

# CONTENTS

*Acknowledgments* ix

Introduction: Valuing Lived Experiences and Community Mentorship  
*Shannon Madden* 3

## PART 1: VOICES

- 1 The Trauma of Graduate Education: Graduate Writers Countering Epistemic Injustice and Reclaiming Epistemic Rights  
*Beth Godbee* 35
- 2 Incidents in the Life of Kirsten T. Edwards: A Personal Examination of the Academic In-Between Space  
*Kirsten T. Edwards* 52
- 3 Voices from the Hill: HBCUs and the Graduate Student Experience  
*Richard Sévère and Maurice Wilson* 73
- 4 Race, Retention, Language, and Literacy: The Hidden Curriculum of the Writing Center  
*Wonderful Faison and Anna K. (Willow) Treviño* 92
- 5 Paying It Forward by Looking Back: Six HBCU Professionals Reflect on Their Mentoring Experiences as Black Women in Academia  
*Karen Keaton Jackson, Hope Jackson, Kendra L. Mitchell, Pamela Strong Simmons, Cecilia D. Shelton, and LaKela Atkinson* 108

## PART 2: BRIDGES AND BORDERS

- 6 Graduate Writing in Communities: Critical Notes on Access and Success  
*Alexandria Lockett* 125
- 7 *Mi Testimonio*: Crossing Borders in the Academy  
*Amanda E. Cuellar* 131

**PART 3: APPROACHES**

- 8 "I Cut Off My Hand and Gave It to You, and You Gave It Back to Me with Three Fingers": The Disembodiment of Indigenous Writers and Writers of Color in U.S. Doctoral Programs  
*Jasmine Kar Tang and Noro Andriamanalina* 139
- 9 Research Writing as an Adaptive Challenge: A Study with Implications for Supervisory Feedback Practices  
*Daniel V. Bommarito* 156
- 10 From Avoidance to Action: Helping Dissertation Writers Manage Procrastination  
*Lisa Russell-Pinson and Haadi Jafarian* 174
- 11 Dissertation Boot Camps: Developing Self-Efficacy and Building Community  
*Rachael Cayley* 198
- 12 Not Just Nuts and Bolts: Building a Peer Review Framework for Academic Socialization  
*Anne Zanzucchi and Amy Fenstermaker* 218
- 13 Playing with Theory in Graduate Writing Groups  
*Rochelle Rodrigo and Julia Romberger* 242
- 14 Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating a Campus-Wide Graduate Writing Initiative at an Urban Midwestern University  
*Jennifer Friend, Jennifer Salvo, Michelle M. Paquette, and Elizabeth Brown* 257
- An After(Word) on the Future of Higher Education  
*Kirsten T. Edwards* 278
- About the Contributors* 283
- Index* 289

## Introduction

### VALUING LIVED EXPERIENCES AND COMMUNITY MENTORSHIP

Shannon Madden

*It is important to remember that negative interactions with peers as well as in the community surrounding campus will also shape [students'] college experiences. Their words testify to the truth of the burden imposed on minoritized students. . . . It is a weight no student should be made to carry. Listen to their voices.*

—Mary Jo Hinsdale

*To say that racial justice is peripheral to [professional academic] work would ignore the realities faced by student writers. We need to listen to and learn from—and with—the voices and epistemologies of historically underrepresented communities.*

—Jasmine Kar Tang and Noro Andriamanalina

*The standard for whites to show their compassion & humanity is so low in comp-rhet that it's literally them learning to listen to PoC [people of color] while PoC have to constantly work to prove their humanity, have compassion for & accept the apologies of whites who are STILL learning.*

—Anna K. (Willow) Treviño

*Higher education probably will never listen. It was founded on a commitment to not listen.*

—Kirsten T. Edwards

## INTRODUCTION

I was in the audience at a faculty development workshop when Dr. Bryan Dewsbury, a renowned expert on inclusive practices in STEM education, encountered this question during his guest presentation: “How many students are we talking about, really?” Dewsbury was presenting data that showed how students of color were experiencing substantially larger

rates of attrition in core courses like chemistry and biology, known informally to students as the “weed-out” courses that prevent the underprepared from entering the upper-division coursework of their desired major. The statistics showed that roughly 50 percent of all U.S.-born students of color enrolled in these courses were receiving Ds or Fs or not completing. A few slides later in the presentation, Dewsbury noted that students of color comprised roughly 8 percent of the enrollment totals of those courses overall. At this point, a senior faculty member in the audience interrupted. “How many students are we talking about, really?,” he said loudly. “You were saying half, but if you’re only talking about 8 percent of students overall, 4 percent doesn’t amount to much. You’re really only talking about a handful of students.” We were only a few minutes into the presentation and nowhere near the Q&A. Several in the audience turned to look at the man who spoke. I shifted in my chair. Dewsbury took a beat and then answered with astonishing calm and grace, “It may only be a handful of students. But what are the pathways to inclusion for those students? How can we help all of our students complete the course successfully rather than simply allowing them to fail out?”

The faculty member’s question—*How many students are we talking about, really?*—prompts reflection on a range of deeper issues relevant to graduate education. In particular, it should make us ask ourselves, How many students must be involved, how many people must be affected by something before we think that *something* is impactful? Important to assess? Meaningful to the trajectory of individual lives? Essential to consider as we design spaces, courses, policies, and programming for students? As is well documented, attrition rates for graduate students overall have been hovering around 50 percent for three decades or more (Bowen and Rudenstein 1992; Casanave 2016; Council of Graduate Schools 2008; Golde 2005; Lovitts 2001). Among those who leave their graduate programs, students from historically marginalized groups are statistically more likely to suffer from attrition or prolonged time to degree (Bell 2011; Council of Graduate Schools 2008; National Center for Education Statistics 2012; Sowell, Allum, and Okahana 2015). A 2017 report by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) shows that in recent years, the number of earned doctorates by Black students as well as students of Latinx origin were the highest they have been in the last decade (Okahana 2017). However, the percentages of those students among doctoral students overall have continued to stagnate (Okahana 2017). Hispanic/Latinx students earn 7 percent of doctoral degrees; Black and African American students represent 6.5 percent of earned doctorates.

Less than 1 percent of all earned doctorates go to Indigenous or Native American-identified students (Okahana 2017).

These numbers suggest that even when institutions or individuals are doing better, graduate education writ large still has a long way to go toward becoming inclusive. In a sense, the question *How many students are we talking about?* is already operating in myriad ways when it comes to change in higher education. When faculty and administrators ask how much effort or money should be put toward a particular policy, program, or initiative—whether it will “move the needle”—they restate the question *How many students are we talking about?* in different terms. How many students can we impact with this program, and is that number big enough to justify whatever it will cost us in labor, time, effort, or attention? How many students are enough to matter? The faculty member who interjected his question during Dewsbury’s presentation, a cisgender white man with stereotypical disheveled gray hair and dressed-down attire, has probably never had to wonder whether his experiences are being considered in programmatic decisions or his needs accounted for in educational practice. If a problem does not seem to impact everyone or even the majority of students, there is a tendency to minimize its importance. If white administrators and faculty do not have access to that experience themselves because it does not reflect their own background or it does not align with the ways we experienced graduate education—as I may not as a cisgender white woman—we may not even recognize it is happening. That is called *privilege*. The question *How many students?* absolves white administrators and faculty from prioritizing the needs and experiences of marginalized students. *There aren’t that many here, so we don’t have to worry about them, right?*

Of course, many factors overlap and coalesce to produce problems of attrition, noncompletion, and lack of diversity in our graduate programs. This collection strives not to be reductive of these multiple factors but to highlight how these issues play out from the perspective of lived experience—from the perspective of the graduate students who are impacted. Paying attention to and learning from graduate students’ lived experiences, this collection asserts, is essential to identifying pathways to inclusion and to creating institutional structures that welcome graduate students from historically marginalized groups to contribute new knowledges, epistemologies, and innovative research studies to their disciplines. Doing so requires, first, that we recognize students as holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal 2002). Toward that end, *Learning from the Lived Experiences of Graduate Student Writers* bridges graduate students’ voices and narratives of their lived experiences with recommendations for

responsive and critical models for mentoring, teaching, and working with graduate student writers. The chapters offer testimony, experiential data, qualitative scholarship, and critical reflections that attest to how inclusion, discrimination, community, and identity function in the various rhetorical and educational contexts graduate student writers encounter.

As the title of the collection implies, listening to students' stories and seeking to understand their experiences is a forceful theme throughout the book. Narrative has been an important mode of inquiry for scholars in many disciplines and for many communities. In a special issue of the *Journal of Educational Research* on narrative inquiry, Petra Munro Hendry (2009) makes the point that in the West, narrative is typically construed as the opposite of science, but Hendry wants us to reconceptualize inquiry beyond a binary framework that privileges science and empiricism. As she notes, new ways of making, representing, and communicating knowledges are necessary if we are to innovate research and push the boundaries of our understandings (77). Critical race and writing theorists such as Keith Gilyard (1991), Victor Villanueva (2006), Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch (2012), Elaine Richardson (2003), Candace Epps-Robertson (2016), Aja Martinez (2016), and Jamila Kareem (2018) remind us of the importance of narratives and storytelling to reveal insights and illuminate nuanced issues in more depth and complexity (see also Clandinin 2000). In addition to data-supported studies, authors in this collection use narratives of their own experiences and the voices of their research participants to illustrate circumstances within academe that impact graduate writers but that may not be immediately evident on the surface or easily quantifiable through statistical and empirical evidence. Moreover, as Candace Epps-Robertson (2016) notes, "Personal stories are a means for underrepresented groups to push against master narratives that often silence the experiences of those who are othered." The powerful narratives in this collection demonstrate the rhetorical force of testimony<sup>1</sup> and highlight critical issues from the perspective of lived experience—from the perspective of the individuals and groups impacted. In stories of lived experience, we can see critical issues in context (van Manen 1990). John Dewey (1938) noted that education is interactive, relational, and experiential, and the experience of education from the student's perspective is what we need to know more about and pay more attention to (Eodice, Geller, and Lerner 2016). One way to do that, as this collection shows and as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Mary Jo Hinsdale (2015), and Jasmine Kar Tang and Noro Andriamanalina (2016) remind us, is through honoring their voices and learning from their experiences.

While the charge to listen to and learn from students' experiences may seem to emphasize the personal and individual, this collection persistently foregrounds the systemic nature of the issues that impact graduate student writers as well. The majority of graduate education in the U.S. context takes place in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) that are founded on—and continue to enact—a long history of cultural exclusion and eradication (Dancy, Edwards, and Davis 2018). Historians of education have pointed out that the establishment of U.S. educational institutions was intertwined with colonial settler imperialism (Churchill 2004; Dancy, Edwards, and Davis 2018; Wilder 2013; Wright and Tierney 1991). Many U.S. universities, including some considered today to be the most elite campuses in the country (e.g., Harvard, Princeton, Yale), included in their early university mission statements explicit objectives to “civilize” and colonize Indigenous peoples (Churchill 2004; Dancy, Edwards, and Davis 2018; Wright and Tierney 1991). Native students' hair was cut and their traditional clothing was traded out for uniforms, and they received severe physical punishments for speaking Indigenous languages in these schools (Wright and Tierney 1991). Ward Churchill (2004) explores how this educational system amounted to cultural genocide. When nondominant cultural practices, languages, and epistemologies were not punished and erased, they were ignored and dismissed; Smith (1999) outlines the processes through which Eurocentric knowledge systems have come to occupy an unchallenged and colonizing position of cultural superiority in Western educational institutions. Hinsdale (2015) extends Smith's ideas to consider how entrenched practices of cultural eradication continue to impact students from historically marginalized groups in the academy (30–31). As she puts it, “Mentoring can be one means of assimilating a student into the academic status quo” by reproducing the logic of white supremacy in mentoring models, instead of using mentorship interactions to enable students to innovate and transform knowledge, study the questions that interest them, and bring their full identity to bear on the academic context (33).

The work of deconstructing white supremacist practices in higher education is more important than ever given our current political moment. In the United States, Black and brown people and children are routinely killed by police officers (*Michael Brown, Philando Castile, Stephon Clark, Terence Crutcher, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Magdiel Sanchez, Joey Santos, Walter Scott*) or die while in custody of the state (*Tanisha Anderson, Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, Jameek Lowery, Natasha McKenna, Jeffrey Pendleton, Derek Williams*). These violences extend and infect university contexts; on college campuses, white students and parents have called the cops to report

Black and brown students who are eating lunch (*Oumou Kanoute*), sleeping in their dormitory building (*Lolade Siyonbola*), and participating in a campus tour as prospective students (*Lloyd Skanahwati Gray*, *Thomas Kanewakeron Gray*). At the University of Maryland, the athletics staff showed so little care for the health of football player Jordan McNair that he died of a heat stroke during training. While these incidents may not seem directly related to historical patterns of cultural exclusion, T. Elon Dancy, Kirsten T. Edwards, and James Earl Davis (2018) trace the treatment of Black and brown people in early U.S. universities to our current context in the United States. They, like Denise Baszile (2006), point out that academia mirrors these violences in a different way. In particular, they note that a settler colonialist paradigm is still evident today in, for instance, differentiated labor expectations for academics of color and the ways universities still capitalize on (and profit from) Black and brown bodies as property (Dancy, Edwards, and Davis 184). The broader U.S. political context that is hostile to and oppressive of communities and individuals of color reverberates to interactions between students of color and the academic institutions in which they participate (Hinsdale 2015; Kynard 2015; Tang and Andriamanalina 2016). In this way, the question *How many students are we talking about?* is not only a provocation for us to reconsider our educational practices. The question also reveals a pervasive belief rooted in this broader pattern of dismissal, exclusion, and exploitation that graduate deans, faculty, and support service providers must acknowledge and actively dismantle. It is the explicit expression of the multitude ways Black and brown people are treated as disposable—as if they are “nobody”—in the U.S. nation-state (Hill 2016). The question shows us, once again, the consistent and intentional disregard for Black and brown lives. Valuing students from historically oppressed groups requires understanding and honoring their voices and experiences.

#### WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

While the research on graduate students' experiences has recently expanded, historically, conversations about graduate education have focused on strategies for helping students adapt to disciplinary communities of practice as they develop from novices to emerging experts. Over the past several decades, researchers have begun to investigate the conditions that lead graduate students to succeed—or not—in their academic disciplines. Within this burgeoning body of scholarship, interest in graduate students as writers has grown in a number of key areas. Early studies highlighted faculty mentorship and the multifaceted ways



graduate students get apprenticed as they develop facility in disciplinary communication practices (Belcher 1994; Liu 2011; Myles and Cheng 2003; Schunk and Zimmerman 1998; Simpson and Matsuda 2008). This research prompted further inquiry into the needs and experiences of multilingual graduate students, who came to be recognized as a population with particular learning needs that require additional consideration and specialized attention (Matsuda 1998; Morita 2004; Seloni 2014).

Yet scholars also recognized that disciplinary communication practices are an acquired language even for English-fluent students (Casanave 2014; Curry 2016; Hyland 2004). As Christine Casanave puts it, “Academic discourse is a ‘second’ language to everyone, full of terminology (necessary), jargon (needless and pretentious), formal turns of phrases, and unfamiliar research methods, theories, and philosophical stances” (23). In this light, students undertaking advanced writing in graduate school must learn to enact the specialized discursive performances through which disciplinary knowledge is made (Curry 2016). However, the processes through which students are meant to gather information about disciplinary communication practices are typically left tacit and invisible (Kittle-Autry and Carter 2015; Swales 1996, 2004; Starke-Meyerring et al. 2011). In other words, when faculty assume too much about students’ capabilities coming into their graduate programs, they communicate too little about the discursive practices that matter in particular disciplinary spaces. The challenge for pedagogies and support services for graduate writers, then, is to socialize and enculturate graduate students to academic communities of practice (Casanave and Li 2008; Curry 2016; Dressen-Hammouda 2008; Lave and Wenger 1991; Paré, Starke-Meyerring, and McAlpine 2011). Doing so would presumably make visible the language practices as well as the social expectations that orient graduate students as the emerging scholars of their fields.

## WHERE WE ARE NOW

Recently the availability of approaches to working with graduate students as writers has expanded. The establishment of the Consortium on Graduate Communication as an official professional organization created a necessary opportunity to bring scholars from several fields together to share research and practical strategies for supporting graduate writers in a range of contexts. Several collections offer program models and data-supported strategies for working with graduate student writers, including Cecile Badenhurst and Cally Guerin’s (2016) *Research Literacies and Writing Pedagogies for Masters and Doctoral Writers*,

Michelle Campbell and Vicki Kennell's (2018) faculty guide *Working with Graduate Student Writers*, Steve Simpson, Nigel Caplan, Michelle Cox, and Talinn Phillips's (2016) *Supporting Graduate Student Writers*, Susan Lawrence and Terry Zawacki's (2019) *Re/Writing the Center*, and special issues of *Across the Disciplines* (Brooks-Gillies, Garcia, Kim, Manthey, and Smith 2015) and the *Journal of Second Language Writing* (Starfield and Paltridge 2019). These volumes offer necessary interventions into institutional practice and perspectives on communication pedagogy for graduate student writers across disciplines. Despite these shifts in understanding and the rich literature on graduate communication development as a lifelong process of enculturation, the experiences of U.S.-born graduate students from historically marginalized groups have been underexamined, and voices of students from these groups have not been centered in the conversation. These voices would offer needed responses—and challenges—to the normative functions of academic enculturation. Significantly, similar patterns of oppression exist across academic rank for both graduate students and faculty—a parallel that indexes an underlying systemic issue.

Stories of how discrimination is woven throughout the experiences of faculty of color, with dis/abilities, on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, and from historically marginalized groups are documented in Gabriella Gutierrez y Muhs, Yolanda Niemann, Carmen González, and Angela Harris's collection *Presumed Incompetent* (2012), Patricia Matthew's edited volume *Written/Unwritten* (2016), and Eric Grollman's blog *Conditionally Accepted*, among other places. Graduate students and faculty of color report similar experiences of microaggressions (DeCuir-Gunby and Gunby 2016; Gomez 2015; Sue 2010), tokenism and pressure to perform acceptable forms of cultural identity (Alvarez, Brito, Salazar, and Aguilar 2016; Burrows 2016; Green 2016; Holling, Fu, and Bubar 2012; Niemann 2012), being made to feel unwelcome (Allen 2012), and being "presumed incompetent" (Allen 2012; Burrows 2016; Martinez 2016). In the introduction to her edited collection about the experiences of faculty of color on the tenure track, Matthew (2016) notes that while in many cases the oppression is not explicit, overt, or intentional, there is nonetheless a distinct "interrelationship of race, meritocracy, and institutionalized discrimination" (8). Jay Dolmage's (2017) *Academic Ableism* and Abigail Stewart and Virginia Valian's (2018) *An Inclusive Academy* likewise examine how inequities play out in hiring, tenure, and promotion practices for academics from historically marginalized groups, which form a pipeline of oppression experiences that contribute significantly to faculty attrition (Garvey and Rankin 2018). The conversation about graduate students as writers must

grapple with the fact of structural academic racism if we are to address the problems of attrition, underrepresentation, and negative and traumatic experiences for graduate students from historically oppressed groups.

The entanglement of meritocracy with structural discrimination—what Edwards in chapter 2, drawing from critical race theory, calls the “myth of meritocracy”—is poignantly visible at the graduate level, where students’ ability to perform unspoken and “occluded” genre conventions (Swales 1994, 2004) in such high-stakes writing situations as the dissertation is viewed as evidence of their disciplinary acumen and intellectual capability. Many scholars have noted how pedagogical gaps and obscured academic communication practices enact a “survival-of-the-fittest” mentality that impacts scholarly productivity and learning development for graduate student and faculty writers (Aitchison et al. 2012; Boice 1990; Geller 2013; Tarabochia and Madden 2018). In the context of research writing, discrimination is intertwined with writing assessment (Inoue 2015); assumptions about “rigor” and “fitness” hide the implicit epistemic and ideological judgments behind them. When a white faculty member asks a Black student if they are an athlete, it may be an obvious microaggression. Yet telling a Black graduate student that their research interests do not fit in the field or that their voice does not sound like it belongs in an academic journal hides discriminatory value statements behind a façade of intellectual neutrality and ideological objectivity. To be told your Black body does not belong in the “white space” (Anderson 2015) of the academy may be offensive and painful; to be told your writing does not fit—connected as writing is to your identity, the issues and questions you care about, and the way you express yourself—is more insidious and harder to challenge.

Marginalized students’ reports of their writing and mentoring experiences should urge us to consider how writing pedagogies at the graduate level reinscribe hegemonic perspectives and reinforce what Asao Inoue (2015, 2016, 2019) calls a “white racial habitus.” In Inoue’s words, “A dominant white discourse . . . operates in all of our judgments on writing” (2016, 97). Importantly, the conversation about how best to help students succeed raises questions about how “success” gets defined—success for what community and on whose terms. Graduate communication experts need to learn *from students* how to support them in accomplishing their own goals they set for themselves that reflect their identities and communities. Only then will we be able to support student writer-researchers in doing work that matters to them, in taking risks that push the boundaries of knowledge and move disciplines forward.

In response to these exigencies and how they materialize in writing center work with and by graduate students, Michele Eodice and I coedited a special collection of *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* in 2016 that focused on graduate writers' lived experiences, especially those of writers from historically marginalized groups. For that collection, we asked scholars of color, scholars with disabilities, and multilingual scholars to share their stories about writing as graduate students in predominantly white, predominantly abled universities—spaces that have historically been and continue to be exclusionary and oppressive of individuals situated outside those identities. In an effort to describe and ultimately disrupt the ways graduate programs erect barriers to access for students from underrepresented groups, authors offered critical reflections, theoretical discussions, methods for nondominant and nonnormative mentorship, new models for graduate writing communities, and frameworks that indicate a need for reconsidering graduate writing center work.

The *Praxis* special issue, which included the work of thirty authors, brought to light what is missing from much of the literature on graduate support and professionalization—direct engagement with the lived experience of writing as a graduate student. The *Praxis* articles provide testimony from scholars of color about being disrespected, talked down to, and “presumed incompetent” by faculty mentors, writing center consultants, and professional colleagues (Burrows 2016; Green 2016; Martinez 2016; Smith-Campbell and Littles 2016). The articles demonstrate that linguistic difference is (still) framed as deficit in the academy (Cirillo-McCarthy, Del Russo, and Leahy 2016; Green 2016), despite extensive research on how hegemony functions through literacy education and how Standard American English has been used as a gatekeeping mechanism throughout the history of writing instruction in the United States (see for instance Farr, Seloni, and Song 2009; Greenfield and Rowan 2011; Inoue 2015; Matsuda 2006; Rafoth 2015; Villanueva 2006; Young 2007; Young, Young-Rivera, and Lovejoy 2013). Contributors to the *Praxis* collection document how others' perceptions of their embodied identities impact their lived experiences as marginalized students in PWIs. As Cedric Burrows (2016) notes, African American students are compelled to perform acceptable versions of Blackness or cultural identity within the PWI, they are treated as if they should appreciate white benevolence for “being allowed into their institutions,” and they are expected to recognize themselves and their identity as an intrusion into [white] university spaces. Moreover, they are considered to represent their entire race; Black students are treated as if they are multiple iterations of the same person or identity rather than individuals. Burrows

describes these factors together as a “Black tax” that compounds the difficulty of the graduate student experience, which is already challenging and isolating (Cotterall 2013).

In these and other ways, *Praxis* issue 14.1 made evident the multiple ways students/scholars from historically marginalized groups are disproportionately impacted by disenfranchising institutional discourses and structures that compel particular kinds of performances, as well as the need for paying attention to their voices and narratives. For instance, feelings of isolation and imposter syndrome are sometimes dismissed as commonplaces of the graduate experience, as something all graduate students go through at some point. Yet for minoritized students, imposter syndrome can be amplified by the belief, which gets communicated to them implicitly and explicitly, that they are token “diversity additions” in their graduate programs (Alvarez et al. 2016; Burrows 2016; Green 2016; Martinez 2016) rather than valued for contributing to the educational and experiential richness that accrues in environments that not only welcome but foster cultural difference. The authors speak to the difficulty of engaging the high stakes genres of graduate school in educational environments that do not support student communities, that are selective about which students they groom, and that communicate to students from marginalized groups that they do not belong in the PWI, in their discipline, or in academe.

As *Learning from the Lived Experiences of Graduate Student Writers* shows, what gets ignored in discussions of programs and interventions is epistemic injustice—in which difference becomes a barrier in the mind of the institution and the advisor, in which a student’s way of knowing is discounted or dismissed, and in which the reasons for attrition reside within the student’s body. Miranda Fricker (2007, 1) defines epistemic injustice as unwillingness to grant another person the right to their own knowledges and ways of knowing (see also Godbee 2017). For instance, listening to someone and automatically disbelieving what they say is a form of epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice can take many forms ranging from mild skepticism to actively believing what a person says is incorrect, irrelevant, or untrustworthy; often epistemic injustice is rooted in prejudiced beliefs. In May 2018 at Yale University, a white woman called the police when she saw a Black graduate student, Lolade Siyonbola, napping in the dormitory common area—and then the police questioned whether Siyonbola had the right to be there even when she showed them her key to the building and her student ID. That is epistemic injustice. The 2012 volume *Presumed Incompetent* (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, and Harris) lays out various forms of

epistemic injustice as they relate to women of color in higher education. As chapters in *Presumed Incompetent* as well as the works in this collection show, the insidious presumption that scholars who inhabit nonwhite, dis/abled, or LGBTQ+ bodies do not “belong” in the academy is still pervasive and gets communicated to students in myriad ways. Beth Godbee (2017) elaborates Fricker’s work on intellectual courage in the context of student writers’ rights to their own language(s). Particularly because writing at the graduate level and making an original contribution to the scholarship requires boldness and confidence, it is essential to consider how we can affirm graduate writers and support them in taking scholarly risks that push the boundaries of our knowledge forward (see also Godbee, chap. 1 of this collection). We can start to do so when we stop denying them the rights to their own ways of knowing.

The charge to acknowledge and challenge epistemic injustice for graduate student writers highlights a central tension of mentoring practice. As Griffin Keedy and Amy Vidali (2016) note, mentors’ assumptions about the writing process always and inevitably influence how they mentor student writers—how we think about and approach writing ourselves influences how we communicate what writing is and how it functions as a process to student writers we advise and student teachers we train. In this way, assumptions about writing become both normative and normalizing for individual mentors, institutionally and disciplinarily. The systematic way writing mentorship can circumscribe writers and their writing materialized as particular challenges for us as editors during the process of editing the *Praxis* collection, as well as this book. For both collections, we invited articles across a range of genres and explicitly sought pieces that exceed the boundaries of traditional “academic” writing. However, as we encountered writing that challenged the discourse norms of our field’s mainstream publications, we often found ourselves struggling to provide feedback that was constructive without being regulatory. Part of the challenge was an audience-based one; audiences encountering an explicitly academic venue such as a scholarly journal or book collection expect adherence to certain conventions, we reasoned. Yet we also wanted to make space in both collections for opportunities and insights outside the boundaries of traditional academic writing. So our problem in providing feedback to authors who challenge (white/Western) academic conventions was how to help writers orient the audiences without colonizing their own writerly voices and discourses. This problem seems to us to be the perennial one for writing instructors and has particular relevance for working with graduate writers—How can we as writing mentors encourage, foster, and value a range of discursive



possibilities within a system that explicitly values only a limited set of linguistic expressions? Our experience led us to rethink mentoring as one of the commonplaces of working with students.

Significantly, the *Praxis* special issue offered many avenues and approaches toward inclusion and empowerment—not by bestowing empowerment upon marginalized students as if it belonged to white faculty and was available to give away but by creating the conditions through which such students could activate their agency, do the work they care about, and ultimately teach their teachers (and their disciplines). Graduate students testified to empowering themselves through writing co-mentoring communities and self-sponsored coalitions (Alvarez et al. 2016), as well as informal affinity groups (Bell and Hewerdine 2016). Scholars described using their graduate-level writing projects to connect to their identities in a meaningful way while contributing new research knowledge and transforming disciplinary understandings. (Epps-Robertson 2016; Green 2016). Charmaine Smith-Campbell and Steven Littles (2016) advocated and modeled a Freirean “pedagogy of love” approach—an approach to working with students rooted in justice, respect, collaboration, and transformative dialogue.

Yet the collection also showed there is much work still to be done if we are to make programs and institutions—and graduate education writ large—inclusive. Inoue (2015, 2016, 2019) claims forcefully that a white racial habitus infuses the teaching of writing across contexts. The work for faculty advisors, writing centers, intensive English programs, and those who support graduate students’ professional development is to recognize and honor writers’ identities and lived experiences. We also must check and challenge the complex and intricate ways white racial privilege, whiteness, and Standard American English determine writing pedagogies, expectations, and standards at the graduate level (Inoue 2016, 94). We must move beyond accountability toward pedagogies, program models, and research methods that are “answerable” (Patel 2015) to the lives of the writers we seek to support. While the academy has typically characterized mentoring efforts, honoring identity, and building community as separate categories of support, the revision offered in *Learning from the Lived Experiences of Graduate Student Writers* calls for integration. We see a trend in questioning the value of mentoring as a solution to the need for engaging and enculturating students (see Hinsdale 2015). Familiar mentoring models, whether destined relationships or designed by program initiatives, may be lacking in vision. Can we even name the downstream goal of our mentoring, or are we simply going through the motions? What if our mentoring methods had a trickle down effect?

### WHAT WE NEED NEXT

Perhaps it is time to reconsider our mentoring practices. The traditional model of apprenticeship through which graduate students learn to perform research by carrying out faculty study designs serves an important function in graduate training—and yet it is a colonized model. If students are expected to serve as temporary employees or interns who perfunctorily execute faculty lab work or continue (without challenging) the research legacies of their field's best-known scholars, knowledge advances will be ever more incremental. As becomes clear, knowledge innovations will require new research methods and patterns of communication (Hendry 2009; Tardy 2016); as such, they will also require new mentoring models. Hinsdale (2015) writes, "Mentoring [students who are positioned as] outsiders calls for an open, responsive approach to students—one that welcomes not only their bodies and social experiences, but also the knowledge[s] they bring and the questions they wish to research" (xiv). This approach is critical to enacting support for graduate writers—it is not enough to increase graduate enrollments for students of color and assume doing so will fix the white supremacy problem in higher education. We must recognize how certain ways of knowing are privileged in the academy over others and consider what impact that privileging has on writers from marginalized identity groups, as well as the future of knowledge across fields. When we are not critical about how university language practices enact and sustain structural and epistemic privilege, we risk communicating to students who occupy nondominant identities and perspectives that their unique ways of knowing and forms of expertise are invalid. Further, we risk stifling innovation—and graduate students are supposed to be contributing new knowledge to their disciplines; their work is meant to offer the next "big idea."

We imagine dissertations developed within a more "expansive frame" (Engle, Lam, Meyer, and Nix 2012) could lead to remarkable outcomes. For example, as a doctoral student at Clemson University, A. D. Carson created a mixtape as part of his dissertation, "Owning My Masters: The Rhetoric of Rhymes and Revolutions" (2017). As found in *The Meaningful Writing Project* (Eodice, Geller, and Lerner 2016), assignments designed with an expansive frame invited students to make a personal connection (to interests, passions, people, and topics) while imagining their future selves. If we can bring an expansive frame to our work with graduate student writers, we might begin to open a space for student agency and empowerment. If we can resist (simply) attempting enculturation to the university, we can then see ways to challenge the structures that colonize knowers/learners and do more to reverse epistemic injustices



(Aitchison and Mobray 2013; Bosanquet and Cahir 2016; French 2016; Fricker 2007; Peterson 2007; Welch 2002). Not only would we offer more opportunities for students to engage multiple facets of their ways of knowing, we could acknowledge that the process of writing a dissertation is part of this whole being and becoming, especially if it is set within an expansive frame (Engle et al. 2012) that allows for more creative and imaginative work tied to the researcher identity.

The focus on identity points back to community. Supporting graduate students in confirming and establishing researcher identity(ies) points back to the contexts that support or inhibit these processes. The process of connecting with identity happens in dialogue with others, in the exchange of ideas, and in building context for one's own perspectives and experiences. For this reason, *Learning from the Lived Experiences of Graduate Student Writers* challenges graduate educators to leverage mentoring as a community investment. As Phillips (2016) puts it, the goal of our programs and pedagogies should be to produce teams of better writers, communities of better writers—not to produce better writers in isolation. Agnes Bosanquet and Jayde Cahir (2016) tell us that intentional and intensive attention to researcher identity, when “developed in conjunction with the support of scholarly community, can act as a buffer against negative experiences” (141). Godbee and Julia Novotny (2013) show how feminist co-mentoring enables writers to make stronger claims and more confidently assert their positions, and Godbee (2018) explores how multiple mentoring structures “can disperse the concentrated power associated with a single supervisor [and] can help [writers] with reclaiming personal power and becoming empowered to stand tall in one's research and professional identity.” Jeanette Alarcón and Silvia Bettez (2017) call for nonhierarchical peer mentoring, the development of partnerships and coalitions, and valuing “community cultural wealth” as efforts departments can begin (25). Michelle Maher and Brett Say (2016) advocate for multiple mentors, cochaired committees, and more coauthoring in the process of earning a doctorate. Further, they suggest programs begin to “require doctoral supervisors to create and actively maintain a collaborative intellectual culture within their own department” (291). Carmen Kynard (2017) explores how mentors who shared racial identifications provided her as a Black woman academic with “a framework for surviving hostile environments based on the cultural memory and history of my own people.” As she puts it, inclusion for Black scholars at PWIs is not (only) a question of making clear the implicit rules of the academy, “it's about centering Black thought and Black life in people's lives at the academy.”

Our sense is that most research recommendations and institutional fixes tend to ask faculty to be more “accountable” in the process of advising graduate student writers. We propose that mentoring models centered on the concept of accountability shift to the concept of *answerability* (Patel 2015). As Leigh Patel (2015) describes it, “Answerability includes aspects of being responsible, accountable, and part of an exchange. It is a concept that can help to maintain the coming-into-being with being in-conversation-with” (73). She advocates answerability to learning, to knowledge, and to context. The chapters in this collection are a timely contribution to this movement. Answerability requires centering marginalized voices and the lives of marginalized peoples in the academy (Kynard 2017). The authors here provide lenses for rethinking and refracting our work with graduate student writers and offer insights about areas of the graduate writing experience such as mentoring, identity, and community that challenge the easy assumption that the potential for success or failure resides entirely in the individual student. In this way, we hope this collection will inspire our audience to think beyond pedagogies and practices that seek to acclimate or enculturate the individual graduate student to university cultures. Rather, our goal should be to privilege incomes—the concerns, experiences, knowledges, and goals students bring to the academy—over outcomes (Guerra 2008). We must do more to recognize the sites at which institutions of higher education are systematically excluding and oppressing students from underrepresented groups and create the conditions that will enable all students to do the work they care about and that is needed for the future.

The movement to recast mentoring as a community endeavor expands possibilities for graduate students to develop and gain confidence in their new identities. At the University of Michigan, a group of graduate students in the sciences created MiSci Writers, a student-led organization that offers communication support for other students (MiSciWriters). Students at the University of North Carolina Nutrition Research Institute founded a student-led group that provides professional development opportunities for students and postdoctoral researchers (Catalyst Group). This kind of grassroots, student-led support structure has potential to decolonize mentoring and also to offer a space where student writers can create community while developing their scholarly and professional identities. Doctoral students are at work on problem solving for our futures, and they are, through their writing, helping us imagine the next thing. Constraining students to standard genres and language forms leaves little room for innovation, especially for students from culturally or linguistically minoritized communities.

What is needed next, as this collection shows, is attention to students' lived experiences and an understanding of the conditions that promote students' flourishing and development—*on their own terms*. By focusing on the responsibility we have as educators to fostering our students' growth, this collection seeks to challenge the narrow ways success is defined and modeled in graduate education and to consider how institutional racism functions within and throughout graduate programs in the United States, infusing trauma into students' experiences. In this way, the collection proposes a "pedagogy of love" approach (Smith-Campbell and Littles 2016). A pedagogy of love is rooted in epistemic justice (Smith-Campbell and Littles 2016) and in this way is "answerable" to students (Patel 2016). Work with graduate student writers should be grounded in pedagogical love in order to foster students' engagement with their disciplines and enable them to innovate their fields. Helping students develop their own intellectual and writerly identities, rather than forcing them to fit existing or traditional beliefs about who they should be or recreating students in our own image, should be our mission. This collection aims to shed light on paths toward that goal.

#### WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM GRADUATE STUDENT WRITERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES

This collection offers narratives of graduate students' experiences as writers in order to provide a complex and nuanced picture of what graduate education is like in its lived reality. The stories offered here challenge universities and individuals to pay attention to students' voices. We imagine that the problems highlighted in this collection are already felt by many in their local contexts and that people may want an easy fix. *Learning from the Lived Experiences of Graduate Student Writers* does not offer a manual for how to fix the problems of graduate student attrition, prolonged time to degree, and oppression in your university. Instead, we offer a framework for how to think about these problems. The chapters offered here seek to reorient perceptions of what the actual problem is; rather than lumping marginalized students together as people who are going to struggle and who may not finish, we must acknowledge who they are as individuals and honor their identities, which is something universities have historically and intentionally worked not to do. We must reorient ourselves to the question of how students from historically oppressed groups should be supported—and recognize the reparations they are owed (Dancy, Edwards, and Davis 2018). Researchers and institutions, this collection shows, must pay careful attention to students'

experiences and needs if we are to enact scholarship, programming, pedagogies, and institutional practices responsive to the lived realities of the writers we hope to support.

Part 1: Voices offers theoretical frameworks, narratives, and voices of students' experiences in graduate education. Beth Godbee (chap. 1) advances the central concept this collection advocates and performs: *epistemic justice*. Through her study of writers' talk around their writing processes, Godbee explores the traumatic impact of graduate education on scholars from minoritized groups and shows how feminist co-mentoring communities can be inclusive sites where students counter epistemic injustices and heal epistemic trauma. Godbee challenges administrators and educators to ask themselves of every policy, program, and interaction whether it affirms graduate writers' rights. Kirsten T. Edwards's award-winning article—written while she was a graduate student—uses narrative inquiry to explore how academics of color are positioned as “dislocated insiders” in PWI spaces (chap. 2). By “crystallizing” individual perspectives from different positions on a spectrum of privilege, Edwards analyzes how minoritized individuals occupy an “in-between” positionality within antagonistic university environments hostile to their very presence. Her analysis hearkens to Sara Ahmed's point, which was posted on October 24, 2017, on her blog *Feminist Killjoys*, that marginalized individuals are burdened with adapting themselves to existing oppressive structures rather than the onus being on the institution to change itself to become more inclusive.

Several chapters show what PWIs could learn from the ways community is modeled and enacted at minority-serving institutions (MSIs). Although researchers have begun to address academic/institutional belongingness for students from historically marginalized groups and the implications of belongingness for motivation and retention (see e.g., Gray 2017; Gray, Hope, and Matthews 2018; Ostrove, Stewart, and Curtin 2011; Solorzano 1998; Strayhorn 2012), research is limited on how belonging materializes as a writing issue in graduate students' academic experiences such that communication support reinforces epistemologically oppressive paradigms of who or what “belongs” in graduate education. The theme of belonging is important in the work of Richard Sévère and Maurice Wilson (chap. 3), who reflect on their experiences in the transition from undergraduate education in historically Black colleges/universities (HBCUs) to graduate school in a PWI. Their narratives highlight the competing burdens placed upon students from marginalized groups in the PWI of representativeness for their race/group on the one hand and the need to reject their culture in order to

be accepted in the ivory (white) tower on the other. Sévère and Wilson note that writing center spaces and writing groups provided them with access to supportive cohorts and enabled a sense of belonging in otherwise unwelcoming conditions. Extending these ideas, Wonderful Faison and Anna K. (Willow) Treviño (chap. 4) offer a composite narrative of their parallel and distinct searches for hospitable spaces within the PWI as women of color. The details of their stories suggest how racist and classist assumptions are built into the material environment and pedagogies of the writing center, as well as how the peer-to-peer writing and language work that takes place in writing centers can enable student agency and “brave(r) spaces.” Karen Keaton Jackson, Hope Jackson, Kendra L. Mitchell, Pamela Strong Simmons, Cecilia D. Shelton, and LaKela Atkinson (chap. 5) offer an edited discussion performance piece through which they reflect on their experiences mentoring and being mentored by other women of color in HBCUs. The authors share aspects of mentoring in HBCUs and communities of color that may be absent in PWI mentoring and emphasize the value and liberatory function of informal mentoring groups among scholars of shared racial identifications. Taken together, the analyses and stories in part 1 reveal how universities can do more to foster inclusion and community for students from minoritized groups. By listening to their voices, we can see “through the eyes of the one who is living it or telling it” (Edwards 2009, 119). These perspectives show how essential it is to create welcoming spaces that make space for graduate student writers to activate their agency and that enable their sense of belongingness.

As the chapters in part 1 show, researchers and practitioners must grapple with students’ lived experiences in the academy; these experiences construct and circumscribe their graduate-level writing, and students’ experiences and perspectives should be central to our research and work with them. In Part 2: *Bridges and Borders*, Alexandria Lockett and Amanda E. Cuellar connect the frameworks and voices presented in part 1 of the collection to the data-supported approaches offered in part 3. Lockett (chap. 6) identifies key themes of the experiences in part 1, such as isolation, minoritization, and the persistent gatekeeping culture of graduate education that suggest that the question of how to support or motivate students must be reframed to consider “the scope of community necessary for ensuring graduate students’ ability to strengthen their writing.” Writing struggle, Lockett notes, “is also often a consequence of racism and linguistic imperialism—interrelated forces that reduce motivation as a traumatic effect.” Cuellar’s reflection (chap. 7) echoes Lockett’s challenge to recognize how hegemonic

conceptions of what graduate-level writing is materialize in students' experiences. Cuellar gathers several impressions that together make her wonder what "the conscious and unconscious expectations that inform professors' reactions to (or constructions of) [her] Otherness" are. Cuellar weaves metaphors of the border and border crossing with memories from graduate school to explain how as a Chicana woman at a PWI she felt discouraged by vague faculty feedback and a lack of connection with other writers. Cuellar reminds us that although the idea of a "natural academic writing voice" gets tossed around casually in a range of graduate education contexts, *academic voice* is a highly artificial white and Western construction that is not natural at all.<sup>2</sup>

While scholars have long since advocated the use of peer learning, these chapters provide evidence to support the integration of mentoring, community, and identity that is needed next. Jasmine Kar Tang and Noro Andriamanalina (chap. 8) present results from qualitative interviews with doctoral student writers of color and from Indigenous communities. They show that two common forms of feedback faculty give to these writers—praise and of shame—reflect "liberal multiculturalist ideologies that subsume or individualize racial/ethnic difference." As Tang and Andriamanalina show, two seemingly opposed forms of writing commentary (praise and shame) can equally be "whitely exercise[s] of racial privilege by white advisors." Mentoring around the dissertation writing process, then, becomes "another heightened site at which racism and racialization can surface in the lives of people of color." Daniel V. Bommarito (chap. 9) examines the impact of mentoring feedback on students' research writing processes in his study of two multilingual doctoral students working with a faculty advisor/supervisor.<sup>3</sup> Although the challenges students have in performing the conventions of graduate-level writing are often treated in institutional practice as technical problems, problems for which routinized solutions already exist, Bommarito shows graduate writing is better understood as being what Linda Flower describes as an "adaptive challenge"—a challenge that requires transformation in order to address it—that is too complex to solve within existing frameworks. This important distinction makes clear that "exhorting writers to perform a writing-related task does not necessarily induce acquisition the way we might expect were these technical problems"—they cannot be solved with an easy recipe or formulaic solution. Mentoring models must shift in response; writing at the graduate level has a psychosocial dimension and is not a simple matter of command of Standard Academic/American English. In that vein, Lisa Russell-Pinson and Haadi Jafarian (chap. 10) explore how writing a

dissertation is wrapped up in the broader emotional situations students are positioned in; they show that procrastination on writing (among other struggles) can result from other causal factors such as unhealthy advisory relationships, financial difficulties, systemic barriers, and (fictional) idealized standards for what writers do and how they behave to which graduate students hold themselves. Drawing from composite narratives and extensive experience working with graduate student writers, they explore the role of emotional factors such as stress and anguish in the writing process and demonstrate that multiple emotional complications that often stem from relational issues with advisors can materialize as writing procrastination; their chapter proposes an integration of writing and emotional support services.

As becomes clear, graduate-level programming must create more opportunities for community building and collaboration. Several of the chapters in part 3 connect new frameworks for supporting students in building self-efficacy and resilient coalitions through community mentoring models. Rachael Cayley (chap. 11) answers the call from Steve Simpson (2016) to gather evidence on the effectiveness of supports that have become commonplaces of working with graduate writers. Cayley provides qualitative data to show writing facilitation provided in a dissertation completion camp setting builds students' self-efficacy as writers and their sense of belongingness. Particularly by sharing their writing experiences in peer interactions, graduate students in "boot" camps integrate community experiences in their own writing practice; sharing experiences empowers them to counter "persistent notions of individualized success and failure in graduate school." Amy Fenstermaker and Anne Zanzucchi (chap. 12) likewise examine the systematic use of peer-with-peer mentoring methods in their discussion of a nonhierarchical mentoring framework that goes beyond nuts-and-bolts advice toward holistic and inclusive support. Shelley Rodrigo and Julia Romberger (chap. 13) propose a playful "sandbox" course for supporting students in engaging with theory and developing interdisciplinary research methods. Using a digital Lego application, timelines, and theory trees, students reorganize conceptual knowledge through a community of practice approach to incorporating theory and methodology in their research writing. Finally, Jennifer Friend, Jennifer Salvo, Michelle M. Paquette, and Elizabeth Brown (chap. 14) provide needs assessments and results that informed a university-wide graduate writing initiative to address students' writing concerns. Their efforts demonstrated tangible early outcomes while they created campus networks and garnered support that enabled them to "build momentum, relationships, and



credibility” as their program developed. Taken together, these chapters advance a variety of approaches to support practices that foster inclusive communities, that are answerable to students’ identities, and that honor the lived experiences of graduate students as writers.

*Learning from the Lived Experiences of Graduate Student Writers* resists a tidy ending and an easy solution. We do not offer a program model, a writing rubric, or a budget amount for the number of resources needed to improve the situation. We advocate creating opportunities for graduate students to do the work they care about and bring their voices to the conversation. In her after(word), Kirsten T. Edwards reminds us that students from historically oppressed groups deserve reparations. Although students’ voices, experiences, and needs should be driving programming in all aspects of higher education, Edwards worries that “higher education probably will never listen. It was founded on a commitment to not listen.” She goes on:

Despite its dominant narrative as an engine of social equality, [higher education] continues to participate in social reproduction. It is fundamentally rooted in a system of winners and losers. Nevertheless, instead of feeling defeated by this reality, it compels me to question, “What magic will minoritized graduate writers produce in response to this bleak present and unknown future?” What kinds of educational futures will they imagine if we diligently create spaces and strategies committed to their freedom?

My coeditors and I hope readers will join us in appreciating the voices included here; we hope these voices influence readers to design programs and initiatives *committed to students’ freedom*. With Victor Villanueva, we believe strongly that—like teaching and mentoring—“editorial work is about supporting unheard voices, expanding the types of knowledge, the types of writing, which impact our understanding” (Selfe, Villanueva, and Parks 2017, 3). Educators must stop replicating white-privileging structures and then apologizing for not doing enough to hear and respond to what marginalized voices are saying. As Neisha-Anne Green (2018) has said, white people committed to dismantling privilege in higher education must stop being (or proclaiming to be) “allies” who remain quiet and passive when injustices are happening. White people must be accomplices—the critical difference being that “accomplices support and help through word and deed”; they “actively demonstrate allyship” (29). It has never been enough—and at this moment in U.S. political history it is not only insufficient but is damaging—“to *quietly* help and support” in a passive and only-when-convenient way (29; emphasis added). The reflections in this collection challenge us all to do the work every day, to consider more expansive ways of framing success, to



challenge entrenched practices that may limit the potential for students to become what academe has always defined as a scholar—someone who makes new knowledge and contributes their own original voice.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Michele Eodice; working with you over the years shaped how I do the work and who I want to be. Heartfelt thanks to my other collaborators and the communities that sustained me through the process of putting this collection together, especially Sandra L. Tarabochia, Ryan Omizo, Clarissa J. Walker, and Amanda Cuellar. Conversations with all of them infused this work. I am very grateful for the opportunities and community available to me in the Consortium on Graduate Communication; thanks in particular to Steve Simpson, Michelle Cox, Talinn Phillips, Nigel Caplan, Lindsey Ives, Shyam Sharma, Angelo Pitillo, Lisa Russell-Pinson, the CGC Executive Board, and Dan Bommarito for their support and collaborations. Many thanks to the students I have worked with and from whom I learn so much, including Shenita Denson, Bernard “BJ” Durham, Erin Elliot, Iwinosa Idahor, Stella Jackman-Ryan, Ashish Kapoor, Whitney McCoy, Ayana Sadler, Valeria Soto Márquez, Bethany Van Scooter, and Matthew Warren. Thanks to Anna Sicari, Melvin “Jai” Jackson, and Zach Beare for their support and collaboration. Working with our other two editors, Kirsten T. Edwards and Alexandria Lockett, enriched my experience greatly. Finally, thanks to the three anonymous reviewers of this collection for their critical feedback and thoughtful commentary, and to Michael Spooner, Rachael Levay, and Utah State University Press for helping us bring this project into being.

## NOTES

1. Thank you to Clarissa J. Walker for the phrase “the rhetorical force of testimony.”
2. Thanks to Michelle Cox for making this point about voice during her panel discussion at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2018.
3. *Supervisor*, *advisor*, and sometimes *chair* are used interchangeably throughout this collection to refer to faculty who mentor students’ dissertations and thesis projects.

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