ABSTRACT

Title: Space and Sponsorship in the University
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Thesis Type: Independent Thesis
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This thesis explores the hierarchies of literacy that are upheld and perpetuated in the university. By using a case study of three different institutions at the University of Massachusetts Amherst—the Writing Center, Commonwealth Honors College, and the University Writing Program, this thesis argues that the university functions as a sponsor of white, middle-class English and that this sponsorship is manifested in the physical spaces of those three sites of inquiry. By exploring the institutional rhetoric and function of those three sites, that either support or challenge the university’s literacy sponsorship, this project complicates the centuries-long tension between who has access and who belongs in institutions of higher education.
Review of Literature

The question that is being explored is how the university sponsors a white middle-class Standard English, which I will refer to as SAE throughout this project. The field of literature in review spans from literacy studies, to the history of composition studies, to Writing Centers, and finally to critical university studies. The literature review is organized in that order, moving from the broadest theory of literacy to the most specific arguments of how those theories of literacy are perpetuated in America’s universities and Writing Centers.

At its core, this project is grounded in Deborah Brandt’s theory of literacy sponsorship, defined as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (19). She identifies sponsors as those who “…lend their resources or credibility to the sponsored but also stand to gain benefits from their success, whether by direct repayment or, indirectly, by credit of association” (19). While Brandt structures the argument of sponsorship, she integrates a definition of human capital, which argues that individuals and companies invest in and profit by the development of intellectual capacities (6). Sponsorship is presented in the context of what Brandt identifies as a history of literacy learning that has been predicated on “…permission, sanction, assistance, [or] coercion…” and facilitated by sponsors who subsidize—or don’t—the development of individual’s literacies to accumulate the corresponding resources to their benefit (19). It is important to remember that a sponsor can chose to neglect the literacy
learning of a people when it determines that the literacy of those people will no longer serve its interest (Brandt 70).

Further, the commodification of literacy by American capitalism only serves to perpetuate structures of racial and class oppression of those literacy learners (Brandt 183). As the populations that American universities serve becomes more diverse in terms of racial and class identities, the argument that the commodification of literacy perpetuates racism and classism is crucial to later works of scholarship in this field.

The commodification of literacy perpetuating systemic oppression also lends itself to what happens when universities increasingly replicate market interests in their institutional practices, and disadvantage the economically disadvantaged even further. Brandt argues that schools should stabilize and augment the value and development of all forms of literacy learning. Further, she argues “schools must…provide for minority constituents the kinds of reading materials and other cultural products that consumer markets overlook and…devise language curriculums that better acknowledge the multilingual conditions in which English literacy finds its meaning for many Americans” (Brandt 186).

However, those same skills have been the fodder for “…resistance, rebellion, the calming of voice, and the development of critical consciousness” (Brandt 148). Much of the other scholarship relating to composition and Writing Centers is grounded in this balance of the sponsor—the university—constricting student writing to only the “academic” and never the personal or radical.

David Fleming’s *From Form to Meaning* is able to historicize the struggle between “academic” writing being “personal” or “political” in composition programs on college
Elizabeth Boquet’s *Noise from the Writing Center* expands on the work of Brandt in many ways as she attempts to better understand the complicated relationship that Writing Center’s hold within the university. Boquet understands Writing Center work to be moving away from university expectations, and the farther a Writing Center moves from those expectations, the more marginal their role becomes. She is able to color this logic by talking about a past experience where a faculty member interrupted a Writing Center staff meeting and told them to quiet down, because they were disrupting his work. It is from this complaint of disruption that Boquet is able to question how the university values centrality and collaborative practices. Boquet asserts that if this view of the Writing Center’s practices as being grounded in centrality is contributing to its marginality in the university, then our institutions are failing us (49).

Boquet expands further on how institutional expectations shape the work of the Writing Center. For example, it is common that Writing Center’s advertise their services as serving more than remedial students; often banners or advertisements will explicitly say “we work with all writers.” Additionally, Boquet reflected on the research that is done between grades and attendance at a Writing Center, and questioned if that was data a Writing Center community cared about or if it was data that administrators care about (64).
Those decisions to identify with non-remedial students and present quantifiable data that administrators value area are all steps that contradict the values of individual student growth that the Writing Center was built off of in order to gain institutional clout and security. Boquet identifies the Writing Center as a place “…of amplification and feedback rather than a receptacle” (77), which is representative of how many scholars view the work of the Writing Center.

Harry Denny’s arguments in *Queering the Center* are in conversation with much of what Boquet has argued about the position of the Writing Center within the university. Denny also touches upon the simplification of Writing Center work in an effort to increase its “sellable efficacy to administrators.” Denny identifies the often tenuous professional identities that often direct Writing Centers—only a quarter of directors hold tenure-track positions. Historically, Writing Centers were viewed—and an argument could be made that they still are—highly feminized spaces, conducting lesser academic work. They also were—and still are—spaces that challenge institutional, educational, cultural, and political tensions.

In conversation with Brandt’s warning about what happens when universities replicate market interests with institutional practices, Denny argues that the Writing Center is a space that supports institutional and social change without necessarily benefiting corporatist academic interests. Further, Denny argues that the conversations that happen within the Writing Center “directly confronts the very human tensions” between lower and working class sociolinguistics with the academy’s demands for middle- and upper- class sociolinguistic standards (147). Very importantly, Denny argues that by nature the
university renders students with lower and working class sociolinguistic invisible, and it is the work of the Writing Center to challenge that invisibility.

Nancy Grimm’s *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times* provides a comprehensive and through understanding of how universities’ value a white middle class English and how they relate to it. Grimm addresses the realities of systemic racism and classism in a much more direct and unapologetic manner than any of the other works of literature. For example, Grimm argues that literacy comes from race and class, as opposed to being the cure for it. She continues to argue that as university’s increase the enrollment of diverse students, they continue to want a clear and standard English; however, it is always made to be the responsibility of the students to assimilate to that standard of English (Grimm 2). The university distances itself from that responsibility through the Writing Center, and in turn the Writing Center distances themselves from those same students by claiming to work with “not just remedial students.”

Grimm returns to the marginal and tenuous position Writing Centers can find themselves within the university and expands on it by then attempting to understand how that influences the actions of the Writing Center. First, she identifies the liberal root of the Writing Center that was focused on making the Other more like “us” which is essentially the same logic the university uses in establishing a Standard English. Moreover, much of standard tutoring philosophy is focused on a “non-directive” style that views the tutor and tutee as peers. Grimm extends this line of critical thought to also question if that dynamic is truly a peer-to-peer relationship considering the complexity of the dynamic (Grimm 112). In many ways, she is able to expose how the tutor has benefited in many ways from
literacy and how the other has been oppressed by it—and when put in the larger context of sponsorship this claim is very, very powerful.

Another challenge that the field addresses is what happens when a Writing Center is merged with or linked to another academic support service that does may challenge or even contradict the foundational philosophy of the Writing Center. Competition inevitably arises and support services find themselves working against each other in attempt to remain on campus.

Much of the literature presented works off of a similar understanding of how universities value a SAE without interrogating how physical spaces on campus manifest that sponsorship. In many ways, much of the scholarship has identified how the Writing Center becomes the space where the tension between the “diversity” that the university claims to strive for clashes with the larger university priority of a clear Standard English. Grimm is the only scholar that truly touches on how the field of Writing Center studies has good intentions but is often failing the remedial students that the university has taken no responsibility to support. This project is able to bridge the gap between the concept of the university as a sponsor of SAE and the physical spaces that perpetuate and are created by that sponsorship.

Introduction

On November 12, 2015 Marty Meehan was inaugurated as the President of the University of Massachusetts. It was a well-calculated move to not only elect a career politician—former chancellor of one of the five UMass campuses and a former Congressman—but to elect a Lowell-native at a time when the university is in a self-reported crisis amid a long-term cutback in state funding for the university system.
I grew up in the suburb next to Lowell and was raised to value a work ethic rooted in Marty (Mah-tee) Meehan’s ascendancy from South Lowell to Congress: the only thing keeping you out of the marble hallways of Congress is hard work. The bootstrap story was used to downplay genuine concerns about a high school that failed physical and academic standards almost yearly—the average SAT score from my high school was in the lowest margin for admissions into the least competitive state universities. Without fail, a critical lens of the school system was smeared by the idea that the responsibility was wholly that of the students—if you wanted to get into a good school, it was on you.

And now, half a decade later, the bootstrap rhetoric of Marty is being used again, but this time to blur the critical lens that has been intensely focused on the American university in a self-reported “crisis.” After losing a contentious battle for increased funding with the State Legislature, UMass announced an increase in tuition and fees—a few months later, $20,000 bonuses for top administrators were granted by newly appointed President Marty Meehan. Even Marty’s annual salary as President of UMass—twice that of the President of The United States—has been called into serious question. Yet, in all of the promotional material and official announcements following his appointment, the message was so clearly that he is one of us; he is working-class and hard working. But he is also the wide-smiling, sleeves-rolled-back career politician that the university understands to be normative, to be objective. It is from this understanding of how the university views itself, of whose bootstraps it believes to be lifting, that this project moves from.

Chapter One:
Temporary versus Permanent Sponsorship in the Writing Center

In Stephen North’s Revisiting “The Idea of a Writing Center” he views the Writing Center “…as institutional conscience, that small nagging voice that ostensibly reminds the institution of its duties regarding writing” (North 87). Twenty-two years later, the Writing Center’s voice has only become louder and more persistent as universities are under an increased pressure to recruit, retain, and support low-income and students of color. In fact, at Mount St. Mary’s University in Maryland President Simon Newman planned to have freshmen take a survey during their orientation that would help them better understand “…motivation, success and happiness” (Schisler). It became clear that President Newman was planning on removing 20-25 students based on the results of this survey to increase their retention percentage. In response to concerns President Newman said, “This is hard for you because you think of the students as cuddly bunnies, but you can’t. You just have to drown the bunnies…put a Glock to their heads” (Schisler). President Newman later fired the professor who oversaw The Mountain Echo, the student newspaper that broke the story, and a tenured professor who strongly disagreed with what he had done (Grenoble).

While President Newman’s alarmingly violent and malicious comments are unique, he offers insight into how remedial students are often seen by administrators as holding a university back. He also offers insight into the pressures that could be placed on university administrators to keep moving up in their rankings and increasing the profile of the university. It is even harder to see administrator actively advocating for increased funding for those remedial students.

When remedial students’ literacy practices clash with SAE, which is understood to be an “academic” literacy, the responsibility to assimilate is left completely with the
student (Grimm 2). Despite the funding the university provides to student support services, such as the Writing Center, it is still largely understood to be “fixing” writing, as opposed to providing a community that can create sustained long-term writing support. Throughout the history of writing centers, the position of the Writing Center within the university, has existed within an ambiguous and tenuous matrix of temporary and permanence—it has never been viewed as an integral support network for writing on campus.

The university creates a fractal relationship with its writing center that is highly selective in what is seen and in what is heard—what is amplified and what muted. At UMass Amherst, our Writing Center is a staple stop on the campus tour—the tours stop outside the walls, looking in. The university tour guide recites the stump speech about how the Writing Center is not only free, but also can help you improve your grade on a paper. In fact, it has become quite common to overhear the adage that the Writing Center can raise your grade by half a letter grade. And while it’s frustrating to have the work of the Writing Center misunderstood, it’s infuriating to see it simplified and mischaracterized.

By representing the work of the Writing Center to be cheap and convenient, the university is able to avoid acknowledgment of a highly trained, passionate community that not only tutors writing, but also engages in a larger discourse of scholarship that critically interrogates composition and literacy practices. While that may seem like a broad claim to make based off a 5 minute stop on a campus tour, the narrative—or lack of one—that the university tells allows the Writing Center to become expendable.

Further, the potential expendability exists within our praxis as well. Writing Centers pride themselves on a peer-to-peer model with the hopes of creating a comfortable and equitable relationship between tutor and tutee. Yet, the operation of the Writing Center
functions on an explicitly temporary and temporal individual conference. Conferences have to be held to the 45-minute appointment with the certainty that the tutor and tutee may not work together again—the work the tutor and tutee do together is temporary in every sense of the word.

Further, the peer-to-peer model also fails to acknowledge the systemic inequities that influence people’s literacies that are within the Writing Center, either as tutor or tutee. While both the tutor and the tutee sit across from each other as students, one of them is being paid for a supposed expertise in writing, while the other is seeking help from a peer. The dynamic of the conference is anything but peer-relational, since one student is benefiting for their literacy while the other is oppressed for it (Grimm 112). And when we interrogate the disparity between a lifetime of permanent sponsorship and a 45-minute session of sponsorship, the degree to which students without a white, middle-class English are abandoned on an institutional level becomes unfathomable. The ephemeral moments of mini-sponsorship are intended to create balance against a tide of inequity and oppression; but if you’re still can’t assimilate to academic writing, it’s on you.

The fear of the expendability the tutee has towards this university support exists also for those within the center as well. Many of the professional identities within writing centers throughout the country are highly tenuous, and one could even argue within the university itself. According to Denny’s *Facing the Center* “…only twenty-six per cent of directors held tenure-track positions…[a] majority…occupy non-tenurable faculty or full-time administrative lines…Associate and assistant directorships have an even lower representation of full-time staffing (47%), with a sizeable population of graduate students doing double-duty as administrators (20%) (147).
The conversations that happen within the Writing Center challenge the University’s sponsorship in a way that no other university-funded support system does. In “Queering the Wiring Center,” Denny argues that the conversation in the Writing Center is one that is overflowing with binaries that are constantly being challenged, such as directive vs. non-directive, an expert vs. a novice, and a faculty member vs. an administrator (41). It becomes impossible to not overhear or see those verbal and non-verbal contradictions being realized in a session. The tension that exists when working- and lower-class sociolinguistics clash with the University’s demand for a white middle-class English becomes physically apparent in a very real and human way within the Writing Center. Those students without a white middle-class English would have otherwise been invisible within the university, and the Writing Center becomes one of the few spaces where the University is challenged.

**Space of the Writing Center**

The physical space of the Writing Center offers a wealth of insight into not only how the University values the Writing Center, but how the work of the Writing Center is in many ways contradicting the larger short- and long-term goals of the University. The Writing Center at UMass Amherst—like many other writing centers—is located in the basement of the library that is 26 floors high, the tallest academic library in the world. The Writing Center is located on the far side of a square basement bustling with different spaces; public access computers, group study rooms, and a modern, open-layout individual and group workspace. A wall was built off the main wall to close off the space of the Writing Center, with two windows facing the Learning Commons.
The pairing of the Writing Center and the Learning Commons is a collaborative pairing between two services on campus that are both considered marginal spaces on campus. As the virtual world grows more rapidly, Libraries are finding themselves with lots of space that is not used in the same way, while Writing Centers work against being located in hard-to-find and isolated spaces (Elmborg 9). This interdisciplinary collaboration is something that administrators strive for since they don’t believe the Writing Center or Library produces “real” scholarship, since Writing Center and Library professionals are more focused on the less valued service and teaching aspects of academia (Elmborg 9).

This understanding of the location of the Writing Center complicates the idea that the gaze of the university upon the Writing Center is objective or impartial. In her book *Noise from the Writing Center* Stephanie Boquet argues that through “…feminist initiatives, through multicultural initiatives, through postmodern, postcolonial, and queer theory…the gaze—once posited as objective, as disinterested—is actually partial: both limited and interested” (55). In many ways, we fail to acknowledge how our location, the space that has been created for us, engenders self-imposed surveillance of our practices. When writing centers distance themselves remedial students by “not just working with remedial students” they reflect the same distancing the university does, because they know they are within the institutional periphery.

In order to truly understand the supposed “peer-to-peer” dynamic, we must fully acknowledge the complexity of the gaze that is upon the Writing Center and how we are responding to it. When we identify our work as supporting ‘not just remedial students’ we are distancing ourselves from remedial students in the same way the university does,
because the gaze of the university upon our space is so apparent. Despite a field of theory of research, our shift away from creating a space that is explicitly focused on supporting remedial students represents how we are trying to rebrand our work in a way that is quantifiable and palatable for university administrators to fund. We inflict a mirrored system of values with the university because of its gaze.

We are focused on imagining what the gaze sees when it looks at the work of our Writing Center within the larger context of the university’s short- and long-term goals. For example, we are forced to conceptualize and digest our work and space in the context of our University’s projected financial status and identification with educational priorities. The UMass Rising initiative is a highly publicized $300 million fundraising campaign focused on “…attract[ing] students with merit- and need-based scholarships, recruit[ing] and retain[ing] exceptional faculty, conduct[ing] research that improves the human condition, creat[ing] buildings and infrastructure that promote learning, [and] strengthen participation in annual giving” (“The Campaign”). While one could argue that those five fundraising priorities are a way of making up for a long-term cutback by the State Legislature in funding, the rhetoric of the campaign speaks very clearly to the priorities and values of university administrators that want to distance themselves from remedial students. On the website of the UMass Rising campaign, the mission of the campaign is identified as “enable[ing] this flagship campus to make a quantum leap in quality, impact and reputation (“Home Page UMass Rising”). If the reputation and ranking of a university exists on a spectrum, with remedial on one end and renown on the other, the UMass Rising campaign is imagining the University as moving toward a more renowned ranking and away from the remedial. The language of rising implies that the University is moving up
from a lower position; not only is the university failing to support remedial students, it’s trying to completely disassociate itself with them.

**Queer Space**

Throughout the fall semester, I worked with a Ph.D. student in Economics who was applying for a number of highly competitive fellowships to support her research and teaching. Many of the fellowships asked her to talk about her various accomplishments and experiences and how they informed her current research interests. Yet, as a Palestinian woman who won a generous scholarship to a highly renowned liberal arts college, she was hesitant to write about why she was truly motivated to study border-conflict economies. Yet, she often found little diversity—of nationality, of race, of sex, or of thought—within the field. Most problem sets assumed an independent two-state system between Israel and Palestine, which seemed quite disconnected from the reality of the problem. She was focused on doing research in the field that genuinely acknowledged the complexity of the dynamic, and making that information palatable to the non-academic communities that were being directly impacted by the economy in question. Throughout that semester, we focused more on how to make her story palatable to a committee than how to make it competitive. We experienced the human tension that Denny refers to as the values of university sponsorship were challenged by her experiences and opinions. What became obvious to both of us was how the university fails to acknowledge or privilege stories that are non-normative to the larger narrative of university sponsorship. This tutee’s experience was unique, since her story could have been so easily excised by the university and made to be a bootstrap story. Yet, she chose to turn a critical lens to the many ways in which the
university fails to acknowledge the lived experiences by the marginal people that they study.

In all of our sessions there were other tutors and tutees sitting a few feet away from us; in one session, she bumped up against another tutee sitting behind her. The question we must ask is what did the people sitting next to or near us in the center hear? After one session, a fellow tutor who was sitting at the table in the center of the room said, “Wow, that sounded like a really intense session.” Having a space where a student was able to discuss and receive support while working through complex respectability politics and oppressive practices of the university is certainty challenging normative practices. However, having other students who may not have ever been exposed to a non-normative narrative overhear and physically experience that tension is very, very queer.

In “(Re)Educating the Senses: Multimodal listening, Bodily Learning, and the Composition of Sonic Experiences” Steph Ceraso defines multimodal listening as:

A practice that involves attending to not only the sensory, embodied experience of sound, but to the material and environmental aspects that comprise and shape one’s embodied experience of sound...multimodal listening amplifies the ecological relationship between sound, bodies, and environments. Broadly speaking, multimodal listening is a bodily practice that approaches sound as a holistic experience. (105)

The physical space of the Writing Center—two rows of tables with their backs to the center, where there is a small table for tutors to sit, in a relatively confined space—promotes, if not requires a full-bodied sensory environment. It was impossible to be in the center and not hear/feel the anxieties and tensions of the session I had with her. Further, Dewey
identifies an ‘esthetic’ experience, “instead of signifying being shut up in one’s own private feelings and sensations, it…signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events” (Ceraso 106).

This esthetic experience of overhearing and witnessing what would have otherwise been a private and personal struggle of negotiating the power dynamics between respectability politics cannot be overstated. In fact, it complicates the objective voice that is encouraged in academic writing; something that is often missed in the classroom. Jonathan Doucette cites this lack of queerness and assimilation to dominant cultural values and practices in student writing in John Goshert’s article Reproductions of (Il)Literacy: Gay Knowledge and Composition Pedagogy: “…assimilation is predicated on the suppression of critical inquiry, and allowing students to…consume and reproduce the discursive products of dominant culture in the classroom (Doucette 5-6). Doucette goes on to cite a more long-term esthetic experience as a first-year student at a conservative liberal-arts college where both his professors and his classmates approached identities as a “…rigid, confined, ahistorical, and unchanging entity…” (7) through an objective lens. When he transferred to Oberlin College, he was surrounded in a new community of critical thought and reflexively witnessed a transition in his thinking and writing to be very non-normative. The “distanced, masculine, heterosexual discourse” that he used in his writing distanced him from viewing his writing as having any connection with his personal identities (7).

The transition Doucette made is a powerful account of the realized potential of the esthetic experience. While Doucette’s is an example of long-term and large-scale
experience, the space of the Writing Center produces a similar esthetic experience of the limits of distant, objective and hetero-normative systems of thinking and writing. For what seemed like generic and simple—one could even argue objective—questions about her experiences and research, the impossibility of responding with distance, objectivity, and hetero-normative language became visible to not just myself and her but to the people who may have never had to think that way before.

**Chapter Two: Aspirational Sponsorship in the Honors College**

The burgeoning Commonwealth Honors College (CHC)—the Honors Program within UMass Amherst—is a hyper-focused sponsor of a consolidated SAE, through not only their academic programs but their residential ones as well. CHC advertises itself as a small college within a large university; it has its own academic dean, lecturers, advisors, classrooms, residence halls, and writing coach. Many classes within the university have the “honors” designation, which implies an increased workload, but there are also classes that are administered by the Honors College. Much of the rhetoric behind the college signifies a higher academic rigor and class-related prestige.

In comparing the mission statements of both the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the Commonwealth Honors College, we are able to not only gain further insight into how the Honors College understands its own purpose, but how it is positioned to the rest of the university. The only available university mission statement was in 2005 by the Board of Trustees, and it is as follows: “To provide an affordable and assessable education of high quality and to conduct programs of research and service that advance
knowledge and improve the lives of the people of the Commonwealth, the nation, and the
world” (Standard One: Mission and Purposes). The mission statement of the Honors
College says: “[CHC] offers highly motivated UMass Amherst students an opportunity to
pursue broad inquiry and to engage in the creation of new knowledge by working closely
with faculty. With a commitment to building a diverse and inclusive community, [CHC]
encourages students to become leaders in thought and action” (Mission). There is an
explicit divergence from the university’s mission by the Honors College that signifies an
increased and individualized form of sponsorship. The mission statement of UMass is
devoid of any narrative pertaining to the lives or intellect of the students it’s providing with
an education. However, the Honors College mission statement represents a much greater
level of individualized support and a somewhat consolidated path to valuable mentorship
and assistantships with campus faculty.

Further, the language of the Honors College mission statement is stepped in
suggestions of an elite English and separation from any form of remedialization. If a
student is “engag[ing] in the creation of new knowledge by working closely with faculty”
their literacy level has to be beyond satisfactory and perhaps in the realm of scholarly. If it
is the mission of the Honors College—and not UMass Amherst—to “encourage[…]”
students to become leaders in thought and action” we must then interrogate the divergence
between both institutions understanding of its purpose in serving its students.

In fact, much of the language used by the Honors College refers to students, not as
students, but as scholars. In another mission statement that was available on the Honors
College website, the Honors College claims to “[p]rovide an intellectually challenging
honors curriculum, create a community of scholars, and prepare future leaders” (Academic
Experience). A scholar is, by definition “[a] specialist in a particular branch of study, especially in the humanities; a distinguished academic” (Scholar). Undergraduate students certainly aren’t viewed as specialists in academia, so what can we draw from the Honors College viewing their students as scholars, and their residential community as a “community of scholars”?

For one, that Honors College students possess a literacy elite enough for them to not only be mentored in advanced scholarly work, but to participate in it. The “Academic Experience” page on the Honors College website goes on to say: “[a]s a [CHC] student…you will be expected to reach beyond the boundaries of your academic major and join in scholarly conversation with students and faculty from disciplines other than your own” (Academic Experience). Expecting undergraduate students to not only understand a scholarly conversation, but to join an interdisciplinary one suggests that students within the Honors College are in many ways required to mirror the elite English of the academy. Since the residential community the Honors College has created is philosophically and physically an academic one, we can also understand the expectation to “…join in scholarly conversation with students and faculty from disciplines other than your own” as an indicator of the conversations that happen within the social residential spaces. If students are unable to mirror the elite English in scholarly conversation, they not only find themselves failing to meet the expectations of their academic college, but possibly failing to meet the expectations of their peers in their social residential community.

**A Writing Coach**

At the beginning of the 2015-2016 academic year, the Honors College instated a Writing Coach, for Honors Students, to help in any stage of their writing. The Writing
Coach offers “30-minute appointments scheduled in advance or 15-minute appointments on a first-come first-served basis” (Writing Coach). The services that the coach offers are broadly explained as “[the writing coach] assists with process, editing, structure, and style on papers and writing assignments from any course or on any section of the Honors Thesis” (Writing Coach). Over the duration of this project, three new coaches have been added, but the original Writing Coach was described as “…a writing instructor for more than 15 years. A published essayist…[she] has extensive experience as a private tutor teaching literature, writing, and conversation in advanced English for ELS student. She is also a flutist who performs chamber music locally and teaches flue. She holds degrees in English from Harvard and Stanford” (Writing Coach). The sponsorship intended by the Honors College, and by extension the university, is very clearly focused on providing support for students to replicate and reproduce a highly elite academic English. In a four line long bio, degrees in English from Harvard and Stanford are clear significations for students who are in the Honors College and want to, in many ways, distance themselves from the rest of the university; this coach can provide them access to that coveted world.

The rhetoric of a coach needs to be broken down further to fully understand the form of aspirational sponsorship that is happening. While the argument was made in the first chapter that in the writing center, the peer-to-peer understanding of our tutoring is representative of a naïve misrepresentation of the complex power dynamic surrounding literacy and the university, the argument made in this chapter is to build off that understanding in realizing the value and meaning of a “coach.”

The description of the coach suggests that she is considerably older than an undergraduate tutor, and much more experienced. She holds multiple degrees from the
most prestigious universities in the country, and has over a decade of teaching and writing experience. Tutors at the Writing Center also write bio descriptions, which tutees can review when selecting a tutor to work with. To illustrate this contrast, one tutor’s bio says:

Lauren…is a Ph.D. student in English and America studies who hates writing prose but loves revising it! She enjoys brainstorming throughout the writing process, and is particularly interested in how form and structure convey purpose. Lauren loves to talk out ideas, often taking notes or drawing pictures to help visualize the moving pieces of a writing project. Within her own studies, Lauren is interested in contemporary narratives of migration to the United States. Her research focuses on how people, labor, capital, and (trans)national discourses of belonging move through bodily, psychic, and geopolitical boundaries. (Silber)

Lauren’s bio not only identifies herself as a writer, even one who hates certain parts of writing, but expands on the practices she enjoys using most during her sessions. She is also clearly identified as a student, and while she is a graduate student, she is still able to come across as a peer after explaining her practices and her personal academic interests. While drawing distinction between the descriptions given by the coach and by a tutor seems pedantic, they represent not only powerful moments of rhetorical effect on outsiders, but they give insight into the philosophy driving both support services. While the Writing Coach’s bio focused more on her credentials to work on writing, Lauren’s bio articulated the practices she would use with the writer.

In order to understand the philosophy informing how each institution views itself in relation to efforts of sponsorship by the university, we must turn to their mission statements to analyze their motivations. There is an introductory paragraph on the Writing
Coach website that summarizes the services of the Writing Coach, which we can assume to function as a mission statement: “[CHC] offers students the opportunity to work one-on-one with experienced instructors and writing coaches. Writing coaches assist with process, editing, structure, and style on papers and writing assignments from any course or on sections of the Honors Thesis.” The Writing Center has a similar introductory paragraph on their website as well: “We believe that every writer deserves a reader. Writing Center tutors work with undergrad, graduate, staff, post-doc, and faculty writers on any academic genre at any point in the writing process” (Welcome to the UMass Writing Center). Both statements begin from two very different perspectives; the Writing Coach is framing the service as an opportunity that is being offered to students by the Honors College, and the Writing Center is framing itself as a community with values around writing. While both services receive funding from academic branches of the university, the Writing Coach relates itself directly to the Honors College, whereas the Writing Center imagines itself as a collective “we” that is not only offering a service to a student but believes that they deserve access to it. If it is the mission of the Honors College to create “scholars” and “leaders in thought and action” then the Writing Coach functions as a sponsor of an elite English for those budding scholars.

While ‘coach’ and ‘tutor’ suggest different forms of praxis, the guiding philosophies of both services are contrary to the implication their name has. A ‘coach’ implies a long-term and sustained support service. However, conferences are 30-minutes with an appointment and 15-minutes on a drop-in first-come first-serve basis (Writing Coach). Conversely, a tutor implies a short-term service, but the philosophy behind the
work of the tutors in the Writing Center is much more focused on sustained, high-stakes writing support.

In understanding how to parse out the differences between the ‘coach’ and the ‘tutor’ it’s important to consider how both institutions—the Honors College and UMass Amherst—view their responsibility to their students. Much of the rhetoric used by the Honors College denotes an elite English amongst its students by viewing them as scholars. Therefore, we must interrogate the service of the Writing Coach as a service that is intended to support students who are understood to be “scholars.” The presumption is that undergraduate students, who are engaging in a scholarly conversation across disciplines, do not need sustained, long-term collaborative support—especially not from their peers.

If “…Writing Centers are, as cultural studies scholars say, a site of struggle within the institution of the university, perhaps the primary site, given the important role we have given to literacy in our society” (Cooper 48) then we must understand the work of the coach to be on the opposite end of the struggle within the university. By creating an institution that is devoid of “remedial” students, the Honors College has removed themselves, and its students, from the struggle within the University. If the Writing Center is a site of struggle, the Writing Coach—and the Honors College that funds it—is a site of privileged ascension.

The Space of the Honors College

If the Honors College works to provide advanced academic opportunities for its students, then the space of the Commonwealth Honors College Residential Community is a physical manifestation of that sponsorship. The residential community not only features state-of-the-art residential facilities on a campus where most residential halls are at least
half a century old, but it has a central location to the classroom buildings, the library, and
the recreation center. While these observations seem somewhat trivial to the larger
arguments of literacy sponsorship, they are crucial in understanding how attitudes towards
the Honors College, and the rest of the university, have begun to shift due to the visibility
of the space it occupies.

Beyond being new residential halls, they are also some of the most expensive living
options for on-campus students at the university. The creation of an elite or exclusive
academic community has now been manifested into a physical one that not only separates
students who have the highest grades and SAT scores, but those who have the financial
flexibility to afford the program and the residential community.

The Honors College identifies their goal of the residential community as being able
to “…offer[…] students the opportunity to truly live in a community of scholars”
(Frequently Asked Questions). Within the residential community, there are live-in faculty
members who partake in community events and remain visible in student residential
spaces. Ivy-League universities most famously use this living-learning model, and it works
to fulfill the Honors College mission of having undergraduate students operate as
“scholars” in the university. Having faculty live alongside students in the Honors
residential community quite literally communicates the position of Honors College
students to faculty, and offers unique moments of sponsorship that are available to them in
establishing mentors and advisors in accomplished senior faculty.

Harry Denny cites the human tension that arises during session in the writing center,
as different sociolinguistics clash with standards of the academy; but if this Honors
residential community is formed around a similar success within the academy, where does
that tension arise. The UMass Amherst Department of Residential Life has a “Residential Life Statement on Multiculturalism” which cites the preface of The Promise of Diversity by Frederick A. Miller: “[d]eveloping the dialogue may not be easy or quick. But by hearing the voices, valuing the experiences, and respecting their points of view, the dialogue finally becomes possible. And that’s where all progress begins” (Residential Life Statement on Multiculturalism). Stephanie Kerschbaum presents a similar understanding of the importance on interactional diversity in the classroom: “…classroom diversity puts students into contact with information about different cultures and worldviews…as students read, talk, and write with others…students realize their own situatedness in a multicultural world” (79). Further, Kerschbaum argues what is lost when residential communities take away from students’ interactional opportunities: “If student’ experiences do not often or regularly intersect with others’, then it is harder to forge connections and relationships…therefore, to foster such interaction among students, institutions need to provide structures that heighten students’ interactional opportunities…” (84). Kerschbaum is able to provide an in-depth analysis of what happens when we not only exclude difference from the classroom, but we remove it from the social communities that students are a part of.

In light of these arguments, we ask why universities invest resources into programs that seem to create opportunity for those that need it the least. Cooper argues, “…when we remember that such programs are reserved for the elite, the inescapable conclusion is that, whatever we may say individually, as a society we don’t want to eradicate class differences. This decision is inscribed in our tacit beliefs about literacy, beliefs that enable us to use literacy to maintain privilege for the privileged” (Cooper 55). For example, the physical
space of the Honors College has a quality to it that suggests it is always ready to be photographed for a university brochure. The quads in-between the buildings are often filled with people playing frisbee or lounging in the grass—it is certainly not a place that has connotations of financial struggle, for the university or the students. That type of physical design for a residential community is unique to the Honors College, and it is unsurprising that it is a space that attracts and fosters a privileged community.

Chapter Three: Vocational or Moral Sponsorship in the University Writing Program

In 1975, Newsweek published “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” a 4,000-word expose on the supposed literacy crisis in the United States: “Willy-nilly, the U.S. educational system is spawning a generation of semiliterates” (Sheils 1). Throughout the article, much of the anxiety surrounding this literacy crisis seems to be stifled by two forces: the notion that Standard English is being threatened by expanding uses of English, and that this literacy crisis will lead to a generation of less-profitable employees.

The anxiety over the power that Standard English may lose amongst the rise of multiple Englishes is made most evident at the end of the article: “[i]f the written language is placed at the mercy of every new colloquialism and if every fresh dialect demands and gets equal sway, then we will soon find ourselves back in Babel. In America today…there are too many people intent on being masters of their language and too few willing to be its servants (6). The language used in this passage makes a coded suggestion that these unidentified “Other” uses of English would work to de-civilize the United States through a reduction of Standard English into meaningless babble. However,
in direct language, the passage also highlights the structured hierarchies that exist within Standard English—there are masters and servants of language.

The master/servant power hierarchies that are referenced lend themselves to the second anxiety—that of the les-profitable employee—that are expressed in the article. To bemoan the desire of people to have their use of English become dominant, is to not only presume the dominance of Standard English but to suggest that those who cannot wield that dominant English are servants—presumably both figuratively and literally—of those who can. The article makes the argument that: “...the cries of dismay sound even louder in the halls of commerce, industry and the professions, where writing is the basis for almost all formal business communication” (1). In many ways this argument reifies Brandt’s theory of sponsorship since, and the response of crisis to this moment of literacy signals the value of literacy skill “...as a resource—economic, political, intellectual, spiritual—which, like wealth or education, or trade skill or social connections, is pursued for the opportunities and protections that it potentially grants its seekers (Brandt 5).

Another reason given as to why Johnny can’t write is the way that the teaching of writing is handled in the U.S. educational system as well. A “‘regression’ toward the intellectually invertebrate” (“Why Johnny Can’t Write 1) in academia, and “creative teachers [who] have subverted their own goals” (3) by not teaching grammar, structure, and style are cited as another reason that young people can’t seem to write. The notion that students being encouraged, as one teacher says, to “...find themselves through their own language” (4) is antithetical to them becoming productive employees is made clear throughout the article.
Writing Across the Curriculum versus Writing In the Discipline at UMass

In 1982, seven years after “Why Johnny Can’t Write” was published in *Newsweek*, UMass Amherst required two writing courses, housed in the university Writing Program: First-Year Writing (FYW), which focuses on general academic writing, called Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Junior-Year Writing (JYW), which focuses on discipline-specific writing, called Writing In the Discipline (WID). These two classes still negotiate the tension on display in “Why Johnny Can’t Write” that existed between “creative” teachers who were motivated by students finding themselves through their language, and students being competitive and profitable employers in the market.

First-Year Writing, or College Writing, is divided into three different sections that incoming freshmen place into, based off a writing assessment administered during their orientation. Basic Writing is “…designed for students who need additional preparation before taking College Writing 112” (Basic Writing 111) and it is facilitated in a “…workshop-style…computer labs to allow for collaboration and consultation amongst students and between students and teacher” (Basic Writing page). The goals of College Writing 112, are described as “… meeting the literacy demands of their [students] academic, professional, civic, and persona lives” (College Writing 112). According to the Writing Program’s website, College Writing 112 is also “…based on the assumption that students are already writers and that writing is an activity that is tied to its social context.” Finally, the third section is College Writing 112H, which is designed for students in the Commonwealth Honors College, and is described with the same description as College Writing 112 (Englwrit 112H: College Writing). The goals of this
College Writing seem to be very focused on meeting student writers where they are ensuring that they section they are in will be a more conducive environment for them to grow as a writer. It would be very easy to categorize the instruction of College Writing into the “creative” phenomena that is identified in “Why Johnny Can’t Write.”

Junior-Year Writing is quite different in its design and facilitation, since each department in the university creates and instructs its own Junior-Year Writing course. There must be approval of the syllabus by the University Writing Committee, but otherwise “departments and JYW instructors exercise a great deal of freedom and creativity in designing their courses” (Junior-Year Writing Program). Despite the variation in JYW courses in different departments, there are common features to the class that are indicative of attention being given to the vocational side of the tension in “Why Johnny Can’t Write.”

In *From Form to Meaning*, David Fleming traces the history of Freshmen Composition at the University of Wisconsin—Madison during the long sixties and its influences from student radicalism. He argues that what became evident was that “[l]earning to write…could not be motivated from outside and above; it had to be a self-initiated and self-controlled process in which students themselves were empowered to take responsibility for their own education and allowed to discover meaning through their own language” (Fleming 108-9). Fleming’s language is strikingly similar to the language of the teacher quoted in “Why Johnny Can’t Write;” there is clearly a history behind the freshman composition course being a site for students to think of themselves as writers writing through and around their identities and society. Yet, two years after the freshman composition course, those students are asked to think of themselves as very different
writers in Junior-Year Writing, especially those students in vocational majors. If College Writing is thinking of you as a writer that is challenging and exploring your position in society, Junior-Year Writing is thinking of you as a writer that is trying to learn how to write like a competitive and professional employee.

The university sponsorship of SAE permeates in the tension of the Writing Program, between the radical instruction of College Writing that works to challenge dominant notions of language in the academy, and Junior-Year Writing, which works to refine the privileged Standard Academic English of the marketplace. Through a rhetorical analysis of two syllabi, one from a section of College Writing 112 and another from Junior-Year Writing in Computer Science (CMPSCI 305: Social Issues in Computing), the ways in which these tensions between Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing Across the Discipline permeate can become more apparent. The two syllabi will be analyzed through a number of dimensions: course descriptions, assignments, evaluation priorities, readings, and community expectations.

Course descriptions can be powerful indicators of how not only the instructor is envisioning the objective of the class, but it can form how the students relate to the class as well. In the Computer Science syllabus, the course is described as:

Through a careful analysis and discussion of a range of computing issues, topics, and polices, we will explore various impacts of computers on modern society. This class satisfies the Junior Year Writing requirement by providing directed practice and specific instruction in a range of writing genres. Students will produce approximately 20-25 pages of polished written work over the course of the semester (Trim).
The description of the course is quite concise and vague to exactly what will be discussed and how students will produce their writing. It is also difficult to discern what the specific goals are of the course, and if more attention is being given to analyzing and discussing computing issues, or the writing they will produce around those topics. There is also a quantified product-orientation connected to the writing that the students will do, and language such as “polished” suggests that attention will be given not only to surface-level concerns in student writing, but that the writing will in an undistinguishable Standard Academic English.

In the College Writing 112 syllabus, there is no course description, but instead a variety of categories that outlines what the course will cover, what will be expected of students, and how those students should succeed. There are seven goals outlined for the course:

Examine writing as a social act within specific contexts; write for a variety of audiences and purposes; develop thinking and reasoning through questioning our own and others’ views; gather, synthesize and cite diverse sources of information; revise your writing substantially and make textual choices that are appropriate to purpose, audience, and context; become a more critical reader and give constructive feedback to peers; gain awareness and reflect on your writing process. (Grandy)

A majority of the goals ask the student to contextualize the writing, reading, and discussions in the class beyond themselves, specifically the social contexts they will be writing in, the information they will be using to support those arguments, and the way they read and respond to peer’s writing. The goals are also quite hard to quantify and
seem to be much more focused on long-term sustained development, such as “develop thinking and reasoning through questioning our own and others’ views” (Grandy) as opposed to the emphasis put on the produced “20-25 pages of polished written work” (Trim) in the Computer Science syllabi.

The assignments for each class also give insight into the type of writers students are expected to be. The syllabus for the Computer Science class provides assignment categories, with specific assignment prompts being handed out in class. Those assignment categories are “Class Participation (10%), Presentations (20%), Jobs Unit (20%), Special topics papers (40%), and Course Reflection (10%)” (Trim). At least forty-percent of the assignments are explicitly focused on career-readiness, and the remainder of the assignments focus on some form of public writing “…such as blog posts and letters to decision makers regarding some computer policy” and some more academic writing, such as “…analytical essays, argument essays, technical writing genres” (Trim). However, the public writing those students are being asked to do is through their identity as a professional in the field of computer science, by navigating around policy and subject matter specifics with stakeholders that do not share their discipline knowledge. Peer-review and instructor feedback is also integrated into nearly every assignment, and revisions are a “normal” part of the class.

The syllabus for College Writing 112 is split into five major assignments: “The Context(s) That Make Me, Interacting with Texts, Adding to a Conversation, Circulating Texts, and Final Reflection.” The assignments are subjective to personal experiences and ask students to negotiate their identities by interacting with a number of different texts. While both classes ask students to negotiate writing for a “public” and
“academic/professional” audience, students in College Writing are responding to and engaging with discourses from their personal identities, not their professional ones. This distinction is important, especially for students who may not have access to the privileged Standard Academic English their peers do, since personal identities allow more space for their writing to be valued than professional ones.

That tension exists as well in evaluation of student work. Since there are specific assignments prompts given for each assignment in the Computer Science class, it is difficult to see how students are evaluated from assignment to assignment. However, there is a policy on grading that is outlined on the first page of the syllabus, which differs from a similar grading policy in College Writing 112. The policy states “…you will revise your work after each peer review. Revisions will also be accepted for revised grades after grades have been posted for the first four unit projects” (Trim). Revision is encouraged, but after the first four unit projects are completed and grade is given to the initial draft submitted.

In College Writing 112, the graph on how to succeed in the class outlines revision as, “changes [that] seem to move beyond the surface, dramatically changing the focus of your essays and demonstrating a strong sense of your audience. Your final drafts look drastically different from your initial drafts” (Grandy). This approach to revision is putting a premium on process over product. In a text-box on the side of the syllabus, titled “Want to pass this class?” one of the bullet points says “Develop your drafts (take chances, make mistakes, get messy, and make big changes—don’t just fix commas)” (Grandy). Again, while drawing distinctions between these two practices of revision and evaluation seems pedantic, it is indicative of the writer that is being sponsored in each
class. The “polished” writing asked for in Computer Science is still expected, even on the first submission, with revision being more of a welcome option rather than a core component of the class. The risks College Writing 112 is asking students to take, beyond having polished surface-level work, is indicative of the different ways of valuing and developing different Englishes. When evaluation is focused on improvement of process over improvement of product, space is made for students who don’t command Standard Academic English in their writing to grow and learn through their writing rather than be restricted by it.

Assigned readings in a class are also factors that shape discussions and student perceptions of the language they should be replicating. The reading list for the Computer Science class is comprised of popular articles, ranging from Tumblr blogs to *The New York Times*, relating to intersections of social issues and the technology field that range from “How to Get a Job at Google” to “A Feminist Critique of Silicon Valley” (Trim). However, the instructor of this class spoke at a Writing Center staff meeting about writing in the Computer Science discipline, and she said that her class is often comprised of mostly white men who have not had many conversations around systemic social issues before the class. In fact, she said that the “Mythbusters” assignment, which is described on the syllabus as incorporating: “…foundational theories related to approaching myth analysis in cultural studies. We will also cover expectations for this writing assignment and begin to parse out intersections and connections, among privilege, identity, and stereotypes…” is often one of the only times students in Computer Science will be asked to consider their social identities in computing throughout their time in the degree program.
In College Writing 112, the readings are comprised of two books, one is *Other Words: A Writer’s Read* edited by the Director of the UMass Writing Program, and the other is an anthology of student writing from past students in enrolled in College Writing classes at UMass. *Other Words* features a number of different texts that students engage with. Like the Computer Science class, it features popular articles from more conventional sources, such as “Is Google Making Us Stupid” by Nicholas Carr, published in *The Atlantic* and “Why Bother” by Michael Pollan, published in *The New York Times Magazine* (Fleming “Other Words”). However, it also features selections from texts like *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Glorai Anzaldúa, which uses a mix of English and Spanish, and alternates between different genres, such as poetry, film, and expository prose to challenge “how we think about identity” (Anzaldúa). While not only providing an example of how the dominant SAE can be challenged, *Borderlands/La Frontera* “remaps our understanding of what a “border” is, presenting it not as a simple divide between here and there, us and them, buy as a psychic, social, cultural terrain that we inhabit, and that inhabits all of us” (Anzaldúa). While the Computer Science course is using selected readings to provide a space to talk around intersections of the computer science industry and social identities, College Writing is using much more radical and Global writings to challenge notions of social identity and a Standard English.

How classroom communities are created and respected is something that has been under particular scrutiny, and both courses approach and position themselves in different ways to that classroom community. In the Computer Science course, there is an “Inclusion Policy” that outlines how difference will be treated in the classroom:
In this course, each voice in the classroom has something of value to contribute. Please take care to respect the different experiences, beliefs and values expressed by students and staff involved in this course. We support UMass Amherst’s commitment to diversity, and welcome individuals of all ages, backgrounds, citizenships, disability, sex, education, ethnicities, family statuses, genders, gender identities, geographical locations, languages, military experience, political views, races, religions, sexual orientations, socioeconomic statuses, and work experiences. (Trim)

The policy is of course quite explicit in its posture towards institutional bureaucracy by not only mentioning the University’s commitment to diversity, but by using language that is creating a community through acknowledgement of a protected legal class. Sarah Ahmed argues in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* that: “statements of commitment can thus be understood as opaque: it is not clear what they are doing if they are not doing what they are saying…statements of commitment…can be understood as ‘non-performatives’” (Ahmed 116). Ahmed expands on the concept of diversity commitment statements further: “…the non-performative, the failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, but is actually what the speech act is doing…[they] are taken up as if they are performatives (as if they brought about the effects they name), such that the names come to stand if for the effects” (117). The language used is also highly replicative of the language students will be encountering in the workplace from employers. In many ways, it is preparing students to navigate conversations of difference in the classroom through the compliance statements and diversity commitments they will navigate professionally.
In College Writing 112, there is a section of the syllabus dedicated to “Our Writing Community” that outlines the expectations for the classroom. In an interesting juxtaposition, the College Writing syllabus refers students to the “Guidelines for Classroom Civility and Respect” in the Code of Student Conduct, which is a relatively lengthy University document that outlines how students should respectfully behave and engage with each other in the classroom. While it is an institutional document addressing diversity, it differs from a statement of commitment in that it provides slightly more tangible, or performative, practices to achieve classroom civility: “…differences of opinions or concerns related to the class should be welcomed if presented in a mutually respectful manner. The challenging viewpoints is part of the academic experience, but should occur in a manner that opens dialogue and does not threaten any member of the learning community” (Guidelines for Classroom Civility and Respect). The language is also focused more on how students should be communicating with each other in the classroom community around different identities, rather than focusing on which identities the students they are speaking to identify with. The ladder half of that argument is at the crux of a statement of commitment: to comply with protecting a protected class, rather than providing tangible steps to create a safe classroom community. Further, the instructor also provided performative steps to take into practice in the classroom: “In classroom discussions, try to speak for yourself and from personal experiences. Accept that you might make mistakes. Remember that it’s okay to change your mind” (Grandy). The language used by the instructor is not only much more colloquial than the university diversity document, but it allows students an honest space to make mistakes and learn
from each other’s experiences: a space for students to challenge conventions of dominant SAE, something they may not find in Computer Science.

**Writing In the Discipline of the Elite**

Despite the work of Junior-Year Writing advancing the competitiveness of UMass applicants on the job market, students at elite colleges land considerably higher paying jobs after graduation. If the previous argument is to be accepted that Junior-Year Writing can work to sponsor a privileged SAE in the interest of student-employability and competitiveness in the job market, the complete lack of a vocational-based curriculum at elite institutions, which are centered in a moral-based curriculum, further extends this argument of a sponsored privileged English: the sponsorship of Junior-Year Writing is in preparing students to utilize the privileged SAE that students at elite institutions already posses and utilize to land higher-paying positions. In this project, a vocational-education is understood as one that is focused on a career-based curriculum, with a purpose of educating students to become marketable and successful employees. A moral-education is understood as one that is concerned with cultivating the individual citizen through intellectual exploration, which in turn informs their morals and values. In order to illustrate the relationship between a vocational-based curriculum and a moral-based curriculum, I will place the English Departments of UMass Amherst and Amherst College next to each other.

The motivation for this specific comparison is in their locality, not only to this project, but also in their physical geography and institutional periphery: on one side of a small New England town is the sprawling public research university with over 30,000
students, and on the other, the small elite liberal arts college considered one of the most competitive in the country. In both departments, courses range from American and British Literature, to film and media studies, to creative writing, as would be expected of any English Department. While UMass Amherst is a considerably larger department, it features much more compartmentalization with specializations in Creative Writing, the Study and Practice of Writing, American Studies, Creative Writing, New Media and Digital Humanities, and Professional Writing and Technical Communication (PWTC) (Letters of Specialization). Many of those specializations have explicit connections to vocational-focused paths beyond being simply an English major. The PWTC program in particular has a strong record of placing students in well-paying careers after graduation, nearly 100 percent since 1990 (Professional Writing and Technical Communication). While there are no readily available statistics on job-placement rates for non-PWTC graduates in the department, there is a stark disparity—in not only employment rates, but in compensation—between students in the department who chose a vocational focus and those who do not.

While that posture towards vocation exists at a university like UMass Amherst, even within a humanities department, average salaries of graduates still pale in comparison to those of Amherst College graduates where there is no vocationally directed curriculum (University of Massachusetts-Amherst; Amherst College). If students at an elite college like Amherst College can forgo a vocational education and still find considerably higher salaries than students at UMass Amherst, without any career-based curriculum, then the vehicle behind their market success has more to do with the privileged class and literacy standards that make a college such as Amherst so
competitive in the first place than the style of curriculum, vocational or moral. In fact, the reason students at an elite college are even able to pursue a moral-education is because of that access to a dominant literacy and economic class that allows a college education to be about intellectual edification, rather than a path to increased socioeconomic mobility.

This tension between who should be able to intellectually wander through college and who should be learning relevant career-based skills manifests in writing through the tension between WAC and WID that has been in discussion throughout this chapter. These multi-dimensional tensions have shaped our campuses for centuries, both philosophically and physically. By looking to the physical spaces on our campuses, we can understand reflections of the complex tension that exists between a moral and a vocational education, and how writing instruction is shaped by those spaces as well. The spaces where the Computer Science and College Writing courses grow from and where their practitioners create them are manifestations of the writers they imagine themselves creating.

The University of Massachusetts, Amherst campus is large and known for its eclecticism: the different periods of growth in the campus’s history is easily marked through strikingly different architectural styles: Robert Campbell, the architecture critic for the Boston Globe, described the UMass campus in 1974 as, “a jumble of unrelated monuments that looks more like a world fairgrounds than a campus” (Page). However, a division of the campus down its center, broadly dividing STEM fields and Humanities and Social Sciences, loosely organizes that eclecticism. Those divisions embody the silo-
ism of American education, with not only discipline-specific buildings, but also separated locations on campus. By looking more closely at both the Computer Science Building and Bartlett Hall, which houses the Writing Program, the tension of WAC and WID, and the ensuing silo-ism of American education become more tangible.

Bartlett Hall, constructed from 1959-1960 sits in the center of campus, with sprawling open green spaces adjacent to some of the oldest buildings on campus (Bartlett Hall). Bartlett is home to the departments of Art History, English, Philosophy, Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies, along with the Writing Program and various other programs associated with the College of Humanities and Fine Arts.

Outside of the building, the lawn and pedestrian-friendly walkways are filled with students and faculty lounging, chatting, and smoking. The abundant space encourages contemplation and conversation, ranging from individuals reading under a large tree or a class convening on the grass. From the outside looking in, the building itself is oddly eclectic, and with due to the large glass windows on the side of the building, it’s easy to see inside. Not only is the inside of the building visibly accessible, it speaks back to those outside its walls: a large red feminist fist, associated with radical feminism of the 1960’s and 1970’s is plastered over the Women’s Studies Department office window.

Far from radical political statements boldly plastered in its windows, the Computer Science Building, built in 2003 (UMass 2003) is a monolithic steel building, with black, opaque windows lining its multiple levels. It exudes the essence of a corporate campus: an imposing, non-descript, building that does not welcome wandering. In fact, a large television screen in the lobby lists the corporate logos of the “Industrial Affiliate Members” of the department and the undergraduate student lounge is built
around a Yahoo-sponsored foosball table, and a “careers@fiksu” arcade game. The corporate campus environment also spreads to the lack of people around the building. In fact, a number of Google searches resulted in zero pictures of the Computer Science Building with people in or around the building. The location and design of the building results in the only people being in or around the building to be people directly connected to the department of Computer Science.

While the Computer Science Building houses one department, and is designed to welcome a discipline-specific body, its silo-ism extends to its lack of physical connection with other buildings. Conversely, Bartlett Hall is physically connected to two other buildings on campus: by sky-bridge to Tobin Hall, which houses the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, and Herter Hall, which houses the departments of History, Classics, and Language, Literatures, & Cultures.

The cross-disciplinary nature of College Writing is physically embodied in Bartlett Hall, because the very idea of Writing Across the Curriculum requires a wandering and self-reflexive posture towards dozens of seamlessly intersecting disciplines and social identities. The Junior-Year Writing course in Computer Science encourages a highly discipline-specific method of thinking and writing, along the same vein in which the Computer Science Building is constructed and the affective feeling it produces.

The Future of Unresolved Tension

However, those spaces are not permanent, and possibly neither is the sponsorship that shapes them. There are two major construction projects on the UMass campus, both
in a very central location, which are renovating much older buildings and adding modern annexes to them. One of those buildings, the South College Academic Facility, will be the new home for Bartlett Hall, which is slated for renovation in the near future. This architectural turn again adds to the eclecticism of the campus, but it also represents a unique fusing of the tension of WAC and WID. This creation of new space preserves the façade, described as: “…Chateauesque…herringbone-patterned gables, that are characteristic of the Tudor Revival” (South College), but includes a visually stunning modern classroom addition to the building.

The original buildings that will be renovated posses a clear connection to the redbrick and ivy buildings of the Ivy League, which have represented the philosophy of moral education since the founding of the United States. Now they will be paired with modern, sustainable additions that have no such connections of intellectual wandering, but the innovate and dynamic global marketplace of tomorrow. In newer buildings, and in renovations in the main library on campus, Team-Based Learning rooms feature the integration between technology and group-collaboration that is so highly sought after in the marketplace. In these large and small scale turns towards fusing the moral and vocational, we must ask what that means for writing instruction at the university.

While UMass Amherst was founded as an agricultural college during the Morrill Land Grant, it has quite clearly worked to navigate a balance between the virtues of a moral and vocational education. As the university continues to build and grow through the next few decades, and even centuries, those tensions between moral and vocational, between WAC and WID, will continue to permeate and structure both the sponsorship and the spaces of our universities.
Works Cited


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