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## Introduction

### WHY WELLNESS?

This book is many years in the making, perhaps my entire career. The exigency for this project likely started long before my first position as an assistant professor and writing center director at a community college on the South Coast of Massachusetts. It started, perhaps, when I volunteered as a preliteracy instructor for women at Rosie's Place in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and worked with unhoused women, predominately from Haiti, trying to pass their citizenship tests. Or perhaps it started when I entered college as a first-generation student and nearly lost my scholarship in my first year because I couldn't seem to figure out how to write academically. Or it may have started long before that, back home in Staten Island, New York, as I watched my single mother go to work sick and injured because she could not afford to stay home and heal. Or it was shaped by 9/11 and the Boston Marathon bombing, which bracketed my educational journey. The lingering trauma of these events profoundly impacted me personally but also impacted how I moved through social and educational spaces. There are many reasons why wellness matters to me—many of which are connected to labor, quality of life, and issues of access and inclusion. There are also reasons why wellness matters to the field of writing center studies, to the broader field of rhetoric and composition, and to higher education.

#### MY PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I want to open with my personal professional autobiography, which I have carefully meted out until now but which I hope informs the structure and content of this project. It is a bit lengthy, so buckle in. As a newly graduated PhD in 2014, I accepted my first position at Bristol Community College (BCC). There, I was tasked with bringing rigor and high-impact practices back into the Writing Center. The Writing Center had been passed around from temporary administrator to temporary administrator for over a decade. But in its prime, it was a generative

space for faculty development on writing across the curriculum pedagogy. As I found out when I arrived, people longed for the days of a powerful and impactful writing center. They regarded the space as faculty-centered and critically important to teaching. Yet, in the decade between the last faculty director and my arrival to campus, something had fundamentally changed. Perhaps because of the precarity of the hiring process, perhaps because of the tension between administration and faculty, perhaps because of the loss of peer tutors, it became a space that was seen as punitive by students and regulatory by faculty. The missing piece, as I saw it, was student engagement. We knew little about who attended the writing center and why. We also lacked student engagement in the writing center beyond the clientele, such as in our staffing model.

My job, as it was communicated to me, was to bring peer tutors back to the writing center. It was also to establish academic and scholarly practices that tethered our writing center to the larger field. Part of this work included revamping the fallow peer-tutoring course. So, in the fall of 2014, 14 students and I embarked on a journey together to “fix” the writing center. For the first few weeks of class, things ran smoothly. Students did the reading. They wrote their reflection logs. They participated with gusto in class. But as we neared the time when students would complete the ethnographic activities that were part of the course’s capstone, things fell apart. Students in the training course struggled to schedule appointments. They failed to observe sessions because of the disproportionate level of cancelations and unfilled appointments. Their attempts to engage with the Writing Center failed on multiple levels because of administrative or cultural issues.

So we went back to the drawing board and created a survey about students’ perceptions of the Writing Center (Giaimo, 2017). I don’t want to go too much into the details because I have written about this before, but this project opened doors that, at the time, I had not really anticipated. Of course, the study had great outcomes for the student researchers (Giaimo, 2019), and we also learned more detailed information about the culture of writing and the culture of engagement with the Writing Center on campus. From this information, we changed training, marketing, hiring, and even our tutoring practices. We used data in an informed way to positively influence the writing center—which was a goal of mine and, by proxy, of the tutoring course. This was the first large-scale programmatic assessment that I did outside of graduate school, and it taught me how important local institutional context and culture, as well as site-specific need(s), are to doing writing center research.

### THE LESS POSITIVE VERSION OF MY PROFESSIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This, however, is the positive framing of that experience. At the time, I naively believed that data was the main and perhaps the only way to combat institutional inertia and other issues. Yet all the data in the world could not prepare me for my work as a writing center administrator at BCC. The truth is that underneath the surface of trying to figure out how to make the Writing Center a more hospitable place to students as well as to tutors, there were tensions that I was completely unprepared to handle. There was, of course, the body of faculty who resisted change. There was also the tension of navigating a position that was only partially in the labor union and the attendant issues of stepping into the minefield of grudges between the administrative and faculty communities. There was the struggle to bring professional (adjunct) tutors on board with change and, ultimately, to encourage them to curtail habits harmful to student engagement, such as copyediting. And there was the student population itself—one in which over 70% of students were Pell Grant recipients, worked full time, and were first generation themselves.

Some of these challenges were ones I anticipated—especially around the high need of the student population. I knew these challenges personally as a working-class first-generation student who also qualified for a Pell Grant. But there were more insidious wellness-based issues that lurked among the workaday happenings at the college. In class one day, my students and I were discussing the “What If?” chapter in the *Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*. When encouraged to discuss their own “what if” scenarios, pertinent to the school, a student raised their hand and asked:

“What if the student is under the influence?”

“Under the influence of what?” I replied.

The student then told us a story about working with someone who was drunk during course-based tutoring. Realizing that *Longman Guide* hadn’t prepared us for many of the realities of working with a nonresidential population in one of the poorest and underemployed regions of Massachusetts, I had to rethink my writing center pedagogy. While I had some personal experiences that were like those of my students and could understand some of what they were going through, my training didn’t equip me well enough to deal with many of the realities of my community college students’ experiences. If anything, I had tried to separate my life experiences and personal identity from my professional one—something I picked up in graduate school likely due to class-based micro- and macroaggressions. This bifurcation hurt, and when I realized that I needed

to draw upon my personal well of experiences and resources and stitch myself together in order to support my tutors, I understood how much we give up—emotionally, personally, even cognitively—to do academic work. Wellness (talking about it, examining it, identifying where it does and does not arise), I have come to realize, is one of the missing links in that chain of professionalization, and its absence causes all kinds of issues later on down the line when our well-being, affect, physicality, or material circumstances are threatened while at work.

The ways in which student tutors navigate situations that suddenly shift and become scary or disorienting has reminded me how I had to learn these things on my own—both in my writing center work and my teaching work. As a tutor, I received no training for how to respond to a graduate student who dropped a 300-page dissertation on the table in front of me and demanded that I edit it because her defense was in a week. I received no training to respond to the student who disrupted my class and yelled in my face about not wanting to read poetry. I received no training for the student whose friend committed suicide and who cried as he explained to me why he was struggling so much in class. In these and other situations, as a writing center administrator and educator, I followed my gut. But, for every person who is willing to ask a student to leave class because they are being disruptive, or who comforts a crying student after receiving their permission to hug them, or who confidently rejects demands to copyedit a dissertation, there are many more who struggle to respond, who respond inappropriately, or who respond in ways they are uncomfortable with. This is not the educators' fault; it is our field's failure to train us.

#### A NEW “NORMAL”?

At BCC, my search for wellness-related research in writing center work started with assessment but also led me to the work of others concerned with well-being in writing center contexts. Degner et al.'s (2015) piece “Opening Closed Doors” was a watershed moment in writing center research on wellness. The article focuses on the mental health concerns that tutors experience and how this impacts their work in writing centers. Following its publication, I started teaching this article in my tutor training courses, and I ran trainings that engaged with this piece as well as center- and college-specific “what if” scenarios. I took to heart the article's call to focus on mental health concerns and other areas of wellness in tutor training and began to expand my own arsenal of wellness resources. Because of my lack of professional training—among other

more personal factors I only later identified—I never felt like what I was doing was enough.

In August 2016, when I became the director of the Writing Center at The Ohio State University (OSU), my work evolved. I was now at the third-largest school in the United States, where support services struggled to keep up with demand. Also, the 2016–2017 academic year was especially chaotic and stressful. Throughout the fall, the presidential election—with its heightened and racist rhetoric—profoundly affected many staff and students at the Writing Center. Instances of hate crimes and hate speech rose, both on campus and off. In early November 2016, Donald Trump was elected. A few weeks after that, OSU had a knife attack that was initially described as an active shooter situation that shut down the campus while the Writing Center was operating. In late January 2017, Trump’s Muslim ban created confusion for many of our clients and tutors who were attending school on a visa. Still after that, in early February 2017, Reagan Tokes—an Ohio State student—was murdered. Arriving at OSU, I found myself once again unprepared for the complex wellness issues that arose in and around my center, whether that was managing the emotional fallout from Trump’s executive orders or responding to the campus lockdown or fielding other tragedies on and around campus. While many of these crises weren’t happening directly in the Writing Center, they still affected the students who worked at and attended the center. Once again, as I did at BCC, I turned to research and assessment to learn if these highly stressful events were impacting tutors in the Writing Center.

In the 2019–2020 academic year, I found myself in a new institutional context—an undergraduate liberal arts college—and facing yet another kind of unanticipated crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has upended how we go about our daily lives. How we work (or are unable to work), how we socialize, how we feel and function. Suddenly, issues of wellness that were only gestured at in faculty meetings and in college emails are now everywhere. We worry for students’ mental health, and for good reason, as mental health issues have been skyrocketing (Anderson, 2020). We talk about all kinds of burnout and fatigue. We see how prolonged stress, compounded with chronic illness, can have deleterious effects on our quality of life. Wellness—or lack thereof—is suddenly out there for everyone to see.

Even though I tried to get ahead of every conceivable crisis, despite my best laid plans, I saw myself once again in charge of a new writing center—this time at Middlebury College—during a time of upheaval. After switching jobs several times and reading about the experiences

of other writing program administrators who have experienced mass shooting events (Clinnin, 2020) and natural disasters (Schlachte, 2020), as well as marking that this is not the first but second worldwide crisis I've weathered (I started graduate school during the 2008 recession), I realize that this might simply be the new normal of education work—especially writing administration work—where crises create wellness issues that affect our work in unanticipated ways. We must, then, be preventative in our thinking, policies, and research but also realize that we simply cannot anticipate every crisis coming down the pike. We are facing the effects of disaster capitalism, and the fallout from decades of neoliberal policies made at the educational and governmental levels, which are made worse by intersecting crises like climate change, income inequity, systemic racism, and a host of other issues. Like the one-two punch of the pandemic, where the public health crisis was followed by an economic crisis, these issues are complex and multivalenced. Yet if we create assessment-driven and activist-informed heuristics for how to address issues of wellness in our workplaces, we can at least begin to understand our positionality and responses during moments of great upheaval. As Naomi Klein argues in her book, when crises hit, and we are “psychologically unmoored and physically uprooted” (2007, p. 21), the possibility of exploitation is greatest. To push back against such opportunistic neoliberalism is yet another kind of fight for wellness.

#### THE RHETORIC OF WELLNESS IN NONACADEMIC CONTEXTS

Our field has a wellness problem, perhaps because our society does too. Until recently, conversations about wellness have been rare except in certain fields, such as the helping professions and activist work. Yet, in the last five years, we have seen an explosion of material touting wellness and self-care practices. Most articles are published in popular publications such as the *New York Times's* “Bringing Wellness to Your Life” set of articles (n.d.), the *Washington Post Live's* “Be Well” corporate wellness stories (2021), or wellness influencers and accounts on social media platforms like Instagram. While most wellness media focuses on food, exercise, and other lifestyle habits, wellness rhetoric is infused into everything from self-help (how to be a better friend, how to be bored, how to be an intentional eater/drinker) to career advice (how to advocate for a raise, how to leave a toxic work situation), to how to manage one's emotionality (and productivity) during the pandemic. Yet in academia, which many of us acknowledge is a profession that is also “unwell,” we are only just getting around to engaging with wellness. For my part, I

have read and, in some cases, helped bring forth this scholarship on wellness and care in writing center work (Giaino & Hashlamon, 2020). Other scholars, such as those in the recently published *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration* (Wooten et al., 2020), are also preoccupied with issues of wellness—be they physical, psychological, emotional, material, or otherwise—that arise in writing administration work.

**OVERWORKED, UNDERPAID, AND BURNT OUT:  
“UNWELL” WRITING CENTER WORKERS**

As I have continued my research in this area—and counter to much of the commercialized wellness rhetoric that is thrown at us through social media, news outlets, HR and institutional wellness programs, and for-profit educational companies—I have come to see stories about wellness as stories that are also about labor rights, such as how our field professionalizes us or how our educational institutions press upon us to be “everything to everyone.” Before entering academia, I did not anticipate all of the helping work I would come to be expected (or pressured) to do. At different points in my career, I have had to do the work of a therapist, a financial advisor, a risk manager and emergency planner, a building coordinator, an advocate, a human resources liaison, a janitor, and a nonprofit volunteer. This is not to say anything of the nonhelper positions I have taken up such as web manager, publicist and marketer, outreach coordinator, graphic designer, editor, event planner, etc. And, looking back, I have taken on these jobs willingly, for the most part. I have crawled under dusty furniture to tighten bolts, I have done wayfinding throughout my campus and developed center signage, and I have edited my websites with gusto. I have comforted grieving students, I have helped students who were suicidal seek resources, I have been a mandatory reporter of sexual assault, and I have supported students through mental and material crises. And, again, I have done so willingly because I was socialized into this work by receiving support from my faculty and staff mentors. I came to see this work as part of the job of educators.

Yet this work—much of it focused on wellness-related issues—takes a toll on one’s well-being. Writing center administrators are often heroic and idealistic people, true believers, who go far above and beyond their duties to support students and their staff members. I have heard many stories about new and not-so-new writing center administrators (WCAs) working long hours, weekends, and holidays to make sure their centers are running well. I, myself, have regularly put in 60-plus-hour work

weeks, especially in the first year of each new job (which amounts to a lot of additional work considering I am currently directing my fourth writing center!). And my experience isn't novel, as Wooten et al. note in a chapter on overwork and emotional labor (2020, p. 270). In fact, as faculty become more advanced in their career, it seems they work even longer hours. This labor is also not distributed equally across all academics with faculty of color, LGBTQIA+ faculty, and women taking on far more of this burden than their counterparts.

Yet despite this overwork—where our time is taken up by meetings, responding to emails, mission creep, and administrative service—the field of writing center studies is reluctant to label this work “managerial” (Heckelman, 1998) and has struggled to fit such work in academia’s frameworks for promotion. Writing center administrators are, however, often managers *par excellence*. Perhaps because we were trained in the trenches, we are good at rolling up our sleeves and getting things done; however, we lack systemic managerial training and, therefore, struggle with emotional labor and other hidden work expectations (Caswell et al., 2016), as well as burnout.

Our field pays little attention, except in abstract ways, to how we are exploited in our work. Perdue et al. (2017) note the precarity of writing center positions in their analysis of job advertisements, which lack standards and often are full of mission- and job-creep duties. Wooten et al. (2020) dedicates an entire edited collection to labor and wellness issues among writing administrators. Currently, however, there are few, if any, articles on tutors’ occupational experiences, including wellness-related issues. While scholars have focused on single elements of tutors’ wellness experiences, such as guilt (Nicklay, 2012), mental health concerns (Degner et al., 2015), and emotional triggers (Perry, 2016), there are few concrete examples of wellness interventions that holistically support peer tutors’ physical, mental, and material well-being. Additionally, and with the exception of the growing scholarship on race and anti-racism, there are few studies that address factors external to the writing center and how these factors impact our tutors. For example, can a writing center be an ethical and wellness-forward place if the larger institution under which it is housed is not? How do we account for and recognize the stress that local and national events can cause in our centers? This book offers an intervention into these matters.

I have frequently turned to the field to respond to questions like the ones I share above and that arise in my writing center. Many times, I have come away empty-handed. There is little research on how peer tutors experience and characterize their work, how emotional labor

factors into tutoring work, or how to develop empirical research questions related to tutor experience and development. In many ways, this book is the one that I wished was available as I searched for ways to better prepare my tutors but also to systemically explore what I saw going on underneath the surface of tutoring and writing center work. It is also the book I wish had been handed to me as a new writing center director or even a new graduate tutor.

My career has taught me hard-learned lessons in understanding how writing center directors (WCDs) are overworked, underpaid, understaffed, and constantly responding to micro and macro crises, to say nothing of micro- and macroaggressions that result from our personal identity markers. These experiences leave us stressed out, burnt out, and questioning. They also leave us little room to consider the more marginalized workers around us, like peer tutors. Research is finally catching up with the lived experiences of WCDs. We are questioning our status, our professional identities (Wooten et al., 2020), and whether our jobs are viable ones to stay in long term (Caswell et al., 2016). Little attention, however, is given to tutors' affective, material, physical, and psychosocial experiences, which I see as a complex network of wellness issues that result from neoliberal policies or from precarities that are created by neoliberalist values. This book offers a deep analysis of occupationally specific phenomena that arise in writing center work; from my research, I have found that many of these issues are ones of wellness. While I argue that the writing center is unwell for many reasons, including how our administrative jobs are perceived and constructed, this book examines the experiences, preferences, feelings, and thoughts of some of the most marginalized workers in writing centers today: peer tutors.

#### CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

The following chapters are organized in a way that reflects my journey as a writing center director and administrator. It begins with an exigency that I was neither prepared to address nor fully cognizant I was addressing until I was well into the thick of things during my first position, which is: how do I as an administrator identify and respond to the many different issues of wellness that arise in my writing center? These issues are not only ones that are centered on wellness; they are issues of wellness *that arise in an occupational setting*. Therefore, these wellness issues are in the literal sense also labor issues.

This book tells the story of my personal journey to secure wellness in my center, especially for my tutors (it is only quite recently that I realized

how large and unfair a task I had charged myself with). Throughout these chapters, I share data from a longitudinal assessment conducted in a Land-Grant R1 institution regarding tutors' experiences of wellness training interventions, their attitudes toward the writing center as a workplace, and their abilities to navigate stressful situations—both inside and outside of the writing center. I also share training documents, emergency planning documents, and several wellness-specific interventions developed from anti-racist, labor-centered, and occupational theories. Findings from my assessment made me recognize the critical role labor plays in tutors' workplace feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. Workplace policies that address labor conditions need to be explicitly paired with any wellness work in the center. Otherwise, this work would be a half-hearted attempt at boosting morale without any appreciable investment on the part of the institution. So, in this way, the research study led me to this larger topic of exploitation and how wellness is only one corrective to such issues in the workplace.

The book begins, however, with **Searching for Wellness**. Once I realized that issues of wellness profoundly impact tutors—and their work—I sought occupational interventions in an institutional setting, such as wellness programs that were touted as preventatives for mental health concerns and other psychosocial issues that students regularly confront. From there, I was introduced to positive psychology—the latest in a long line of workplace wellness programs. Chapter 1 traces the history of workplace wellness programs up through the current day and locates the rise in popularity of these programs within a complicated nexus of workforce development and retention needs, as well as austerity-minded business-logic that promotes toxic bootstrap rhetoric and individualistic change as cost-saving measures. Programs in higher education are not immune to this trend, with several colleges and universities adopting one such program that relies on positive psychology to provide students with wellness support. I share assessment findings from tutors on their experiences of a positive psychology-focused workplace wellness program. Chapter 2 examines factors that lead to occupational stress more broadly, as well as government and international standards for mitigating occupational stress. I then turn to writing center research to understand how our field talks about and conceptualizes stress. Finally, I share study findings on how tutors at my writing center experience work-related stress (internal to the writing center) and external stress of different kinds such as longer-term political stress, and punctuated stress related to emergencies or crises. Chapter 3 and the final part of the first section provides a deeper dive into the methodology underpinning my

longitudinal research on tutor wellness and provides guidance on how to conduct such empirical research on wellness at other institutions.

The second section of the book, **Finding Wellness**, provides concrete examples of how to support wellness in the writing center through mindfulness and wellness interventions that tutors favorably rated in my research study (Chapter 4). However, alongside training interventions, I also include policy interventions that are centered on fair labor practices and that I hope administrators will consider implementing as they develop their own wellness interventions. In Chapter 5, I trace the history of emergency planning and risk assessment—especially in higher education—to contextualize and ground the development of an emergency and risk management plan in my writing center, which, I argue, is critical for finding wellness in one’s own center. Drawing from my experience of an active shooter alert, as well as several other crises, I provide resources and guidance on creating this critical document and attendant policies around post-crisis response and reflection.

The final two chapters and the conclusion of this book comprise Part III, Looking to the Future of Wellness. Chapter 6 provides an overview of the history of research on emotional labor before turning to research on this topic in writing center studies, which I pair with training resources for identifying and discussing emotional labor in individual centers. I then define burnout—which results, in part, from unchecked emotional stressors in the workplace—and argue that our field’s strained relationship with the managerial aspects of our work, paired with austerity measures in the neoliberal university, can produce profound worker burnout. I end with a call to action for the field to develop more ethical models of writing center administration that consider how class and race affects our relationship to our work and our engagement with and responses to emotional labor. In Chapter 7, I trace the history of wellness work that connects wellness to the Civil Rights Movement and its focus on community-based and wraparound healthcare as critical to dismantling racism and creating empowerment and autonomy in Black communities. I then discuss the extension of this work into Black feminism through figurations of radical care and self-care work. In decolonializing the origins of wellness work and situating it in communal, radical, and pro-Black social movements, I aim to demonstrate how critically situating wellness work also contributes to anti-racist wellness models. To that end, I share resources and action items for supporting underrepresented staff in writing centers while also challenging exclusionary and ahistorical wellness programs that center whiteness and comfort over safety for BIPOC staff members.

I conclude the book with how we might envision the future of writing center work as one informed by wellness and care interventions. Along the way, I include data from previous research projects, as well as previously unpublished findings. Each chapter begins with an autobiographical narrative that frames my thinking on wellness work in writing centers, which has been shaped by my lived experiences as a writing center director or associate director at four very different institutional types (R1 private, two-year college, R1 public, and selective liberal arts college). While I locate my research on workplaces and wellness in writing centers, this research can just as easily be carried out in other workplaces inside and outside of higher education. And findings and best practices that emerge from this work can be easily applied in teacher-mentor situations, in laboratories, among sports teams, and in first-year orientation and writing programs. In short, in whatever blurry spaces that students occupy as both students and workers, and in those spaces where issues of wellness leave deep marks on individuals as well as the collective, this book's findings are applicable.

#### WELLNESS RESEARCH IN WRITING CENTER STUDIES

Although there is not currently a lot of published research on wellness, care, and labor in writing center work, that does not mean that larger conversations about these topics are not taking place in our field. To the contrary, the 2018 East Central Writing Centers Association Conference, held at Ohio State, saw roughly 100 presentations and nearly 300 attendees present on wellness, care, and labor ethics in writing center work. Also, in 2018, the South Central Writing Centers Association hosted a conference on mindfulness at the writing center. Recently, *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* published a special issue on wellness and care in writing center work. And, in the first digital edited collection published by *WLN*, Featherstone et al. (2019) published a chapter on a mindfulness training intervention, along with assessment data on its efficacy. Finally, another digital edited collection, of which I am the editor, on wellness and care work in writing centers was published in early 2021. And, in the broader field of composition studies, research on mindfulness (Mathieu, 2016), contemplative writing practices (Wenger, 2015), and emotional labor (Sano-Franchini, 2016) all indicate a sustained interest in applying wellness theories and practices to writing administration and pedagogical practices. Additionally, several projects are in the pipeline, so to speak, on emotional labor, such as Concannon and Morris's edited collection on affect (Parlor Press, forthcoming).

Wooton et al.'s book on emotional labor in writing program administration was published in fall 2020 and became the subject of several book clubs and the plenary for the International Writing Centers Association 2021 Collaborative. And *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors* (Caswell et al., 2016) has critically informed research on emotional labor, up to this point, in writing center studies. So, this book is in good company, alongside the interests and scholarship of hundreds of writing center practitioners and compositionists. We, as a field, are hungry to be well—to have wellness centered and upheld in our work—however, the socioeconomic contexts underpinning the sudden explosion of interest in wellness has been left sadly under-examined, as have the historical and political origins of wellness sub-fields like mindfulness, self- and community-care, and workplace safety. We need an institutional history of wellness that situates it in progressive political movements that demanded safety, fair wages, and care for communities of color and the working class.

Broadly speaking, more discussions about the labor that we perform in our field need to be had at all levels—regional, national, international, and, of course, local. And, while some administrators may still believe that writing can somehow be divorced from the emotions and experiences of clients, many more recognize that tutors (and educators more broadly) have been performing wellness work with and for their clients for as long as writing centers have been around. Even the formalization of writing centers, in the current moment, was galvanized in an emotionally heightened period in our educational system: during the open access movement. Writing centers became part of a systemic support model offered in higher education institutions around the country at a time in which institutions, administrators, and educators argued that newcomers to higher education needed additional academic support (Boquet, 1999). Framing writing center work within a deficit education model—one that we still carry forward when we use the language of “help” to describe the work that writing centers perform—elides the historical roots of our labor as emotionally charged, stressful, and rooted in a white racial habitus. As Asao Inoue (2015) describes it, a racial habitus is “a set of structuring structures, some marked on the body, some in language practices, some in the ways we interact or work, write, and read, some in the way we behave or dress, some in the processes and differential opportunities we have” (p. 43). The pedagogical and occupational origins of writing centers are steeped in a white racial habitus and have helped to frame how we justify our work structures as much as we do our workplace practices.

It should come as no surprise, then, that tutors characterize and describe the work that they do in far more complex ways than scholars often do (Giaimo et al., 2018). Tutors use emotionally charged language in their session notes and express feelings of doubt, misgiving, and even shame when describing their labor in these notes. Through conducting a corpus analysis of a year's worth of session notes, I was able to trace the invisible labor that tutors perform and to locate it within affective work centered on the language of failure. In using wellness as a heuristic through which to frame writing center labor, we can consider different administrative maneuvers we may take to mitigate tutors' complicated or downright negative experiences in their work. Of course, training interventions and policies are only developed after we acknowledge and study what is going on at our centers. To me, research is a useful way in which to ground wellness interventions in evidence-based practices, but it is not the only way to do this work. We also need to draw upon pro-labor and anti-racist policies and practices to do this work.

Other scholars have approached studying writing center phenomena from a similarly research-based inquiry. As Mark Hall (2017) notes in his excellent book, *Around the Texts of Writing Center Work*, "Examination of everyday documents . . . illuminates the theories that underpin and motivate writing centers" (p. 4). It is the quotidian nature of writing center work that Hall attempts to make visible and render scholarly. Through analyzing different documents, he can theorize writing center work. Yet the work itself is not necessarily only theoretical or scholarly, nor is it only informed by scholarship; it is embodied and affective (Lawson, 2015); it is material; it is emotional.

#### **WELLNESS IS NOT A CURE-ALL FOR THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY**

The work we do, however, is also political and intimately tied to our identities and relative positionality within the broader institution. We need to recognize both the liminality of peer tutors—their liminality as students and staff—and we need to set up robust responses to caring for their wellbeing while also recognizing how easily wellness interventions can be coopted by the neoliberal academy (Monty, 2019). In my search for wellness for my tutors—and for myself—I came across several corporate and institutional interventions that placed expectations for success and wellness primarily on the individual. In addition to culling from institutional histories of workplace wellness programs, I referred to national and international guidelines for workplace standards for safety and wellness. Yet even as I drew from power structures such as higher education,

government agencies, or international organizations, I realized that neoliberalism—a political approach that favors free-market capitalism, deregulation, and reduction in government spending—underpins much of the creation of these policies and structures. My research—and my tutors’ responses to our developing wellness project—taught me that there are very few quick fixes to wellness issues in workplaces because these issues are systemic and because they are informed by internal and external factors that are not entirely in our control.

In higher education, I believe, we are always fighting against the alluring fantasy of neoliberal wellness, which is that if the individual puts enough policies in place; if they spend just a little more personal time; if they trace out and anticipate enough eventualities; if they, in other words, do more and more and more with less and less and less, then our educational spaces (and our students and tutors) will be remade and be well. For the past 40 years, the United States has been dominated by such neoliberal thinking, which has led to policies and practices that many believe improve “national conditions for free markets, increasing global competition, and establishing new national and global economic configurations” (Vazquez & Levin, 2018). Yet these policies have resulted in “drastic cuts to state supported social services and programs, the extension [of] an economic rationality to cultural, social, and political spheres, and the redefinition of the individual from a citizen to an autonomous economic actor” (Saunders, 2010, p. 42). As neoliberalism became the dominant ideology in US politics and business, it also infiltrated higher education through management policies informed by “new public management,” which touts smaller, leaner management that is customer-focused (Olssen & Peters, 2005), and that drastically revised the “core professional academic values” of the institution and its faculty (Vazquez & Levin, 2018). As Vazquez and Levin (2018) note,

The infiltration of neoliberal ideology into public research universities, particularly the increase of managerialism, surveillance, and accountability, is enabled by the assumption that there is no alternative to symbolic violence, precariousness in work conditions, or denial of humanity for academic professionals. The consequences of the rise of symbolic violence affects the psycho-emotional life and well-being of faculty members, causing stress, anxiety, feelings of powerlessness, loss of autonomy, and uncertainty in relation to their profession (Vazquez & Levin, 2010).

Here, Vazquez and Levin (2018) identify the ways in which neoliberal ideology has harmed academia and the professorate. The economic and political aims of this ideology have, of course, come home to roost in our educational institutions. We see this in mobile foodbanks on our

campuses. We see this in the rates of suicide and mental health concerns among our students. We see this in the increased number of mass shooting events on campuses around the country. We see this in the rise of adjunct labor and the disappearance of tenure track lines. We see this in the closure of entire departments—or schools—and the furloughs, retrenchments, and layoffs that accompany these economic decisions.

In writing centers, we are continuously faced with the results of neoliberal ideology and policy. In many ways, it drives our customer-service model of support and how we assess our success. It is possible, with the boom in wellness research on subjects like emotional labor, burnout, triggers, etc., that we as a field are sick of being unwell. As austerity measures at the university level increase—especially with the economic fallout from the pandemic—we are all feeling the squeeze more profoundly in the current era. Our turn to wellness, then, might be a localized response to austerity. What better response to the dehumanizing mechanistic and profit-driven ideologies of neoliberalism than the humanizing, values-driven ideology of wellness? While a good response; it should not be the only response. We need to hold our institutions accountable and resist plugging all gaps that neoliberalism creates with further exploitation of ourselves and others.

So, even though this book argues for several wellness interventions in the writing center, it asks practitioners to think carefully before they develop and implement wellness programs in their educational spaces. It asks practitioners to consider the interconnectedness of workplace wellness interventions and advocacy work. It asks practitioners to assess their wellness work and to listen to their tutors as they redesign their interventions. In short, this book guides practitioners through some hard-learned lessons about neoliberal wellness programs and how to develop sustainable and more ethical models that consider not only wellness programs but also workplace policies. I hope this book will help administrators and tutors alike to smartly intervene and to better support the wellness of their centers and their own wellness, but also, in the immortal words of Kenny Rogers (1978), “Know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em, know when to walk away, and know when to run.”