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INTRODUCTION

Talisha Haltiwanger Morrison and Deidre Anne Evans Garriott

Writing Centers and Racial Justice is a book born both of frustration and hope. In its pages, you will find contributors wrestling with some of the same questions and dilemmas writing center administrators have been discussing for decades. And to be honest, that is part of the point. The questions here are not new, but we hope that some of the answers will be. We have given this book the subtitle “a guidebook for critical praxis,” and it is our intention that this collection will provide guidance for current and aspiring writing center administrators dedicated to (or just curious about) racial justice. While we won’t claim that this book holds all the answers to our most challenging questions, we do feel that this collection provides some of the clear advice and recommendations that writing center administrators have asked for to help them make concrete changes.

INSPIRATIONS AND ORIENTATIONS

In their 2018 International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) keynote address, Kendra Mitchell and Robert Randolph Jr. (2019) questioned the progress we have made as a field by interrogating the conference theme, “The Citizen Center,” asking, “Haven’t we done this before? What have we done about it?” (23). Many writing center administrators (WCAs) walked away from Mitchell and Randolph’s keynote seeking concrete examples of how to cultivate racially just centers. Administrators sought answers with increased urgency following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other unarmed Black people in 2020. On WCenter, the professional LISTSERV for writing centers, as well as the Writing Center Directors and Writing Center Network Facebook pages and at annual meetings of the IWCA Anti-Racism Special Interest Group, we observed many administrators expressing a sense of frustration and inadequacy, wondering how to enact racial justice in and through the writing center. As we put this collection together, an additional motivating

factor arose as more than twenty states across the nation restricted or introduced legislation that could restrict conversations about race in public education, and colleges and universities in conservative states also experienced increased pressure and surveillance from their local governments and news sources regarding conversations about race. The ongoing pandemic, along with the heightened racial and political tension, fueled our desire to provide actionable guidance to navigate this challenging climate.

Talisha

Prior to starting this collection, in the late spring and early summer of 2020, I originally had plans to continue working on a solo-authored book based on my dissertation, *Nooses and Balancing Acts* (Haltiwanger Morrison 2018). In this project, I spoke to Black writing tutors about their experiences with racism both in their writing centers and on their campuses. However, in the midst of the nationwide upheaval over the murder of George Floyd and at the beginning of a pandemic taking disproportionately the lives of Black and Brown Americans, it did not seem like the best time to ask Black students about their trauma. Further, I did not want to talk about it. I did not want to hear more stories of pain. What I was hearing, however, was people from both writing centers and Writing Studies more broadly taking up the conversation about racism and racial justice more vigorously. White people had awakened and wanted to do something. Everywhere people were asking, “What do we do?” My initial feelings about this awakening were annoyance and frustration. The bewilderment of white “allies” was painful, and the constant conversation about Black death and destruction was exhausting. I found myself withdrawing even further from the internet and social media, trying to escape. But, even as I withdrew, I kept thinking about that question, “What do we do?” I had served as co-leader of the IWCA anti-racism SIG from 2017 to 2019 and during that time also heard that question repeated, “What do we do?” or “How do we do this?” But also, I knew that there were people in the field, directing writing centers, who were doing meaningful racial justice work already.

I decided to put together a collection of current writing center administrators giving clear and practical advice about what steps they were actually taking to enact racial justice through their centers. As I thought more about the project, I began rereading scholarship and was struck by Kendra Mitchell and Robert Randolph Jr’s powerful words from their 2018 IWCA keynote. In that address, Mitchell and Randolph

question the field's reliance on decades-old scholarship by white administrators. They demand to know where the central texts are by scholars of color. They challenge the field to realize our circuitous nature of our conversations around race, racism, and racial justice in writing centers, noting that we've had these conversations before and arguing that we will continue to have them unless we make an intentional effort to do differently. My hope was that a collection such as this might be part of that intentional effort. If a major barrier to more directors taking up actionable racial justice in their centers was that they did not know where to start, then a guidebook with specific examples and recommendations would remove that barrier.

Deidre

During the spring and early summer of 2020, as I worked from home teaching and directing my university's Writing Center, I planned to focus on publishing my solo-work on public memory in the South. But the immediacy of COVID turned my attention away from sites of public memory—most of which were shut down, along with the physical archives—and toward webinars and literature about being an effective teacher in digital environments. In these lessons, I repeatedly encountered sentences or asides mentioning issues with accessibility that arose from systemic barriers. More bluntly, someone would warn us to “make sure your digital class is accessible because many people don't have the bandwidth for synchronous learning.” *Which people?* I wondered, already knowing the answer, the words that so many white people are reluctant to utter. Black and African American people. But how should I improve accessibility, and how does the idea of accessibility change when I center racial justice?

George Floyd's death, his murder by cops, changed the discourse and the motivations of Writing Center Studies by demanding that writing center professionals center Black excellence and racial justice. In addition to emails sent to the Writing Studies community and new statements such as “This Ain't Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice!,” our organizations provided workshops and webinars. In the writing and meetings, I observed more direct conversations among participants about the ways that writing centers are complicit in racism and institutional barriers that keep BIPOC, LGBT+, and women from accessing institutions in the same ways as cis-het white people. We moved away from euphemisms and spoke directly about race, racism, and Writing Studies. Most important, I saw WCAs asking,

“How do we make our centers more racially just?” I saw an opportunity for us to move beyond platitudes toward real actions.

Which is why I was excited when Talisha asked me to join her on this project. As both a white woman who wanted more help and who was already doing some anti-racist work in her profession, I wanted to contribute to resources that help spark more conversations about practice. This is especially important, I thought, for early career WCAs who needed a place to turn for ideas. As a white woman, I sought to work with Talisha and the contributors to create a place where writing center practitioners could learn from each other.

WHAT THIS BOOK DOES AND DOESN'T DO

Writing Centers and Racial Justice: A Guidebook for Critical Praxis responds to our field's ongoing quest for practical guidance for the racial justice work in which so many want to engage. Writing Center scholars have drawn increasing attention to the importance of racial justice in writing center work over the past several decades. Recent writing center scholarship centered on racial justice has explored the ways in which writing centers perpetuate linguistic injustice (Greenfield 2011; Young 2011; Gallagher et al. 2017; Alvarez 2019), served as primarily white spaces (Pimentel 2014; García 2017; Haltiwanger Morrison 2019), and continued a white-savior paradigm in higher education (Villanueva 2011; Greenfield 2011; Wilson 2011; Denny et al. 2019; Bond 2019). This body of scholarship has advanced the study of racial justice as a writing center concern and accelerated efforts to adopt anti-racist policies in writing centers. However, the field overall is still struggling to turn problematizing into meaningful change.

We feel strongly that this collection helps us turn toward that change. There does not currently exist any book that offers clear and actionable advice on how writing centers and their staff may take up racial or social justice work as part of everyday administrative practice. Two popular guidebooks for writing center administrators, *The Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice* (Barnett and Blumner 2007) and *The Writing Center Director's Resource Book* (Murphy and Stay 2006), offer collections of previously published scholarship on various writing center matters such as historical perspectives and tutoring practices. While some of the texts included in these collections speak to ethical matters in writing center administration, neither collection gives substantial attention to race or racial justice pedagogies. An emphasis on race can be found in more recent collections, such as *Writing Centers and the*

New Racism (Greenfield and Rowan 2011) and *Out in the Center* (Denny et al. 2019). While these collections have been valuable additions to the field, they do not offer the kind of grounded examples offered in our collection. We hope that the advice here, including the appendices accompanying several chapters, will help current administrators revise or implement racial justice practices in their own centers, campuses, and communities.

Difficult Decisions

As we were developing this collection, we found ourselves wrestling with several difficult editorial decisions. One of our first considerations for the collection was that we wanted to include as many scholars of color as possible. We developed a list of people whom we knew (or knew of) and believed could offer clear and accessible guidance on how to do racial justice work through the writing center. What we found, however, was that our initial list consisted overwhelmingly of writing center directors from predominantly and historically white (research) institutions (PHWI). We understand that writing centers exist at a variety of institution types, and these differences affect practical considerations such as the size and diversity of the writing center's staff, how the writing center engages with faculty, and budgetary constraints that shape programming, outreach, and other administrative matters. So, we shifted gears to intentionally recruit scholars and administrators from diverse institution types. We reached out to potential contributors from both public and private institutions, from PHWIs, and also from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs), Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs), and Asian-American and Native American Pacific Islander serving institutions (AANAPISIs). We reached out to scholars from four- and two-year institutions and from high school writing centers. We still wanted to include as many scholars of color as possible and found ourselves trying to balance racial diversity with institutional diversity, a process made more challenging by the lack of racial diversity in the field. Our efforts to attract scholars of color were also affected by the ongoing pandemic. Many of the writing center administrators we initially reached out to did not respond to our invitations. Others accepted and then withdrew their proposals as they prepared for and began their first full pandemic semester in fall of 2020. Eventually we decided to open the call for proposals outside of our initial list and solicit proposed chapters, knowing that there were others out there doing good work but whom we simply did not know or had overlooked.

The collection we've ended up with includes chapters from both invited and accepted contributors. The racial makeup of our contributors is not quite what we initially hoped for, but we feel proud to elevate the work of so many scholars of color and to include several pieces authored or coauthored by tutors. And we hope that the variety of institutional and writing center structures represented here will be useful to readers as they imagine how to adapt and enact similar efforts at their own centers.

The collection has other limitations as well. We were unable, for example, to include a contribution from a high school writing center or a community college. We regret that these institutions are not represented here and know that our collection would benefit from their inclusion. Another limitation is that the collection speaks most directly to centers that are staffed by peer undergraduate tutors. Although several of the centers discussed here also (or in one case only) employ graduate tutors, the peer undergraduate tutor model is most represented in these chapters. Readers who direct centers staffed by professional and/or faculty tutors may have to make additional considerations for how to apply the advice given here to their own contexts.

Additionally, contributors in this collection speak to different audiences within the larger writing centers' community. Some of the white contributors (including Deidre) speak directly to white audiences, in acknowledgment that most WCAs are white and approach racial justice from a different standpoint than BIPOC administrators. The collection offers a variety of frameworks and approaches. Some we would not personally use; others we have already begun adopting at our own centers. We intend the collection to speak to WCAs who differ in race and in other ways, such as geography, class, gender, institution and position type, and others. We hope that audiences from many backgrounds and contexts will find something useful within the book's chapters and that the suggestions here will spearhead new practices and progress toward increased racial and social justice in the field.

Finally, an intentional decision is what some readers may consider limited engagement with writing center theory. Many early drafts of chapters included lengthy literature reviews that situated their advice in existing scholarship. However, as editors, we wanted to maintain the essential purpose of the collection: to offer clear and actionable advice. Most current work on race and racism in Writing Center Studies is theoretical and/or narrative based. We find this work to be valuable and important. Indeed, readers will also find narrative and theory in this collection, particularly

in the first section. However, they will also find clearly defined lessons and takeaways, actionable recommendations, and sample materials. While we expect praxis to grow out of and be linked to writing center scholarship, we were not interested in repeating the same conversations that can be found elsewhere. Others have done that and have done it well. Instead, we asked contributors to limit their reviews of existing scholarship and their arguments for particular theoretical frameworks and to offer as clear and uncluttered advice as they could. We hope that readers will appreciate the selectivity and concision and are able to use the work here alongside important theoretical scholarship.

PART OVERVIEW

We have divided the collection into five thematic parts: part I: “Counter-ing Racism and Colonialism in Higher Education”; part II: “Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention”; part III: “Tutor Education and Professional Development”; part IV: “Engaging with Campus and Community”; and part V: “Holding Our Professional Organizations Accountable.” Although the parts are separate, we consider the conversations within them as building upon one another through considerations of, for example, how well-developed tutor education enhances retention, or how faculty and community outreach offer additional professional development opportunities.

The first part, “Counter-ing Racism and Colonialism in Higher Education,” is the most theoretical of the collection and helps provide some framing for the remaining pieces. In Part I, contributors Jennifer Martin and Mark Latta confront the institutional structures that make anti-racist, decolonial pedagogies and labor difficult in higher education. Opening the collection with chapter 1, “Tutoring and Practice at a Tribal College,” Jennifer Martin, an Indigenous peer tutor, examines the writing tutor’s opportunities, challenges, and obligations to clients at Tribal Colleges and suggests a methodology for equipping writing centers and tutors to better meet the needs of Indigenous writers as allies rather than perpetrators of settler-colonialism. Following Martin, Latta, in “Another White Voice in the Room,” chapter 2, identifies and critiques popular racial justice rhetoric of Writing Center Studies that have allowed white supremacist pedagogies to maintain strongholds in higher education and offers his own efforts as a white administrator to decenter whiteness and advance racial justice in the writing center.

Part II, “Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention,” meanwhile, makes visible the realities and constraints of enacting racial justice in writing

centers within higher education. In chapter 3, “Why Do White Tutors ‘Love’ Writing?,” Rachel Herzl-Betz uses quantitative research methods to study the variables that motivate undergraduate peer tutors to apply to work at a writing center. The chapter not only offers Herzl-Betz’s findings but also details how she applied the data to improve her own recruitment and hiring procedures at Nevada State College, an HSI in Las Vegas, and how others might generalize the findings to improve their own recruitment and hiring.

Jamie P. Bondar, Kristina Aikens, and Devon Deery, in “Toward Anti-racist Writing Center Hiring and Retention Practices,” chapter 4, extend Herzl-Betz’s investigation by analyzing administrative policies and practices around hiring, recruitment, and retention. They explain their efforts as white WCAs to dismantle white racial frames (Feagin 2013) and offer strategies to handle tutors’ reports of bias and harassment and promote retention.

Part III, “Tutor Education and Professional Development,” provides readers guidance into racial justice in tutor education. In chapter 5, “Beyond the Tutor Training Seminar,” Zandra L. Jordan, writing from a womanist position, outlines both her tutor-training seminar and ongoing professional development for cultivating a tutoring staff equipped to engage race(ism) and promote racial justice. Extending Jordan’s examination of tutor education, Lindsay A. Sabatino asserts in “Addressing Racial Justice through Re-imagining Practicum to Promote Dialogue on Campus,” chapter 6, that centralizing racial justice in tutor education empowers tutors to become agents of change inside and out of the writing center. Similarly, Rachael Shapiro and Celeste Del Russo, in “Working toward Racial Justice in the Writing Center,” chapter 7, offer strategies for a translanguaging approach to tutor training to promote racial and linguistic justice in the writing center. Next, Lisa Eastmond Bell, in “Disrupting Systems,” chapter 8, offers recommendations for how writing center practitioners can better understand power, increase access to services, and use data to build more racially and socially just online tutoring services. Talisha Haltiwanger Morrison closes the part with chapter 9, “Tutors Matter Too,” by arguing that WCAs must think carefully and proactively about how to support peer tutors, particularly those of color, as they engage in anti-racist tutoring work.

Part IV, “Engaging with Campus and Community,” considers various ways that WCAs and tutors can expand the center’s work and reach when they make racial justice central to their practices. In chapter 10, “Anti-Blackness Professional Development to Pro-Blackness Actions,” peer tutor Brianna Johnson and administrators Rebecca Johnson and Nicole I.

Caswell describe their center's nine-month process of researching, drafting, and revising a letter to faculty calling for a commitment to racial linguistic justice on their campus, and they offer readers advice on how to engage faculty in conversations on anti-Blackness. Deidre Anne Evans Garriott, in "Leveraging Faculty Pedagogical Development to Center Racial Justice," chapter 11, offers readers examples of and guidance in using their position as WCAs to engage non-writing instructors in anti-racist pedagogies and practices to extend the anti-racist work of writing centers beyond its walls. In chapter 12, "Community Is the Center," Nicole Emmelhainz, along with peer tutors Graciela Greger and Amanda Ballou, reflect on Emmelhainz's tutor education course and the tutors' individual research into the need for a community writing center in Newport News, Virginia. The part concludes with chapter 13, Kamille Bostick's "Writing Revolution." Drawing on her experience directing the center at her HBCU, Bostick argues that writing centers should pursue social justice and civil rights engagement by working closely with student writers to produce public texts and reflects on the transformative power for the center and writers when that work becomes a priority for WCAs.

Finally, the chapters in part V, "Holding our Professional Organizations Accountable," expand readers' view by turning our attention to our professional organizations, specifically the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) and the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA). LaKela Atkinson, in "Practicing What We Preach," chapter 14, reflects on her experiences as the HBCU representative on the SWCA board and argues that organizational boards can center anti-racist practices by being more innovative when creating and filling board positions. In "Remaking IWCA," chapter 15, Genie Nicole Giaimo, Nicole I. Caswell, Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Elise Dixon, and Wonderful Faison frame their experiences advocating for IWCA to change its structures and goals to better center racial justice as its core principle. The collection ends with an afterword by Kendra L. Mitchell, whose work helped inspire this project.

CONCLUSION

The collection offers detailed examples of the anti-racist and racial justice work current writing center directors and tutors are doing and explanations of how this work might translate to readers' own contexts. Several contributors have also provided appendices, such as sample recruitment materials, tutor training activities, and course syllabi. We do not expect the chapters here to provide a definitive "how to" for racially

just writing center work. Rather, we seek to spearhead conversations about concrete practices with examples, advice, and lessons learned about the challenges of this work. We hope that you, as current or aspiring directors, will take the guidance here and use it to begin implementing change in your own centers and institutions.

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