Faculty Endowment Award Follow-up Report
Risk and Reward within Writing Program Ecologies
Recipient: Kristi Costello

Co-Presenters: Anis Bawarshi (University of Washington), Mary Jo Reiff (University of Kansas), Kelly Kinney (State University of New York at Binghamton), Daniel Sanford (University of New Mexico), and Amy Devitt (University of Kansas).

Follow-up Narrative for Website

Owed to the support of the Nathan Deutsch Faculty Development, I recently traveled to Tampa, Florida to present a panel titled "Risk and Reward within Writing Program Ecologies" at the 2015 Conference on College Composition and Communication. The speakers in this panel represented multiple institutions as well as multiple programs, from First-Year Composition (FYC) programs, to undergraduate writing majors, to Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs, to writing centers. All of us are also a part of a book project very recently published (March 2015) by Parlor Press titled Ecologies of Writing Programs (http://www.amazon.com/Ecologies-Writing-Programs-Program-Profiles/dp/1602355118). Drawing on an ecological framework that recognizes the dynamic inter-relationships as well as the complex discursive and material conditions that writing programs inhabit, this book and our conference panel explored the fluctuations and changes within writing program ecologies and the contextualized risk-taking that accompanies such changes.

My contribution to this project illustrated the ways in which writing programs—along with the Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) who shape, manage, and maintain them—are in a constant state of flux. I focused on my move to a new institution and writing program at Arkansas State University, highlighting the risks and rewards of the inevitable impact of my previous experiences (and institution) on my current decision-making and planning in new institutional ecologies, from the incremental shaping of a more standardized curriculum for First-Year Writing, to the development of a Writing Studies Minor, to the implementation of WAC/WID initiatives. Particularly as we have made tremendous progress over the past year and a half, my presentation illustrated that stAte has gone from a minimally supported, unsupervised writing program to a growing, progressive, and well-supported Writing Program and Writing Center with extensive WAC/Writing in the Disciplines (WID) reach.

In sum, the $500 grant from the Nathan Deutsch Faculty Development Fund allowed me to represent Arkansas State University, present my and my colleagues’ findings on a national stage at the largest and most prestigious conference in my field, and afforded me the opportunity to support the editors of the text and the publishers during the most critical period of the book’s sales period.
Longer Narrative

I was invited to join an elite group of scholars in my field (listed above) to present a panel titled “Risk and Reward within Writing Program Ecologies” at the 2015 Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 17-22 in Tampa, FL. The speakers in this panel represented multiple institutions as well as multiple programs, from First-Year Composition (FYC) programs, to undergraduate writing majors, to Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs, to writing centers. All of us are also a part of a book project very recently published (March 2015) by Parlor Press titled Ecologies of Writing Programs (http://www.amazon.com/Ecologies-Writing-Programs-Program-Profiles/dp/1602355118).

Thus, thank you in part to the support of the Nathan Deutsch Faculty Development, I traveled by car to Tampa, Florida to present at the 2015 Conference on College Composition and Communication. I was in Tampa from March 17-21 and we formally presented on March 19 from 8:30-9:45 a.m., though when not presenting or attending other conference panels, the other authors and I talked to our colleagues in the field at the Parlor Press Publication Booth and Mobile Book Store in efforts to assist in promoting the book.

Drawing on an ecological framework (Cooper, Dobrin, Hawk, Syverson, Weissler) that recognizes the dynamic inter-relationships as well as the complex discursive and material conditions that writing programs inhabit, this book and our conference panel explored the fluctuations and changes within writing program ecologies and the contextualized risk-taking that accompanies such changes. While legislative decisions, budget crises, state mandates, accreditation requirements, etc. threaten to take writing scholars out of their comfort zones, our work examines the innovative ways that writing program administrators have adapted to change, taken risks, and implemented innovative, creative solutions while working within institutional ecologies. Examining writing programs as they exist within the context of dynamic, interrelated, institutional systems that are in constant flux enabled us to focus on how we have “taken a chance on change” or “tried something different” (CFP, CCCC 2015) and have balanced the risks and rewards of writing program innovations. By calling attention to the networked nature of agency and innovation—the way that causation and phenomena “are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces” (Coole and Frost 9)—we challenged notions of risk and reward as isolated, individualized actions/phenomena and explored them within ecological relationships.

My part of the presentation illustrated the ways in which writing programs—along with the Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) who shape, manage, and maintain them—are in a constant state of flux. I focused on my move to a new institution and writing program at Arkansas State University, highlighting the risks and rewards of the inevitable impact of my previous experiences (and institution)
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In terms of our outcomes and contributions to the field of Composition and WPA, while ecological frameworks have been applied to linguistics, literature, and FYC curriculum, this is the first body of work that applies such a framework to Writing Program Administration. Given renewed interest in students’ writing, WAC/WID, and writing centers (as evidenced not just in the scholarship in the field of Composition, but also in interdisciplinary publications such as the Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside Higher Ed), this project is incredibly timely. Our unique framework adds understanding to a growing and developing field. Further, while my colleagues and I have been working on this project for more than a year, this conference presentation was our field’s introduction to our project. It seems, based on book sales and the approximately seventy people who attended our panel that our work has fueled their interest and will lead to additional success of each of us as well as the text.

Looking toward the future, I am hoping that my active participation in this project has opened up a door for me to continue collaborating with these amazing scholars. Already, this project has led to me being offered a prestigious editorship with Composition Forum, a reputable scholarly journal in my field. At the very least, it is great to know that because this text has already been adopted as a text for several graduate Composition Theory and W.P.A. courses across the country, stAte’s Writing Program is receiving recognition for growing, changing, and improving.

In sum, the $500 grant from the Nathan Deutsch Faculty Development Fund allowed me to represent Arkansas State University, present my and my colleagues’ findings on a national stage at the largest and most prestigious conference in my field, and afforded me the opportunity to support the editors of the text and the publishers during the most critical period of the book’s sales period. Thank you for your generous support.