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INTRODUCTION

Jenn Fishman and Amy C. Kimme Hea

Longitudinal, adj. and n. *Pronunciation:* US *lɒndʒəˈl(j)udənl*.
Forms: late Middle English *longitudinale*, late Middle English *longitudinel*, 1500s *longytudynalles* (plural), 1500s–1600s *longitudinall*, 1500s *longitudinal*.

We humans have had longitudinal coordinates and muscles for a long time. For centuries, we have traced the thin line of the horizon as it extends, seemingly endlessly, toward the illusion of an origin point. In English, early modern surgeons mapped gross anatomy along longitudinal bodily axes. They also distinguished compound, transverse, and fissure-like “cissurale” fractures from longitudinal ones, while botanists and geographers described shape, distance, and dimension longitudinally. With time, we have learned to take the long view and play the long game, whether cards, golf, or politics. When someone calls “go long,” we know what to do. Likewise, we have devised innumerable ways to measure and manage duration. We keep learning and relearning how to long haul, and we know when to cut a long story short and when to offer the long-form version. (This introduction, by the way, is a twenty-minute read.) Through it all, we continue to be captivated by change over time. Witness childhood height marked annually along a door frame. Google Kasmin Gallery and watch the portraits James Nares filmed at 600 frames per second—a process that renders being and time an event, if only for a moment.

On a considerably larger scale, we have been collecting longitudinal data for hundreds of years, since the first censuses were taken in the mid-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But it was not until the early twentieth century that we began to designate some inquiries “longitudinal research” or scientific studies “carried out or extending over a prolonged period of time” and “involving serial observations or measurements of the same individual, cohort, or experimental group”

(*Oxford English Dictionary* 2016). In one of the earliest English-language references on record, dating to 1913, J. E. Wallace Wallin (1913, 896) identifies longitudinal study as essential to clinical psychology, a necessity for the correct diagnosis and treatment of patients. A quick canvass of scholarly literature since then shows longitudinal research to be a method, a methodology, and even a quasi-field or subfield within social and behavioral sciences and the health sciences. Perhaps most usefully, several scholars including Scott Menard (2002, 2) distinguish longitudinal research as “a family of methods” defined by comparative analysis of data collected at two or more distinct periods of time. Cross-disciplinary examples run the gamut, encompassing everything from prospective and retrospective panel studies to cohort studies and, in some fields, repeated cross-sectional studies (3).

As longitudinal writing researchers, we echo the founding editors of the journal *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*. More than a decade ago, they declared longitudinal research “the vehicle par excellence for mapping the changing human life course within a generation as development and ageing proceed” (Bynner et al. 2009, 3). They also acknowledged life course theory and research as a well-established “means of showing how the life course is both shaped and re-shaped through the interactions between changing societal circumstances, and individual and collective agency” (4). In writing studies, the focus has been on academic rather than birth cohorts and projects with Ns in the tens instead of the hundreds or thousands. Nonetheless, longitudinal research has proven to be a significant vector for improving our understanding of writing. Early examples focus on the development of school-age writers: 338 children in California followed from kindergarten through twelfth grade, starting in 1953 (Loban 1967); 100 eleven- and 100 fourteen-year-olds, whose writing development was tracked for four years starting in 1967 (Britton et al. 1975); and 8 twelfth graders interviewed in 1967 (Emig 1969, 1971). At the college level, semester-long as well as year- and years-long studies date back at least as far as the research Albert R. Kitzhaber (1963) conducted between 1960 and 1962 at Dartmouth College. Sixty years later, longitudinal research continues to serve mainly educational purposes but in an expanded sense, through studies of not only an ever-increasing diversity of writers but also writing educators and various scenes of formal and informal or independent writing instruction.

For practitioners, longitudinal research epitomizes the abundance—or superabundance—of research. Certainly, the yield from any given longitudinal study is exponentially greater than findings that circulate in

formal reports, and it is not unusual for longitudinal data from a single study to inform some combination of scholarly literature, professional reports, government documents, and pedagogical materials. Less frequently, a longitudinal project generates popular commentary. A good example is the Harvard Longitudinal Study, which began in 1938. Also known as the Grant Study, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, and, most colloquially, the Harvard Happiness Study, this ongoing research has been the subject of scores of academic publications, is one of the most-watched TED talks, and is continually accruing popular references. Even a comparatively modest longitudinal study can generate a great reservoir of data rife with potential for evolving use. As this volume recognizes, longitudinal studies also contain multitudes of told and as-yet untold stories, which stand to enrich our knowledge of not only their ostensible objects of study—whether happiness or health or writing—but also affiliated sites of activity, linked networks of relations, and corresponding communities of practice.

Some of the best-known stories drawn from longitudinal research are cinematic, including the documentary series *Up*, directed by Michael Apted. Begun in the early 1960s with *7 Up!*, the series follows a fourteen-person cohort through installments filmed at seven-year intervals. A half-century into the project, Apted described the combination of patience and longevity that enabled him simultaneously to document and honor “the drama of ordinary life” (“49 Up” 2007). Although Apted asserted that “doing a documentary is one set of your muscles and doing a drama is another,” some of his colleagues feel differently (Kouguell 2019). For director Richard Linklater, longitudinal filmmaking makes possible the impossible work of bringing phenomena such as relationships and childhood to the screen. Discussing his decision to film *Boyhood* with a single cast over the course of twelve years, Linklater recalls: “I just got this eureka moment of, ‘Well, why couldn’t you just film a little bit [at a time], and encompass all of it’” (quoted in Bishop 2014). In writing studies, Bump Halbritter and Julie Lindquist have explored the affordances that digital video lends to longitudinal research. They describe LiteracyCorps Michigan as “an oral history documentary project” designed to illuminate college students’ “experiences of education in relation to [their] family histories, community life, and use of communication technologies” (n.d.). Over three stages of data collection, both they and project participants stepped behind the camera to record scenes of students’ literate lives from different angles. The results challenge disciplinary conventions associated with everything from literacy narratives to empirical research, defining a methodology of looking,

listening, and “strategically deferring interpretive closure” (Halbritter and Lindquist 2012, 174).

This volume is a collection of stories about longitudinal writing research told by longitudinal writing researchers. All sixteen contributors have conducted longitudinal studies at educational sites, including high schools, two- and four-year colleges and universities, and adult literacy centers. Together, we have worked on longitudinal research across career stages, starting as early as graduate school. Our ranks (at the time of writing) include one or more doctoral candidates, contingent and tenured or tenure-track faculty at two- and four-year colleges and universities, and program and university administrators. Collectively, we have designed longitudinal studies in conjunction with courses we teach (e.g., first-year composition, professional writing). We have sought IRB approval for dissertation and program research, and we have followed our longitudinal interests from our own campuses to other institutions and institution types. The stories we have chosen to tell for this occasion are related to yet distinct from the research reports and academic arguments we make elsewhere. In this volume, we tell stories about our work and the students and colleagues with whom we have worked. We tell stories about the sites that have prompted and sponsored our projects, both enabling and constraining them. We also tell stories about the scholarly conceits that we negotiate—and even seek to change—across the life cycles of our work.

We share our stories in response to a hunger for them. As Tricia Serviss and Sandra Jamieson (2017, 14) advocate, discussing the future of our discipline: “One dynamic way forward is to make the methods and processes of writing research as central as the findings reported from the research.” In *Points of Departure*, they and their contributors offer a variety of tactics that support an overall strategy of greater transparency and information flow among researchers, encouraging more and more widely circulated pilot studies, changes to graduate education, and new uses of both extant data and familiar data collection and analysis tools. With similar goals in mind, others have called for resources such as an annual scholarly bibliography and a registry or census of writing research at any stage of completion (Haswell 2005; Fishman and Mullin 2012; Mullin and Fishman 2017). These arguments chime with the call Doug Downs and his colleagues (2020, 100) make in the Naylor Report, where they champion the publication of what they term “stories of discovery” as well as more conventional research findings or “discovered stories.” The examples they offer, including personal narratives from undergraduate research publications like *The JUMP+*, do

critical work. They offer context as well as insight into how researchers understand the rhetorical situations of their projects; they may also contain thick descriptions of and reflections on praxis. Such details make stories fair substitutes for the how-to manuals new longitudinal writing researchers often crave. They also go beyond simple instructions or models to offer commentaries on and arguments about different aspects of our discipline.

The stories we tell in this volume serve not only to illuminate longitudinal research as contributors have practiced it but also to bring attention to the places where we conduct research as well as the sites where participants in our studies write and learn about writing. Our stories portray some of the many relationships forged and tested through longitudinal research, and they shed light on different local and virtual or discursive communities of practice. In doing so, the stories we tell serve a critical purpose or, really, a range of critical purposes. Some stories give presence to facets of research frequently glossed over or ignored in our discipline, including the vital and complex, sometimes difficult relationships that form among researchers and between researchers and research participants over the course of a long project. Some stories bring attention to the powerful roles sponsoring institutions, localities, and cultural moments play in longitudinal studies of writing. Still other stories explore methodological possibilities, advocating for new uses and new kinds of longitudinal research. What all of our stories have in common is their engagement with some of the many affordances for scholarly communication that storytelling offers: opportunities for reflection and refraction, space to make associations and acknowledge relations, chances to creatively provoke and defend arguments, and so on.

In *Telling Stories: Perspectives on Longitudinal Research*, we embrace storytelling aware that the relationship between writing studies and story can be vexed. As a discipline, we have scrutinized the relationship between Greco-Roman rhetoric and poetics from antiquity onward, tracking it across genres as diverse as oratory, poetry, and medical case histories (Walker 2000; Berkenkotter 2008). Depending on our purpose and our positionality, we have chosen to trust and mistrust stories along with the narrative architectures that support them. We have recognized and even celebrated lore as a form of knowledge in composition (North 1987; Massey and Gebhardt 2011), and we have worried that stories and our enthusiasm for them contribute to wars on data-driven research within our discipline (Haswell 2005) while limiting our ability to defend our work to public audiences, including education policymakers (Anson 2008). Most problematic, we have built and provisioned grand

narratives, perhaps especially (but not exclusively) in our historical scholarship, although we have also countered those stories and their undergirding methodologies. Along with critiques, correctives, and any number of additions to the historical record, we have added to our repertoire archival ethnography (Ritter 2012), retellings (Glenn 1997; Enoch and Jack 2021), counter and crooked histories (Hawk 2007; Ruiz 2016; Skinnell 2016), and, most notably, counterstory (Martinez 2020). The latter is a methodology rooted academically in critical race theory and culturally in knowledge-seeking and sharing traditions that have been long marginalized by white researchers and the predominantly white institutions that sponsor research.

The storytelling undertaken in this volume aligns with ongoing efforts to increase the number and range of stories told about writing and writing research, broadening the scope of perspectives available. To this end, we offer our stories as critical labor, reflections on and prompts or provocations to reckon with the limits of individual perspectives and the consequences of the choices we make in the various professional roles we play: teacher, researcher, writer, writing administrator. By recounting choices we did and did not make, by narrating some of our negotiations with the projects we designed and our projects' actual unfoldings, we hope to create greater conditions of possibility for future longitudinal projects. At the college level alone, we know that a great deal of recent and ongoing work is not represented directly in the chapters that follow. Indeed, we in this volume represent a small sample of writing researchers who have taken longitudinal approaches to researching postsecondary multilingual writers, STEM students, engineering students, writing center peer tutors, and graduate writing instructors. This book can be used to focus on individual courses and programs as well as different forms of assessment. Both in and beyond formal school settings, longitudinal research stands to illuminate not only writing development but also knowledge transfer and writers' resilience. There are connections to be drawn across school-based studies, K–college, and studies situated in different workplaces, in virtual spaces, and in diverse geographic locations—embracing a greater range of demographics. There are also connections to be drawn among longitudinal studies that look at writing and literacy in relation to additional activities: athletics, leadership, numeracy, spirituality, political activism, and others.

The contents of this volume might be endlessly rearranged to bring out the many connections among individual chapters. The order we chose highlights the ways longitudinal studies of writing are also studies of relationships and linked networks of relations, affiliated sites of

activity, and corresponding communities of practice. Brad Jacobson and J. Michael Rifenburg, in “Storying Longitudinal Research: Relationality and Self-Reflexivity,” open this collection with a central preoccupation: the relationship between researchers and research participants. Together, they introduce us to Jain, a Latinx high school student who matriculated at the University of Arizona, and Logan, a US Army cadet who attended the University of North Georgia. Drawing on Leigh Patel’s scholarship (2019), Jacobsen and Rifenburg story their experiences as principal investigators of longitudinal studies to examine what it means—what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like—to take responsibility for representing other writers over time. Specifically, they story their years of work with Jain and Logan to self-reflexively examine the power dynamics within their projects and to bring to the fore “issues of power dynamics, reciprocity, and representation” that are woven into the fabric of their own and others’ longitudinal projects. Their chapter juxtaposes the joys and anxieties that surround the work of building trust with research participants and striving toward reciprocity while negotiating differences of power and perception over time.

The two chapters that follow continue the close-up work of storying longitudinal relations. In “Weaving Reflexivity, Relationality, and Time in a Decade-Long Study of Writing Development and Learning Transfer,” Dana Lynn Driscoll offers a retrospective on her career-long longitudinal work to showcase the interlinked dynamics of research, teaching, and mentoring. Her story—or, really, the stories within her story—give presence to some of the many personal relationships that shape her longitudinal research, including evolving friendships with former study participants, remembrances of students and mentors who have passed, and her own, ever-changing sense of self as an academic and an expert in our field. In “Following Participants as Leaders in Long Research,” Lauren Rosenberg is equally reflective about her work and the ways her research has, over decades, intertwined her life with the lives of others. Specifically, Rosenberg reflects on the uniquely organic and dialogic way her work with adult literacy learners became longitudinal. Incorporating surprise and flux into the regimentation of IRB-approved research and roles, Rosenberg models what it looks like—and what is to be gained—when researchers are willing to follow participants’ lead and allow their interests to guide and even drive ongoing inquiries.

The four chapters that follow tell stories about longitudinal research relations on a broader scale. They showcase some of the many ways multi-year studies of college writers and college writing are also

studies of the colleges and universities in which each study takes place. Importantly, the chapters contributed by Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano; Amy C. Kimme Hea; Doug Downs, Mark Schlenz, Miles Nolte, and Ashley Rives; and Aimee C. Mapes do not tell full-blown stories of sponsorship; nor should their contributions be read as full-fledged institutional ethnographies. Instead, these middle chapters bring attention to the “ideological freight” colleges and universities contribute to campus-based longitudinal studies (Brandt 1998, 168), and in doing so they show how writing researchers bear that weight—whether as gifts or burdens—in their work.

Coauthors Hassel and Giordano as well as Kimme Hea delve into the complexities of institutional dynamics and their long-term impacts on student writers, writing researchers, and the enterprise of writing education that so much longitudinal research is designed to serve. In “Mission-Driven Longitudinal Research: The Public Value of Telling Stories of Two-Year College Writers,” Hassel and Giordano outline the intense political and institutional pressures they faced as co-researchers at a community college within the University of Wisconsin System. Theirs is a story of constant negotiation with not only limited resources and accompanying rhetorics of austerity but also persistent exigences for longitudinal research and related, evidence-based revisions to college writing curricula along with the attitudes and received ideas that undergird them. The story Kimme Hea tells in “Understanding Imbricated Contexts: Institutional Formation and Longitudinal Writing Research” offers some surprising parallels. Writing from the University of Arizona, Kimme Hea stories some of the institutional and environmental factors that explicitly shaped her and her colleagues’ longitudinal work, including draconian state immigration policies. Her assertion is for us researchers to consider specific institutional formations as we outline our research efforts.

The next two chapters also tell stories of institutional relations, but they look more closely at relationships among longitudinal writing researchers, paying particular attention to when and how the power dynamics of rank and role inflect longitudinal research practices and processes. In “Researching for Capital: Longitudinal Research, Precarity, and Institutional Citizenship,” Downs, Schlenz, Nolte, and Rives tell a multi-perspectival tale of program-based longitudinal research and academic labor. Together, they examine ethical questions that arise when tenured writing administrators and adjunct writing instructors undertake longitudinal research meant to assess and improve writing instruction at an institution that does not support or credit faculty equally

for scholarship, teaching, or service. In “More Simple Gifts: Labor, Relationships, and Ethics in Longitudinal Research,” Mapes centers her story of longitudinal research on her own positionality as a non-tenure-track faculty member who joined a longitudinal study in progress as a co-principal investigator. The latter role put her in a supervisory relationship to more than a dozen graduate research assistants, creating a tricky dynamic that Mapes stories to identify and value its many gifts of “exchange, obligation, and reciprocity.”

The final three chapters of this volume tell stories of longitudinal research in relation to specific communities of professional practice, where longitudinal research is—or can and should be—practiced: namely, technical and professional communication (TPC), the emerging US-based field of lifespan studies, and the rhetoric and composition/writing studies archives. To begin, Yanar Hashlamon stories longitudinal writing research as a means of advancing the social justice turn in TPC. Ostensibly, “The Precarious Method: Longitudinal Research and Material Uncertainty in Professional and Technical Writing Studies” presents classroom-based longitudinal writing studies as a means of countering the problem of determinism about workplace writing that persists in TPC research. In this chapter, Hashlamon also stories his own workplace writing, examining his role as a graduate student principal investigator of a classroom-based longitudinal study to lay bare some of the many ways precarity informs his work as much as his commitments to anti-capitalist pedagogy and ongoing critique of the corporate neoliberal university.

Where Hashlamon sees longitudinal research as a means of advancing an established area of study, Ryan J. Dippre and Talinn Phillips see it as a resource for establishing something new. Specifically, in “Radically Longitudinal, Radically Contextual,” where they tell the story of “Growing Lifespan Writing Research,” they also narrate some of the ways that longitudinal research can participate. As they explain at the outset of their chapter, “The diverse research methods and approaches of our fields often don’t speak effectively to each other,” and “even when methods do play well together, the field often lacks the structures and incentives to encourage researchers to play together themselves.” Directly addressing readers who are (or may be) longitudinal researchers, they write: “Our aim here is to help those with longitudinal research experience understand how to bring a lifespan lens to existing and future projects.” Jenn Fishman seems to have a very different destination for longitudinal researchers in mind when she encourages readers to head for the archives. In “Becoming History,” she tells stories from

her own work on the Stanford Study of Writing and Vernon Writes to explore possibilities—and possible reasons—for working in the archives of previously conducted longitudinal studies of writing. Hers is a somewhat novel suggestion, one that recalls previously collected longitudinal data to life and opens new opportunities for would-be longitudinal writing researchers. It also complements the impulse of lifespan and life course studies to capture the whole story of an individual writer or a group of writers or a particular era within the history of writing.

Of course, there is never a “whole story” to be told. Instead, there are always innumerable, ever-evolving stories that reflect the positionality, the disposition and predispositions, and the emplacement of the teller(s). The stories in this volume capture particular perspectives on longitudinal writing research; in doing so, they afford us glimpses into others’ writing and researching lives. The stories also complement other forms of reflecting and reporting on research, and as such they enrich both our knowledge of writing and our efforts to share that knowledge with one another.

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