursue greater social equality as an end goal, then it should also strive toward equity in whose knowledges are valued in everyday program interactions. As both case study partnerships aim to address hierarchies between universities and their partner institutions, that stance should be present in how different knowledges are valued in program practices, such as the drafting processes for Toth's book or reflection protocols that ask secondary and university teachers to share what they learned from one another. Many programs in writing studies that espouse justice-oriented goals or values related to democracy may have opportunities to integrate the related value of epistemic equity into programmatic processes.

Possibilities and Limitations: Toward Democratic Design in the Field of Composition

The Deweyan idea of democracy as a "social idea" reminds us of the rich capacity participants have to shape the programs, systems, and organizations that impact them. In this article, we have offered democratic design as one way to move toward a form of leadership that values and reflects the knowledges and interests of participants. Epistemic equity—a conscious effort to honor stakeholder knowledges throughout the organizational structure—serves as the defining characteristic of our model, acting as a mechanism for stakeholder leadership and creating space for voices that can sharpen a political vision. As Bickmore of SLCC argued, "At every level where we talk about systems of higher education, it's important to recognize knowledge-making where it occurs, and that it occurs everywhere. Recognizing it means, then, that you can actually use it." This recognition of marginalized knowledge is especially critical in public partnerships to better understand the impacts of partnerships and resist the ways universities often fail to engage communities ethically, even in partnerships that seem to emerge from progressive ideals (Kannan et al; Mathieu). The model of democratic design, emerging from public partnerships, may also speak to broader conceptions of leadership in writing studies, as many of our programs are similarly impacted by sharp power imbalances and epistemological hierarchies. Democratic design, an "end in view" approach to building programmatic ideals into collaborative leadership structures, can be a partial answer to these imbalances, serving as an accountability system to less-powerful stakeholders, as Wildcat Writers board member Maria Elena Wakamatsu asserted.

Yet democratic design comes with its own thorny questions and limitations. In particular, participants in our study asked whether it is ethical to ask marginalized stakeholders to dedicate labor toward program leadership, and, if so, how much is too much to ask? Toth shared, "As one student told me, and I think about this everyday, 'It's not my job to fix you people. It's your job to

fix you people.'" If stakeholders are going to be invited to take on program improvement, how can administrators act in light of the potential costs and risks to marginalized participants? These questions point to long-standing tensions in community engagement scholarship. Collaborating with university classes can be a burden on community partners (Stoecker and Tryon), and that burden is heightened when taking on a leadership role. The ethics around asking marginalized stakeholders to serve on an advisory board are especially complex given that participants can face barriers to board participation, such as transportation and accessibility (Grabill), and an element of risk when advocating for stakeholder interests in ways that may be unpopular with those who hold more power. High school teacher Street noted that serving on the advisory board requires a willingness to "put your neck out," and Wakamatsu added that several advisory board members had "paid dearly, quite frankly, to be part of this program" in terms of opportunities for advancement at the district office, because advocating for students to have access to college-level curriculum sometimes required being at odds with administrators. The inherent risks of centering stakeholder interests were discussed in the SLCC-U partnership, as well. Toth's initial involvement came during her pre-tenure years at the U, and from this unstable positionality she had to advocate for institutional change to create more authentic transfer pathways.

The Wildcat Writers advisory board members also noted that participation on the board led to work-life balance compromises. Due to the differing schedules of high school and university faculty, meetings often overlapped with time that would otherwise be reserved for family. Board member Johnson and co-author Brad Jacobson remembered bringing their young children to meetings. In an illustration of the human costs of advisory board work, Johnson added that in a recent conversation about patience, her daughter said simply, "Mom, I've learned how to wait."

Given the burden of democratic design for participants, compensation becomes an important way to honor the labor of stakeholders. In the SLCC-U partnership, students able to participate as co-researchers, co-developers, or co-teachers, are paid for their labor, and, if it's useful to them, get tuition-free credit that counts toward a writing and rhetoric studies minor or major. All forms of compensation, including stipends for advisory board service, are available to students of any documentation status. In our roles coordinating advisory boards, we have pursued opportunities such as grant-funded stipends, research assistantships, and credit-bearing internships in an effort to recognize the labor burden involved, yet these options have not always been available. For stakeholders who are not rewarded for service in a tenure portfolio, "the sudden invitation to serve on a committee or collaborate on a project may be perceived as simply more work without more compensation" (Leverenz 16).

Leverenz suggests inviting forms of participation that benefit stakeholders in ways they value, such as inviting contingent faculty to co-lead a workshop when professional development counts for merit evaluation. We sought creative ways of providing professional value, such as mailing letters to high school principals on university letterhead that celebrated teachers' contributions and hosting a Wildcat Writers teaching award, but it is also worth noting that advisory board members' motivations were more complex than monetary or professional advancement. For example, Johnson found deep satisfaction in opportunities to "tell the story" of Wildcat Writers through scholarship, potentially leaving a professional legacy by impacting other programs.

The participants in the Wildcat Writers advisory board conversation were also quick to note that the costs of participation were counterbalanced by meaningful social connections forged through the board. Following up on a comment about the impact of board commitments on family time, Johnson remarked that "the offset to that [labor and time burden] is that the board can feel like a family." Other interviewees agreed, sharing memories of dancing together at a board member's wedding and making pizza before meetings. Street emphasized, "It can't just be another meeting that you have to go to," and Wakamatsu described how sharing food and wine helped give a relational feel to gatherings. This kind of relationality was also evident in our interviews about the SLCC-U partnership. For example, Toth shared that SLCC-U faculty and current and former students had attended her "non-baby shower/baby party." This theme reminded us of Steven Alvarez's argument for *confianza*, or the ongoing, intentional process of establishing mutual trust through listening, valuing home knowledges, and building relationships. As he illustrates, such relationality is foundational to community literacy work. When Johnson says the board "can feel like a family," she suggests that opportunities for social interactions are not fillers to be included only if there's time; rather, in some contexts, they make the work possible, helping participants–administrators included, we would emphasize–weather the risks and costs of democratic design.

In addition to considering time for individual participants, it is also important to acknowledge another aspect of time: democratic design may not meet the expectations of efficiency and traditional metrics many institutional leaders desire. Democratic design takes time to build relationships of trust, to share perspectives, to make decisions and, if necessary, change course. brown describes making the case for collaborative decision-making "to people who use the words 'efficient; and 'ASAP' to describe everything good," arguing that the real "heart of efficiency" occurs when people who will be involved in the work have trust and alignment (230). Without collaborative commitment, participants may not give their full energy toward the project, slowing it down. For brown, taking the time to involve impacted communities in decision-making

not only allows organizations to identify more ethical goals–what is efficiency for if it doesn't lead us to the desired result?–but it also allows organizations to move toward those goals more effectively. Leaders in writing studies fields will need to make a creative and rhetorical case for a democratic design approach when advocating for institutional support or justifying democratic structures to skeptical colleagues or administrators. For example, to fund stipends at her current institution, co-author Rachael Shah accessed an external grant focused on improving teacher quality by arguing that secondary teachers participating on an advisory board would build teacher capacity. The SLCC-U partnership utilized undergraduate research funds to develop their co-researcher approach. Leaders might also look to others doing participatory research or program design at their institutions for inspiration on how to justify this work. Rachael recently connected with minority health disparities researchers who utilize community advisory boards (CABs) because they recognize that the validity, reach, and impact of inquiry can be augmented by democratic approaches.

Measuring impact and what counts as success raises other questions for leaders utilizing democratic design within accountability-focused models. While some partnerships, like Wildcat Writers and SLCC-U, lend themselves to data collection on student impacts that tend to be valued by administrators, democratic design reminds us that measuring results must also align with the means. Echoing Garcia's call for HSIs to seek legitimacy by meeting traditional measures of success (e.g., graduation rates) while valuing transformational practices like developing critical consciousness and ethnic identity, we see promise in combining traditional metrics and processes with a broader range of data and participatory approaches. In addition to identifying metrics valuable to administrators or external funders, democratic designed partnerships could work to develop their own metrics aligned with programmatic values. For example, a partnership that values reciprocal learning could analyze written reflections for the depth of response in describing what students learned from their partners. In this way, the program evaluation process itself can become an opportunity for democratic design, as a range of stakeholders can be involved in determining which outcomes to track (for external and internal purposes), how to go about gathering data and participant input, and/or how to interpret results (Sabo Flores; Shah). Using more expansive data markers and evaluation processes alongside established research on student success (like high-impact practices) could help to present a holistic picture that sustains democratic design. At the same time, we acknowledge that a democratically designed evaluation comes with its own ethics and labor tensions, so this is far from a simple answer.

As we continue to pursue this work, we have encountered other questions: How can programs grapple with the slippery nature of representation—who

can speak for a community or group? For example, does an advisory board that only includes teachers sufficiently represent the communities involved in Wildcat Writers?[3] How should factors like race and class be considered when thinking about representation? How might programs navigate the tension in the importance of having people of color in leadership of an initiative that primarily serves minoritized communities without overburdening teachers or students of color? Are programs that draw on democratic design in danger of falling under an "inclusion delusion" (Kannan et al.), in which the appearance of community participation provides a smokescreen or false sense of security that allows for problematic practices? And how might the contexts of particular programs bring additional ethical questions to the fore? Democratic design has limitations, to be sure. We want to be clear that we are continually negotiating institutional dynamics in our own leadership capacities, and what works in one situation may not work in another. We look forward to learning from others enacting strategies to justify and build democratic design in their unique programmatic and institutional contexts.

Qualified as our call is, we believe democratic design–through stakeholder leadership, political vision, and epistemic equity–can provide a hopeful approach to change. While we have focused our discussion on public partnerships that link composition studies in the university with broader constituencies, we also see these principles as applicable within departments and programs themselves. Readers in a variety of leadership positions might consider strategies from these case studies, including advisory boards, stakeholder co-authorship, collaborative research across institutional positionalities, mission statements that center marginalized stakeholders or epistemic equity, and discussion protocols that disrupt knowledge hierarchies. Could writing programs draw upon democratic design as they establish a student advisory board, invite NTT faculty to help drive curricular decision-making, or work with neurodivergent students to create a teacher workshop on neurodiversity? Many English departments have mission statements that claim to center marginalized knowledges and a range of potential outcomes, but how might they build in stakeholder accountability beyond tracking readings on syllabi or student graduation rates and job placements? How could program leaders incorporate insights from students who feel excluded or marginalized from writing classroom practices?

Democratic design as a metaphor reminds us that all leadership structures are built, and processes that may be taken as given are actually choices that carry significant consequences for stakeholders. A program's end goals cannot be divorced from its leadership structure, as decisions about structure define whose knowledges are valued within a program. We argue here that the epistemic equity central to the Wildcat Writers advisory board and the SLCC-U writing studies partnership is a necessary condition for such a collaborative

leadership structure. For leaders in composition who see collaboration as central to their mission, democratic design can serve as a linchpin for aligning processes with values.

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Notes

1. IRB # 16186, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

2. New processes may be needed when epistemic equity is a goal. Toth shared that while it can be difficult for undergraduate students to "get a word in" during a faculty-dominated discussion, they were able to contribute more in small group settings. Toth reminds us that maintaining epistemic equity does not always mean everyone in the same room hashing things out; there are "massive power asymmetries" that will never be equal.

3. The Wildcat Writers advisory board has since included undergraduate students. Husker Writers, which Rachael went on to coordinate at a different institution, has also included undergraduate and high school students on the board.

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