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LEARNING AND LABORING: STUDENT-WORKERS' NETWORKED
EXPERIENCES OF LITERACY, AGENCY, AND MOBILITY IN THE NEOLIBERAL
UNIVERSITY

By
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B.A., Bellarmine University, 2013
M.A., University of Louisville, 2015

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in English/Rhetoric and Composition

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

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A Dissertation Approved on

April 10, 2019

by the following Dissertation Committee:

Bronwyn T. Williams
Dissertation Director

Mary P. Sheridan

Beth Willey

Karen Christopher

DEDICATION

For the Davids:

My father,
my greatest teacher.

And my son—
the most important work of my life
will always be
you.

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I am endlessly grateful for the constant support and encouragement of my director, Dr. Bronwyn Williams. Without your mentorship and friendship, I would not be the scholar, teacher, or human that I am today. Thank you for teaching me what I needed to pursue this project, especially for helping me see myself as an educator and researcher.

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ABSTRACT

LEARNING AND LABORING: STUDENT-WORKERS' NETWORKED EXPERIENCES OF LITERACY, AGENCY, AND MOBILITY IN THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

Layne Porta Gordon

April 10, 2019

Rhetoric and composition has a well-established tradition of considering the connections between literacy education and the discourses and structures of political-economic institutions. This dissertation builds from this work and foregrounds the experiences of student-workers in the UPS Metropolitan College program through a qualitative study that is informed by institutional ethnography (Smith, 1987, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2006). Institutional ethnography examines institutional texts and text-mediated discourses as coordinators of individual action.

Therefore, I draw on primary data gathered from individual interviews with nine student-workers and one Metropolitan College administrator as well as supplemental data gathered from a survey administered to composition instructors, two instructor focus groups, and a range of institutional documents to argue that labor and education are networked practices for these students that are coordinated by powerful, interacting institutions. I implement theories related to mobility, agency, and neoliberal ideology in order to show that as these students navigate the work-school network, their identities, literacy practices, and senses of agency are shaped according to neoliberal values.

These shaping forces are often obscured by the structures of our institutions of education and by default approaches to teaching academic writing. This dissertation brings these forces to light and organizes their implications into roughly two lines of argument: first, I argue that student workers' literacy practices, affective responses, and identity development are coordinated by an institutional "mobility script;" and second, I argue that student-workers' ownership and agency are coordinated by institutional structures of time and labor. These forms of coordination are mediated by particular texts, such as professional development documents and syllabi, as well as more general text-mediated narratives that shape the ways student-workers participate in this network (namely, the narrative of the ideal neoliberal worker and the narrative of the typical college student). Those who are not already trained in middle-class, neoliberal work ethics and values can be particularly disadvantaged in these processes of institutional coordination. I suggest that, to intervene in such processes, postsecondary literacy educators should adopt a framework of intelligibility in order to understand, recognize, and accommodate student-workers' lived realities.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“I work like six hours a night—and they say don't work over 20 hours a week as a college student if you're going to be full time, but I work about 30 and I'm doing okay. I think it's a case-by-case thing, honestly. But I work 30 hours a week and I go to school 13 hours a week, and it's like, this is a full-time job. Both of these are full-time jobs.” —Kathleen, a student-worker in the UPS Metropolitan College program

Kathleen is a first-year student majoring in education at the University of Louisville. She also works as a package handler at the UPS Worldport hub, loading parcels onto shipping trucks five nights a week, third shift. When her shift ends at about 5 a.m., she goes home to sleep until about 11 a.m. when she has to wake up and drive to campus for her classes. After her classes for the day are finished, she returns home to care for her younger sister, work on homework, and get ready for work again at 11 p.m. Kathleen is a participant in the UPS Metropolitan College program, which offers free tuition and other financial incentives for students who work this “graveyard” shift.

While the temporal structure of Kathleen’s work life may be extreme, her experience of managing the demands of work and school simultaneously is shared by many who seek postsecondary education in the current economic climate. In fact, data from the Department of Education and the United States Census Bureau indicates that over two-thirds of postsecondary students are working students. In *The Condition of Education 2017*, the Department of Education reports that “among undergraduates in 2015, some 43 percent of full-time students and 78 percent of part-time students were

employed” (McFarland et al., 2017, p. 1). Data from the 2010 census similarly indicates that “of the 19.7 million students aged 16 and over enrolled in undergraduate college, 72 percent worked” (Davis, 2012, p. 1). This data signals what many of us who teach and research in postsecondary education already know: for the majority of college students in the United States, the prevailing assumption is that taking on significant economic burden now will pay out in increased economic security and social mobility later.

Working while going to college is certainly not a new phenomenon—as long as postsecondary education has had a cost, there have been students laboring to afford it. What has shifted, though, is the increased economic pressure on students from “under-resourced” populations to pay their own way through college, incur significant amounts of debt, or both. The radical privatization of postsecondary education is a primary catalyst of this shift. At both the state and federal levels, public investment in higher education has declined steeply since 2001 (Dillon, 2005), and even more significant reductions in federal aid and grants for higher education are expected under the Trump administration (Harris, 2017). Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and President Trump have both pushed for cuts to financial aid programs totaling almost \$4 billion annually (Douglas-Gabriel, 2018). One implication of this privatization is that the burden of financing postsecondary education falls on the individual—a hallmark of neoliberal¹ policy and ideology. Given the institutional position and mission of composition, it is

¹ In this dissertation, I adopt Steger and Roy’s definition of neoliberalism as a term that encompasses “three intertwined manifestations 1) an ideology; 2) a mode of governance; 3) a policy package” (11). The central concepts of neoliberalism include: an emphasis on the decentralization of government and the primacy of private ownership and accountability, the value of entrepreneurship and individualism, and the imperative for workers to be “flexible” and “skilled,” (Steger and Roy). I discuss this term in more detail in Chapter Two.

vital that we understand how structures such as these shape students' work and school lives.

Two recent edited collections indicate a renewed concern in composition and literacy studies about how best to respond to the current neoliberal economic climate: *Economies of Writing: Revaluations in Rhetoric and Composition*, edited by Bruce Horner, Brice Nordquist, and Susan M. Ryan (2017), and *Composition in the Age of Austerity*, edited by Nancy Welch and Tony Scott (2016). Welch and Scott (2016) insist that political economic structures are not only relevant but centrally important for our work in composition. They link austerity politics to neoliberal ideologies, explaining that the chapters in their collection “[respond] to a felt sense of crisis among those who teach and do research in postsecondary writing education that is wrought by the intensifying sway of neoliberal logics in US higher education, compounded by stepped-up austerity measures in the wake of the 2008-2009 economic crisis” (Welch and Scott, 2016, pp. 4-5). Our unique institutional role contributes to this felt sense of crisis. Because we tend to be attuned to our students' anxieties, challenges, and successes as well as the institutional dynamics of our colleges and universities, we have a unique perspective on how neoliberal ideologies function in the postsecondary landscape. In the introduction to *Economies of Writing*, Horner, Nordquist, and Ryan (2017) similarly claim that “the economic as force and framework shapes the conditions, direction, and purpose of our work” (p. 2). I share these scholars' assertions that issues of labor and ideology in the political economy have an impact on every part of our identity as a discipline: the way we are perceived in our institutional settings, how we understand the way writing works in the world, and what our students expect to learn from us. This intermingling of our

disciplinary history and identity with broader political-economic structures and ideologies means that we now have a crucial opportunity to develop “reflexive, collective strategies for response” (Welch and Scott, 2016, p. 7) to the current economic landscape.

This dissertation works toward this goal in two ways: first, by illustrating how a particular educational-economic partnership shapes students’ real, lived experiences; and second, by considering the mediating role of college composition in this process of shaping. The institution that I analyze in order to accomplish these goals is the UPS Metropolitan College program—a “learn-and-earn” program in Louisville, KY that offers free tuition and other financial benefits to local postsecondary students in exchange for their third shift labor at the UPS Worldport. Learn-and-earn programs such as these are particularly relevant to our work in composition because they illustrate ways that workplace literacy, educational access, and social mobility intersect in neoliberal ideology. Although public perception of our work has shifted over time, our contemporary disciplinary identity is still affected by a tension between gatekeeping and providing access (Fox, 1999; Miller, 2009). There is still a tendency among many administrators, as well as our peers in other disciplines, to assume that first-year composition courses will either successfully “train” those who are seen as unprepared for college-level work or prevent them from advancing in the college curriculum. Learn-and-earn programs have the potential to increase the number of such seemingly “unprepared” or “underprepared” students because they claim to provide access to postsecondary education to those who would supposedly not have it otherwise. By promising job training as well as an “easier” path to achieving a college degree, these programs intervene in the neoliberal education landscape and claim to offer upward social mobility

while simultaneously solving the problem of the “skills shortage” in the workforce. Up to this point, though, the implications of partnerships such as these have not been attended to in our field.

We would therefore do well to attend more intentionally to the effects of these programs in students’ lives and to understand how they mediate between individual, lived experience and broader neoliberal ideologies about literacy, social class, and identity. In other words, if we can better understand how learn-and-earn programs enable and constrain student-workers’ mobility in a neoliberal political economy—and how this structuring affects their senses of identity and agency—we can develop pedagogies that are more attuned to the lived realities of our students and that help make those realities intelligible in the composition classroom. Of course, if we turn our attention towards them, we can see these effects everywhere. However, status quo structures, policies, and narratives about students tend to obfuscate how these structures work on and in their lives. In other words, there are powerful assumptions at work about the identity and material circumstances of the “typical college student” that underlie the structure of postsecondary education in general and of college composition in particular. Over the past several decades, our field has taken strides in challenging certain aspects of this archetype, calling attention to the white, male, heterosexual, ableist biases inherent in this norm. However, there are still many things we can learn from a nuanced consideration of the ways that economic ideology and labor conditions affect our students’ lives—not as future workers but as present actors in an economic landscape. As the literature review below suggests, our field is well aware of the material and economic pressures our students will face after college, but we are less practiced in considering their work-school

lives as networked, embedded experiences. In other words, we tend to assume that our students' work and school lives operate in a linear sequence—*from school to work* (as I discuss in Chapter Three). In doing so, we risk missing an opportunity to engage them in processes of reflection and critique about the role that a variety of networked institutional structures play in their lives.

One potential benefit, then, of foregrounding these institutional structures is that composition instructors and writing program administrators may attend to them more directly in our practices and programmatic structures. Specifically, this visibility will allow us to consider the intersections of identity and access in the context of our individual classrooms and in the administration of writing programs more broadly—how do the structures of our courses and curricula support some students and limit others? How can we better understand the material and affective experiences of student workers with work *and* postsecondary education? How can we recognize and support students *as workers* while developing pedagogical practices and dispositions that will encourage them to critically engage with the institutions in which they participate?

In pursuing responses to these questions, this dissertation builds on three existing concerns in our field about our institutional position and history, the personal and political stakes of writing instruction, and the connections among literacy, identity, and political-economic ideologies. In what follows, I offer a discussion of this existing scholarship and highlight ways that the current project may shape our thinking about these concerns. Rather than organizing this discussion into distinct sub-disciplines or debates, I have framed the sections below as responses to broad scholarly questions in order to highlight the complexity and fluidity of the concerns that are central to this

dissertation project. It is worth noting here that this project also draws on a range of theoretical frameworks outside of the immediate purview of rhetoric and composition. For that reason, I will offer descriptions of the specific theoretical frames that I am applying to my analysis within individual chapters rather than including a review of those theories here. The purpose of the literature review below is to illustrate the disciplinary position and contributions of this project within composition and literacy studies. Underlying this discussion is the broad claim that the often obfuscated effects of the UPS Metropolitan College program and others like it are particularly important for our work because of how we value students' lived experiences and how we understand the relationship between these experiences and their literacy development.

How should the field of composition understand our relationship to the institutional structures and ideologies in which we are situated?

From the earliest days of our discipline, we have had to navigate a tension between adhering to institutional and curricular structures and wanting to democratize academic literacies. It is useful to consider this context because learn-and-earn programs have the potential to increase the number of such seemingly “unprepared” or “underprepared” students since they claim to provide access to higher education to those who would supposedly not have it otherwise. As Susan Miller (2009) notes in her introduction to *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*, one of the original functions of composition courses was to “weed out” seemingly unprepared students; however, we have also simultaneously held an important role in furthering the democratization of higher education by educating students in academic literacies and genres of power (p. xxxv). Our contemporary disciplinary identity is still affected by this history, as many

assume that our courses will either successfully “train” those who are seen as unprepared for college-level work or prevent them from advancing in the college curriculum.

Conversations about how to navigate these competing demands illustrate that composition courses often function as mediators between students’ educational development and institutional expectations about “college-level” writing. If we leverage this mediating role in order to provide access, what are we providing access to, exactly? Ultimately, these concerns have centered on how we navigate institutional structures and how these structures shape our disciplinary identity.

Historically, one response to the tensions inherent in our institutional positionality has been to make the genres and discourses of both academia and the workplace accessible for our students while also teaching strategies that would enable them to critique these discourses. At the heart of this response is the assumption that by teaching students to use and understand language in different ways, we are also teaching them ways of being and making themselves intelligible in a variety of cultural and political contexts. As James Berlin (1982) has argued, “in teaching writing we are tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student’s place and mode of operation in it” (p. 237). The current working reality for our students in general, and the rise of learn-and-earn programs in particular, means that we must continue to develop pedagogies that are attuned to the realities in which our students participate. However, we can also ask how *we* are implicated in the neoliberal ideologies that shape our students’ lives and the structures of our own curricula, departments, and colleges and universities.

This question builds from a rich history of considering how our pedagogical practices can make us complicit in perpetuating class bias. Early research in this area set

an important precedent for how we view our own disciplinary positionality in these larger political-economic structures and ideologies. Jean Anyon's (1980) influential ethnographic study of elementary school classrooms, for example, offers empirical evidence to support that early education interpellates children into different social class positions. Anyon argues that unconscious decisions teachers make about the kinds of work they assign and the way they communicate with students has the effect of training the students to align themselves with particular class values and identities (Anyon, 1980, pp. 73-74). Lynn Bloom (1996) applies similar ideas to the college level, specifically to composition pedagogy, arguing that "freshman composition is an unabashedly middle-class enterprise" (p. 655), as evidenced by the ways in which it reflects and reinforces the values and structures of the middle class in the United States.

John Trimbur (2000) famously echoes Bloom's characterization of composition as middle-class enterprise in his suggestion that the composition instructor acts as a surrogate parent, *in loco parentis*, and that the composition classroom mirrors the "drama of the middle-class family" (p. 192). Glynda Hull and Mike Rose's (1990) "'This Wooden Shack Place: The Logic of an Unconventional Reading'" similarly illustrates the ways in which our default approaches to critical thinking and textual analysis can disadvantage students from working class or other marginalized backgrounds. By analyzing a conversation with a student from their remedial composition class, Hull and Rose (1990) claim that our disciplinary habits of textual interpretation align with normative middle-class identities in the context of academia (p. 293). Hull and Rose add to conversations about how composition is positioned among broader norms of class and identity by asserting that "the laudable goal of facilitating underprepared students' entry

into the academic community is actually compromised by a conversational pattern that channels students like Robert into a more ‘efficient’ discourse” (p. 296). This more efficient discourse codes for middle-class ways of being and thinking.

What these scholars share is an insistence that social class is always present, but not always marked; we need to make visible and attend to the ways that class is manifest in our conceptions of students and in our pedagogical approaches. Working towards this goal means asking how we can use our institutional position to best respond to both students’ needs and our institutional, curricular demands simultaneously. As Tom Fox (1999) has explained, part of the tension in this question arises from the assumption that an expansion of access leads to a decline in standards in higher education. However, this assumption is based in classist and racist biases. At the heart of these initial discussions about students’ class identities and academic literacy development is a desire to attend not only to the achievement of specified learning outcomes but also to students’ broader identities and affective development. This desire continues to shape an expanding interest in our disciplinary relationship to a variety of intersectional, non-normative identity positions within the academy, acknowledging that we may also perpetuate racist, sexist, ableist, heteronormative socio-cultural biases (Alexander and Gibson, 2004; Banks, 2006; Cedillo, 2018; Inoue and Poe, 2012; Kerschbaum, 2015; Prendergast, 1998; Villanueva, 1993; Young, 2007).

In these responses to the question of how we deal with the tensions in our institutional responsibilities, scholars tend to focus on looking inward at our disciplinary identity and our complicity in perpetuating class ideologies. Another response, though, has been to look outward at our surrounding institutional cultures and structures—

namely, those of the postsecondary institutions in which we are situated. This scholarship is often explicitly activist in nature, as exemplified by the institutional critique methodology of Porter et al. (2000). Porter et al. explain that institutional critique is “a method that insists that institutions, as unchangeable as they may seem (and, indeed, often are), do contain spaces for reflection, resistance, revision, and productive action” (p. 613). Furthermore, while other scholarship tends to focus on either the micro-level classroom or instructor, institutional critique is explicitly “an unabashedly rhetorical practice mediating macro-level structures and micro-level actions rooted in a particular space and time” (p. 612). Tony Scott (2009) has taken up similar work in his political-economic analysis of composition’s value and function within the institution of higher education. In the same way that Porter et al. are concerned with space as a mediating entity between the macro and micro, Scott (2009) offers case studies and analyses of student writing in order to examine “the relationship between the systemic/ideological and the particular/material” (p. 15). Scott suggests that those of us in composition must advocate for organizational change in order to sustain a critical pedagogy that is based on the political-economic. This work indicates that when we are reflecting on our institutional position and history, we must also recognize our positionality and power to effect change within material, institutional structures. Our disciplinary identity is not separate from the institutions of postsecondary education in which we work, and attending to these institutional structures can reveal sedimented patterns in how composition is valued (or not valued) as a discipline.

These conversations have been central to how we think about who we are and how our curricular function relates to students’ success in and access to postsecondary

education. However, while the conversation I outline above has generally moved from inward reflection about our identity to outward institutional critique of our particular colleges and universities, we have yet to move these considerations beyond the boundaries of our campuses in a concrete way. In other words, while these scholars consider individual classrooms, departments, or universities as sites in which class struggle and institutional tensions play out, they do not consider broader networks of institutions that similarly, and significantly, affect our disciplinary identity and pedagogical work. This dissertation thus aims to extend this conversation by foregrounding the networked relationship between UPS and the University of Louisville in order to reorient this line of thinking toward a more expansive account of the relationship between our work and the extracurricular institutions that shape this work.

As the following section illustrates, though, the relationship between institutional structures and disciplinary history is incomplete if we don't consider and seek to understand students' real, lived experiences. These structures and relationships have real consequences for students' identities, literacy practices, agency, and affective experiences of education.

What are the personal and political stakes of academic literacy instruction for students' identities and lived experiences?

Our field has long recognized the potentially negative consequences of asking our students to practice and inhabit academic discourses. As a result, responses to this question are rich and varied. In the broadest sense, this line of scholarship has asked what academic discourse and our methods for teaching it mean for students' lived experiences and senses of identity, belonging, and agency. A central example is the interest in the

experiences of “basic writers” after the open admissions movement of the late 1960s. As Patricia Bizzell explains, “basic writer” is a term that has been used to describe those students who appear “to many teachers and to themselves as the students who are most alien in the college community” (Bizzell, 1986, p. 294). Faced with the challenge of responding to “non-traditional” social class identities and literacy practices among their students, composition educators struggled with how to reconcile our disciplinary responsibilities. How do we adapt our standards in order to provide greater access to postsecondary literacy education (recognizing the social mobility that often accompanies it) while still communicating the standards of academic literacy to which students will be held in the college curriculum? These were the concerns of the “basic writing movement” of the 1970s and 1980s, and the various responses that developed during this time highlight a desire for more responsive, inclusive pedagogies (Shaughnessy, 1997; Lu, 1991; Rouse, 1979). Although this dissertation does not address “basic writing” or “basic writers” specifically, this history is illustrative of complex, intertwined conversations about the relationship between students’ identities and the demands of academic discourse. Furthermore, these early conversations highlight a complex concern in our field about how our course structures and pedagogical approaches support some students and limit others.

While the basic writing movement illustrates a foundation in our field for prioritizing students’ identities and lived experiences of class and literacy education, others have focused more specifically on economies of writing and on how we might encourage students to be critical of the subjectivities they are asked to inhabit. One response has been to adopt pedagogies designed to attend to writing as labor and to

encourage an awareness of and resistance to capitalist ideologies that obscure systems of production and commodification. One of the earliest calls for this approach came from John Trimbur (2000), who suggests that our tendency to “[neglect] delivery has led writing teachers to equate the activity of composing with writing itself and to miss altogether the complex delivery systems through which writing circulates” (p. 189). The main consequences of this focus on composing are that the material processes of writing are elided and that we risk reproducing capitalist versions of utility and self-improvement (pp. 216-217). One way of correcting this reproduction has been to advocate for critical pedagogies as a way to offer students alternative subject positions in their engagement with the political economy (Giroux, 2014; McLaren, 1998; Shor, 2012, 2014). At the same time, though, others have asked whether critical pedagogies accomplish their liberatory goals or simply reinscribe their own set of norms and values. David Seitz (2004), Julie Lindquist (2004), and Irvin Peckham (2010) are some of the scholars who have argued that there are hidden class assumptions at work in critical pedagogies, which can exclude students from working-class backgrounds and (just as Anyon (1980), Bloom (1996), and others argued in years prior) reinscribe middle-class ideologies.

Seitz (2004), for example, argues that “critical theory searches out the negative position,” and subsequently asks if students in disadvantaged social and economic positions can “afford to think negatively?” (p. 18). His research addresses how working-class students and minority students (which, he suggests, also tend to adopt/exhibit a working-class ethos) view critical pedagogy strategies. Seitz’s main argument is that language means differently for students of different class statuses (p. 95), and that our pedagogical strategies should take this into account. Julie Lindquist (2004) is also

interested in the identities of working-class students, and she argues that we often fail to accommodate or respond to these identity positions in the composition classroom. Lindquist claims that in privileging rational, critical inquiry we can deny students the opportunity to more fully understand the way social class works in their own and in others' lives (p. 187). Lindquist's proposed solution is for us, as literacy teachers, to consider how we "might perform emotional engagements that students find authentic and valuable within scenes of literacy instruction" (p. 188). Irvin Peckham (2010) similarly forwards a pedagogy that fosters a contextualized understanding of writing and identity and a commitment to investigating and honoring students' own literacy skills and goals (p. 101). Peckham diverges from Seitz and Lindquist, though, in his attention to identity as a concept in middle- and working-class cultures. Peckham explains that "for the working-class person raised in circumscribed environments, identity is fixed. For the middle-class students, whose parents have to learn how to respond to varied rhetorical situations, identity and meaning are contextualized. This latter notion of shifting, contextualized perspectives is what we reward in student writing" (p. 73). Peckham, Lindquist, Seitz, and others working on these issues thus carry on a longstanding conversation in the field about how our supposedly liberatory discourses and curricular structures can, in fact, reinscribe class-based ideologies and value middle-class discourses over those of the working class.

These ideas function as powerful revisions of our status quo approaches because they ask us to pay attention to assumptions about student identity that underlie the ways we value and teach academic literacies and critical thinking. However, the particular working lives of students and their actual, material labor processes are often elided in this

scholarship. Seitz, Lindquist, Peckham, and others have certainly advanced our understanding of our students' lives by insisting that we recognize social class as a powerful aspect of their identities; however, this work does show social class or students' labor as a concrete, material set of practices and lived experiences. Abstracting the working lives and material circumstances of students can lead us to view students as *future* workers, rather than current ones. Marc Bousquet and Cary Nelson (2008) have addressed this problem as well and called for more attention to the institutional structures that lead to contingency and exploitation in postsecondary student populations. This dissertation contributes to this scholarship by foregrounding the actual, lived experiences of these students and the implications of the intertwined nature of their work-school lives. As Donna LeCourt (2006) has argued, "class is not predetermined but continually determined by the local situations in which we encode experience" (p. 37). Because our field cares about students' identities and agency in the composition classroom, we would benefit from research that foregrounds these locally situated practices and offers a material as well as a social understanding of how social class comes to matter in our students' lives and literacy development.

How are individual literacy practices, institutional structures of literacy sponsorship, and cultural beliefs about literacy affected by economic structures and ideologies?

As many scholars have illustrated, there are complex relationships among literacy, identity, and economic ideologies. Current understandings of these relationships center on the idea that literacy is not just a skill that is passed on through instruction, but that it is a social and epistemological phenomenon that extends far beyond the boundaries of

classroom walls. Much scholarship that works towards this more expansive understanding of people's literate lives comes from New Literacy Studies, which, as Brian Street (2003) explains, is committed to the idea that "literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles" (pp. 77-78). Current New Literacy scholarship that responds to these concerns has its roots in early ethnographic research on social class, community belonging, and workplace literacy contexts. James Paul Gee, Glynda Hull, and Colin Lankshear (1996), for example, consider the ways in which capitalist discourses are taken up in a specific workplace—a factory in the United States. Gee, Hull, and Lankshear's sociocultural approach focuses on the trajectories of human lives as they engage in a variety of practices and participate in a variety of institutions (p. 4). Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) influential *Ways with Words* similarly highlights the networked nature of literacy development, as she discusses the ways in which different family structures, shared values, and material conditions work to create differences in literate practices that persist as children from different communities adapt their home literacy practices to school literacy contexts.

This dissertation shares a commitment to understanding literacy development as a complex, unfolding experience that is affected by a variety of institutions and relationships. Like these scholars, I share the assumption that literacy is central to understanding how individuals navigate institutions and communities. As David Barton and Mary Hamilton (1998) emphasize, "literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals" (p. 7). Literacy practices are therefore

inherently relational, and they connect individuals, communities, and institutions. Scholars have also considered this networked, relational aspect of literacy more specifically in the context of economic institutions and ideologies. Deborah Brandt's (1998) famous description of literacy sponsors, for example, also references economies of literacy in which "literacy as a resource becomes available to ordinary people largely through the mediations of more powerful sponsors" (p. 173). Therefore, to say that literacy is relational means to foreground it not only as a set of social practices but also as an ideological function of institutions.

Literacy also operates economically because it is assigned instrumental and exchange value in professional contexts. This view of literacy leads to it being coded in public discussions as simply a tool for achieving upward social mobility rather than a highly complex, lifelong and life-wide activity. Harvey Graff and others have referred to this as the "literacy myth," which is "the belief, articulated in educational, civic, religious, and other settings, contemporary and historical, that the acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to and invariably results in economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement, and upward social mobility" (*Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, as quoted in Graff, 2010, p. 635). This understanding of literacy is made apparent in recurrent moments of cultural panic over supposed illiteracy among young people (as evidenced by texts such as Flesch's (1955) *Why Johnny Can't Read*, for example). Bronwyn Williams (2007) has argued that these "literacy crises" indicate deeply rooted middle-class anxieties, and that "if we want to serve students best in their literacy education we should not scare them with tales of the literacy crisis of their generation but instead teach them how to understand how language, culture, and

identity work together” (p. 181). Williams and others have thus examined the powerful structures that shape individuals’ experiences with literacy in order to complicate dominant narratives about literacy, work, and social class.

One way that this dissertation contributes to these conversations is by examining the mediating institutional structures in such literacy networks. While the emphasis on the local in New Literacy Studies scholarship offers rich, situated illustrations of literacy as a social, epistemological phenomenon, this emphasis on the local may obscure the complex, nuanced interactions between the local and global. In other words, the tendency to focus on either macro-level ideologies or micro-level experiences may lead us to overlook the meso-level, mediating practices between the two.

Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton (2002) also take issue with this tendency and present the idea that literacy is a “translocalizing agent” as a corrective. At the heart of this argument is the idea that “literacy is not wholly produced or reproduced in local practice but rather is a contributing actor in it” (p. 353). Brandt and Clinton draw on actor-network theory to emphasize the materiality in literate practices, arguing that “when we use literacy, we also get used. Things typically mediate this relationship” (p. 350). Brandt and Clinton, among others, initiated an important turn in New Literacy Studies toward accounting for materiality in studies of literacy and of the networked nature of literacy practices. Brandt and Clinton’s (2002) insistence on “bridg[ing] the usual gaps between micro and macro levels of social structure as they relate to literacy and literacy learning” (p. 349) is central to the understanding of literacy employed in this dissertation.

Summary of Contributions

As this review of the literature illustrates, there is an established tradition in composition and literacy studies of analyzing the relationship between our work as literacy educators on the one hand and the discourses, practices, and structures of political-economic institutions and ideologies on the other. Many scholars have discussed the tension between working-class identities and academic discourse, conducted locally-situated ethnographies of workplace literacies and literacy sponsorship, and described pedagogical strategies for dealing with the neoliberalization and corporatization of higher education. However, it is worth noting that extant scholarship has not yet investigated the implications of learn-and-earn programs for our work and our students' lives. There are at least two benefits of pursuing this research. The first is that it foregrounds the lived realities of students' working lives. Rather than treating social class as primarily an abstract experience, directing our attention toward students' working lives offers the opportunity for a better understanding of the variety of institutions that structure their experiences of postsecondary education. Second, analyzing learn-and-earn programs is valuable for how we think about the increasingly networked institutions that affect higher education and writing instruction. The UPS Metro College program in particular is a valuable example of this phenomenon because of the highly embedded nature of this corporate institution in the structures of the University.

Furthermore, there is a tendency in previous scholarship to focus on either micro experiences or macro structures, obscuring or glossing over the mediating forces that create possibilities for agency and intelligibility in these relationships. I will work to add this focus to current conversations by foregrounding how the material conditions, structures, and discourses of neoliberalism structure students-workers' experiences while

also making concrete the institutional structures that coordinate individual activity and agency in the context of postsecondary literacy education.

Given this focus on labor and political-economic ideology, my analysis of identity in this project focuses primarily on social class. However, it is important to acknowledge that in analyzing social class, other forms of difference including race, ethnicity, and gender do not slip away. As Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) has argued, experiences of marginalization “are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism” (p. 1243). Other scholars have since added that social class, sexual orientation, disability, and other forms of difference also intersect to produce complex, interrelated systems of oppression. Although this study does not explore race or gender directly, I am well aware that issues of labor and social class intersect with normative discourses about gender, race, ethnicity, and so on in powerful ways. For instance, one student-worker I discuss in this dissertation is also a primary caretaker for her elementary-school-aged sister. Her experience of labor is, of course, affected by the gendered expectations of her domestic labor as well. My focus on labor in this project thus heightens issues of social class, though I am aware that other markers of difference are always in force.

Ultimately, this research aims to offer a situated, networked illustration of the lived experiences of student-workers in order to consider how these experiences can be made intelligible in the composition classroom and how we might better support student-workers through our pedagogical approaches and through the ways that we structure our writing programs.

Research Questions

- How are the structures of contemporary higher education and neoliberal economic systems manifest in the real experiences and lives of working students?
- How does participation in the UPS Metropolitan College program affect student-workers' lived experiences, literacy practices, and social class identities?
- What are the texts and text-mediated discourses that coordinate or structure these experiences and practices, and how do they do so?
- What are the opportunities and obstacles that the UPS Metropolitan College program presents regarding composition pedagogy and writing program administration?

Chapter Summaries

Because this project aims to understand how institutions mediate between broad, neoliberal ideologies and individual lived experiences—and, specifically, the role of texts and normative discourses in this mediation—this dissertation project is heavily influenced by the epistemological and methodological approaches of institutional ethnography. Institutional ethnography analyzes institutional texts and examines people's experiences in order to illustrate the ways that social relations are manifest in and constructed by the real, daily, lived activities of people—or, in other words, how institutions coordinate the activity of individuals. Chapters Three and Four each focus on a different instantiation of neoliberal discourse and trace these discourses in relevant institutional texts and in student-workers' lived realities. Chapter Five draws on the perspectives of composition instructors to discuss how this institutional coordination

should inform writing pedagogy. Across these chapters, I draw on the concept of a network to illuminate the ways in which institutional coordination is simultaneously material, affective, and relational. In Chapter Two, I provide the foundation for these analyses, as I describe my methodology in detail, argue for the relevance of institutional ethnography to composition and literacy studies, and explain the phases of this research project. I offer brief descriptions of the nine focal student participants and one administrator participant in this study, and I discuss the ethical considerations and limitations of this project.

In Chapter Three, I draw on mobility studies to illustrate how the UPS Metro College program claims to foster students' mobility through postsecondary education according to a linear, stepwise model of progress and success. I refer to this model as a "mobility script" that coordinates student-workers' identities and literacy practices according to neoliberal ideologies. One manifestation of this institutional coordination is the College and Academic Planning Program (CAPP)—a professionalization program that is required of all Metro College student participants. By discussing the particular literacy practices that this program requires and the ways in which these practices relate to the institutional mobility script, I show how the Metro College program sponsors certain literacy practices that are based in neoliberal values of efficiency and marketability. I conclude the chapter by discussing the effects of this coordination on student-workers' identities and emotional dispositions. I describe the experiences of students like Heather and Reya, who have to perform certain identity work or "affective labor" in order to maintain their participation in the Metro College program.

Chapter Four builds on Chapter Three's discussion of affective responses as institutionally shaped phenomena and considers the points of tension or alignment between institutional discourses about ownership and agency and the actual experiences of students. In this chapter, I explore how the Metro College program claims to offer ownership to its participants, what the terms of this ownership are, and how feelings of ownership and agency surface (or not) in the lived realities of student-workers. I consider the University and the Metro College program as embedded institutions that shape individual decision-making and capacities for action. One implication of the embedded, networked nature of these institutions is that student-workers must operate within a rigid temporal economy in which school and work compete for control over their time. For some students, this temporal economy makes them feel as though they lack agency in their work and school lives, while others find it offers them an increased sense of control. In addition to this temporal structuring, I also consider the labor demanded of these students in both their work and school lives and describe the embodied and emotional consequences of these labor conditions for students' feelings of agency in educational contexts. I conclude this chapter by describing the implications of this institutional coordination for the work of writing programs, and I analyze learning outcomes and syllabi as texts that coordinate students' time and labor according to institutional discourses about ownership, individualism, and efficiency.

In Chapter Five, I explore ways that composition pedagogy might leverage its mediating role in order to intervene in the shaping of students' lives by the economic institutions in which they participate. I situate this discussion in the perspectives of composition instructors, whose attempts to make sense of the experiences of Metro

College participants take up institutional narratives that may not be able to account for the varied and complex experiences of these students. I offer a pedagogical framework based on the concept of intelligibility, which is informed by the philosophical underpinnings of institutional ethnography. I argue that this approach can help postsecondary literacy educators better support student-workers and offer them the opportunity to reflect on and critically engage with the networks that shape their lives.

Finally, I conclude this dissertation in Chapter Six by summarizing the contributions of this project and discussing directions for future research. While I acknowledge that this research is situated and local, I also argue that it has far-reaching implications for a range of student populations that are considered “non-traditional.” Specifically, if it is true that more and more students will become “non-traditional” in 21st-century fast-capitalism, then we have a responsibility to structure our writing programs and design our pedagogies in ways that make a greater variety of life circumstances intelligible. My hope is that, by attending to the real experiences of student-workers, those of us invested in postsecondary literacy education may practice dispositions towards our students that prioritize the complex material and emotional conditions of their lives.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

“Institutional ethnography’s radical move as a sociology is that of pulling the organization of the trans- or extra-local ruling relations—bureaucracy, the varieties of text-mediated discourse, the state, the professions, and so on—into the actual sites of people’s living where we have to find them as local and temporally situated activities” (Smith, 2002, p. 19).

I was born and raised in Louisville, so I was familiar with UPS’s “free tuition” program and the general lore surrounding it long before I began my graduate career at the University of Louisville: UPS takes care of its own if you’re willing to make sacrifices and work your way up. In fact, my mother worked the night shift at UPS for a short time after I was born. My father was working to finish his dissertation, and my mom went to work for UPS to provide a degree of financial stability for our family. Though she wasn’t participating in the learn-and-earn program, she still recalls how difficult it was to try to survive on the few hours of sleep she got in the afternoons while I napped, but maintains that it was worth it so that our family would have reliable income and decent health insurance.

As I progressed in my graduate education and began teaching college composition, I had another interesting encounter with this program. When I attended new instructor orientation for graduate teaching assistants, we were cautioned about “UPS students” and the challenges they would face in our classes. We were told that these students would almost certainly have issues meeting deadlines and attendance requirements and that they would likely fall asleep in class; however, we were not given

specific suggestions on how to accommodate these challenges. I was intrigued by this problem—what should we do when our policies seem to operate on expectations that are antithetical to the realities of a specific population of students? As I met more and more of these students in my classes (and struggled to figure out how to meet their needs while upholding some kind of “standards”), I became interested in how their working lives shaped their educational lives in unique ways.

Working third shift and having to attend classes during the day is a fairly extreme picture of what it’s like to be a working student. In other ways though, the challenges these students face also seem to reflect the competing, sometimes conflicting roles and responsibilities that many students seeking postsecondary education have to navigate in a neoliberal economic climate. This dissertation project arises from these tensions and attempts to bring to light the many ways in which student-workers’ lives are shaped by the educational-economic institutions in which they participate.

In this chapter, I will describe in more detail the history of the UPS Metropolitan College program, explain how the design of this study draws on institutional ethnography, offer a brief research timeline and narrative, and account for the limitations of this project. I will conclude this chapter with brief definitions of some of the key theoretical terms that I use throughout my analysis and discussion in Chapters Three through Five.

Research Site

In 1998, UPS, the University of Louisville, Jefferson Community College, and Jefferson Technical College (which have since merged to become Jefferson Community and Technical College) came to an agreement in which students at one of the

participating colleges would receive free tuition, weekly pay, and other monetary incentives in exchange for working third shift at UPS's Worldport hub in Louisville, KY (Sturtevant, 2011). The cost of the program is covered by UPS, the respective postsecondary institutions, the local Louisville Metro government, and the Kentucky state government ("Funding," n.d.). The Metropolitan College (Metro College) program describes itself as "a joint education-workforce-economic development initiative" and explains that "developing a responsive and educated workforce for the region and state has always been a key component of the Metropolitan College model" ("About Us," n.d.). While the explicit purpose of the program is to expand access to postsecondary education, it has also been credited as the primary motivation behind UPS's decision to keep an operations center in Louisville and subsequently expand their Louisville hub. Strother, et al. (2004) explain that this program essentially saved the Worldport hub because it "provided a framework to enlarge the pool of part-time workers for UPS" (p. 363). In addition to simply increasing the pool of part-time workers, though, the Metro College program has also significantly reduced part-time overnight employee turnover at UPS from 70% to 20% ("History," n.d.). Recent data from the program illustrates the centrality of the Metro College program for the company's significant increase in employee retention. As the program states:

Student retention on the job has increased from average of 8 weeks prior to MC program inception to 195 weeks currently. Work retention of UPS-MC participants in 2015 was 89% compared with 39% for non-MC participants working the same shift. Percentage of students working at night for UPS has increased from approximately 8% prior to MC program inception to 37% currently (35% was original goal). ("Quick Stats," 2018)

In addition to being seen as an economic success on the local level, the Metro College program has also received national recognition. The Department of Labor, for

instance, named the Metro College as one of twelve innovative initiatives for solving skills shortages (Department of Labor, 2010). The program was also recently recognized as a top-25 program in the *Innovations in American Government Awards* (Bath, 2013). As the Metro College program states on their website, they have also been recognized by publications such as the *U.S. News and World Report* (Powell, 2017) and *Forbes* (Noer, 2011). This program has thus been lauded in both the government and economic sectors for its innovative partnership structure and tuition benefits. It is seen as the solution to a variety of problems from UPS's initial dissatisfaction with the Louisville labor market to the supposed "skills crisis" in the workforce.

On the University of Louisville Belknap campus, the Metro College program is fairly visible. Recruitment on campus is ongoing and year-round. UPS representatives regularly attend freshman orientation, career fairs, and other involvement events to promote the program. The University also offers a Metro College "themed community" in one of the residence halls. Any student who is participating or plans to participate in the Metro College can apply to live in this community, which offers programming and other forms of support for these student-workers. Retention is an ongoing concern for these students. The Metro College program reports that "Fall 16 to Fall 17 student retention in school was 56% for JCTC participants and 60% for UofL participants (these students completed fall 2016 coursework, remained employed and returned fall 2017)" ("Quick Stats," 2018, n.p.). This data does not specify students' year in school, but the first-year retention rate for U of L students overall from 2016-2017 was 81% (Watkins, 2018).

Table 1, below, displays the total enrollment of University of Louisville students in the Metro College program per semester from fall 2016–spring 2018, the time frame during which this dissertation research took place. In fall 2017, the total undergraduate enrollment at U of L was 15,738, so approximately 7% of the student body participated in Metro College during that semester. This percentage is on par with the data for fall 2016, in which 7.1% of the total student body (16,033) participated in the Metro College.

Table 1	
<i>University of Louisville Students Enrolled in the Metropolitan College program from FA 2016—SP 2018</i>	
<u>Semester</u>	<u>Number of students</u>
Spring 2018	896
Fall 2017	1100
Summer 2017	392
Spring 2017	974
Fall 2016	1145

Table 1, data provided by the Metropolitan College program (“Quick Stats,” 2018).

Focal Student Participant Profiles

In Table 2 (below), I offer some brief demographic and background information about the student-worker participants in this research. I include this table to provide relevant background information about these participants, but also to illustrate the intersectional location of their social positions (Smith, 1987). I did not include questions about specific demographic information in my interview guide, so these descriptions are based on what each participant disclosed during the course of our conversation: the student’s year in school, major, career goals, position and length of time at UPS, place of birth, family income level or self-identified social class, and race/ethnicity. I use

“traditional-aged” to refer to participants who enrolled in college immediately or shortly following high school and therefore will be 18-24 years old during their undergraduate education.

Table 2	
<i>Student-Worker Participant Profiles</i>	
<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Profile</u>
Brandi	Brandi is a white, traditional-aged first-year student pursuing a degree in biology. Brandi comes from a working-class family, and her father has worked factory jobs for most of his life. We spoke in November of 2016. At the end of that semester, Brandi left the University of Louisville. Brandi’s position at the Worldport hub involved both loading and unloading planes.
Summer	Summer is an older student who completed a degree in graphic design in Puerto Rico. She decided to return to school to complete a bachelor’s degree in mathematics. Both of her parents attended college (at the University of Louisville), but Summer did not indicate if they graduated. She lives with a significant other and does not receive any financial support from her parents or other family. At the time of our conversation, Summer had been working in the small sort area of the Worldport for about five months.
Heather	Heather is a white, traditional-aged first-generation, first-year student majoring in graphic design. She began working for UPS the summer after she graduated high school. She works as a loader, preparing “cans” that will be loaded onto outbound planes. She identifies her family as being “not broke” but not wealthy. A primary motivator for her to do the Metro College program was to allow her family to afford her younger sister’s high school tuition. We spoke in November of 2016, about one month before the end of her first semester.
Kathleen	Kathleen is a white, traditional-aged first-year student. She is majoring in education with plans to become a high school math teacher. She is originally from Hardin County, KY, but has lived in Louisville for the past 2 and a half years with her mother, stepfather, and younger sister. She takes on many of the caretaking responsibilities for her sister. She identifies her family as “blue collar.” Kathleen began participating in the

	<p>Metro College program during the summer after she graduated from high school. Kathleen's position involves loading package onto trucks. We spoke twice—the first time in January of 2018 at the beginning of her second semester, and a second time approximately two months later.</p>
Dean	<p>Dean is a white, traditional-aged first-year student. He is in a relationship with another participant in this research, Kristin (see profile below). He began working for the UPS co-op program as a high school student. After graduating, he began the Metro College program. He works in the small sort section of the operation.</p>
Kristin	<p>Kristin is a white, traditional-aged first-year student. She is from the Louisville area and is in a relationship with Dean. She requested that she and Dean be interviewed together, and the three of us met near the beginning of their second semester. At the time of our conversation, she had quit working for UPS after a period of about a month during her first semester.</p>
Reya	<p>Reya is a traditional-aged first-year student majoring in education. She began participating in the Metro College program shortly after graduating high school. She referred to her father having saved money to pay for her college education, but she decided to participate in the Metro College program to pay for her college education on her own. Reya works as a loader and was injured while on the job right before “peak season” (the time around the winter holidays). When we spoke at the beginning of her second semester, she had finished physical therapy for her back injury and was almost completely off “restrictions” at work (meaning limitations on the weight of packages she was allowed to lift).</p>
Jill	<p>Jill is a white, traditional-aged second-year student majoring in Education. She began doing the Metro College program at the beginning of her first year. She has an administrative position at the Worldport, which involves scanning packages and updating their tracking locations. Jill identifies as coming from a family that is “pretty well off,” but her parents have not been able to afford to help Jill or her sister pay for college due to spending habits. We spoke in the middle of her fourth semester.</p>
Ramon	<p>Ramon is a graduating senior about to enter dental school in the fall. He is Latino and lived in Cuba until he was 8 years old, at which point he and his family moved to Louisville. He joined the Air Force immediately after high school. After his military service, he began his postsecondary education at JCTC, then</p>

	transferred to U of L. At the Worldport, he initially worked as a small package unloader, then transferred to “irregs,” which is where irregularly sized parcels are sorted. We spoke about a month before graduation, and he had been accepted into dental school for the following fall.
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Table 2, Student-Worker Participant Profiles

It is important to acknowledge that this sample is not entirely representative of the demographic characteristics of the population of participants in the Metro College program. Data provided by the program indicates that in the 2017-2018 academic year, the majority of participants were male (56%), white (80%), and aged 18-21 (67%) (“Quick Stats,” 2018). While this sample does reflect the majority in terms of race/ethnicity and age, it is skewed because the majority of the research participants identify as female. However, given the kind of purposive sampling I conducted (described below), I would not expect the sample for this research to be representative of the general Metro College participant population.

In addition to these nine student participants, there is one additional focal participant whose perspective significantly informs my analysis, particularly in Chapter Four. This participant is Caroline, who is an upper-level administrator in the Metropolitan College program. I conducted one interview with Caroline.

Table 3 <i>Metro College Administrator Participant Profile</i>	
Caroline	Caroline has been an administrator in the Metro College program for over 16 years. Her role within the program has involved career services, student support, and long-term planning. Although Caroline did not identify a particular social class background, she did refer to coming from a family in which she did not have to work while she attended college. Caroline is white and is married with two children.

Table 3, Metro College Administrator Participant Profile

As I describe in greater detail later in this chapter, this research project also included a study of composition instructors' perspectives on the Metro College program. This phase involved a survey and two small follow-up focus groups. However, I consider this data supplemental, rather than focal, so I have not included profiles of the participating instructors here. Alternatively, I offer relevant background information about these participants in Chapter Five.

Methodology: Institutional Ethnography

Because this project aims to understand how institutions mediate between broad neoliberal ideologies and individual lived experiences—and, specifically, the role of texts, norms, and narratives in this mediation—this dissertation is heavily influenced by the epistemological and methodological approaches of institutional ethnography (IE). Drawing on the work of sociologist Dorothy Smith (1987, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2006), I identify three central features of institutional ethnography as a methodology: 1) the researcher is explicitly interested in the project—the goals of the research are expressly political; 2) IE aims to understand the interaction between institutions and individuals; and 3) the starting point for this research is the lived experiences of real people. These features are foundational in the methodological approach I have taken in this project.

Through specific processes and epistemological commitments, IE aims to illustrate the ways that social relations are manifest in and constructed by the real, daily, lived activities of people. As I quote at the opening of this chapter, Smith (2002) argues that “institutional ethnography’s radical move as a sociology is that of pulling the organization of the trans- or extra-local ruling relations—bureaucracy, the varieties of text-mediated discourse, the state, the professions, and so on—into the actual sites of

people's living where we have to find them as local and temporally situated activities" (p. 19). While this dissertation aims to foreground certain problematics in the context of composition and literacy studies, my political and philosophical commitments make a sociological perspective particularly apt for this study. While I am not claiming to *do* sociology, I am claiming to pursue an understanding of real people's lives in a way that begins from the assumption that these individual lives are situated in social systems.

This relational characteristic of institutional ethnography is grounded in Smith's use of feminist standpoint theory. Smith (2002) explains that in this methodology, "the central project is one of inquiry which *begins* with the issues and problems of people's lives and develops inquiry from the standpoint of their experience in and of the actualities of their everyday living" (p. 18, emphasis mine). The starting point for an institutional ethnography project is the people—the micro—because "institutional ethnography does not have pre-given theoretical destination" (Smith, 2005, p. 38). IE starts with the locally situated reality of people's experiences because it prioritizes the ways in which different social and institutional positions can lead to differences in people's experiences and perspectives (or standpoint).

However, it is important to note that institutional ethnography does not stop at the level of the local. Rather, it connects this micro level to the macro by looking to how the everyday lives of real people are organized by institutions (Smith, 1987). In order to understand the relationships between the micro and the macro, institutional ethnography turns to texts, which it sees as coordinators of people's activity² and the social relations in which they are enmeshed (Smith, 2002; 2006). It is through texts and textually-mediated

² I use "activity" in this context to refer broadly to people's actions, behaviors, experiences, dispositions, and perceptions.

processes, then, that the institutional ethnographer connects the experiences of real people to dominant norms, narratives, and ideologies. Michael Walby (2013) emphasizes this aspect of institutional ethnography as well, explaining that “IE treats people not as the object of analysis but as an entry point into understanding organisational processes” (pp. 142-143). While these texts are often literal documents, they are not necessarily so. For instance, Smith (1999) describes the idea of the “Standard North American Family” as a kind of umbrella “text” because it functions as an “ideological code” that is mediated by texts (p. 159). Similarly, in this dissertation, I often describe specific, actual documents as mediators or coordinators of individuals’ experiences, but I also refer to dominant narratives such as the “ideal neoliberal worker” as discourses that function in the same way (Smith, 1999, p. 158). In this methodology, both of these “texts” are institutional coordinators of people’s activity.

Institutional Ethnography for Composition and Literacy Studies

Since Smith’s research, institutional ethnography has been widely adopted as a methodology for sociology. For example, Marjorie Devault (1991; 1999) has relied on institutional ethnography in her research on the social organization of families. Sociology is clearly the home discipline of institutional ethnography, but it has been taken up in a variety of other fields including healthcare (Rankin, 2015) and workplace studies (Malachowski et al., 2016).

Although rhetoric and composition has been influenced by a range of sociological methodologies and perspectives, scholars in our field have primarily taken up institutional *critique* (Porter, et. al, 2000) rather than institutional ethnography. While institutional critique and institutional ethnography share some key features, there are at

least two salient differences. Understanding these differences is key to understanding my argument for institutional *ethnography* as a methodology for composition and literacy studies.

The first key difference is that institutional ethnography takes the personal—the individual—as its starting point, whereas institutional critique takes the institution itself as its starting point. This might also be understood as a difference in the unit of analysis. Smith makes clear that “institutional ethnography *begins* by locating a standpoint in an institutional order that provides the guiding perspective from which that order will be explored. It *begins* with some issues, concerns, or problems *that are real for people* and that are situated in their relationships to an institutional order” (2002, p. 32, emphasis mine). Alternatively, Porter et al. begin their research with the institution itself, as evidenced by their explanation, “We focus, then, *on institutions* as rhetorical systems of decision making that exercise power through the design of space (both material and discursive)” (p. 621, emphasis mine). This stance is echoed by Knight et al. (2009) in their institutional critique of writing program websites. Rather than beginning with the experiences of users of the websites, for example, they begin with the institutional space of the website itself. The difference here might also be understood as a top-down versus bottom-up approach. While institutional ethnography begins with individual experience in order to understand how institutions organize that experience, institutional critique begins with an understanding of the institution itself and tends to theorize the effects that may follow on the micro level.

In addition to beginning with different units of analysis, institutional ethnography and institutional critique also espouse different methods. Institutional ethnography often

makes use of in-depth interviewing, participant observation, and textual analysis. Smith (2006) describes the relationship between people, texts, and institutions as follows: “a form is filled in; the form becomes the institutional representation of a person; its properties are read back into the actuality of the person it represents” (p. 86). In this way, “institutional ethnography treats texts as... establishing the concepts and categories in terms of which what is done can be recognized as an instance or expression of the textually authorized procedure” (Smith, 2006, p. 83). In addition to textual analysis, dialogic interviewing is also central to institutional ethnography (discussed in more detail below). Institutional critique, on the other hand, often takes postmodern mapping and boundary interrogation as central methods. As is appropriate for research that begins with the analysis of institutions, these methods focus on the material organization of space and the messages that such organization communicates about difference, power, and relationships within the institution itself (Porter, et. al, 2000).

Institutional ethnography has been taken up in composition and literacy studies in one notable example: LaFrance and Nicolas (2012) use institutional ethnography in their study of human resources classifications and labor expectations in the writing center. They argue that institutional ethnography is useful for addressing a concern in writing studies for being able to account for the material conditions of writing program work. They suggest that “the institutional ethnography framework refocuses us on the ways that disciplinary discourse is always articulated to the local; these discourses inform the mechanisms that actualize and generalize the individual’s lived experience” (p. 145). LaFrance and Nicolas’s study is primarily concerned with the labor structures within academia, but IE has yet to be applied to students’ labor and lived experiences. IE offers

rich opportunities to foreground the lived experiences of individuals as they are coordinated by institutions, which is well-aligned with a commitment in composition and literacy studies to humanism and a concern for positively contributing our students' lives in the context of their education and beyond.

Research Questions and Problematic

In institutional ethnography, the formulation of a research problematic is central for directing the research. As Rankin (2017a) explains, "the formulation of a research 'problematic' expresses the researcher's discoveries and descriptions of when knowledge 'shifts.' It encapsulates the junctures (or disjunctures) when the researcher notes when knowledge generated from 'being there' is abstracted into something else" (p. 3). For this study, the research problematic can be understood as follows: dominant institutional narratives about the Metro College program are in tension with the material and emotional complexities of student-workers' lived experiences. This problematic informs the following research questions (as I mention in Chapter One):

- How are the structures of contemporary higher education and neoliberal economic systems manifest in the real experiences and lives of working students?
- How does participation in the UPS Metropolitan College program affect student-workers' lived experiences, literacy practices, and identities?
- What are the texts and text-mediated discourses that coordinate or structure these experiences and practices, and how do they do so?

- What are the opportunities and obstacles that the UPS Metropolitan College program presents regarding composition pedagogy and writing program administration?

Researcher Positionality

As I mention above in defining this methodology, the position of the researcher is key. Smith (2002) argues that “observation without an attentional frame is anomie. It means not knowing how to look, what to select, what to ask, what to follow up, and so on. It means not knowing what part to play in the dialogue” (p. 23). The institutional ethnographer, in other words, necessarily contributes an attentional frame to the research. She is both *positioned* in relationship to the research and *situated in* the research; she is interested in the problematic that her research attempts to bring to light. This positionality of the researcher means that institutional ethnography tends to be explicitly political and activist in nature. Smith (2005) foregrounds this element of the methodology in her suggestion that “institutional ethnographies produce a kind of knowledge that makes visible to activists or others directly involved the order they both participate in and confront” (p. 32). My own positionality as a feminist and someone interested in issues of labor and exploitation means that when I talk about changing our pedagogical practices to account for the networked experiences of students, I am making a political call for change. My standpoint leads me to want to foreground the experiences of these student-workers so we can intervene in structures that disadvantage them.

It is also important, though, to recognize the ways in which my attentional frame is limited by my privilege. I am a white, heterosexual, able-bodied, cis-gendered female; I come from a middle-class family. As the daughter of an academic, I am very much

enculturated into the institutional values and processes of academia. These factors influence my own standpoint—what I recognize, value, and understand. Specifically, while my focus in this research is on labor and social class, my own forms of privilege make it easy for me to fail to attend to other markers of difference, such as race and ethnicity. While I acknowledge the intersectionality of marginalization (as I describe in Chapter One), I also acknowledge that my positionality limits my standpoint in this way.

Research Narrative and Timeline

In the fall of 2016, I conducted a pilot study for this dissertation in which I interviewed three student-workers in the Metro College program. The goal of this initial phase of my pilot study was to better hone my research questions and better understand the experiences of the student-workers I was interested in learning from. The most important way in which this pilot study subsequently shaped my research process was that it led me to recognize the need to account for a much wider range of experiences and perceptions of student-workers than I had originally anticipated. Because of my own positionality as someone attuned to issues of labor, I had assumed that most student-workers would have negative feelings about the Metro College program. I quickly learned during this initial research phase that this was not the case. Therefore, this pilot study further confirmed the need for institutional ethnographic methods that begin in people's lived experiences.

In the subsequent semester, I realized that I wanted to triangulate the data I was gathering from students in order to better understand the problematic from multiple perspectives. As Michael Patton (2002) has explained, “it is possible to achieve triangulation within a qualitative inquiry strategy by combining different kinds of

qualitative methods, mixing purposeful samples, and including multiple perspectives” (p. 1193). In order to pursue the goal of triangulation, I implemented a second phase of the study in which I sought out the opinions, perspectives, and experiences of University of Louisville composition instructors with the UPS Metropolitan College program and with student-workers who participate in it. This pilot phase was integral to the development of the research problematic for this project since it brought to light some of the dominant narratives in the composition program about UPS student-workers’ experiences and challenges.

In the subsequent semester, fall 2017, I filed an amendment to my initial IRB protocol, expanding the research into the 2017-2018 academic year, and began recruiting student participants for the main interview phase of the project in the fall semester of 2017. Because the lived realities I most want to foreground are those of student-workers, I consider these interviews to be the primary source of data for this project. My interview with Caroline informs my understanding of the institution and institutional texts of the Metro College program, and my instructor-related data, as I mention above, indicates ways that teachers make sense of these students’ experiences.

Table 4 <i>Research Timeline</i>	
Fall 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Received IRB approval for dissertation pilot study (IRB number 16.0980). ● Conducted three, individual interviews with Metro College participants.
Spring 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administered a survey to composition instructors at the University of Louisville about their perceptions of the Metro College program. Out of 64 instructors invited to

	<p>participate, 22 responded.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted follow-up focus group discussions with two groups of composition instructors (one with three participants and one with four) in order to better understand their experiences with Metro College students and their perceptions of the program.
Fall 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received IRB approval on the amendment to the pilot study protocol. Began recruiting student-worker participants for interview study.
Spring 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted six interviews with seven total student-workers and one interview with a Metro College administrator between January and April.

Table 4, Research Timeline

Methods, Coding, and Analysis

As the above timeline in Table 4 illustrates, from the fall of 2016 to the spring of 2018 I conducted 10 total semi-structured interviews, which comprise the primary data for this project: eight individual interviews (two of these were with the same participant, Kathleen), one group interview with two student-workers, and an individual interview with an upper-level administrator in the Metro College program. While an initial goal of this research was to conduct multiple follow-up interviews with a small group of participants, the demands placed on these students' schedules (and mine) made a case study approach impractical. However, I did conduct a follow-up interview with one student participant, Kathleen, after I had done some initial open coding because I was interested in gaining this participant's perspective on some of my early coding and analysis schemes.

Sampling for this study was purposive, meaning that I sought out only those Metro College participants who are also taking or have previously taken a composition

course at the University of Louisville. Sharan B. Merriam (2015) explains that “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). Given my research questions and interest in connecting the experiences of these students to the work of composition pedagogy, I determined that purposive sampling was appropriate. I recruited participants by publicizing my study to composition instructors via direct emails and listserv announcements in which I requested that they share an invitation to participate with their students or allow me to briefly visit their class to recruit participants. I included a flier with my contact information, a brief description of the research project, and the criteria for participation. Once a student participant contacted me, we decided on a time and location for an in-person interview that would fit well with their schedule.

As I describe above, interviewing is a central method for institutional ethnography. Walby (2013) points out that “the point of interviewing in IE is to learn about the individual’s location in the ruling relations and to learn what the individual does with texts” (p. 143). In my approach to these interviews, I adopted Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Lina Leavy’s (2006) definition of feminist in-depth interviewing, in which the researcher is “interested in getting at the ‘subjective’ understandings an individual brings to a given situation or set of circumstances” (p. 118). A feminist approach to in-depth interviewing adds a concern “with getting at experiences that are often hidden” (p. 118). Given my research questions and my interest in foregrounding the often obscured material and affective implications of participation in

the Metro College program, feminist in-depth interviewing is an ideal method for this project.

All interviews (with student-workers and Caroline, the Metro College administrator) and focus groups (with composition instructors) for this research were semi-structured. In this approach, a list of topics or questions helps focus the discussion, but, as Michael Patton (2002) notes, “other topics might still emerge during the interview, topics of importance to the respondent that are not listed explicitly on the guide” (p. 344). All interview guides are included at the end of this chapter. All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 30 minutes and two hours. While most of these interviews took place on the University of Louisville Belknap campus, some took place in public locations such as coffee shops or restaurants. Informed consent forms were distributed to all participants before interviews were conducted. These forms explicitly state that participants have the right to confidentiality in discussions of the research findings, the right to cease participating in the study at any time, and the right to decline to answer any questions. The consent forms also clearly indicate that the subjects would not be forced to answer any questions such as those that they find inappropriate or irrelevant. Any information gleaned from the study that contained identifiable markers was stored on a password-protected computer, and any printed materials were housed in a locking cabinet.

I personally transcribed each interview from all audio recordings. Once a transcript was complete, I sent it to the participant(s) and asked if they wanted to clarify, delete, or add any further explanation. One participant did wish to add some information, but none requested deletions. All participants were also given the opportunity to select

their own pseudonyms. In the case that they declined to do so, I assigned a pseudonym to them. When I quote from interview transcripts in this dissertation, I omit verbal pauses (um, like, etc.) and repeated phrases or “false starts” for the sake of clarity. For instance, I may quote a participant as saying, “What I can say is....” rather than, “And I do think—I mean, what I can say is...”. I believe that this concision represents the participant’s intended meaning as directly as possible.

Composition Instructor Survey and Focus Groups

While interviews with Metro College participants comprise the primary, focal data for this study, I also sought supplemental data from composition instructors, as I mention above. This data took two forms: a survey and two follow-up focus groups with two small groups of instructors. First, I invited all composition instructors at the University to respond to a brief survey about their perceptions of and experiences with the Metro College program. Jackie Grutsch McKinney (2016) has noted that “a researcher generally uses a survey when he or she wants a big picture description of the population, particularly of the population’s attitudes and beliefs as it is generally believed that this is what respondents can answer in a survey format” (p. 73). This is precisely what I hoped to accomplish by administering a survey: to determine generally what instructors thought about the program and how it influenced their pedagogy. I also wanted to use this survey as a way to recruit participants for more extended conversations in the form of interviews or focus groups. I used Google Forms to create the survey, and I publicized the invitation to participate in my study through the composition program listserv, direct emails to instructors, and the English Graduate Organization Facebook page (specifying that only those who had taught composition at the University were being

invited to participate). The survey was made available on March 21, 2017, and responses were being submitted up to April 10, 2017. Out of 64 instructors invited to participate, 22 responded. The survey questions are listed at the end of this chapter. After activity on the survey had been stagnant for a few days and I had exhausted feasible recruitment options, I closed the survey. The quantitative data from these responses was compiled into an excel spreadsheet. I then compiled responses to the two open-ended questions into a document (the first asked about accommodations made for students in the Metro College program and the second asked about perceptions of the program). I coded the aggregate of these responses rather than examining each individual's survey response as a whole. Initially, I open-coded using NVivo software, noting common phrases that appeared across survey responses. I then performed a second round of coding by hand with themes that emerged from this open coding: incompatibility of school and work, lack of fit between expectations and reality, visibility/disclosure, positive outcomes/perception, negative effects/perception, and student types.

While working on this coding, I also conducted two small focus groups in order to foster a more nuanced picture of composition instructors' perceptions of the Metro College program. To recruit participants for these focus groups, I asked instructors to indicate at the end of the survey if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up individual interview and/or a follow-up focus group. Because of the large number of people who indicated their willingness to participate in a focus group, I did not conduct any individual interviews for this phase of the study.

As survey responses were submitted, I emailed instructors who had indicated their willingness to participate in a focus group to schedule a time to meet. This process did

limit the sample to a degree. In one case, for example, the majority of a group could meet at a specific time, but one instructor could not. This sampling was therefore highly purposive in that I singled out specific individuals to ask them to participate in the focus groups. As with the student interviews, informed consent forms were distributed to all participants before the focus groups were conducted. Each focus group lasted for roughly 45 minutes, and they were conducted approximately three weeks apart. Group One consisted of three composition instructors: one part-time lecturer and two teaching assistants and PhD students. We met in a conference room housed in the liberal studies department (as per the recommendation of one of the participants). Group Two consisted of four composition instructors, all of whom were teaching assistants and PhD students, and we met in a conference room in Ekstrom Library. In addition to recording these conversations, I also took field notes. Like with student interviews, I transcribed each recording by hand. Once I had finished transcribing, I sent the transcript to each participant individually to allow them to amend, clarify, or withdraw anything they said during the conversation. No participants indicated desired changes.

Textual Data

In addition to the survey and transcript data, I also collected a range of texts for analysis. Many of these texts are publicly available, such as advertisements about the Metro College program and descriptions of benefits and requirements as listed on their website. I collected these documents as PDFs or JPG screen captures. However, the Metro College's College and Academic Preparedness Program (CAPP), which is discussed in detail in Chapter Three, can only be accessed by Metro College participants, administrators, and others with login credentials. Caroline provided me with the

username and password to a dummy account for the MyMC dashboard, which serves as a hub for links to resources, notifications about contract deadlines, contact information for Metro College student development counselors, and a running tally of the benefits paid out to the student-worker by the Metro College program. This dashboard also provides access to the series of CAPP modules. I was able to log in with the dummy account credentials for a period of 30 days. During this time, I completed every module myself, took notes about the process, and created screenshots so that I would be able to analyze and refer to this textual data at a later date. In addition to this access, some student-worker participants logged in to their own MyMC dashboards and showed me this interface during our interviews. I do not reproduce any of the screenshots that I collected in the subsequent chapters with the exception of a partial screenshot that I include as Figure 1 in Chapter Three. This image can also easily be found by searching for “success clip art,” which suggests that this image is not proprietary to the Metro College program. I elected not to reproduce entire screenshots for two reasons: 1) these documents are not available to the public, and 2) I do not conduct visual or other types of analysis in this dissertation that would necessitate their reproduction. I did not conduct formal analyses of these texts, but I did open-code and annotate them recursively throughout my research process.

Coding and Analysis: Student-Worker Interviews

While I was in the interview stage I kept a research journal in which I noted recurring ideas, narratives, and observations. I began formal coding and analysis in April 2018. This analysis comprised roughly three phases. First, I read each transcript in its entirety and open-coded, or indexed (Rankin, 2017a), some of the common experiences,

perceptions, and practices as well as tensions or contradictions that student-workers described. The subsequent phases of my coding were adapted from the “listening guide approach,” which draws on narrative inquiry. As Walby (2013) argues, the listening guide approach is highly applicable to data analysis in institutional ethnography. Specifically, the listening guide approach aligns with IE in terms of the unit of analysis, commitments to reflexivity, and “a theoretical backdrop pertaining to feminist discussions of power, organizations and human relations” (Walby, 2013, p. 150). The four steps of the listening guide approach are, as Walby (2013) explains, roughly as follows: 1) listen for the plot and central actors in participants’ narratives (p. 146); 2) listen for the construction of self or the “voice of the I” in participants’ narratives ; 3) listen for contrapuntal voices, “or multiple voices within one story that are reflective of the broader relations the self is enmeshed in” (p. 143); 4) and finally, listen for “traces of how cultural discourses and structural forces shape and limit the participant’s capacity for action” (p. 144). Although I did not strictly adhere to these as discrete steps, they did provide points of entry for me as I conducted two rounds of formal coding. I used both hand-coding and N-Vivo software for this analysis. In the first round of coding, I coded for the “voice of the I” and the narratives that participants were telling about their work and school lives. In the second round of formal coding, I coded for “contrapuntal voices” and indications of ways in which participants’ senses of agency were shaped by broader cultural discourses. Throughout these coding phases, I read each transcript in its entirety several times, listened to the audio recording of the interview, and often moved recursively between coding and more long-form analysis (such as memo-writing).

Out of this process, two clusters of institutional narratives emerged in student-workers' perspectives and experiences that illustrate how the Metro College program attempts to coordinate individual activity: 1) the program enhances student-workers' social and economic mobility if one is willing to work hard and sacrifice, and 2) the program enhances students' ownership over their education because it leads them to develop a particular work ethic. Student-workers take up or resist these narratives in a variety of ways, and this institutional coordination has a range of emotional and material effects on student-workers' lives. Because of the significance of these two clusters of narratives, I have devoted my two central analysis chapters (Chapters Three and Four) to these two themes, respectively. In Chapter Five, I discuss and analyze the instructor survey and focus groups in order to illustrate how composition teachers might intervene in these two institutional narratives.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The first ethical consideration in this study is related to issues of power, labor, and precarity. There are risks and challenges in asking student-workers, who are already in positions of little power and authority, to disclose their perceptions of and experiences with an institution that provides them with significant material benefits. Although confidentiality measures were in place and were clearly outlined for participants, there is always risk involved in asking those who are subordinated to speak truth to power. Sending interview transcripts to participants was one way I attempted to be sensitive to this risk. Both during the interview and via email when I contacted students with the transcript, I made it clear that if there was anything they decided they wish they had not said or anything they did not want me to include all they had to do was let me know, no

explanation necessary. However, because I recruited student participants *through* their composition instructors, it is likely that students regarded me as an authority figure, and consequently may not have been comfortable voicing any concerns they had about the contents of their interview. Therefore, although I attempted to anticipate and mitigate this risk, I acknowledge that the differences in power between participants and me are always in force.

The instructor-related phase of this study also contains some important ethical considerations and limitations. Most notably, I spent a good deal of time publicizing my initial pilot study to composition instructors in order to recruit *student* participants. This outreach likely framed many composition instructors' perspectives of the Metro College program and potentially their interactions with student-workers in this program. One participant confirmed this complication by mentioning in a focus group, "I didn't know [the] UPS [program] was a thing until—mostly because of your project." Furthermore, since many of the instructor participants are friends of mine, they were already aware of my own opinions of the program and my motivations for analyzing it long before being invited to participate in my research. There is potential, then, that these pre-existing relationships shaped participants' responses or made them feel pressured to agree with my own perspective on the program. To mitigate that effect, I began the focus groups by emphasizing that I was interested in participants' own experiences and perceptions and that these would be most helpful in informing my dissertation and analysis of how this program affects composition pedagogy at the University.

In addition to these relational, ethical considerations, there are some structural limitations to this project that are important to delineate. First, although my

epistemological and ontological foundations are based in institutional ethnography, my research process did not follow a strict IE approach. This study was not longitudinal and, although I did conduct both interviews and textual analysis, I did not conduct observations or visit the work site. Furthermore, my analysis relies on a relatively small sample size. My goal was to conduct at least 15 interviews, but I concluded the data collection phase with 10 (not including the instructor focus groups). While many factors influenced this outcome, my sense is that this limitation is due in large part to the structural constraints of these students' work lives. This is a population with very little time or energy to spare.

It may also be the case, then, that the experiences of participants in this study represent extreme experiences with the Metro College program rather than a typical or "average" experience.³ Particularly when participants must respond to an open call to participate, it is likely that those with extreme feelings about the program—either very positive or very negative—will be the ones to volunteer. In other words, "opting in" to the study requires that students have some kind of stake in voicing their perspectives. I did acknowledge in my recruiting materials that students' perspectives, whatever they may be, may help instructors respond to the needs of other Metro College participants in the future. I do think participants appreciated this possible outcome, but I did not compensate participants in any way.

Furthermore, I limited this research to students at the University of Louisville and did not seek out the perspectives of Metro College participants who attend Jefferson

³ However, given the significant differences in the various positions that students can have in the Worldport facility (which I discuss in Chapter Four), I doubt that such an "average" experience truly exists.

Community and Technical College. It may be the case that the experiences and perspectives of students who are mostly traditional-aged and are attending a large, public four-year research institution differ significantly from those who may be “non-traditional” in a variety of ways and are seeking postsecondary education at a two-year college. I believe that these limitations suggest a need for more research on populations such as this one with a variety of recruiting and data collection techniques. I discuss some of these opportunities for future research in greater detail in Chapter Six.

Defining Neoliberalism and Networks

To close this chapter, I would like to offer definitions of two terms that I use extensively in my analysis of this data: neoliberalism and networks. I have included these definitions here because I use both terms throughout the dissertation and because they have complicated histories and varied uses both within the discipline of rhetoric and composition and beyond it.

Neoliberalism

Steger and Roy (2010) explain that the term “neoliberalism” encompasses “three intertwined manifestations: 1) an ideology; 2) a mode of governance; 3) a policy package” (p. 11). The central concepts of neoliberalism include: an emphasis on the decentralization of government and the primacy of private ownership and accountability, the value of entrepreneurship and individualism, and the imperative for workers to be “flexible” and “skilled,” and (Steger and Roy, 2010). Although global financial crises have led many to dismiss neoliberalism as a viable economic strategy (Steger and Roy, 2010, p. xi), the ideology of neoliberalism is still operating forcefully, particularly in postsecondary education and other economic institutions.

In the context of postsecondary education, many scholars have directly addressed the ways in which educational institutions have acclimated to the neoliberal global economy. Davies and Saltmarsh (2007) argue that “education, under neo-liberalism, is no longer a public, but a private good, something to be strived for in competition with others, to be paid for by the individuals who will in turn make their profit and consume in the market place (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Davies, 2005; Davies & Saltmarsh, in press)” (p. 5). As Davies and Saltmarsh suggest, the individualist logics that underlie neoliberal ideology have also come to shape the way postsecondary education is valued and structured. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) argue this point as well, and forward a theory of academic capitalism, which “sees groups of actors—faculty, students, administrators, and academic professionals—as using a variety of state resources to create new circuits of knowledge that link higher education institutions to the new economy” (p. 1). Slaughter and Rhoades also take a networked approach in their explanation of academic capitalism, foregrounding the active role that colleges and universities have in this process rather than portraying them as passive victims of neoliberalism (p. 12). They justify this approach by explaining that these actors “use state resources to enable interstitial organizations to emerge that bring the corporate sector inside the university, to develop new networks that intermediate between private and public sector” (p. 1). This description aligns almost seamlessly with the way learn-and-earn programs typically come to exist—through “interstitial” partnerships that “intermediate between private and public sector.” Slaughter and Rhoades’s work is therefore particularly useful for understanding the role of learn-and-earn programs in the process of neoliberalization.

Although I maintain that Slaughter and Rhoades' (2004) analysis informs an understanding of neoliberalization in educational contexts, I do not adopt their term, "academic capitalism." I have alternatively chosen to use "neoliberalism" for two reasons. First, "neoliberalism" subsumes several other practices of contemporary capitalism including marketization (Welch and Scott, 2016, p. 4), commoditization, corporatization, and entrepreneurialism (Scott, 2016 p. 205). Second, I prefer this term because—as Steger and Roy (2010) note—"neoliberalism" has multiple functions and instantiations, and therefore connotes corporate neoliberal practices, university neoliberal structures, and neoliberal ideology as it is manifest in discourses about work and literacy simultaneously.

Networks

Many scholars in rhetoric and composition have used the idea of networks to account for the multifarious movement of texts and ideas in a multimodal, fast capitalist world (Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, & Papper, 2008; Gries, 2013, 2015; Rice, 2012). I follow their work in defining "network" as a key metaphor for understanding the complicated way that individuals, things, and ideas interact in and across place, space, and time (Edbauer, 2005; Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, & Papper, 2008). The roots of this conversation are multiple and encompass ecological understandings of literacy, actor-network theory, new materialism, and circulation studies. Rebecca Dingo's (2012) work exemplifies how our field has taken up the idea of networks as both a theoretical concept and a methodological cornerstone. Dingo explains that "when feminist rhetoricians network arguments they draw attention to power relations as well as the political and material consequences of rhetoric circulation" (p. 17). "Network" therefore

functions for Dingo as both a verb (a method) and as a conceptual framework. What I find particularly compelling in Dingo's use of "network" is her insistence that "networking" as a rhetorical activity means calling attention to the manifestations of power in lived experience: "to write networked arguments ultimately means connecting the micro and the macro by situating writing practices within far-reaching economic and political systems and by drawing connections between vectors of power" (p. 148.). In this understanding of "network," I find many resonances with institutional ethnography's description of the way that institutions and institutional texts coordinate individual activity. My own use of "network" in this dissertation is therefore significantly informed by this understanding of network as a way of understanding the material and affective relations that connect the micro and macro.

In addition to these disciplinary applications, "network" also has a long history of use in media studies, in which it typically connotes information exchange and cybernetics (Galloway, 2010). In this context, network is often used to call attention to the material systems of connection that allow for the flow of information and the organization of digital processes. However, as Galloway (2010) notes, "networks are often symbols for, or actual embodiments of, real world power and control" (p. 283). Galloway unites these understandings in suggesting that "networks are understood as systems of interconnectivity. More than simply an aggregation of parts, they must hold those parts in constant relation" (p. 283). Significantly, this relationality requires labor: "networks are not simply textual entities, they are entities in a constant labor with themselves" (p. 291). A network must be constantly maintained through material structures, relationships, the implementation of policies, the adherence to norms, etc. Finally, as I explore in greater

detail in the remainder of this dissertation, networks are also centrally about intelligibility. As Galloway (2010, p. 293) points out, in order for something to be considered a net, it must have holes. Figuring an institution or multiple institutions as a network thus brings to light the organization of people and power within the way the institutions are structured, the multiple forms of labor that keep the network in relation, as well as the experiences and identities that are made intelligible within the context of that network.

Interview Guide: Student-Workers

- How did you learn about the Metropolitan College program?
 - What did you know about the Metropolitan College program before you started participating in it?
 - Why did you decide to participate in the Metropolitan College program?
- What benefits have you personally experienced from participating in the Metropolitan College program?
 - When you think about the Metropolitan College program *as a worker*, what benefits have you experienced?
 - When you think about the Metropolitan College program *as a student*, what benefits have you experienced?
 - Have you seen others benefit in ways that you haven't; if so, how? Why do you think you haven't experienced these benefits?
 - Have you seen others benefit less than you; if so, how? Why do you think you have experienced these benefits and others have not?
- When you imagine yourself in the future, how do you think you will feel about having participated in the Metro College program?
- What drawbacks have you personally experienced as a result of participating in the Metropolitan College program?
 - Have you seen others struggle in the program in similar ways?
 - Have you seen others struggle in the program in ways that you haven't? What do you think might explain that?
- Could you describe a particularly memorable moment or experience in your work at UPS?
- If you could change anything about the Metropolitan College program what would it be; why?
- (Show the Metropolitan College description of "Benefits" on their website: <http://metro-college.com/benefits/tuition>) What do you think about this

description of the program? What would you add or change about this description?

- What would you say are the main reasons you came to UofL? Why did you choose UofL over other colleges?
- Was the option of participating in the Metropolitan College program important in your decisions to come to UofL? Why/why not? Would you have come to UofL if there was no Metropolitan College program?
- What is your view on programs like Metro College more generally? Would you say the benefits of these types of programs outweigh the drawbacks; why/why not?
- Do you think your composition instructor(s) understand the constraints you may experience as a Metro College worker? Why/why not?
- Have you had opportunities in your composition classes to write or talk about your work experiences? If so, could you describe what this was like? If not, would you like to have this opportunity? Why/why not?
- Do you think your other instructors/professors understand the constraints you may experience as a Metro College worker? Why/why not?

Interview Guide: UPS Administrator

- What do you see as the main benefits of students' participation in the Metropolitan College program?
- What are common struggles/successes you see with these students?
- What do you think makes some students more successful in this program than others?
- Where do you think the Metropolitan College program will be in 5-10 years? Do you think it will expand? Why/why not?
- If you could change anything about the Metropolitan College program, what would it be; why?

Instructor Survey Questions and Response Options:

- 1) Are you familiar with the UPS Metropolitan College program (in which students work third shift for UPS in exchange for tuition and other financial incentives at UofL or JCTC)? [yes; no; other]
- 2) How would you describe your general impression of the UPS Metropolitan College program? [short answer]
- 3) Have you had any students in your composition classes who are participants in this program? [yes; no; other]
- 4) If you answered yes to the above question, what in which composition class(es) did you have these students? [short answer]
- 5) Did those composition class(es) have a particular theme? [short answer]
- 6) What time and day did you teach those composition class(es)? [short answer]

- 7) Have you had to make special accommodations for these students? If so, please briefly list some of these accommodations: [short answer]
- 8) Would you be willing to be interviewed about your experiences and perceptions of the UPS program and your approaches to teaching composition? If so, please include your name below. [No; name]

Instructor Focus Group Guide:

- What has your experience been with students who do the UPS Metropolitan College program?
- What things have you heard about the UPS Metropolitan College program?
- Can you tell me about any memorable experiences or interactions with students in this program?
- Can you tell me about any memorable experiences or interactions with working students in your courses more generally?
- Do you discuss issues related to work in your composition classes?
- What do you hope students will be able to do as a result of your composition course?
- What types of assignments do you include in your composition course?

CHAPTER III

NAVIGATING THE INSTITUTIONAL MOBILITY SCRIPT:

STUDENT-WORKERS' MOBILITY, LITERACY, AND AFFECTIVE PRACTICES

"I'm trying to be a supervisor right now, so hopefully that'll lead me forward there. But as far as how it relates to my degree, I don't know. But at this stage, I just want to be employed. And since I already have the computer science and design majors maybe as I move further up the ladder I'll find something related to that. Right now I'm just looking for more pay and less physical labor." –Summer, a student-worker in the UPS Metropolitan College program

Introduction

When a parcel reaches the UPS Worldport hub in Louisville, KY, it typically arrives on a large air freighter, housed in one of several "cans." The cans are then extracted from the airplane and lowered to the ground on a ramp or hydraulic lift, and a worker unloads each package by hand onto a conveyor belt. The package then travels 155 miles of conveyors within the Worldport facility where it is scanned and machine-sorted according to zip code ("UPS Worldport Facts," 2015). After being processed, it is re-loaded onto a truck or plane and sent out towards its next destination.

When Kathleen, a student-worker in the Metropolitan College program arrives for work at the Worldport hub, she parks her car, takes a shuttle to a guard shack where she undergoes a security screening, then walks to her assigned building. While at work, her movement is highly regulated. She must use specific doors and is not permitted to enter other buildings with the exception of Building Two, where the cafeteria is located. When

traveling to the cafeteria during her break or to the exit at the end of her shift, she must stay within the boundaries of demarcated walkways between guard shacks.

As these descriptions illustrate, the physical mobility of both people and things is highly systematized, standardized, and monitored in the context of the UPS Worldport. The physical movement of objects is obviously central to the identity and purpose of UPS as an institution. Their various slogans over the years (“We (heart) logistics,” “Moving at the speed of business,” “Get there,” etc.) illustrate the importance of efficient, systematized mobility to their business model and corporate identity. The Worldport hub, in particular, is a shining example of the corporation’s capacity for hyper-efficient mobility. As UPS explains in a webpage dedicated to the hub, “The entire operation is an inspiring feat of mechanized logistics.... Packages (unless they're labeled incorrectly) are touched by human hands just twice, when pulled off the plane and at the end of a, on average, 13-minute journey through the conveyors” (“UPS Worldport Facts,” 2015, para. 2). While UPS boasts of the technological mechanization of this process, the experiences of student-workers in the facility tell a different story. Summer, for example, describes her work life as consumed with mobility: “You're basically constantly in motion. If you're sitting down for a long period of time you're doing something wrong.” However, it is not only the physical movement of her body that is coordinated by her position in this operation. For student-workers like Summer and Kathleen, their educational trajectory, social mobility, and identity development are also forms of movement that are significantly shaped by their participation in the Metropolitan College program. The purpose of this chapter is to explore this mediating relationship between individual

experiences and institutional narratives by foregrounding the ways in which student-workers' mobility tends to be structured by the Metro College program.

One way of making sense of the relationship between individual mobility and institutional norms, discourses, and structures is through the concept of a “mobility network.” Drawing primarily on the work of Brice Nordquist (2017), I define “mobility network” as a large system of interrelated individuals, groups, things, technologies, and places among which movement is coordinated, organized, and regulated by an institution. Whereas Nordquist (2017) uses the term “mobility system,” I prefer “network” for two reasons (as I reference in Chapter Two). First, as Alexander R. Galloway (2010) argues, “networks” are not simply “abstract concepts describing shape or structure,” but rather signify “specific technologies of power, organization, and control” (p. 282). “Network” may be used productively as a metaphor or heuristic, but it is also material and locally situated. Second, “network” foregrounds the relationality that is necessarily produced in this organization of power—“more than simply an aggregation of parts, [networks] must hold those parts in constant relation” (Galloway, 2010, p. 283). In describing the Metro College program as a “mobility network” then, I aim to highlight an extensive material, physical, and discursive system that contributes to the ways student-workers' movement through their lives, particularly through their educational trajectories, is structured.

The purpose of considering the Metro College program as a mobility network is to highlight that, due to the nature of this public-private, educational-economic partnership, students' participation in this program requires complex navigations of multiple, interrelated clusters of nodes. In other words, these students' experiences of postsecondary education are composed of interrelated, sometimes competing, material

structures that require multiple forms or levels of mobility and that have significant consequences for students' perceptions of their education, their future, and themselves. One major cluster of nodes in this network is the Worldport hub itself, as I describe in the opening of this chapter. However, the Metropolitan College mobility network also includes other material nodes that extend far beyond the site of the Worldport hub, including the physical space of the University of Louisville campus, various campus support services, students' classes, Metro College requirements, institutional authorities, and so on. So, crucially, when I discuss the Metropolitan College program as a mobility network, I am not referring only to the institution of the Metro College program, but to the entire partnership between UPS, the University of Louisville (U of L), and Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC). Each of these entities functions as a cluster of nodes in the mobility network of the Metro College program. Because of the interrelated nature of this mobility network, the Metro College program is not simply a microcosm of UPS, but rather is functionally and culturally its own institution. It has its own mission, goals, and procedures that, while affected by and embedded within the institutions that created it, also functions independently from them. For this reason, I refer to Metro College itself as an institution (rather than focusing on UPS as the principle or organizing institution), but I simultaneously see the program as composed of and reflective of broader systems of thought and material practices that include neoliberal logics, the cultures of U of L and JCTC, and the regulatory practices of UPS.

The feature of this mobility network that this chapter primarily attends to are the discourses and narratives about movement within the network itself. In other words, I focus on the institutional norms, directives, and narratives that hold these nodes in

relation and that tell subjects how to navigate the nodes successfully. At times, these directions about movement are explicit, such as when the Metro College program directs students to particular campus resources in order to “ensure” their academic or professional success. Other times, these norms are more abstract, such as when the institution delineates a particular narrative of development that individuals should follow in order to be valued in the neoliberal labor market. Significantly, the specific institutional discourses about mobility in the Metro College program can also be traced to broader neoliberal ideologies about work and education. As I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, mobility has become a key feature of the neoliberal labor market, and in turn, a significant impetus behind the way education-oriented institutions direct students to apply the literacy skills, knowledge, and cultural capital gained during postsecondary education. Therefore, a primary argument of this chapter is that the particular institutional texts and sponsored forms of literacy in the Metro College program mark and reinforce this neoliberal mobility imperative.

In framing the Metro College program as a mobility network that perpetuates a neoliberal mobility imperative, I aim to call attention to the range of relationships, structures, and texts that mediate between neoliberal ideologies about work and individual lived experiences. I do this by illustrating and analyzing the institutional norms that coordinate individuals’ movement in the mobility network, and examining how a particular institutional text, the Career and Academic Planning Program (CAPP), functions as a node in the mobility network. I also foreground the effects of this institutional coordination in the lived experiences of student-workers. In what follows, then, I will first offer a brief review of relevant literature in mobility studies, highlighting

the concepts in these conversations that pertain most directly to an analysis of identity and perceptions, neoliberal discourses, and the texts that mediate between them. Then, I will discuss two forms of “mobility scripting” that contribute to how the lived experiences of participants in this research are structured: 1) the narrative of the successful stair-stepped educational trajectory, and 2) the narrative of the ideal hypermobile neoliberal worker. Finally, I will discuss the implications of this mobility script for our work in composition and literacy studies.

I use the term “mobility script” to refer to the ways that certain versions of mobility are valued, normed, and sanctioned. As such, the mobility script represents an amalgamation of dominant narratives about successful movement through the Metro College program and, in turn, through postsecondary education. This term also highlights the important role of narrative in how discourses about mobility are taken up, resisted, and shaped by the real, lived experiences of people. There may be a particular script that an institution or network maintains, but individual actors can appropriate, revise, and re-write that narrative. Therefore, whereas the “mobility network” refers to the physical, spatial, and relational, “mobility script” refers to the narratives and discourses that make a particular version of mobility the norm within the network. This norming happens both explicitly and implicitly. It can be traced in material texts such as descriptions on websites, instructional documents, and syllabi, but it is also embedded in and reflected by individuals’ uptake of the discourse and the ways in which it becomes manifest (or resisted) in their decisions and perceptions. If we follow the metaphor of a script a little further, we might compare this to a movie script, for example, which often reflects the assumptions, motivations, and desires of a particular production company (among other

stakeholders), but requires the individual actor to adapt and internalize that script in order to bring to life the character they want to portray. For this reason, I find the concept of “mobility script” particularly useful because it connotes textuality as well as identity; it allows for a foregrounding of discourse as manifest in texts and literacy practices as well as the ways in which those texts and literacy practices coordinate the activity and experiences of individuals.

Drawing on these concepts, the primary argument of this chapter is that, through the mediation of texts and the sponsorship of particular literacy practices, the Metro College program coordinates individual mobility and affective practices in ways that are concordant with neoliberal ideologies about development and success. One consequence of this process is that the program coordinates students’ literacy practices and affective dispositions in ways that best prepare them to become ideal neoliberal workers. Furthermore, although this program is designed to foster students’ mobility and smooth their process of achieving a postsecondary degree, in effect it conflates access to postsecondary education with participation in postsecondary education—an ideological conflation that can do a disservice to those who are not already trained in middle class, neoliberal work ethics and values. Therefore, the demands of navigating this mobility network have significant effects on how participants think about their education, their futures, and themselves. While Chapter Four attends more specifically to issues of agency in this mobility network, this chapter focuses on the ways that discourses and texts script a particular version of mobility and the points of alignment or tension between this script and student-workers’ lived experiences.

A Review of Mobility of Studies

The fairly large umbrella term, “mobility studies” refers to a broad theoretical approach that is informed by a variety of disciplines including sociology, geography, migration studies, and anthropology (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p. 207) as well as, more recently, literacy studies and rhetoric and composition. As Cresswell (2011) suggests, “mobility has a wide theoretical purchase because of its centrality to what it is to be in the world” (p. 551). At the heart of a mobility studies approach is the idea that mobility is not only a physical, embodied capacity or experience—it is simultaneously a social, affective, political concept. If one were to examine, for instance, the mobility of a first generation student who must commute to her classes at a large research university, one might consider the factors that enable or constrain her mobility physically (does she own a car? Borrow one? Take public transportation? How much time does her commute take? What else could she do with that time? What relationships does this movement create? What other resources must she use to maintain this mobility?) as well as the social and political implications this mobility (how does planning for that movement affect her daily life? Does her status as a commuter student affect her participation in the campus community? What other material and social conditions have led to and are affected by this movement? How does her status as a first-generation student affect her perceptions of her social mobility?).

Cresswell (2011) explains that one commonality across the work on the mobilities paradigm is a “focus on the entanglement of movement with meaning and power” (p. 553); however, the *kind* of movement that mobility studies scholars attend to can vary widely. Cresswell (2010) is largely focused on physical mobility—the travel of people and things across place and space and over time. Sheller and Urry (2006), though,

emphasize the social and technological dimension of mobilities studies and argue that we live in a “networked society” in which participation in social life hinges on access to tools that enable networked communication (p. 213). Because of this networked quality, “social life thus seems full of multiple and extended connections often across long distances, but these are organised through certain nodes. Mobilities thus entail distinct social spaces that orchestrate new forms of social life around such nodes” (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p. 213). Mobility is therefore integral to a networked organization of power and relationality. Adey (2006) also addresses the relational character of mobility but focuses on the idea of a politics of mobility as well, which holds “first, that movement is differentiated—that there is a politics to these differentials. In other words, that power is enacted in very different ways. And second, that it is related in different ways, it means different things, to different people, in differing social circumstances” (p. 83). One of the greatest affordances of a mobilities lens is that it enables such an examination across scales.

Those working in human geography often use global and local scales to describe and understand mobility in terms of migration phenomena. King and Skeldon (2010), for instance, argue that “internal and international mobilities create an integrated system, which can be observed at a range of scales: family/household, community, national, and the constellation of countries linked by migration flows” (p. 1640). Since mobility functions within systems on multiple scales, I find mobility studies particularly useful for examining processes of mediation because it allows for an analysis of movement as, at once, physical (embodied, spatial, and temporal), social (relational), and political (related to the organization of power). In other words, mobility studies unites these scales and

forms of mobility under one theoretical umbrella and highlights how they are related and interdependent.

While mobility studies is highly interdisciplinary, and is still evolving as a sub-discipline, it has been taken up in literacy studies and rhetoric and composition in ways that are useful for considering how texts and structures mediate between global/macro norms and discourses on the one hand and individual lived experience on the other. A key example of this is the work of the New London Group (1996), who argues in their foundational “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures” that literacy educators “need to engage in a critical dialogue with the core concepts of fast capitalism, of emerging pluralistic forms of citizenship, and of different lifeworlds. This is the basis for a new social contract, a new lifeworld” (p. 73). The New London Group (1996) sees mobility as a new and essential feature of work and social life—and, subsequently, as an imperative for ethical literacy education since mobility has become central not only to the forms texts take and the way they circulate, but also to the nature of living as social and economic subjects. As the New London Group (1996) explains, one of the great challenges for pedagogy under these conditions is to account for a variety of lifeworlds.

As lifeworlds become more divergent in the new public spaces of civic pluralism, their boundaries become more evidently complex and overlapping.... The more autonomous lifeworlds become, the more movement there can be: people entering and leaving, whole lifeworlds going through major transitions, more open and productive negotiations of internal differences, freer external linkage and alliances. (p. 71)

The New London Group thus sees their “pedagogy of multiliteracies” as a way to encourage our students to see themselves as designers of their own futures in the context of dominating narratives and fast capitalist ideologies about language, literacy, work, and identity that attempt to move/circulate them in particular ways.

In addition to the New London Group's perspective on the relationships among literacy, mobility, and work and social lives, there are three specific concepts within the purview of mobility studies that I draw on in this chapter. The first, and most widely attended to in existing literature in composition and literacy studies is the connection between literacy and social mobility in capitalist society. As many scholars in our field have discussed, public conversations about education and workplace preparedness tend to treat literacy as a "skill" to be acquired and then properly applied for the purposes of economic and social advancement. As Harvey Graff (2010) explains, this "literacy myth" refers to "the belief, articulated in educational, civic, religious, and other settings, contemporary and historical, that the acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to and invariably results in economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement, and upward social mobility" (Encyclopedia of Language and Education, as quoted in Graff, 2010, p. 635). Although Graff calls this the literacy *myth*, there are very real, material implications of this popular understanding of literacy. It is a myth that still operates powerfully and materially in contemporary social life. My discussion in the sections below illustrates how this version of literacy is perpetuated by neoliberal educational discourses and how this perspective on literacy operates in the lives of the participants in this study.

The second concept that is central to my analysis in this chapter is an understanding of the role of institutions in structuring the (im)mobility of individuals. Specifically, I draw extensively on Brice Nordquist's (2017) articulation of educational mobility systems. Nordquist explains that

we can think of schools as consisting of and contributing to intersecting and adaptive *mobility systems* that enable and manage predictable repetitions of

movements of people, objects, texts, ideas, and information (Urry 2007). As assemblages of immobile structures and circulating entities, these systems create, distribute, and concentrate labor and capital (always unequally) and materialize place and scale. They enhance the potential mobility of some and diminish or halt the mobility of others (Sheller 2014). In this way, mobility systems are also always immobility systems with elements of viscosity, coagulation, and friction (Cresswell 2014). (p. 9, emphasis in original)

Nordquist goes on to explain that successful movement through this system is determined by a stair-stepped trajectory in which individual mobility is marked and evaluated as a hierarchical, linear progression. One of Nordquist's examples is standardized testing and Common Core curriculum structures, which function within institutions of education as mobility checkpoints. Nordquist's (2017) use of "stair-stepped" to describe these trajectories emphasizes that they are essentially and necessarily developmental (p. 9). Each step is supposed to signify that the individual has gained some knowledge, skill, certification, or quality and that is helping them move incrementally toward a specified goal according to institutionally regulated and sanctioned successive stages. As a result, each step contains certain parameters for what people at that stage should know, do, or think. This model of rigid, or fixed, mobility follows students to postsecondary education as well. This understanding of the role of educational structures and policies is central to how I approach the function of the Metropolitan College program as a mobility network that coordinates and scripts the mobility of individuals within postsecondary education.

Finally, I draw on the idea of affective practice (Wetherell, 2012) and mobile identities to consider the ways that institutional mobility scripts mediate between individual identities and neoliberal discourses. As many scholars have argued, discourses are not simply forms of communication, but rather powerful ways of calling people into being. While this argument has roots in Marxist cultural theory (e.g., Althusser's (1971)

account of interpellation), more recent scholars in literacy studies have considered how discourse shapes people's identities as well as subjectivities. Gee, Hull, and Lankshear (1996), for example, argue that "discourses create, produce, and reproduce opportunities for people to be and recognize certain *kinds of people* (Hacking 1986, 1994)" (p. 10, emphasis in original). In the context of neoliberalism, this identity scripting rests on the ability to adapt in an ultra-fluid environment. Zygmunt Bauman (1999) also emphasizes the importance of mobility to neoliberal ideology in his articulation of "liquid modernity," in which "the era of unconditional superiority of sedentarism over nomadism and the domination of the settled over the mobile is on the whole grinding fast to a halt....It is now the smaller, the lighter, the more portable that signifies improvement and 'progress'" (p. 14). According to Bauman, this liquidity, or fluid mobility, characterizes every aspect of modern life, including—significantly—labor. As this imperative takes hold, there are significant implications for the identity development of individuals. James Paul Gee (2004) discusses this phenomenon as well and offers the idea of "shape-shifting portfolio people" as a way to think about literacy learning in new capitalism. Gee explains,

Shape-shifting portfolio people are people who see themselves in entrepreneurial terms....Their set of skills, experiences, and achievements, at any one time, constitutes their portfolio. However, they must also stand ready and able to rearrange these skills, experiences, and achievement creatively (that is, to shape-shift into different identities) in order to define themselves anew (as competent and worthy) for changed circumstances. If I am now an "X," and the economy no longer needs "X"s, or "X"s are no longer the right thing to be in society, but now "Y"s are called for, then I have to be able to shape-shift quickly into a "Y." (p. 96)

Not only is fluid mobility a central characteristic of the labor market in terms of the fluctuation of wages and available jobs, but individuals themselves must *be* fluidly

mobile, both physically and affectively, if they want to be intelligible in a neoliberal network. This fluidity may seem in tension with the rigid, stair-stepped model of mobility that I describe above. However, as I note, the stair-stepped model is developmental; it signifies and regulates individual growth according to a specified trajectory. Once the individual has completed this trajectory (i.e. graduated with a postsecondary degree), they should be ready and willing to perform this hyper-flexible or fluid mobility in the marketplace.

In the remainder of this chapter, I analyze the mobility script as one way in which the Metro College program coordinates individual lived experience. In doing so, I draw on this previous scholarship in mobility studies in order to implement “mobility” as a theoretical concept in a variety of ways. At times, I use it to describe rigid models of movement, progress, or development in which acceptable or successful movement is institutionally structured (as in the case of the “mobility script” that dictates to student-workers how they should move through their educational trajectory and what achievements will mark successful progress). These rigid models are evident in institutional texts and in individuals’ perceptions. However, I also use mobility, or “fluid mobility,” to refer to an ideological underpinning of these more rigid structures that demands that neoliberal workers be hyper-mobile in order to be valued in the labor market. This form of fluid mobility is more closely aligned to a quotidian use of “mobility” meaning able to move.

In the following analysis, I draw on these theories and definitions to articulate ways that student-workers have rejected or aligned themselves in some ways with a particular institutional mobility script that conceives of education as a stair-stepped

trajectory (Nordquist, 2017); how this mobility script affects their experiences and identities; and the texts and literacy practices that mediate between broader, neoliberal ideologies about mobility, work, and education on the one hand, and individual lives on the other.

Staying on Track: The Metro College Program and the Neoliberal Narrative of Postsecondary Mobility

The ways that student-workers view the relationship between their participation in the Metro College program and the development of their futures show traces of the institutional mobility script about successful movement through postsecondary education. One particularly telling moment is student-workers' descriptions of how they got started with the Metro College program—what motivated them, what they knew before they got started, and what surprised them. Beginning with these narratives and descriptions is useful because it foregrounds participants' perceptions of their work and how they make sense of their participation in the program in the context of their lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Bell, 2002; Kim & Latta, 2010). It is important to note from the outset that the experiences and perceptions of these student-workers are shared by many of the students that we meet in our classrooms and on our campuses, such as the belief that a college degree is a (or, *the*) means of achieving a better life. The Metro College program is not distinct from US educational culture, but is rather deeply embedded in it and functions as a highly systematized instantiation of these broader cultural, neoliberal narratives about mobility, education, and work. As such, it offers an opportunity to understand how these narratives affect the lived experiences of real students, and how the

texts and structures of the institution of the Metro College program mediate this relationship.

Kathleen, the student-worker I refer to in the opening of this chapter, describes wanting to do the Metropolitan College program as a way to set herself up for a more financially stable future:

I knew I wanted to be an education major, so I was like, well, as a high school math teacher I'm probably not going to make a whole lot of money. Not that it's a bad profession or anything, it's just—I won't have a lot of money. So I wanted to, you know, financially set myself up for then. I didn't want to go into life with a bunch of debt, so I decided that I would work there.

Kathleen describes herself as coming from a “blue collar” family in which she was told by her parents from an early age that, while they might be able to help her out “in a pinch,” they would not be able to pay for her college education. In the above narrative, Kathleen explains that, because of her family situation, her primary motivation for participating in the Metro College program was financial. However, her statement is also indicative of how she perceives the relationship between her current educational decisions and her future life—as a series of steps, each one affecting her ability to reach the next. Her use of the phrase “set myself up for then” highlights the structure according to which she sees her educational experiences unfolding: as a linear, hierarchical trajectory. Her description also highlights the role of the Metro College program in this trajectory: it functions as a vehicle that will take her towards this future. Interestingly, in Kathleen’s perspective, this future is when her “life” will begin. What she is doing now is just preparation that is leading her, step-by-step, to the point at which her actual (independent, adult, fluidly mobile) life will start.

Several participants echo Kathleen's emphasis on the financial benefits of the program and see their participation in it as the only stepping stone they have to a better future. Summer, for example, also describes a stair-stepped, developmental version of individual mobility that is marked by her movement through successive "stages." Summer completed a Master's degree in graphic design and computer science at a university in Puerto Rico before moving to Louisville. She was a few courses shy of a degree in mathematics as well and decided to return to school to finish this degree. Her parents met at the University of Louisville, and she cites that as a major reason for deciding to enroll there, describing it as "kind of like continuing the family tradition." As I quote at the beginning of this chapter, when I asked Summer about her plans after college and how she saw her work at UPS connecting to her future, she explained,

Well, I mean if I can stay [at UPS] and—I'm trying to be a supervisor right now, so hopefully that'll lead me forward there. But as far as how it relates to my degree, I don't know. But at this stage, I just want to be employed. And since I already have the computer science and design majors maybe as I move further up the ladder I'll find something related to that. Right now I'm just looking for more pay and less physical labor.

Unlike Kathleen, Summer does not have a specific career in mind for her post-graduate life, but she does envision reaching a "stage" that is better than the one on which she locates herself now. Summer's expectation of moving "up the ladder" also highlights her perception of this version of mobility. Her desire for both "more pay and less physical labor" signals that she expects "moving up" to entail a job that might be considered more "white collar" than "working class." Both Summer and Kathleen see themselves moving through (or being moved through) a series of developmental steps toward a "better" future.

Summer's and Kathleen's experiences are representative of a common way that a stair-stepped version of mobility has taken hold in the perspectives of these student-workers towards their work-school lives. Kathleen, a traditional-aged first-year student sees this trajectory as more rigid and sequential, whereas Summer believes her life is moving in a particular direction but is less certain of the destination. Nevertheless, both figure their mobility as linear and hierarchical. Importantly, these descriptions also illustrate that these "steps" conflate work and school such that they become the same experience, the same stage. Kathleen's and Summer's work lives are bound up in their educational lives and vice versa. Participation in the Metro College program becomes inextricably incorporated into their education-career trajectory and is seen as a vehicle (or, for many like Summer and Kathleen, the *only* vehicle) towards future success.

However, other student-workers acknowledge the potential for participation in the Metro College program to, in fact, derail their educational trajectory. For example, Ramon (the only student in this study who participated in the Metro College program for the duration of his postsecondary education—a phenomenon that will be attended to in Chapter Four) insists on Metro College students understanding the importance of "staying on track." Ramon and I spoke just a few weeks before he was about to graduate with a degree in biology and go on to start dental school the following semester. Ramon was born in Cuba and moved to Louisville with his family when he was eight years old. After high school, he joined the military, which he feels gave him the discipline and maturity to succeed in school and in the Metro College program, explaining, "I definitely would not have done well if I had joined UPS right out of high school and started working at UPS *and* started going to school." In reflecting on what he has learned during

his five years in the Metro College program, Ramon repeatedly describes a kind of risk that the Metro College program could become detrimental to one's ability to complete a postsecondary degree. In addition to the physical demands of the labor and adjusting to a challenging sleep schedule, Ramon cites an inability to keep up with school work as a potential consequence of participating in the program, and reiterates, "If you're gonna tell a student about the program, you have to tell them, if you do not keep yourself on track, it's going to affect your grades." In Ramon's assessment, participation in the Metro College program is something that could potentially sidetrack someone who isn't disciplined enough to stay on their educational path. Kathleen discusses this idea several times as well in the context of "priorities," narrating stories of friends of hers who failed to put school first and ended up "off track" because of it:

I've been [at UPS] awhile now, and I've talked to a lot of people, and a lot of people there are either there for the insurance or they're there because it's paying for college, like that's the only reason people work there. And there's a lot of people who, it's like—they don't take college seriously—I mean, they take it seriously enough to get good grades, because if you do get less than a C in a class Metropolitan College won't pay for it. So, they're like, 'Well it's okay if I don't take some classes this semester because I can just do it next semester, UPS will still pay for it.' Whereas I'm like, I want this to take four years, that's it. Like, I want to leave after four years.

Although Kathleen doesn't use the term "track" here, she is drawing a distinction between what she perceives as a successful, linear, four-year trajectory towards degree attainment and a less efficient, less direct, less valuable path.

These participants' perceptions of the role in the Metro College program in how their lives will unfold shows how they have taken up this mobility script, but also reveals some tensions in how the Metro College program functions in this trajectory. On the one hand, the Metro College is as a platform, raising students up to the next stage in their

educational/professional development. On the other hand, while it still is a vehicle forward, only those who are prepared for the ride can really take advantage of it.

These tensions can be seen from an institutional perspective as well. Caroline has been an upper-level administrator in the Metro College program for over 15 years and currently oversees the program's career development efforts (which are discussed in more detail in the next section). During our conversation, Caroline offered a valuable perspective on the role of the Metro College program as an institution that coordinates individual mobility. She explains that:

The program's intention was never to start and complete someone in the program⁴....The purpose of the program is to eliminate an educational barrier wherever one should exist. For some folks, that's at the very beginning of their educational path. They wouldn't have access to postsecondary education without this program. For some students, they wouldn't be able to finish postsecondary education without this program. And for many, it is a pathway for the entire process of postsecondary education.

Caroline's description of the institutional purpose of the Metro College program illustrates the program's role as a mediator between broader neoliberal norms about education and social mobility and individual lived experiences. The purpose of the program hinges on mobility—enabling movement through an “educational path,” as Caroline puts it. Her description encapsulates the mobility script of the Metro College program. The narrative is that if you work hard enough, you can succeed in this program and graduate debt-free. As such, the program coordinates individual mobility in particular ways and reinforces for students a narrative of educational achievement that is defined by stepwise, linear movement towards a degree.

⁴ Some of the structures of the Metro College program seem to contradict this idea. For instance, the program offers semester completion, academic milestone (credit hour achievements), and graduation bonuses, which offer students financial incentives for staying in the program.

Mediating the Mobility Script: The Career and Academic Planning Program (CAPP)

This material and ideological mobility coordination relies on many structures, relationships, policies, and texts. One such text is the primary career development initiative of the Metro College program, the Career and Academic Planning Program (CAPP). The CAPP is composed of a mixture of online modules and follow-up appointments with Metro College Student Development Counselors, either in person or via email. Caroline had a key role in developing this program when she first began her position in the Metro College program in the early 2000s. In her words, the impetus behind the CAPP was a desire to transform the Metro College into a workforce development program:

The goal was, how do we intentionally take [a] student throughout their academic progress, wherever they are, and help them connect this experience of their degree attainment and what's happening in the classroom, but even more so how do they take this work experience at UPS and translate that to how they sell their candidacy.

This purpose is also evident in the description given in the first module of the CAPP, the “Student Transition Program,” which explains that the CAPP:

Assists MC students by

- 1) Educating students about MC policies and procedures and creating an awareness about information and resources available to achieve their academic and career goals.
 - 2) Providing support and resources to clarify career goals, understand the current job market, and participate in experiential learning.
 - 3) Providing guidance and resources to assist MC students with articulating how their UPS experience, education, and skills and experiences can fulfill future employer needs.
 - 4) Assessing their program satisfaction and gathering post-graduation plans to assist with program improvement and on-going program success.
- (“Student Transition Program Intro,” n.d.)

A central aspect of the Metro College program from its inception has been coordinating student-workers' movement through their educational trajectory and into postgraduate employment. Adding the CAPP component to the program was based in a desire to make this work experience more mobile for student-workers, to endow it with some degree of cultural capital that could contribute to students' social and economic mobility in the labor market. The implicit suggestion in this form of professional development is that students should be able to transfer the skills and experiences they gain while in the Metro College program to their schooling, but more importantly to their future jobs. By completing the CAPP, they should learn genres and ways of communicating in a professional context that will help them attain social mobility in the labor market. Literacy skills and dispositions towards literacy thus play a key role in the way students are directed to frame their institutional experiences as marketable and mobile in their professional lives.

By performing these functions, the CAPP acts as both a node in the mobility network of the Metro College institution (students must complete this program in order to stay in the network) and as a guide for how to move in the network. In performing this latter function, the CAPP maintains and extends the mobility script of the Metro College on at least two levels. First, as a material, textual artifact, it signifies and structures progress through the stair-stepped educational trajectory. In the process, it frames other texts and material practices as similar signifiers of successful linear progress. Second, as a manifestation of institutional and cultural values, it sponsors forms of literacy that align with neoliberal narratives about who the ideal worker is and what literate identities they will inhabit. The primary argument of this section is that, through the CAPP, the Metro

College program sponsors literacy practices and ideologies of literacy that are based in neoliberal values of efficiency and individualistic marketability. These values perpetuate narratives about who the ideal neoliberal worker is and how literacy will function in their professional identity as a way to enhance their cultural capital and certify their workplace readiness.

Before discussing the implications of this institutional framing of literacy, though, it is useful to describe the structure and content of the CAPP a bit more. The program has five components, each of which were written by Metro College staff. Its content is therefore specific to the program itself and addressed to the particular population of students that participates in the program. Each of the CAPP's components aligns with a specific credit hour milestone, and completing the CAPP is a requirement for continued participation in the Metro College program. New Metro College students (those with 0-29 credit hours) must complete the STP, which is a series of seven online modules that take two to three hours to complete in total (according to the program's instructions; it took me approximately one hour and 35 minutes to complete the seven modules). The STP guides students through a career assessment and coaches them in a variety of topics including time management, "financial literacy," and strategies for accessing academic support services. At 30 credit hours, students must create a resume and discuss that resume with a Metro College Student Development Counselor, either face-to-face or over email. At 60 credit hours, students complete an "experiential learning" module designed to educate them about internship, co-op, undergraduate research, and volunteering opportunities. And finally, at 90 credit hours, students participate in a mock interview

with a Metro College Student Development Counselor and complete a graduation survey about their experiences with the Metro College program.

The structure of the CAPP exactly mirrors the traditional curriculum markers of the trajectory of postsecondary degree attainment. At most colleges and universities, sophomore status is achieved at 30 credit hours, junior status at 60, and senior status at 90. The CAPP reflects and reinforces this structure, rewarding students for making linear, stepwise progress on their educational trajectory. In this sense, the CAPP functions as a powerful node in the mobility network of the Metro College program. Students are required to take part in these modules, but the modules also provide them with (supposedly) valuable information about how to move in the rest of their work-education network and beyond. In other words, if a student-worker stays on track with their work *and* education, they gain access through the Metro College to valuable information about networking, interviews, campus resources, and so on. This rigid structure also means, though, that the CAPP performs a kind of gatekeeping function: students can *only* access this information upon attaining these marked levels of educational progress. A student *cannot* access the resume module, for example, until they have reached 30 credit hours. The CAPP therefore contributes to the structure of the mobility network by marking and reinforcing these particular nodes or “milestones.” The CAPP controls students’ movement through successive developmental stages, rewarding those who stay on track and denying access to information and resources to those who do not progress according to the specified, stepwise structure.

This structure is further reinforced by the assessment function of the CAPP. Every module includes an automated assessment at the end designed to measure whether

students have retained what they read, and the module cannot be completed until the student receives a score of 80% or higher. This implementation of assessment is significant, as it parallels the educational discourses that contribute to ideologies of neoliberal mobility. As Nordquist (2017) argues, “educational and political discourses render the future knowable and actionable by figuring space-time as a static grid used to individuate and measure students’ movements among fixed and discrete locations” (p. 9). Like the fixed, discrete locations of credit hour status, these assessments serve as textual, material markers of students’ stepwise progress. Admittedly, the stakes of this assessment aren’t that high; a student can retake the quiz as many times as they want. However, the fact that an assessment is included further supports the idea that individual movement is institutionally measured and evaluated in this context.

There are, however, some tensions in how the STP relates to the stair-stepped trajectory. While it strongly encourages new students not to take on a full-time course load,⁵ it also suggests that students can “get back on track” as they progress toward their degree. The developmental structure that underlies this suggestion can be seen in Figure 1, a partial screenshot from the STP module. This clip art-style graphic is a literally stair-stepped visual that spells out “SUCCESS.” This image appears next to an explanation that students can increase the number of credit hours they take each semester after they have some experience in the program.

⁵ The Metro College program recently implemented a policy that rewards students who take 10 or fewer credit hours in their first semester. Previously, the program did not pay tuition for grades below a C-. As of Fall 2019, first-semester students who enroll in 10 or fewer credit hours and receive a D grade are still eligible for tuition benefits.

Fig. 1: “Success” clip art graphic used in the “Student Transition Program”

In considering these directions alongside this visual, the implied suggestion seems to be that it's acceptable if students' progress toward degree attainment is initially slowed, but it should nevertheless be structured linearly and hierarchically. Students should “catch up” to the educational, developmental structure of their “traditional” counterparts. Rather than offering a truly alternative model, this aspect of the CAPP suggests that students should ultimately align themselves with a linear, step-wise trajectory, even if that means overcoming some initial struggle.

Student-workers are well aware of this stepwise structure. Kathleen, for example, explains that the first series of modules, the Student Transition Program, “laid out the plan,” and that “there's certain benchmarks like that you hit, like once you hit a certain amount of credits you have to go into the Metropolitan College office and do things, like, you have to bring in a resume at some point, and you have to do a practice interview at one point.”

As Kathleen's description suggests, in the process of reinforcing the structure of educational mobility, the CAPP also aligns particular literacy practices with stages that are measured according to economic goals. These literacy skills thus also reinforce and

mark linear progress toward employability. Some of these literacy activities include listing questions to ask an academic advisor, making a to-do list, and writing down personal and academic goals. In this context, though, even an activity like creating a list of “personal goals” is ultimately framed as a means of economic management. For instance, the two examples given in the segment on “personal goals” are “get to work on time every day” and “save \$10 a week for Spring Break.” Rather than, perhaps, stress management, health and wellness, relationship-building, or other non-work-related goals, this literacy activity is focused specifically on what is signified as economically valuable. A section on time management aligns with this conception of literacy as well as it encourages students to “use a written planner or a smart phone [sic] to keep track of your daily schedule, schedule reminders, and keep track of your To-Do [sic] list.” Similarly, a slide on “goal-setting” frames the act of writing down academic and personal goals as a “helpful time-saving tip” because “goals are broken down into the manageable steps needed to complete them.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, these directives to write suggest that the institutionally valued literacy practices—those that will lead to economic success—are those that pertain to managing oneself, one’s time, and one’s mobility. For example, a subsequent slide guides students through creating a “time management calendar” in which they “must complete the entire calendar” by labeling each hour of time with certain activities before receiving feedback on their supposed time management skills. (When I completed this module, I initially allotted too few hours for sleep and received the message, “Oh no! You have dedicated less than 42 hours of sleep per week” with a list of tips for how to fall asleep after work.) In this context, certain literacy practices are

figured as means to keeping oneself “on track,” and, as such, suggest specific ways in which students should perform their student-worker identities in the mobility network.

The general topics of the modules in the CAPP program also outline larger economic and literacy markers, which Kathleen summarizes in her references to the resume and interview. In addition to these two professionalization activities, the CAPP directs students to what the appropriate literacy-mediated milestones and activities are for each stage of their education so that they will be best prepared to enter the labor market once they have traversed the mobility network of the Metro College program. As a freshman, one should decide on a major that will lead to job attainment. As a sophomore, one should have a polished resume. As a junior, one should be collecting extracurricular activities and accomplishments to enhance one’s academic/professional capital. And, as a senior, one should be preparing to apply to a variety of professional positions, undergo interviews, and enter the workforce. Reinforcing these somewhat abstract milestones are concrete texts and literate activities.

For example, the first module, the “Student Transition Program,” requires students to complete the “TypeFocus” assessment, “an online career assessment that can help you identify occupations that fit you best” (“Career Assessment,” n.d.). After completing this test, students are instructed to research potential careers that align with their TypeFocus results, then use that research “to make an informed decision about your major and career choice” (“Career Assessment,” n.d.). Underlying this process is a range of literacy practices, including assigning language to one’s beliefs, capacities, and interests as well as conducting database research. But this requirement also communicates to students that part of being located on this “new student” stage is

deciding on a career goal so that the stepwise trajectory has a clear destination. Similarly, the resume, which is a requirement for student-workers at the sophomore level, is a genre that is intended to signify the acquisition of marketable skills and experiences that certify one for work in a particular field. Requiring that the resume be composed by sophomore year suggests that the resume itself—and the neoliberal portfolio that it represents—should be actively used from an early stage in one’s educational experience so that decisions about jobs, leadership opportunities, volunteering and community service, and other extracurricular activities may be coordinated by this professional document. In other words, the resume itself can become a document that coordinates students’ decisions about what roles, awards, and extracurricular activities to pursue in the remainder of their education. This argument is furthered by the “Experiential Learning” module, which refers to opportunities like co-curricular on-campus experiences as ways to “network,” “gain skills,” and “extend your resources” (slide 11). Within this context, the resume functions as both a marker and a means of managing one’s movement through the educational trajectory. In this way, the Metro College program directs students to mark and signify their progress through their educational trajectory.

To be fair, the CAPP makes no claims of developing the whole person or offering multiple forms of support; it is explicitly a professionalization program. Furthermore, the literacy practices and genres that the CAPP values will, in fact, enhance students’ employability in the neoliberal labor market. This is a material benefit that certainly should not be denied to students. Nevertheless, it is worth attending to the ways in which institutional literacy norms and directives contribute to student-workers’ postsecondary education and literacy development. Deborah Brandt’s (1998) concept of literacy

sponsorship is particularly helpful for considering this mediating role of institutions between broader ideologies of literacy and individual uptake of literacy practices and dispositions.

Deborah Brandt (1998) has famously argued that “literacy as a resource becomes available to ordinary people largely through the mediations of more powerful sponsors” (p. 173). Brandt defines these more powerful sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (p. 166). In Chapters Two and Four, I discuss how UPS benefits from this program in greater detail. But I do want to acknowledge here that there are several ways in which the Metro College program and UPS benefit from the literacy practices they sponsor. For instance, by helping move students toward graduation, UPS may gain from a larger qualified workforce from which to recruit more long-term employees. Furthermore, by requiring this kind of literacy training, the Metro College program benefits from being able to claim that they are a “professional development” program rather than simply a labor program, which affords them wider recognition.

It is also important to note that, according to Brandt’s definition, a sponsor is not simply an individual in a one-to-one mentoring relationship with another individual, but rather, as Brandt explains, “sponsors are delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners” (p. 167). The Metro College program works as a sponsor in this way by becoming a key means through which neoliberal economies of literacy are presented to individual student-workers. While these students are almost certainly receiving similar

messages from a variety of sources about things like the importance of resumes and making lists in order to stay organized, it is significant that they are also receiving these messages in a systematized way from an institution that is so constitutive of both their work and school lives. By positioning literacy as an economically-oriented activity, and by requiring the exercise of certain literacy practices that align with this disposition, the Metro College program reinforces neoliberal ideologies of literacy and sponsors particular literacy practices that are in line with this ideology. In other words, the Metro College program sponsors literacy practices that best prepare students to be excellent neoliberal workers.

This shaping of literacy practices reinforces the autonomous model of literacy as articulated by Brian Street (1995, 2003). This model “disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it so that it can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal” (Street, 2003, p. 77). While literacy scholars have done much to complicate the way literacy is framed in academic and cultural contexts, the CAPP is an interesting example of how this model of literacy can still function powerfully in institutional contexts. On the surface, the CAPP’s treatment of literacy may seem neutral; however, the discourse of the program positions literacy as a means of gaining social and economic mobility by managing one’s individual efficiency and practicing genres that will communicate the cultural capital gained through this work-educational experience. Such literacy practices are therefore highly valued in this context for their ability to make experiences mobile in the neoliberal marketplace. The Metro College’s sponsorship of a model of literacy that is in line with the neoliberal ideologies of mobility is not distinct from cultural norms about work and education in the contemporary United States but is

rather inextricably part of them. Because of its systematization of the neoliberal stair-stepped model of education, the Metro College program serves as a valuable example of how the relationship between broad cultural ideologies and individual lived experiences is mediated by institutional structures and texts. The following section explicates some of the implications of this mediation for the lived experiences of student-workers.

But first, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the benefits of the CAPP program that many students recognize or the beneficent intentions behind it. Caroline spoke passionately about wanting to use the Metro College program as a way to engage students more directly in how they work toward their desired futures: “The intention is not to keep students long term as package handlers. This is just a means to an end. We are supportive of whatever their educational goals are, and we want them to be intentionally engaged in processes that work towards whatever fulfills those goals.” Many students involved in this study praised the CAPP, repeatedly calling it helpful and useful, and the Metro College program website claims that of respondents to the graduation survey, “87% indicated that CAPP had a positive influence on their career and/or academic development” (“Student Development,” n.d.). This statistic, of course, only represents those students who were still participating in the program upon graduation, but nevertheless, it is indicative of the perceived benefits of the CAPP. It is not my intention, therefore, to paint the CAPP program—or the Metro College program more generally—with broad strokes or to make it seem that since the program aligns with certain normative narratives about educational progress and neoliberal success that it is inherently bad. Rather, the point of this discussion is to illustrate *how* certain literacy practices and values within this script perpetuate neoliberal ideology, and to understand

the implications of this script and ideology of literacy for how individuals think about themselves, their work, their education, and their futures.

Literate Identities and Mobile Affect: The Labor of Following the Institutional Mobility Script

The purpose of this section is to explore these implications further by discussing how student-workers take up the institutional narrative of who the ideal neoliberal worker is and how that identity is achieved. Like the narrative of successful movement through postsecondary education, this narrative is also mediated by neoliberal ideologies and is coordinated by institutional texts and discourses. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, mobility is not only a defining value and feature of postsecondary educational discourse but also of neoliberal economic discourse. While there are many levels on which mobility has come to characterize neoliberal policy, structures, and ideology, one key way that affects our students and our work is due to the material realities of the neoliberal labor market. Many scholars have referred to this as the power of the market to dictate workers' physical and geographic mobility. Bronwyn Davies and Sue Saltmarsh (2007), for instance, have discussed the shift from previous economic relations to neoliberal market structures and claimed that "a direct implication of this shift has been the loss of job security and conditions. People must adjust themselves to whatever the market demands of them as workers and as consumers" (p. 4). The New London Group (1996) also calls attention to this shift in the individual's relationship to labor structures, explaining that in post-Fordism, "a division of labor into its minute, deskilled components is replaced by 'multi-skilled,' well-rounded workers who are flexible enough to be able to do complex and integrated work (Cope & Kalantzis, 1995)"

(p. 66). This material reality also has effects on how people come to think of themselves and respond emotionally to their lived conditions.

Part of how neoliberal ideology works is by demanding that neoliberal laborers accept a mobility of affect and identity if they are to be successful and valued. As I refer to in the opening of this chapter, this is what James Gee (2004) argues as well: the demands of a neoliberal economy have significant implications for how workers perceive themselves and how their identities (professional and otherwise) develop. The “shape-shifting portfolio people” that Gee describes have essentially mobile identities. As Gee defines them, these are “people who gain many diverse experiences that they can then use to transform and adapt themselves for fast-changing circumstances throughout their lives” (2004, p.4). It is important to note that the heart of transformation and adaptation is mobility—a capacity to move one’s current state or disposition to an alternative state. What makes them marketable as laborers is that they can become whatever the managerial class needs—they have a pool of skills in their “portfolio” that they can draw from and apply at will. As Gee argues, this shapeshifting has become imperative for achieving success in the modern, new capitalist/neoliberal world (2004, p.4). Gee does not discuss though, the fact that, in addition to simply possessing these skills, prospective workers must also be able to articulate them through their literacy practices in contexts such as interviews and social “networking” opportunities and through genres such as the resume. I want to add, and illustrate in this section, is that the shapeshifting portfolio person is a *literate* identity in which individuals must become the kind of person who can display certain literacy practices and dispositions that perform this hyper-mobility.

Furthermore, as I acknowledge in the opening of this chapter, scholars of literacy studies have long argued that discourses are inextricably connected to identity development. In the context of neoliberal discourses about work and postsecondary education, it is important to attend to what exactly these “opportunities” for being certain kinds of people are, how they are made explicit or implicit through the textual practices of the institution, and how they affect the lived experiences of people in the institutions that adopt this discourse. Specifically, while the purpose of the Metro College program is ostensibly to support and smooth a specified, sanctioned path of mobility through the educational trajectory, student-workers’ lived experiences suggest that the process of making this program function as a platform to a more secure future requires certain “identity work,” to borrow a sociological term (Beech, 2008; Watson, 2008). Specifically, it requires that student-workers labor to develop a kind of hyper-mobile affect and literate identity that enables participation in the neoliberal work-education landscape.

In examining the concrete, lived experiences of student-workers in this study, it becomes clear that the process of becoming a “shapeshifter” and following the narrative of the good neoliberal worker entails a great deal of psychological and affective (as well as physical) labor. Although feminist scholars have used the term “affective labor” to focus on the emotional labor that disproportionately falls on women in social relationships (Hochschild, 1983), I am implementing the term here in a way that is closer to what sociologists refer to as “identity work.” In what follows, I use “affective labor” to refer to the activity of laboring to alter one’s affective practice in order to adhere to a normative narrative about identity development in a given context, to develop a certain

affective relationship to one's circumstances, and to become a certain kind of person.

While “affective labor” and “identity work” essentially refer to the same processes, I find “affective labor” more useful for this context because it foregrounds emotional responses as a way to make sense of the tensions *and* alignments between individuals and institutions. In this analysis, I adopt Margaret Wetherell's (2012) definition of affect as “embodied meaning-making,” or “human emotion” (p. 4). Looking to identity and affect enables a foregrounding of the range of implications of the institutional mobility script—and the literacy practices and ideologies that accompany it—for individual lives and perceptions.

The affective consequences of students' participation in the Metro College program are particularly interesting in the experiences of Heather, a first-generation, first-year student. Heather describes having an intensely negative, embodied response to her work life for the first several months:

I remember for the first, like, three months, I cried every night at work. And I had to hide it from people. And I was like, 'No I'm fine I just got dust in my eye.' Yeah, I used to bawl my eyes out. And I told my mom and dad, I was like, 'I'm dropping out of college, I don't want to do this anymore, it's all so hard.' But you just have to get in the groove of things. And making those connections with the people I work with really helped.

Later in our discussion, Heather returned to this narrative and insisted on the importance of adaptation to her success.

You just have to be willing to adjust to it because, like in the beginning when I was crying the whole time, I didn't want to adjust. Like, I didn't want that, didn't want to lose sleep. But, you just kind of have to humble yourself I guess and just say alright, this is the process, this is how I get through it and then just go from there.

Heather's description of this experience reveals important things about the affective labor she had to perform in order to take on the identity of someone who could stay “on track”

with her work-education life. Wetherell's (2012) concept of affective practice as "an immediate thread of mostly ordinary actions in particular contexts" (p. 79) is useful here. As Wetherell explains, "One of the first things that becomes evident when looking at examples of situated affect is the ways in which affect is patterned in normative episodic sequences. Affective performance can display quite routine shapes" (p. 79). Heather had developed an almost automatic affective practice in her work life in which she felt sad, frustrated, and hopeless every time she had to show up for work. There were times when she thought about quitting and dropping out of school because of how much she disliked the work she was doing. However, this routine shape eventually transformed entirely for Heather. Through the labor of altering her affective practices, she completely revised her affective relationship to her work and created a new pattern in which she felt more purposeful and hopeful in her work life.

One way to think of this quality of being open to emotional transformation is as "affective mobility." This term is also useful for highlighting the interaction between individual emotion and identity on the one hand, and the institutional mobility script on the other. Heather's choice of language above is particularly interesting because she draws on a mobility metaphor, "getting in the groove," to explain how she adapted to her circumstances. She attributes her initial emotional struggles to not being aligned with the routine and structure of the Metro College program. At the core of this affective labor is the idea of adaptation. Being adaptable, in Heather's experience, means altering her affective practices in order to have a positive response to her daily lived experiences, and, subsequently, to continue to participate in the mobility network. Admittedly, it is not clear how much of Heather's transformation was just sheer force of will and how much

was affected by family support (she mentions calling her parents after work) and other factors in Heather's personal network (such as creating close social relationships with her co-workers). However, what we do know is how Heather made sense of this experience, how she saw herself developing, and how she perceived herself as actively changing her affective relationship to her work.

It is important to recognize that this idea of transformation is a common trope in education, particularly in the context of literacy development. For example, many composition and literacy studies scholars have recognized that when students are asked to write literacy narratives, they may rehearse or perform certain identities respective to their literacy development. Bronwyn Williams (2004), for example, notes that one of these identities is that of "hero." Drawing on the work of Carpenter and Falbo (2003), Williams (2004) explains that these students often portray themselves as "overcoming all obstacles to succeed in writing and reading at school....In these narratives it is the traditional individualistic heroic attributes—perseverance, self-reliance, self-confidence—that allow them to triumph" (p. 343). Although Heather doesn't directly connect her transformation to literacy practices, we can see how this narrative structure resonates with Heather's perception of her identity development. Furthermore, I did make Heather aware that I was doing research in composition and literacy studies, and that I worked in the composition program and the Writing Center. Her knowledge of my scholarly interests (and, possibly, her perception of me as a writing teacher) may have influenced how she framed this experience. Regardless, the idea that survival in school depends on the individual meeting both emotional and material challenges is embedded in many students' educational lives. And, in Heather's case, we can see how this transformation

narrative may be reinforced and shaped by emotionally and physically challenging work experiences as well. For those of us who are already interested in the ways that literacy and identity work together in students' lives, these kinds of networked experiences and the compounding effects they may have on student-workers' identities and affective practices are particularly compelling.

Through the notion of affective practice, we can also see how Heather's narrative illustrates an institutional ordering of affect. Wetherell (2012) emphasizes the importance of pattern to her notion of affective practice, explaining that "an affective practice is a figuration where body possibilities and routines become recruited or entangled together with meaning-making and with other social and material figurations" (p. 19). If Heather had maintained her affective practices of crying every night she went to work, she would not have been able to sustain her work-education life. In addition to the personal toll this would have taken, the institutional discourse does not accommodate this affective response. As Wetherell notes, emotions are not only individual responses to stimuli but are also socially and systemically patterned activities. Several interacting social and systemic forces likely influenced Heather's affective transformation in this case. It is important to recognize, though, the contributing role of institutions in sanctioning a particular patterning of affect.

As Gill and Pratt (2009) argue, Marxist affect theorists that focus only on the "positive, transgressive potential" of affect obscure "the other roles affect may play—not simply in resisting capital but binding us to it" (p. 21). While affect is, of course, deeply personal, individual, and embodied, it is also a powerful tool of ideology. As Sarah Ahmed (2004) argues,

Emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments. Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective. (p. 119)

Through the complex process of reorienting her perspective toward her work, Heather was able to develop affective practices that were also in line with the “social and material figurations” of the Metro College program.

One way to understand this phenomenon is as interpellation, as Louis Althusser (1971) defines it. Althusser’s famous example of interpellation is the person (man) turning in response to a police officer yelling, “Hey, you there!” and thus realizing that he is always already a subject of the Ideological State Apparatus (p. 33). He goes on, however, to also address the relationship of the process of interpellation to the consciousness and attitudes of the subject, explaining,

“If the reproduction of the relations of production is to be assured, even in the processes of production and circulation, every day, in the ‘consciousness’, i.e. in the attitudes of the individual-subjects occupying the posts which the socio-technical division of labour assigns to them in production, exploitation, repression, ideologization, scientific practice, etc.” (p. 39)

In these terms, Heather’s experience illustrates a complex, difficult process of being called into being as a subject of this neoliberal institution, an Ideological State Apparatus. While this reading is useful for connecting Heather’s experiences to ideological subjecthood, I am more interested in the labor that Heather had to perform in this process. Heather had to work to secure her participation in this mobility network; although she was always-already a subject of neoliberal ideology, she also had to perform that subjecthood emotionally in order to maintain her participation in the Metro College

program. Traces of this institutionally and ideologically sanctioned affective practice can also be seen in texts of the institution.

Contextualizing Heather's narrative within the coordinating texts of the Metro College program illustrates that a primary affective practice of the institution might be understood along the lines of delayed gratification: the current emotional challenges are temporary, and they'll be worth it in the end. There are several references to this affective practice in Metro College documents. For example, the "Tips for Student Success" on the program's website acknowledges that "going to school while working third shift can be a challenge, but remaining focused on a goal can help students succeed in their school work and their eventual career." In fact, the Metro College program consistently acknowledges the difficulty of the life structure that participation in the program demands, which is significant because it is what follows these acknowledgements that indicates how the program is training students to think *and feel* about their work-school lives. In the claim above, what follows the acknowledgement of challenge is the suggestion that "remaining focused on a goal" is the solution to any potentially non-normative affective responses that participants might experience.

In a more formal sense, the CAPP also reinforces an affective practice based in economic and individualistic conceptions of success. In the "Time Management" section of the "Student Transition Program," a slide on "Free Time" claims:

"It is important that you plan time to spend with family and friends. A strong support network is important to your success as a Metro College student. When planning free time, make sure you first prioritize your work time, class time, and time for study and homework. Time with friends and family is a great way to reward yourself for hard work during the week!"

While this recommendation does acknowledge the role of a “support network” in Metro College student-workers’ success (which is defined as staying on track towards graduating debt-free), it also makes clear that spending time seeking such support should be a reward rather than a priority. Rather than encouraging students to take the time to reach out to their support network when they are experiencing stress or exhaustion, this text emphasizes affective efficiency: put all your energy (both affective and physical) toward your goals, and if anything is left over, you can reward yourself with social relationships. This text thus encourages students to structure their lives according to a strict economy of time in which certain activities and experiences are budgeted for and others are seen as leisure activities. In this affective economy, delayed gratification and subsequently, a suppression of overly emotional responses (which is performed by maintaining a commitment to “hard work”) is the normative affective practice. Any “non-normative” affective practices, such as crying every time one goes to work, create inefficiency in the affective economy. In this context, “getting in the groove,” as Heather puts it, means developing affective practices that are in line with the normative, institutionally sanctioned affective relationship to one’s work. This kind of affective alignment requires labor, specifically, labor that is based in a mobility of affect and identity.

One consequence of this necessary (and often invisible) labor is that student-workers like Heather must take advantage of the mobility of their affective practices in order to perform identities that are intelligible and valued in the mobility network of the institution. As Galloway (2010) argues, when we talk about networks, “the primary issue here is the notion of intelligibility. Who or what is excluded from networked presence?

What are the necessary conditions in any specific situation for an entity to be excluded from the network? What price must be paid in exclusion? What *larger* price must be paid for inclusion?" (p. 293, emphasis in original). Heather's reference to "humbling" herself suggests that there is some sacrifice she had to make in performing this identity work—she had to give up something in order continue her participation in the mobility network. For instance, she had to accept that her struggle was an individual failure, rather than an indication of systemic problems in the institution. However, she also gains material benefits and cultural capital in the neoliberal marketplace by adapting to this demand for individual affective mobility. In this sense, the concept of mobility highlights the interplay between individual affective response and development on the one hand and broader neoliberal mobility imperatives on the other. The structures and culture of the institution of the Metro College mediate this coordination of individual dispositions according to neoliberal ideologies of mobility.

The affective economy and the economy of literacy described in the previous section thus work in tandem to train students for the neoliberal marketplace. Just as the Metro College program sponsors literacy practices and ideologies of literacy that reinforce neoliberal values and goals, so too does it sponsor and sanction affective responses that best prepare students for the kind of affective mobility that they will need to adopt and perform as neoliberal laborers. The affective labor that goes into being a Metro College student thus also entails performing the ideal neoliberal worker disposition—a willingness to adhere to rigid mobility structures in the present in order to achieve fluid mobility in the future. Because of this affective labor, student-workers also gain cultural capital in being able to inhabit this identity. Reya, for example, a first-year

student-worker, suggests that the Metro College program is “definitely not for everybody because of the fact that people don't want to tough it out.” Reya’s claim illustrates the relationship of identity to this affective mobility: in order to succeed in this program, you have to *become the kind of person* who can “tough it out.” In other words, students need to have or develop a disposition to their material labor circumstances in which they can shift their emotional responses to their work lives from frustration, anger, or resistance to acceptance. Students also need to be able to follow an institutional narrative that is structured according to the value of delayed gratification: the current struggle now is just something you have to deal with because you’ll be significantly rewarded in the future. While this is true on many levels of all students seeking postsecondary education (there are certain demands, structures, and processes that they must adapt to), the extreme physical and temporal demands of the Metro College program make this process of affective mobility more challenging and more necessary. Compared with their “traditional” counterparts, then, Metro College students will supposedly be endowed with more cultural capital because they embody this affective mobility to an extreme degree. Participating in this program thus certifies that the individual student can align their emotional disposition with the institutional narratives about behavior and work ethic.

The value of affective mobility in the neoliberal labor market more broadly is illustrated by public conversations about “grit.” For example, Angela Duckworth’s (2016) *New York Times* bestselling book, *Grit*, argues that it is “a combination of passion and perseverance that [makes] high achievers special” (p. 8), and sources such as the National Association of Colleges and Employers site “flexibility/adaptability” and “strong work ethic” as among the qualities that employers most desire in recent college

graduates (Gray & Koncz, 2017). The idea of grit in this conception is inherently neoliberal because it values an individual's ability to rise above their circumstances. It is also, though, inherently emotional and identity-based because it suggests a way of ordering one's affective responses so as to secure continued participation in a particular network. Participation in the Metro College program itself is often read as an activity that requires a great deal of "grit." References to toughing it out and repeated acknowledgements from both student worker participants like Reya and Metro College administration illustrate this perspective. Ramon, for example, cited his participation in the program as a key factor in his acceptance into dental school. He acknowledged that his GPA was lower than the average applicant, but explained that the admissions committee "saw that I worked 30 hours a week, third shift, so they're like okay that's a big difference." Ramon was also very intentional in his praise of the CAPP program, particularly the resume and mock interview portions. He felt that both of those requirements helped him prepare to apply to dental school. While Ramon acknowledges having to retake at least one course because it was held early in the morning and he frequently overslept, he was nevertheless able to graduate in five years and secure a position in a strong dental school program. For students like Ramon, the literacy practices sponsored by the Metro College program and the affective mobility that participation in it requires did, in fact, lead to his successfully moving through the stair-stepped educational trajectory with significant material benefits. In this way, grit (and the affective practices that signal it) serves as an important form of cultural capital in the neoliberal educational landscape.

Many of the texts that emphasize the marketability of students' Metro College experiences (and other postsecondary experiences) reflect this version of neoliberal capital and reinforce the narrative of the ideal neoliberal worker as one whose identity, emotional responses, and skills are characterized by hyper-mobility. A series of student profiles featured on the program website (which will be discussed at length in Chapter Four), offers several examples of this argument. One published profile, for example, begins with:

‘The best career advice that I have ever received was given to me by a frontline supervisor on my very first day at UPS’, said Metropolitan College alum, Dustin Weber. Weber’s frontline supervisor expressed to him that ‘if you approach [this job] with a good attitude, it makes all the difference.’ (Davis, 2018d, n.p.).

Another profile echoes the relationship between certain attitudes and professional value, referring to the student as having “proven to be a talented professional who has consistently demonstrated many of the qualities necessary to succeed in virtually any setting—ambition, persistence, professionalism, and dedication” (Davis, 2018c, n.p.). Both of these descriptions emphasize dispositions that are characterized by affective mobility and explicitly frame this mobility as a desirable trait in the neoliberal marketplace. References to succeeding in “virtually any setting” echo Gee’s (2004) description of the “shapeshifting portfolio people” as those whose can “transform and adapt themselves for fast-changing circumstances throughout their lives” (p.4). Taken together with the CAPP’s instructional modules, these profiles and other institutional documents illustrate how the texts of the Metro College program, and the norms that those texts perpetuate about identity, affect, and literacy coordinate individual lived experiences according to a mobility script that frames success as linear, stepwise, and ultimately neoliberal.

What is at Stake in this Scripting of Mobility?

The purpose of this analysis has been to show that while the student-workers in this study physically and materially labor to succeed in the structure of the Metro College program and beyond, they are also laboring to inhabit certain literate identities and affective practices that are bolstered by neoliberal ideologies about mobility, identity, and literacy. One significant conclusion to be drawn is that institutional partnerships that are designed to help move students through the educational trajectory—to reduce the friction in their mobility—may, in the process, reinforce neoliberal ideologies and narratives that position literacy as a marker of developmental progress and obscure the affective labor required for participation in the institutional partnership.

As illustrated above, the process of aligning oneself with the mobility script of the institution is complex. There are both rewards and risks in adhering to these normative narratives about development and success in the institution. It is also important to acknowledge, though, the consequences for rejecting or failing to develop this institutionally sanctioned affective mobility and ideology of literacy; in other words, what happens when a student decides not to perform this affective labor?

While these issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, it is worth briefly noting here the experiences of Brandi, whom I spoke with near the end of her first semester at the University. Early in our conversation, Brandi mentioned that she needed to go into the Metro College office to sign her agreement for the spring semester. When I asked how she felt about making that commitment, she replied, “You really feel stuck, honestly, like you really don't have a choice. Especially like with me, I did it because I can't afford college, there's no way, but just being there for a couple months now, I'm

thinking I could just drop out of college and get a factory job and it'd be ten times easier than trying to pay for college and go full time.” During our conversation, Brandi made it clear that she was extremely dissatisfied with her experiences in the Metro College program. Towards the end of our conversation, she offered a compelling perspective on the affective and material consequences of attempting participation in the Metro College program, saying, “I feel like Metro College is the reason people quit college. For real. Because you don't have time to work and do school. It's almost impossible. Unless you don't sleep or you don't eat. I do both, depending on how the week goes.” About a month after our conversation, Brandi emailed to inform me that she had decided to stop working for UPS and would leave the University of Louisville. I was unable to contact her again. Brandi's experience illustrates some of the material consequences of participating in the Metro College program as well as the affective consequences. Like Heather, Brandi had very negative emotional responses to her work life. She described herself as feeling “stuck” and like she had no other options—in a word, she felt immobilized. Unlike Heather, though, who aligned her affective practices with the mobility script of the Metro College program, Brandi decided to withdraw her participation, and I do not know the costs (or benefits) of that decision. Brandi's experience does highlight, though, the range of effects of this mobility scripting on individuals' identities and perspectives.

As the experiences of Brandi, Heather, and others bring to the foreground, one significant problem with this institutional mobility script, and the role of literacy within it, is that it makes it seem as though the trajectory is neutral. As long as you can tough it out, practice making your experiences economically intelligible, and focus on the end goal, you can graduate debt-free—all the steps are laid out for you to follow. In this

figuration, any individual struggles are not problems with the system itself, but rather are individual shortcomings, as we have seen in Heather's experience. However, as student-workers' actual, lived experiences and perceptions show, the mobility script is not in fact neutral. It privileges certain identities and backgrounds, particularly those who can internalize the values that underlie the script itself, those who can internalize the sanctioned literacy practices, and those who can make their identities and affective practices mobile enough to alter their relationships to their working lives. A key question, then, is: who gets to succeed in the program (and, by extension, in postsecondary education)? While this idea will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, what I want to emphasize at this point is that while the Metro College program is "not for everyone," it is for those who can make themselves intelligible within the network, who can order their affective practices and literate identities in order to "stay on track." Students from backgrounds that are already disadvantaged in academia can be especially harmed by this reality, such as those who come from working-class families, like Brandi. What happens, then, when these students come up against "roadblocks" in their educational trajectory or fail to develop literacy activities that are supposed to certify their value as a neoliberal worker? And, what happens when the material burdens of this institutional mobility network are compounded by other conditions that these students may face, such as financial hardships or family responsibilities? Kathleen, for instance, is a primary caretaker for her younger sister. She provides her sister's meals and helps her with her homework in the time between arriving home from class and leaving for work. For these students, support in these challenges will likely not be found within the institutional structures of the Metro College program; however, this reality does provide

an opportunity for those of us in composition and literacy studies to take advantage of our institutional position and specialized knowledge to intervene.

Conclusion: Intervening in Institutional Mobility Scripts

By systematizing a certain mobility script, the Metro College program obscures important forms of difference. Significantly, this neoliberal stair-stepped trajectory reinforces a mobility script that is inaccurate (in that it does not account for the complexity of students' work-educational experiences) and that obfuscates many of the very real obstacles of participation in it. This mobility script represents dominant narratives about educational development that can be seen from elementary school through graduate education. As such, the Metro College program is not necessarily a unique institution. It is, however, an exemplar through which we can foreground the texts, policies, and structures that mediate between broad, neoliberal ideologies and concrete, individual lived experiences. And in examining this example closely, we can see how, through the mediation of institutions and their texts, ideologies about mobility in a neoliberal educational-economic climate can become rigid scripts for individual progress and success.

In the context of composition and literacy studies specifically, it is important to recognize that if we also adhere to a similar institutional mobility script, those students who are not read as "staying on track" become unintelligible and devalued. It is equally important to acknowledge, though, our own institutional limitations. First and most obviously, time is linear, so any talk of progress towards a specified goal will have some degree of linearity to it. Second, there are very real, material implications for students, educators, and administrators of adhering to or failing to adhere to this stepwise mobility

structure. Financial aid, course requirements, and other bureaucratic structures are based on this trajectory. However, one thing we might do as scholars of composition and literacy studies, particularly in our classrooms, is to question why this is the default version of mobility in postsecondary education and encourage our students to question this default as well. To work towards more inclusive versions of social, economic, and educational mobility, we might talk with students about reflecting on their mobility and their networked experiences, particularly how to make sense of what happens when their lives don't fit the normative, stair-stepped trajectory. We can also include both readings and writing projects in our courses that challenge narratives about grit, linear development, and neoliberal success.

Another way of thinking about our options for intervening in these neoliberal processes is to consider how we can develop alternative ways of thinking about our students' movement through their education. Particularly as we continue to see shifts in who is coming to college and how they are getting there, it is important that we do things to offer alternatives to linear, institutionalized mobility scripts. A networked approach is one way of re-orienting how we think about student mobility and how we might ask them to think differently about their work and educational experiences. Rather than a stepwise, linear version of mobility, we can talk with students about the networks that compose their lives and what literacy practices mediate those networks. Recent work in circulation studies offers some interesting possibilities for what such teaching practices might look like. Laurie Gries (2015), for example, has argued for the value of attending to rhetorical becoming, claiming that "students must be given an opportunity to set their own discourse in motion and to witness how it circulates and activates others around them" (p.

287). This kind of approach can accommodate and reinforce discussions about alternative mobility scripts. In addition to attending to the mobility of texts and arguments, these (likely semester-long) discussions can involve a focus on students' own literacy practices and events that have structured their individual mobility.

Ultimately, these opportunities for alternative forms of mobility are also about creating alternative emotional experiences for students in our classrooms. Bronwyn Williams (2017) has argued that we should “think about our practices in school, from curriculum to classroom pedagogy, as a series of emotional experiences” (p. 32). This practice means “understanding that students enter our classrooms with existing emotional dispositions toward literacy practices that have been shaped by multiple experiences in school settings” (Williams, 2017, p. 32). As this current research project foregrounds, experiences that can shape students' dispositions towards literacy practices also include their work lives as well as previous educational experiences. Understanding the ways that our students' movement—both material and affective—is scripted by the institutions in which they participate can help us better understand the emotional experiences they bring to our classrooms and, in turn, the opportunities we have for making those experiences intelligible in an educational context.

Chapters Four and Five will address more concretely the ways writing programs and composition educators might take advantage of these opportunities, but before this chapter closes, I would like to acknowledge that a third way we might intervene in these mobility scripts is by questioning curricula and structures that reinforce the script itself. Because of composition's institutional embeddedness in neoliberal educational structures (as described in Chapter One), we may be more likely to replicate a kind of stair-stepped

trajectory through our courses as a way of preparing first-year writing students for their postsecondary careers. For example, Eli Goldblatt (2017), for example, has expressed concerns that “the current ‘writing about writing’ pedagogy movement, and the contemporary conversation about teaching to transfer, have oriented the discussion about writing instruction too narrowly around school success and professional preparation” (p. 441). In addition to developing pedagogical approaches that are more broadly attuned to students’ networked experiences, we can exercise our disciplinary agency to create assignment sequences that are based in other ways of meaning-making.

As I hope these suggestions illustrate, I believe that as a discipline, we have a valuable institutional history and repertoire of pedagogical knowledge that make us particularly well-positioned to offer alternative mediating texts, relationships, and experiences that may give students like Brandi, Heather, Summer, Ramon, and Kathleen more options for making their work-school lives meaningful. Chapter Four builds on this idea, discussing in more detail the relationship between student-workers’ feelings of agency and ownership, institutional control, and writing program administration.

CHAPTER IV

“IT’S NOT FOR EVERYONE:”

WHO OWNS STUDENT-WORKERS’ TIME AND LABOR?

“You know, I think students will tell you, it's tiring, it's hard. But I really love the value of a student having ownership in the process. I think sometimes we forget the value of the struggle and the value of overcoming struggle, and what that means to future success...And it's a different work ethic in my mind.” - Caroline, Metropolitan College program administrator

Early in this research project, I became interested in a particular phrase I heard from students and read in the institutional texts of the Metro College program: “It’s not for everyone.” I asked Caroline, an upper-level administrator in the Metro College program what she thinks makes the difference. If the program isn’t for everyone, who is it for? Who is able to succeed in the program and how? Caroline described the importance of time management and dedication to obtaining a degree, and she offered the description I quote above of the connection between struggle, ownership, and work ethic. As I continued with my research, I was surprised at how frequently the student-workers I spoke with described their own feelings of ownership, control, and motivation (or, just as frequently, a lack thereof) as they talked about both the benefits and challenges of participating in the Metro College program. As I reflected on these alignments and points of tension, I came to think of Caroline’s description as illustrative of a particular institutional perspective on how students *should* feel about their involvement in the Metro College program.

According to this institutional narrative, educational “ownership” is achieved through individual labor, efficiency, and the internalization of struggle. The assumption is that ownership can only be achieved through exchange; in this case, the individual must accept that “true” ownership requires some temporary personal sacrifice. A similar logic governs the idea that scholarships or federal grants are “handouts” that result in a student being “given” an education without working for it. In Caroline’s perception, this kind of working for an education is an intrinsic value that leads to better people and better workers. However, while this work experience can lead to changes in students’ affective practices and identities (as discussed in Chapter Three), the version of ownership that Caroline describes relies on significantly taxing and potentially alienating labor: the value is dependent on the struggle. This supposed connection between degree obtainment and labor raises some interesting questions, chief among them being whether student-workers’ perceptions of ownership are aligned with this understanding. Do student-workers feel this ownership? What other forms of individual power or control might they feel at work in their lives? What role do institutional structures and texts play in ownership? And, particularly for working students, how do the institutions in which they participate shape their feelings of ownership and agency?

This chapter works toward some responses to these questions. In Chapter Three, I described how the Metro College program claims to foster students’ mobility through postsecondary education, how the institutionally sanctioned forms of mobility sponsor particular literacy practices and ideologies, and the implications of these institutional processes for student-workers’ affective practices and identity development. This chapter builds on the discussion in Chapter Three of affective responses as institutionally shaped

phenomena and offers another way of considering the points of tension and alignment between institutional discourses about ownership and agency and the actual experiences of students. In this chapter, I aim to bring to light how the Metro College program claims to offer ownership to its participants, what the terms of this ownership are, and how feelings of ownership and agency surface (or not) in the actual lived realities of these student-workers.

At the heart of this discussion of ownership are issues of control and power: how do the embedded, co-constitutive institutions of UPS and the University shape individual decision-making and capacities for action for those who participate in the Metro College program, and how do the structures and policies of these partnered institutions mediate between individual experiences and broader neoliberal discourses? While this chapter explores students' feelings of agency in their work and school lives broadly, it also aims to delineate the implications of this form of institutional mediation for the work of writing programs. In considering these complex issues, it is important to understand the nuanced differences between a concept like "ownership" and the phenomenon of "agency." In the following section, I review some of the relevant scholarship on ownership and agency for two reasons: first, to trace some of the key theoretical underpinnings of these complex phenomena, and second, to illustrate the centrality of these issues to the work of writing programs.

A Review of Ownership and Agency

At first glance, "ownership" and "agency" may seem to describe the same phenomenon: a capacity to act on one's own terms with confidence and control. Both concepts can be used to foreground the ways individuals' actions are shaped by the

networks in which they participate and, in turn, how such individual action shapes these networks. However, there are two important distinctions I will draw in this chapter between these terms in order to develop a better understanding of institutional control in the lives of these student-workers and to explore ways in which writing programs might use our institutional role to intervene in these structures. While I will elaborate on these ideas below, I briefly summarize these differences here. First, *ownership* refers to an individualistic feeling of control, and as such, tends to function in neoliberal ideology as a top-down, hierarchical way of talking about individual power in institutional contexts. On the other hand, *agency* can better account for the social, relational, and networked aspects of feelings of confidence and capacities for action. For example, ownership may be used to describe how someone who works in a factory develops a sense of personal investment in their work lives, including a sense of belonging in the organization and a sense of personal stake in that company's production. A description of agency, on the other hand, might illustrate the range of experiences, artifacts, and relationships that foster that person's capacities for action and reflection. Second, *ownership* connotes an economic, commodified association between a person and an object; a synonym of ownership is possession. *Agency*, on the other hand, is not necessarily economically derived. Therefore, while ownership tends to code for more individually-bound and economically-oriented feelings of confidence and control, agency tends to code for more affective, networked capacities for action and reflection.

I want to make clear from the start, though, that these are not discrete entities; both concepts get at issues of institutional control and power; both are shaped by institutional possibilities for individual action. Because the purpose of this chapter is to

attend to how student-workers experience these phenomena in their work and school lives, I will discuss both agency and ownership, which often overlap. Before attending to how these phenomena play out in the lives of student-workers, though, I will first discuss relevant scholarship that informs the distinctions I have drawn here.

Ownership

Issues of ownership and agency are intrinsic to concerns about literacy and writing pedagogy in a postsecondary climate. Scholars in rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies have specifically considered ownership in relation to collaborative writing and writing groups (Spigelman, 2000), intellectual property and plagiarism (Lyon, 2009; Pennycook, 1996), multilingual writers and English language learners (Norton, 1997), and student portfolios (Wall & Peltier, 1996). One of the most expansive conversations about writing and ownership, though, comes from writing center studies. At least since Stephen North's (1984) article, "The Idea of a Writing Center," respecting and fostering a writer's sense of ownership over their texts has been a cornerstone of writing center theory and practice. Scholars such as Terese Thonus (2001) and Isabelle Thompson (2009) have addressed the complex factors that can affect students' feelings of ownership over their writing. Thompson (2009), for example, discusses the ways in which tutors use an awareness of genre and scaffolding strategies to "balance between encouraging student responsibility and ownership and guaranteeing successful student performance" (p. 419). Thonus (2001) similarly focuses on the range of factors that a writing tutor negotiates in a tutoring session and argues that the absent presence of the instructor can complicate student ownership. At the heart of this scholarship are concerns about power, authority, academic discourse, and identity; these scholars use ownership to discuss

important affective and relational stakes of writing instruction, but their scope is also limited to the individual student or writer. In this way, these discussions highlight some of the affordances of using “ownership” in an institutional context. Specifically, the use of ownership in writing center studies foregrounds how institutional power shapes individual ownership of the products of their labor—in this case, their compositions. This is an assumption and concern that I share, and one that helps illustrate how the concept of “ownership” can bring into focus the precarity of individual control and labor production in institutional contexts.

As Linda Adler-Kassner (1998) has explained, ownership is also an important concept for the field of composition in general. Adler-Kassner traces our field’s treatment of ownership through the progressive and expressive eras and argues that, “for many students the possibility of ownership might be erased even before pen hits paper (or fingers hit keyboard). As we think about facilitating student ownership of writing, therefore, we need to be conscious of the historical contexts in which ideas like ‘ownership’ developed” (p. 230). Adler-Kassner’s argument highlights that, although ownership is a useful and important term for our field, there are some potentially negative implications of making it a goal of our pedagogies. For Adler-Kassner (1998), one such critique is that ownership has a traditionally individualistic emphasis, an emphasis that affected composition pedagogy in both the progressive and expressive eras and continues to do so today (p. 212). To Adler-Kassner’s critiques of the history of “ownership” in composition pedagogy, I would add that ownership also implies commodification. While ownership does carry with it the political and cultural value of individualism, as Adler-

Kassner illustrates, it also recalls middle-class values of hard work and delayed gratification.

Agency

Theorists across a range of disciplines have attempted to understand what exactly agency is, how it is shaped, and how it can be cultivated. Within composition and literacy studies, these discussions have been particularly fruitful for highlighting the role of language in how people effect change in their worlds. However, scholars have also debated an understanding of agency as something that is *possessed* by individuals and argued instead that agency is more like a field, or an *effect* of intra-action. Many of these debates have been propelled by the discipline's interest in New Materialism and other posthumanist approaches.

Among these conversations, Marilyn Cooper's (2011) definition of rhetorical agency offers somewhat of a middle ground that I find persuasive in trying to account for the complex individual, social, and material nature of agency. Cooper argues for an understanding of agency as "an emergent property of embodied individuals" (p. 42). She goes on to explain that "agents *do* reflect on their actions consciously; they *do* have conscious intentions and goals and plans; but their agency does not arise from conscious mental acts, though consciousness does play a role. Agency instead is based in individuals' lived knowledge that their actions are their own" (p. 421, emphasis mine). This is an important distinction that Cooper parses between an explicit decision to do something and the felt sense or belief that one is in control of one's actions. While her definition does center on agency as an individual feeling, Cooper argues that it is fostered through an ecology—an organism and its surround. As Cooper puts it, "agency is

grounded in individual embodiment. But by virtue of that embodiment, we also exist in interaction with the surround” (p. 440). By positioning agency as something that is simultaneously individual and interactive, Cooper’s definition thus also accommodates materiality and relationality.

Furthermore, although Cooper argues persuasively for the ecological nature of agency, I would use “networked” because, as I discuss in Chapter Three, “network” foregrounds the organization of power into material systems in which the various nodes must be constantly held in relation (Galloway, 2010). Describing agency as *networked* can, therefore, call attention to the mediating norms and narratives that hold the nodes in relation within the network and, in the process, that recognize, sanction, or encourage certain expressions of individual power.

In addition to theorizing the qualities of agency generally, other scholars have explicitly addressed the complex factors that affect students’ agency in their experiences of postsecondary literacy education. Bronwyn Williams (2017), for example, has noted that “agency—the ability to respond with confidence and skill to a given writing or reading situation—is a goal often articulated in research, on course syllabi, and in learning outcomes” (p. 3). As Williams argues and Cooper (2011) also suggests, agency is something that we, as literacy educators, tend to want to work towards. We often seek out ways to help our students feel more confident about their literacy practices and approach writing tasks with the knowledge that they are capable of acting and making decisions within their literate identities. Williams’s (2017) definition of agency is also useful because he highlights an understanding of agency as related to “action, decision, and reflection in a social context” (p. 10). This definition thus accommodates reflection

and meaning-making as well as overt action. This is particularly beneficial for recognizing a capacity to make meaning from one's experiences as an agential act.

Sociology has been a significant contributor to understanding the interaction between individual agency and social and cultural forces. In describing data analysis for institutional ethnography, for example, Michael Walby (2013) refers to examining data for "traces of how cultural discourses and structural forces shape and limit the participant's capacity for action" (p. 147). This sociological approach to agency maintains that individuals have freedom to make decisions, but that their decision-making is always shaped by structural forces such as norms, ideologies, and resources. This understanding is integral to my examination of individual student-workers' feelings of and expressions of agency and ownership in work and school contexts because it sees individuals as operating within a network of forces that act on them and vice versa. The perspectives of student-workers in this study about how they see themselves acting with or against certain norms in their networks can, therefore, illustrate characteristics of the network itself and the ways ideologies operate within it.

This scholarship provides a useful foundation for approaching issues of individual control, action, and decision-making. I also want to argue, though, that when considering matters of agency and ownership in institutional contexts it is useful to bring in the concept of intelligibility. Drawing on the work of Michael J. Shapiro (1992), I use "intelligibility" to refer to a form of institutional recognition in which an individual's or group's experiences and identities are able to be perceived and understood. Since agency is a networked phenomenon, intelligibility is integral to understanding how agency is recognized (or not) and, consequently, shaped in institutional contexts. If an individual's

attempts at expressing agency are unintelligible in an institutional context, then that individual may feel defeated, they may feel less confident in attempting similar expressions of choice, and, in turn, they may feel a diminished sense of agency. Take, for example, a student-worker who only got three hours of sleep and decides not to attend his composition class for the fifth time. He has used up all allotted or excused absences and makes the decision not to attend anyway, knowing that this decision will likely lower his grade in the course. Typically, this decision is not intelligible as an expression of agency. Postsecondary institutional norms and discourses often influence individual instructors to code this student's decision as an act of resistance or apathy, particularly in a discipline like composition that places high value on student participation and investment (as evidenced in program-wide attendance requirements). I will expand on the role of intelligibility in Chapter Five, but I want to note now that intelligibility is useful for considering how institutional recognition can affect students' capacities for action and reflection by influencing how those in positions of authority respond to students' actions.

In making a distinction between ownership and agency, I do not want to suggest that there is somehow a "wrong way" to talk about students' capacities for action or decision-making. In fact, ownership can be a helpful concept for highlighting issues of individual control, labor, and institutional struggle, as I explain above. However, there are economic and institutional connotations to ownership that are worth attending to, particularly when considering how significantly educational structures and discourses are already affected by neoliberal ideologies. Furthermore, in composition specifically, if we *only* talk about ownership at the exclusion of other ways of recognizing individual power and control, we could limit what we perceive as students' capacities for action and

reinforce individualistic, economically-based understandings of power. It is therefore worth considering how institutional discourses might shape what we, as literacy educators, recognize and value as individual ownership and agency.

Scope and Purpose

My primary goal in this chapter is to understand how the Metro College program and the University shape and recognize individual agency and ownership and the impact of this shaping on student-workers' lives. Following the structure of Chapter Three, I analyze two forms of data in this chapter: 1) student-workers' narrated experiences—the points of tension or alignment that they feel as subjects (or objects) in these institutions and the ways they make sense of these moments; and 2) the texts and material structures that constitute and reinforce institutional discourses in this context about ownership and agency—in other words, the texts, policies, and practices that mediate between institutionally sanctioned forms of individual control and individual lived experience. Through conducting this analysis, I argue that the Metro College program advances and contributes to a narrow version of ownership that relies on neoliberal values of efficiency, individualism, and commoditization. I suggest that the concept of ownership, when used in an institutional context, functions as a mediating value between individual perception and broader neoliberal narratives about labor and individualism. I then explore the implications of these forms of institutional control for writing program administration by framing writing programs as mediating institutional entities that are well-positioned to respond to the needs of working students.

As I illustrate below, there are many ways in which institutional control plays out in the lives and experiences of these student-workers, and many ways in which these

individuals also exert control over their circumstances. Two broad categories I will use to trace some of these forms of institutional control are time and labor. As I discuss in Chapter Three, these student-workers' experiences are significantly structured by the structures and norms of the Metro College program. However, the University also exerts its institutional control in these students' lives in powerful ways. In this chapter, then, when I explore the material-discursive structures that constitute institutional control, I aim to highlight how *both* of these institutions function in mediating roles between individual experiences and neoliberal ideologies. Although I discuss some structures that are University-wide, I do so with the goal of highlighting the institutionally situated nature of writing programs. Therefore, while I discuss policies and norms that apply to the entire University, I ultimately focus on writing programs as key mediating entities between broader discourses about education in a neoliberal landscape and individual lived experiences.

The Metro College Program as a Sponsor of Ownership

The data I discuss in this chapter affirms what the literature review above illustrates: ownership is a complex phenomenon, and one that is institutionally mediated and shaped. In order to ground my discussion of some of these complexities in the lives of these student-workers, this section illustrates how the Metro College program claims to expand students' access to and ownership over postsecondary education. It is important to recognize, though, that this ownership is not only an affective stance; it is also materially situated. There are very real, concrete benefits that the Metro College program provides, particularly for students from "under-resourced"⁶ populations.

⁶ I first heard this term during an all-staff training for composition instructors at the University. A representative from the Student Success Center was invited to discuss the financial demographics

Although there are no formal family income requirements (like there often are for other forms of financial aid, such as Pell Grants), Caroline explained to me that, demographically, many Metro College participants are from “middle-income” families:

What we know from our students is that they are aware of the debt they could go into with obtaining postsecondary and they have accessed this program to ensure that they don't have that debt. Our population of students is not your Pell Grant eligible folks. We have less than 20% in our program that are Pell Grant eligible. And we don't have folks in our program who have that parental support to pay for postsecondary. So our program really attracts that middle-income student who may not otherwise access postsecondary education, or who, if they did, would probably incur a great deal of debt.

As this explanation indicates, the Metro College program is deeply situated in broader economic trends in the neoliberal landscape, including reductions to Pell Grant funding and other forms of public support for postsecondary education. In this educational-economic landscape, there are fewer options for students seeking postsecondary education and, simultaneously, more pressure to do so. The Metro College program attempts to intervene in this landscape and make it possible for students from lower- to middle-income families to get a college degree. This function of the Metro College program is confirmed by student-workers' perspectives:

“I just don't want that burden of college tuition on my parents, you know. And also I don't want the burden of debt for the next twenty years, so [it's] just all about money, really....That's really the main reason, just so I can support myself—by myself—eventually, one day.” —Heather

“I did it because I can't afford college, there's no way.” —Brandi

“All I knew [before starting the program] was that it paid for college and I was like, that's kind of all that matters.” —Reya

of the student population. His primary argument was that the University has many financially under-resourced students, and that this population tends to struggle more academically than other students.

As these comments illustrate, the reduction or elimination of debt is a very real benefit that the program offers. There is a clear need that they are filling for students who have no other option. Because the Metro College program provides an alternative to burdensome debt, it claims to foster ownership over education that is both material (as indicated by the economic reality of pursuing postsecondary education) and affective (as expressed in Caroline's description of the relationship between ownership and hard work).

For the Metro College program, one form in which the discourse on ownership is manifest is the MC Spotlight. The MC Spotlight is a series of "feature stories" published on the program's website, each of which features a testimonial from a successful Metro College participant. Some of these profiles were written by the students themselves and submitted as part of an "MC Spotlight Contest," while others are written by a Student Development Counselor in the Metro College program. At the time of writing, the MC Spotlight features prominently on the Metro College website, as it is the focal content of the website's landing page. The majority of the site is taken up by a photo of the student who was most recently featured. This is a familiar marketing trope that is commonly used by postsecondary institutions to showcase things like the "diversity" of their student population. Given that the Metro College website is the main hub for accessing information about the program and logging in to complete requirements such as the College and Academic Planning Program, the MC Spotlight is a highly public, highly visible institutional text to both a general public and participating student-workers alike. As such, this series is also representative of the ways in which the Metro College program attempts to train students to think about their work lives. It is important to

recognize that these are not only individual accounts; these are carefully curated, institutionally sanctioned marketing tools. As such, they represent some of the narratives about ownership and success that the Metro College circulates and perpetuates.

This collection of profiles will be discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter as I trace an institutional discourse of ownership in students-workers' descriptions of their orientation to the Metro College program. However, I do want to briefly acknowledge two ways in which this text positions ownership as a particularly neoliberal value. First, as Caroline's description at the beginning of this chapter also illustrates, the institutional discourse as represented and publicized in the MC Spotlight assumes that the more challenging the labor, the more one's character (and cultural capital) is developed. Second, the MC Spotlight foregrounds the individualistic nature of ownership by positioning the acquisition of a debt-free college degree as an expression of one's freedom from crippling loans or reliance on parents or other providers.

One way in which this value manifests in the discourse of the MC Spotlight is through references to "pushing through." For example, one quote from a Metro College alum illustrates the deep, personal value that can be gained through this process: "I did not give up, I pushed through all the challenges—balancing sleep, maintaining good grades and a healthy social life. I worked hard to earn my degree—debt-free—and no one can ever take that away from me!" (Davis, 2018b, n.p.). Like a bootstraps model of achievement, this perspective reflects a middle-class form of ownership in which the individual rises above their circumstances to achieve success. By creating conditions in which students can earn their degree "on their own," the Metro College program supposedly provides students with both access to and a felt sense of ownership over their

education. However, the reality of student-workers' material conditions and feelings of ownership are much more complex.

This chapter explores these realities and argues that underlying such institutional claims is a narrow version of ownership: one that relies on neoliberal ideologies that place efficiency, individualism, and commodification at the heart of people's capacities for action and feelings of control. Furthermore, as I illustrate throughout this chapter, we can see parallels between this form of institutional control and institutional control in a university context; specifically, the two institutions often share discourses and structures of ownership that are based in the same ideologies of efficiency and individualism. However, while the Metro College program and the University are often ideologically aligned, the mechanisms through which they exert that control are often in competition or tension. This tension is perhaps most apparent as each institution attempts to structure student-workers' time and labor. These institutions therefore compete for control in student-workers' lives, and in the process, shape how these individuals develop and express their feelings of ownership and agency. In what follows, I will explore time and labor as two categories of this institutional control, I will attend to how students respond to these structures and limitations, and I will conclude by drawing on these students' experiences to discuss implications of increasing numbers of working students for writing program administration.

Operating in Temporal Economies of Scarcity

One of the most significant forms of institutional control for the student-workers in this study is how the Metro College program and the University compete for control over their time. In both institutional contexts, time is rigidly structured. For the

University, most departments schedule courses during standard business hours, often between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. In the Metro College program, students are required to work third-shift. Many Metro College participants (and all of the students in my study) begin work at about 10 or 11 p.m. and are finished in the early hours of the morning, typically somewhere between 3 and 4 a.m. As student-workers' narrated experiences illustrate, there are implications of this temporal structure for their agency and their feelings of ownership over both their work and school lives. Reya, a first-year student describes some of the social and psychological limitations that result from this structure:

Working night shift is really hard on me because I struggle with a lot of things. I struggle to keep myself balanced, and I take medicine for it and everything. So working all throughout the night and not really getting a lot of sleep has really pushed me back on that. I'm still, like, happy, but sometimes it's really hard to be when you can't go out some nights because you have work. Or if you have to get up early that morning, sometimes they'll let you leave a little early, but sometimes they won't, so you have to get like two hours of sleep and that's it.

The structure of third shift labor means, for Reya, that she sacrifices a degree of control over her mental health ("staying balanced") and ability to participate in social activities ("go[ing] out some nights"). As a result, she is denied opportunities to act in the best interest of her emotional and psychological wellbeing, which limits her agency. In addition to the psychological effects of this temporal structure, physical exhaustion is a very real constraint for many of these student-workers. Ramon, whose experiences I discuss briefly in Chapter Three, repeatedly described how difficult it is to adapt to the schedule of third shift work:

It's a big adaptation, because I mean you're going from—it's not just four hours a night. It's getting in there, going through security, riding the shuttle, so it's like an extra hour and half of your work I guess. So, it's like in between a part-time and a full-time job. And it's third shift, so it's just hard to get used to. I mean I still sometimes wake up and I'm like, I'm so tired.

Other students similarly referred to the unique challenge of working third-shift while trying to earn a college degree. Kathleen, for instance, described the implementation of a recent policy (roughly in March 2018) limiting overtime hours, which prompted some of her coworkers (who were not college students) to get a second job. Kathleen felt that their experiences resonated with her experience of being a working student, and said, “If I didn’t have anything on my plate, having one job wouldn’t be that big of a deal...then you add school on top of that. School is just like another job.” Other students expressed a desire for the Metro College program to offer the option to work either days or nights. When I asked Reya what she would change about the Metro College program, she responded, “I would change the choice of whether we work nights or days. As a college student it’s really hard working nights, but some people like working nights. So I feel like we should be given the choice.”

However, it is unlikely that such a change will be made. As the Metro College program publicizes on their website, this program has had a significant effect on employee retention at UPS (as I also mention in Chapter Two). “Student retention on the job has increased from average of 8 weeks prior to MC program inception to 195 weeks currently.... Percentage of students working at night for UPS has increased from approximately 8% prior to MC program inception to 37% currently (35% was original goal)” (“Quick Stats,” 2018, n.p.). The material benefit of employee retention for UPS means that this temporal structure is inherent in the program. Signing up for the Metro College program means sacrificing control over when one sleeps, eats, socializes, and so on.

The temporal structure of these students' work lives is already challenging, but when a student-worker attempts to navigate the demands of third-shift labor and adhere to the typical temporal structure of postsecondary education simultaneously, these challenges can be compounded. One participant in this research, Jill, described feeling somewhat out of sync with the typical rhythm of university life. When I asked Jill about whether she thought her challenges were unique among other students she knew, she described the similarities and differences between her experiences and those of her roommate, who worked in retail and had an internship while taking a full-time course load. Jill perceived many benefits of her position at UPS, such as having a reliable schedule (unlike her roommate experienced in the retail industry). She also referred to the structure of her time as somewhat of an obstacle: "It's different when you start your first class at noon and you get to campus and most people are getting close to finishing their day. So I think that's always different. You kind of feel behind." Although Jill doesn't explicitly refer to feelings of diminished control per se, she does feel "behind," as though she is unable to keep pace with and participate in the typical structure of time in university life. In other words, her ability to practice the activity of college life is limited. Etienne Wenger (1998), in his articulation of "communities of practice," explains that:

Practice is, first and foremost, a process by which we can experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful. Of course, in order to engage in practice, we must be alive in a world in which we can act and interact. We must have a body with a brain that is functioning well enough to participate in social communities. We must have ways to communicate with one another. But a focus on practice... includes not just bodies (or even coordinated bodies) and not just brains (even coordinated ones), but moreover that which gives *meaning* to the motions of bodies and the working of brains. (p. 51, emphasis in original)

We can see some important connections in this concept of practice with agency. Making meaning from something is part of how we express our agency, and making meaning

requires not only being able to be physically present, but also being able to practice.

While Jill's *access* to postsecondary education and economic stability was significantly expanded by joining the Metro College program, she also feels that the terms of her participation in her educational network are more limited than those of her peers.

However, Jill is able to feel that she is part of a community of practice at work, so she makes do with this limitation in her school life. Jill reflected on her positive attitude toward her work life and suggested:

I think it's just kind of like creating the space that you want while you're there. Like I remember when I first started, like no one in my area really talked. And so I'd bring like riddles in and we would try to crack riddles and stuff, and it was like getting through that awkward stage. But it was so awesome. Like once everyone gets out of their shell it's really fun to work with everybody.

As this brief narrative shows, Jill was able to use her skills and sociable personality traits to create meaning in her work life beyond only the financial benefits being offered. She exercised her agency and ownership to create conditions that were conducive to social connections. She established a community of practice in which her fellow members accepted their challenging labor conditions by having fun and establishing friendships.

Other participants, though, were somewhat more frustrated by the limitations placed on their ability to engage in their social networks. Kathleen referred to having to miss out on socializing with her friends because of their tendency to schedule events while she had to catch up on sleep. Although she recalls recommending that her friends schedule events like seeing a movie later in the afternoon, she describes feeling a kind of burden in having to ask her friend group to acclimate to her unusual schedule. For both Jill and Kathleen, the temporal structure of their work lives shapes how they perceive

their ability to participate in their social and educational networks, though they exert agency in different ways to accommodate these limitations.

From an institutional standpoint, one response to students' felt tensions between work and school temporal structures is to encourage them to simply manage their time better. Like we saw in Chapter Three with the institutional coordination of affective mobility, it is ultimately the responsibility of the individual to succeed despite challenging material and temporal conditions. Any failure to do so is a problem with the person, not the institution. The discussion of the College and Academic Preparedness Plan (CAPP) in Chapter Three described this institutional time management imperative more concretely and the literacy practices that were intended to mediate this skill. In the hyper-efficient time management that the Metro College propagates, time becomes a commodified unit that the individual "owns" and "spends." However, they must "spend" it in the way that the institution deems valuable; there is no such thing as unallocated leisure time (neither materially nor ideologically). Kathleen, for example, describes reaching out to her coworkers at the beginning of the school year to ask how they managed their difficult work schedules with the demands of school. She discovered that, according to her peers, the key was to make use of every available minute in the day:

They were like, 'You just have to find time.' Like on Mondays and Wednesdays I had about an hour between the time that I got home and the time that I would have to go to work, and they were like, 'You have to *use* that time.' Whether it be for you to try and get some sleep or do homework or study, or you know, email, that professor that you forgot to email yesterday. So it was like you have to use every minute, like it can't be spent watching Netflix, or you know, just playing video games or whatever. You just really have to make your priorities very clear to yourself. (emphasis Kathleen's)

In Kathleen's description, we can see the ways in which institutional conditions have led her to internalize the idea that time is a commodity that the individual owns and spends.

I see this particular version of individual efficiency in a temporal economy as an extension of historical shifts in perceptions of time that were precipitated through significant changes in the systems of production. E. P. Thompson (1967) is one early theorist who traced the relationship between these shifts in mechanisms of production and resulting changes in the culture. Thompson (1967) describes changes in the organization of labor in agricultural contexts specifically, which, he points out, also came to characterize industrial manufacturing. One of the most significant consequences of this shift in labor was an ensuing change in how time was measured and valued. Thompson explains,

Those who are employed experience a distinction between their employer's time and their 'own' time. And the employer must *use* the time of his labour, and see it is not wasted: not the task but the value of time when reduced to money is dominant. Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent. (p. 61)

According to Thompson, this distinction between employer and employee time was a hallmark of industrialism. Now, in a neoliberal economic landscape, the categories between employer and employee time are collapsed. All time is potential work time, and the individual is responsible for maximizing it. The radical individualism of neoliberal ideology thus compounds the commodification of time and makes each individual the manager of their own efficiency, and therefore, success.

This commodification of time also bears traces of Taylorist values of efficiency and task-management. Frederick Winslow Taylor was an influential figure in the Progressive Era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and is known for his theory of "scientific management," also referred to as Taylorism. As Aaron Stoller (2015) explains, Taylorism created a new relationship between employees and employers that was based on the "task." "Taylor believed that 'the task' is that thing a worker must know and be

able to do in order to perform their role productively and correctly” (Stoller, 2015, p. 318). The manager, in this context, was responsible for determining and assigning the task (Au, 2011). “Scientific management” also allowed for extreme control over laborers’ lives since “Taylor’s model was intended not simply to regulate worker outputs, but to control the very processes, behaviours and actions of employees” (Stoller, 2015, p. 323). While I return to a discussion of Taylorism later in this chapter, at this point I include it to illustrate how the institutional discourses about time and efficiency build upon and perpetuate neoliberal, capitalist norms about labor value. In this ideology, ownership is predicated on adhering to and internalizing a concept of time as a commodity. If the worker takes ownership of their time, then they will maximize it according to the most efficient means of production.

Kathleen’s experiences illustrate how this discourse can become internalized and valued, but also how it can positively affect students’ senses of agency. Kathleen reflected openly on a difference in her relationship to time that she attributed directly to the constraints of this temporal structure. She feels *more* capable and in control because she has had to learn this extreme efficiency. In describing what she sees as the benefits of her participation in the Metro College program, she reflects, “I did not realize how much time I actually had in life because I didn’t realize that I could actually push myself this far.” When we spoke a couple of months later, she reiterated this feeling of control over her time, reflecting, “Now that I look back [to high school], I’m just like, I can’t believe I wasted so much time. I didn’t even do anything when I was in high school. There were so many hours that I spent doing nothing. I can do so much with my time! Because there’s so much more, but I just had to find it, like had to look for it and find it.” Kathleen’s

description positions time as a resource that she had to find and put to proper use.

However, she also sees this ownership of her time as a personal improvement that enables her to feel agency in her work-school life. She *feels* more productive and more in control of her circumstances because she has learned how to maximize her time as a commodity. In a temporal economy of scarcity, Kathleen is reaping significant rewards.

In Kathleen's description of the shift in her relationship to time, we can see how she has taken up the Metro College program's institutional discourse on time efficiency, which is illustrated in the MC Spotlight series. Some of the recent profiles list specific questions with the students' responses rather than taking more of a short essay format. These questions typically address things like advice for other Metro College students and what the participant has learned while in the Metro College program. In one recent profile, a Metro College alum was asked about the best career advice she had ever received. She responded, "You can always make more money; you can never get more time so use your time wisely" (Davis, 2018b, n.p.). This profile also includes the following advice for new Metro College students: "Prioritize your time!! Make sure that you make time for what's important to you to meet your goals. Know your limits. Don't take on more than you know you should handle. It's all about how you spend your time!" (Davis, 2018b, n.p.). This alum's description of time echoes Kathleen's description of operating in a temporal economy. Like Kathleen, this former participant equates time with money and cites spending time wisely as the key to success. Several other profiles similarly laud time management and using time efficiently in these terms. As this profile suggests, one of those narratives is that success is achieved through possession of time in which the individual is expected to examine their own temporal economy and exert their

control over how their time is spent. In this narrative, success is often connected to “balance,” which, I would suggest does not, in fact, describe a material balance between work, school, and personal time. Rather, “balance” codes for an affective stance of acceptance of this temporal economy and the behaviors it demands.

Kathleen’s experience illustrates some of the complexities of examining agency and ownership in this institutional context. In one sense, Kathleen’s way of managing her time is aligned with a neoliberal imperative to take ownership by developing a personal sense of urgency and efficiency—every moment must be productive and productivity is the foundation of personal value and control. Her participation in the Metro College program means that she must adapt to conditions that require this efficiency. However, as her reflections make clear, the process of adaptation has actually contributed to her feelings of agency and enabled her to feel more productive, capable, and confident. (In this way, Kathleen’s process of adapting to her work life resonates with Heather’s, which I discuss in Chapter Three). Kathleen’s assertion, “I can do so much with my time!” reflects her belief that she is in control of her time, which has expanded her capacities for action. I want to make clear, then, that it is not my intention to suggest that Kathleen’s feelings are “wrong” simply because they align in some ways with the forms of ownership and agency that are institutionally sanctioned. It is important to recognize these moments as agential and to learn from them about the complexities of student-workers’ lived experiences. At the same time, it is important to recognize that these feelings are shaped by institutional discourses and neoliberal ideologies. If the goal is to develop a more networked understanding of the experiences of student-workers, then, as I also argue in Chapter Three, it is important to examine what holds the nodes of this

network in relation. In this case, we should ask what norms, narratives, and meanings support (or deny) students' feelings of agency.

Kathleen's, Jill's, and Reya's experiences illustrate the implications of third-shift labor on their feelings of confidence and capacities for action, decision-making, and reflection. These are some of the ways, then, that these students' work lives shape their experiences of postsecondary education. While third-shift labor exemplifies an extreme form of institutional control in the context of these students' working lives, there are similar structural limitations that result from the temporal practices of postsecondary education.

While many brick-and-mortar and online degree programs alike have realized the importance of offering course schedules that accommodate working adults, the norm at many institutions is still to schedule the majority of courses in the morning and early afternoon. This reality is, of course, brought about through a variety of factors (such as available teaching labor), but these material conditions can have significant implications for student-workers' ability to choose class schedules that are conducive to their work lives. For instance, for many students, registration season is a stressful, frustrating, and often disappointing time in the semester as they negotiate limited course offerings with their own degree requirements and interests. This is not, of course, unique to the University of Louisville. All students across institution type have to deal with potentially frustrating limitations on their schedule. However, the particular challenges of Metro College students illustrate how these limitations can be not just transient frustrations, but significant factors in students' abilities to complete their degrees or feel in control in their school lives. A secondary limiting factor Metro College student-workers is that they are

not granted “priority” registration⁷. Therefore, although these students have strict demands on their schedule and often require courses with a late morning or afternoon start time, there are few structures and policies in place to help them secure enrollment in required courses. Rather, as illustrated by the discussion of the CAPP in Chapter Three, students are encouraged to disclose their participation in the Metro College program to their advisors and to ask for help scheduling their courses later in the day. Furthermore, students must perform the mental and emotional labor of disclosing this information over and over again. Since they are not identified as Metro College participants in any bureaucratic systems, students must take the initiative to inform instructors on their own. Instructors have no way to know that there are Metro College students in their classes unless they explicitly ask or these students disclose (this is an issue that will be discussed extensively in Chapter Five).

This bureaucratic limitation often leads to students not being able to enroll in prerequisites that they need to advance toward their degree (on schedule, according to the predetermined stepwise structure of postsecondary education) or having to risk failing a course that is scheduled earlier in the day. Ramon, for example, whose experiences I also discuss in Chapter Three, had to retake a calculus course because he failed the section he attempted to take at 8 a.m. He passed with an A the second time around when he took the class in the afternoon. Several participants in this research cited University registration practices as one of the most challenging and frustrating obstacles to their success.

⁷ On January 15, 2019, the Student Government Association passed a resolution supporting the implementation of priority registration for Metro College participants. Their rationale aligns with my analysis, as they argue that “the extension of priority registration to UPS student workers is anticipated to improve student performance and retention by placing less of a scheduling burden on these students during registration.” At the time of writing, higher administration has not yet responded to this SGA resolution.

“I think UPS students should have, like, where they register first, so they have the later classes available. I was one of the last people to register, and I was lucky to get all the classes that I wanted.” –Dean

“Sometimes it's hard to find classes or a class that you need to take in a timeframe that is good for you. I want to do secondary education. So they had an intro to teaching class, but there was one that was focused toward elementary education, and there was one that was focused toward secondary education, and I couldn't take the one that was focused toward secondary education because it was at 9 in the morning and I was like, I can't wake up at 9 in the morning, like that's not going to happen.” –Kathleen

“With class scheduling, I feel like it would be a lot cooler if the UPS people could schedule first because a lot of people want the later classes, and we physically can't get up for the early classes. Like, if I had an 8 a.m. I would probably die.” —Reya

For these students, the institutions that exert the most control in their lives operate according to completely different structures of time. This tension leads to significant limitations on their agency in terms of their ability to create a course schedule that fits with the necessary structure of their work lives, the requirements of their degree programs, and their interests. Part of this issue is that the University offers most courses in the mornings, with increasingly fewer sections later. However, as these student-workers suggest, the competing institutional structures of time are only part of the problem.

Student-workers' feelings of agency are particularly affected by the fact that they are not made systematically intelligible in one of the most significant bureaucratic forms of the University: advising. As I mention above, there are no specific structures in place within the institutional system to ensure that these students receive the advising support and registration timeslot that will increase their chances of success.⁸ In order to receive

⁸ This information was initially provided by an instructor participant in this study during spring 2017. However, since then, I have encountered additional information about how Metro College participants are institutionally identified. According to Caroline (email communication, April

such support, they must take it upon themselves to disclose their status as Metro College participants (the issue of disclosure is discussed significantly in Chapter Five). A lack of institutional intelligibility for these student-workers is significantly connected to a lack of agency in the context of their school lives. Because they are not immediately intelligible in the bureaucratic structures of the University, their options for exerting control are restricted. They are once again put in the position of having to take ownership over their identity as Metro College participants and individually seek out help.

There are, of course, necessary limitations to registration processes at most institutions and for most students. There will always be winners and losers in a first-come, first-served system. However, the institution's failure to consider the effects of participating in the Metro College program is an oversight that has very real material and affective consequences for these students' feelings of ownership and agency. Neither the University nor UPS formally acknowledges the temporal economy of the other. Although Metro College resources tend to be very clear about the difficulty of working on little sleep and trying to register for courses according to a schedule that is different from the norm, *structurally*, there are no mechanisms in place to restore to these students a degree of control or choice over how their time is coordinated. Therefore, it falls on the

2019), Metro College students are, in fact, placed into a particular student group (METR) within the PeopleSoft system when they sign their first MC agreement. However, this designation only signals that a given student has participated in the Metro College program at some point, not if they are current participants. Therefore, while an advisor *might* see that a student belongs to that student group, they would not be able to determine if they are participating in the program during the semester at hand. Caroline further clarified that an advisor could see Metro College anticipated aid for a specific semester if they accessed the "customer accounts" portion of PeopleSoft, but speculated that most advisors likely do not access that information. One implication of this conflicting information is that even for those who are authority figures in the University, these institutional systems and designations are somewhat nebulous and difficult to navigate. While there are ways to find out if a particular student is an MC participant, this information is nevertheless obscured by a restricted, somewhat convoluted software interface.

individual to take ownership of their time by managing it with Taylorist hyper-efficiency. The idea of the individual managing their own temporal economy is also perpetuated by the institutional discourses and texts that coordinate this commodified relationship to time.

The Price They Pay: Performing Academic *and* Third-Shift Labor

Because agency is an embodied phenomenon, it is important to also consider the labor demanded of these students and the implications of these material labor conditions for students' feelings of ownership and agency. Specifically, I am interested in the variety of forms of labor that these students must perform in order to maintain their participation in the Metro College program, and, therefore, in the University. I have already discussed some of these forms of labor in Chapter Three, where I argued that adhering to the institutional mobility script requires that students perform the labor of aligning their affective practices with institutional norms about efficiency and delayed gratification. Here I build from and expand that argument to consider how the labor conditions of these students' work and school lives affect their capacities for action and feelings of control.

In Chapter Three, I also briefly referenced the experiences of Brandi, who decided to withdraw from the Metro College program and the University after a very challenging, frustrating semester of working for UPS during which she felt exploited, tricked, and unsupported. I also referred to Brandi's feelings of immobility as a potential cause for her decision not to perform the affective (and physical) labor required to participate in the Metro College program. I return to Brandi's narrative here to attend more fully to the effects of her work experiences on her sense of agency. It is worth returning to this idea of "feeling stuck" in the context of ownership and agency because it highlights the ways

in which individuals' capacity for action and feelings of control and confidence can be limited by their participation in the mobility network of the Metro College program.

Brandi comes from a working-class family and was a first-generation college student. When we spoke, she was majoring in biology in the hopes of attending medical school and securing a career with significant financial stability, which she felt she never had while she was growing up. However, Brandi was extremely dissatisfied with her experiences in the Metro College program. While working on unloading a plane, she seriously injured her knee and had to undergo weeks of physical therapy. She also expressed frustrations about a perceived lack of communication from the program about how difficult it would be to manage work and school and repeatedly described being told “just the benefits, like *oh yeah we pay free tuition, book reimbursement, you know, flexible hours*. They don't say, *oh yeah, you're also gonna be sleep deprived, you're gonna have to work twice as hard, you have a contract, you have to maintain all this or else we don't pay*.” When I asked how she felt about signing up for another semester with the program, she replied, “You really feel stuck, honestly, like you really don't have a choice.” Several times during our conversation, Brandi referred to herself as having only two options: either keep participating in the program or drop out. Brandi's experiences are revelatory of the ways that a lack of decision-making opportunities can shape individuals' perceptions of their lives and their ownership over their labor conditions. Brandi, for example, described feeling “stuck,” and made it clear that the only way she could obtain a postsecondary degree was to sacrifice her sleep (and, to a significant degree, her body) in very physically and emotionally challenging labor conditions.

Although Brandi had perhaps the most negative response to the Metro College program out of the participants in this research project, others similarly reported feeling “stuck.” Dean and Kristin, for instance, also felt this sense of immobility and alienation from their circumstances. As I mention above, at the time of our conversation, Kristin had already quit the Metro College program after three weeks. Dean, however, planned to continue with the program for the duration of his postsecondary degree. He had also completed a co-op with UPS while he was in high school, and felt that he would be able to keep up with the schedule and his school work. Both Dean and Kristin, however, had fairly negative feelings toward the Metro College and UPS as an institution. Kristin, like Brandi, felt that she was not made aware of the challenges of participating in the Metro College program. “They’ll say you know, free college, free this, free that, but they don’t explain to you that—Like, during [Dean’s] peak season he worked six days a week for like a month and a half, sometimes seven.” Dean agreed with Kristin’s assessment, saying, “I feel like they recruit you in and make it sound really good. And then, like you’re stuck there or you have to pay for your college, so it’s like you’re stuck there for that amount of time. But I’ve heard of a lot of people quitting because they just can’t handle it, like the hours and then school.” Brandi’s, Kristin’s, and Dean’s feelings of being constrained illustrate how students’ lived experiences of agency are affected by their participation in the Metro College program. Their feelings also illustrate an important connection between mobility and agency. From their experiences, we can see how part of feeling that you have agency is feeling that you are mobile—that you can choose your own path and move yourself any direction you choose (to paraphrase a popular Dr. Seuss quote). For these students, though, the demanding labor situations in

which they find themselves significantly constrain their ability to feel in control of how they were being moved through their lives.

In addition to this feeling of being immobilized, a particularly challenging material reality of working for UPS in the Metro College program is the degree of variation between positions in the Worldport facility. Texts such as the MC Spotlight make it seem as though success is ultimately up to the individual; however, this focus on individual ownership obscures the unevenness in labor expectations and requirements of different positions within the Worldport hub. Some require significant physical ability, with participants referring to lifting boxes over 80 pounds or, as mentioned below, physically pulling large rolling palettes of parcels that weigh up to a ton. Alternatively, administrative positions (such as Jill's) do not typically involve physical labor at all.

For many participants in this study, this variability is one of the most significant factors affecting their senses of agency and ownership in their work lives. Many refer to a feeling of being at the whim of UPS with no capacity to choose for themselves or have their desires recognized by the institution. Kristin, for example, quit the Metro College program after about three weeks and, during our conversation, repeatedly referred to how challenging her specific position at UPS was. She felt a sense of frustration knowing that others had less challenging positions, and cited that as a reason others might be able to make it through the program when she did not:

I feel like you could just get lucky, like, I think most of the people that can make it through the program have something easier.... my job was pulling like a 2000 pound thing—I mean they're on rollers, but they're still heavy—and then unloading all of them and just constant, super, super heavy stuff. Like, I smashed my finger under a hundred-something pound metal thing. It's just super hard to do. So, I feel like if I was able to choose, I probably would've gone to small sort.

Kristin's ability to make decisions and feel in control of her circumstances was significantly limited in this case, to the degree that she felt that her position completely prevented her from continuing her participation in the Metro College program. Because of these physical, embodied, and emotional factors that left Kristin feeling isolated, challenged, and unsupported, her sense of ownership over her work life was significantly constrained. Rather than continue to negotiate these conditions, Kristin accepted the possibility of having to take out loans to finance the rest of her education.

Kathleen similarly discussed the effects of this labor contingency, explaining, "There's so many different levels of difficulty with the different jobs that you have at UPS, so I think that for some people when they complain and they say that it's not worth it, they don't get paid enough for the job that they do. But then, like my job, I don't think it's that bad." Kathleen offers an interesting counterpoint to the institutional narrative that some students just don't take ownership over their circumstances or fail to develop the work ethic required. Rather, as Kathleen points out, the challenges of working in certain areas of the Worldport hub are materially and significantly greater than those of other areas. What these descriptions illustrate, then, is that feelings of agency in students' work lives are limited from the very beginning because they have little choice in what kind of work they are doing and where in the Worldport facility they are placed. As a result, many students already feel that their opportunities for decision-making are limited by the very nature their work lives. In accepting a position in the Metro College, these students are automatically accepting the sacrifice of multiple forms of control: control of their time, control in structuring their course schedules, and control over how their bodies are put to work in the Worldport facility.

It is worth noting, though, that some students describe tactics that they used to obfuscate the institutional norm of being placed wherever they were needed in the Worldport operation and to exert a degree of control over their labor. Jill, for example, knew to ask for an “admin” position because her father works for UPS, and was able to offer her this guidance. As she acknowledges though, “Most people just don't even know about the admin positions, so they apply for package handler, so just the benefit of knowing that was really great.” Reya similarly mentions knowing that she could request a specific supervisor on the application form, so she requested her cousin’s supervisor so that they could work in the same area. These students thus leveraged their knowledge of institutional texts and institutional decision-making processes in order to achieve a degree of control in their work lives. However, many students are not afforded this institutional awareness.

These students’ experiences also illustrate the centrality of individualism to the way labor is structured and valued in the context of the Metro College program and the constraints that this individualism places on agency and ownership. Kristin and Dean, for example, described wishing that they had more support and understanding from both Metro College staff and University instructors. For instance, Dean reflected on his experience of working for UPS as a high school student in their co-op program. In this program, Dean had a mentor that was on site at the Worldport hub and regularly checked on how the co-op students were doing. Dean suggested that bringing something like this to the Metro College program would be a beneficial form of support and connection. Dean and Kristin (and other students) also referred to feeling like many of their instructors either did not care or did not understand how challenging their work lives

were. Although this particular issue will be discussed later in this and the following chapter, for now, I want to note that the individualism inherent in the sanctioned work ethic of the program made these students feel that they had no control over their work lives *and* that they were disconnected and unintelligible in their school lives. Although individual instructors may give extensions or make exceptions to attendance/participation policies (and often do, as I discuss more in Chapter Five), it is not in the structure of the University to accommodate these students' needs. The status quo approach to who students are and what labor can be expected of them can, therefore, disadvantage these student-workers in significant ways. Kristin, for instance, described some consequences she had experienced after missing more than the allotted four classes in her mathematics course:

You could only have four absences, so I think I was at the end of it by the end of the semester, and then my grandpa passed away, so I had to use the fifth one. And then I tried to explain to him, like, well one of them was whenever I started at UPS and I was just trying to get extra sleep or like had to leave early or something. And he just kind of blew it off, like I don't think most professors or teachers really care, to be honest.

Kristin's experience illustrates that moments like these in which students do not adhere to the labor demands of the university can have significant consequences for their feelings of agency. Whereas this experience *could have* been an important moment of feeling seen and understood for Kristin, it became yet another moment in a string of moments in which her experiences were not valued or understood. Such moments can leave students who do not fit the mold of the "typical student," such as student-workers, feeling defeated, unsupported, and unrecognized. In many four-year institutions, it is common for faculty to assume that our students are primarily 18-24 years old and that they have fairly typical schedules and obligations. Because we still operate largely according to a

specific understanding of who a “normal” or “traditional” student is, experiences like working 30 hours a week third shift are made unintelligible.

Such assumptions about students’ material conditions are accompanied by an ideology of individualism that we can see in postsecondary education in general, but can also recognize in the structures and norms of our composition programs in particular. Nancy Grimm (2011) has referred to the idea that “students should learn ‘on their own’” as “the dominant ideology in higher education.” (p. 83). Grimm goes on to note that “learning ‘on one’s own’ is linked with the quintessential American bootstraps mythology, one that Villanueva (1993) critiques” (p. 83). The university grading system is a prime example of this individualism. Even within composition programs, in which process, peer review, and conferencing are highly valued, ultimately the grade signifies individual effort. The instructor assesses what students produce and assigns them a grade in exchange, which either enhances or diminishes their academic and cultural capital in the university.⁹ As Asao B. Inoue (2019) notes, “all assessment systems use student labor in exchange with other things of value, such as grades, essays, feedback, or learning products or outcomes” (p. 80). Even though writing classes may include collaborative projects, this exchange is always, in the end, individual. Other educational norms and structures reinforce and reflect this tendency towards individualism. For example, plagiarism detection software is now a billion-dollar industry.¹⁰ Platforms such as Turnitin.com or SafeAssign are meant to certify, independently of any action on the part of the teacher, that the student has done all of their work “on their own.” As Lynn Bloom

⁹ This is certainly not the fault of composition programs—there is only so much control we have over these institutional requirements.

¹⁰ On March 6, 2019, Turnitin was acquired by Advance for \$1.75 billion (“Advance to Acquire,” 2019).

(1996) argues, “middle-class composition teachers, ever Emersonian in spirit, stress the importance of self-reliance (‘Your work must be your own work’), even in nominally collaborative classrooms” (p. 659). Similar to the work ethic coordinated by the Metro College program, this emphasis on individual production and exchange reflects a discourse of individual ownership over one’s labor and time.

For students in this research, this individual ownership also manifests in individuals’ decisions to suppress their feelings of dissatisfaction or resistance to the material conditions of their work-school lives. For instance, several students referred to a personal commitment to not complain, while at work or otherwise:

“It’s what I signed up for. It’s what I’m going to do. I’m only going to complain sometimes.” —Reya

“I think once you voice a complaint—like, yeah we’re all tired, but once you voice it, it gives power to it. So I think definitely just being like, we are all tired here and the sun doesn’t shine any brighter on anyone else—you know, like, all the same kind of outlook. And I think that definitely helps, to accept your circumstance and then see how you can make it work.” —Jill

In Jill’s and Reya’s assessments, we can see traces of the institutional discourse of ownership: to *own* one’s choices means to accept individual responsibility for the conditions of one’s life. Although Jill recognizes this is a shared experience of struggle, she believes that she alone is ultimately responsible for her experience in the Metro College program. As discussed in Chapter Three, the neoliberal discourse of the Metro College tends to downplay individual struggle and frame challenge as a non-normative affective practice.

A similar form of institutional regulation occurs in this case with ownership. The only thing the individual can change is their response to their conditions, and they can change this response by *owning* their decisions. I do not intend to engage in a

philosophical debate over whether this kind of internalized acceptance of one's lived conditions "counts" as agency. I do, however, want to acknowledge that this aspect of institutional discourse can be powerfully persuasive because it offers student-workers terms on which to reclaim a sense of control. Furthermore, we have seen how this discourse leads to both felt and material successes in the cases of Kathleen, who mostly feels confident and in control in her work and school lives, and Jill, who has been participating in the Metro College program for two years and speaks very highly of her experiences. It is worth noting, though, that if control does not extend beyond the individual, then a capacity for change does not extend beyond the individual. The individual can control (supposedly) how they feel about their work life, but they cannot change the structures of the institution itself.

Another potential consequence of this internalization is that students may be disinclined to disclose how challenging their work lives are to any resources or forms of support, including their instructors, advisors, or Metro College staff. Because the norm is to internalize any struggle, the structural issues that deny them choice or opportunities for support in *both* work and school can be compounded. By structuring emotional response in this way, the Metro College program reinforces a narrow definition of ownership that is based on efficiency, individualism, and the internalization of struggle in order to maintain participation within the mobility network.

"I learned to love syllabi:" Student Labor and Writing Programs

A primary argument of this dissertation is that these students' work lives significantly shape their experiences of postsecondary education and that it is the responsibility of writing teachers to understand these experiences concretely and respond

to them in both our programmatic structures and our pedagogical strategies. As I emphasize here and in Chapter Three, both the Metro College program and the University function in the lives of students as mediating institutions. In their institutional texts and discourses, they circulate broader ideologies that are characterized by neoliberal, Taylorist values and norms. While this complex mediation is particular to the situated, local context of the Metro College program, the institutional, ideological positionality of postsecondary education is pervasive. It is therefore beneficial to consider more fully the implications of this reality for writing programs. In relating this complex, networked reality of working students' lives to composition pedagogy and writing program administration, I have two goals. First, I aim to discuss the opportunities that literacy educators have to intervene in this network. This will be the focus of Chapter Five. My second goal, however, and the one I will attend to in the remainder of this chapter, is to recognize some parallels between the institutional functions of writing programs and the neoliberal ideologies that are constitutive of the norms and structures of the Metro College program.

Like any institution, the ethos and ideology of writing programs are manifest in its institutional texts. An interesting example of such a text in writing programs is the syllabus. Although we, as educators, may think of our syllabi as deeply unique and personal documents, they nevertheless perform important institutional functions and bear traces of institutional norms and practices. This institutional role was highlighted by many of the student-workers I spoke with during this research, particularly when they described how they navigate the competing demands of their work and school lives. For many, syllabi served as documents that helped them orient their energy towards the

academic tasks required of them, and as a result, helped them feel more in control and more successful in their academic lives. For instance, when Kathleen described the demanding course schedule she had her first semester (due to not being able to register for courses at more desirable times), she reflected on the importance of her course syllabi in managing her time: “I learned to love syllabi, and on the weekends, I didn't do much on the weekends. It was like, literally, get homework done for Monday through Wednesday because I knew I wasn't going to have time during those days to get anything done.” Kathleen’s description of how she segmented her labor for school illustrates how syllabi function as institutional texts that coordinate students’ academic labor. Although syllabi are, in many ways, very individual to the particular instructor, they are also repositories of institutional discourses about labor, time, and control. Particularly for writing programs, where syllabi templates or common syllabi are often used (for at least a portion of the instructor population, such as teaching assistants), it is worth considering how these texts mediate between institutional norms and students’ feelings of agency. Student Learning Outcomes offer a particularly salient example of a syllabus component that can reveal institutional discourses about who our students are and what role our courses will play in their lives.

Learning outcomes are deeply connected to agency and ownership because they function as a kind of contract or agreement, telling students that by performing academic labor in the class, they will learn and be able to do certain things. In this way, learning outcomes also function as textual repositories of institutional labor expectations. Asao B. Inoue (2019) argues that “assessment ecologies, even ones that avoid giving grades, still are systems of exchange. In them, texts, ideas, judgments, and labor are exchanged” (p.

79). Within this ecology (or network), learning outcomes perform multiple, layered functions. They are yardsticks for assessment as well as a means of institutional certification that the student will possess (or own) particular, sanctioned skills and dispositions by the end of the semester. This is one way in which writing programs mediate between broader ideologies and individual experiences.

Occasionally, the relationship of learning outcomes to ownership is even more explicit, as in the case of the learning outcomes for first-year writing at the University of Louisville. In November 2014, a revised set of learning outcomes was introduced for first-year writing. Many of the revisions were prompted by the desire to include an awareness of the affordances of digital technologies and multimodal communication, but another change was the addition of “Confidence and Ownership” as a new outcomes category for English 101, Introduction to College Writing. After Rhetorical Knowledge, Critical Thinking, Processes, and Conventions, Confidence and Ownership is listed as the final category of outcomes for the course. This category is described as follows:

In fulfilling the above outcomes, students will take ownership of their work and recognize themselves as writers who:

- Have a growing understanding of their own voice, style, and strengths
- Demonstrate confidence in their writing through frequent drafts
- Can articulate their own positions relative to those of others.

“Confidence and Ownership” thus functions in this list of as a kind of culminating outcome that indicates the ultimate payoff of fulfilling all the other outcomes. This addition to the English 101 outcomes also illustrates an interesting intersection between ownership and identity. In this description, ownership is aligned with the perception of oneself as a writer. The two are simultaneous; the act of taking ownership of one’s work goes hand-in-hand with seeing oneself as a writer. In this description, we can see

resonances with the writing center scholarship I cited at the beginning of this chapter. As literacy educators, we want students to see the power they hold as writers and to feel ownership over what they produce within the institutional setting of the academy. However, this stated version of ownership still reinforces the importance of production (in that it is through producing writing with certain characteristics that students will develop this ownership and become a certain type of writer) and places responsibility for “taking” ownership on the individual. There is, of course, a burden of responsibility placed on the teacher to ensure that students meet these outcomes, this language affirms students as the primary subjects of the outcomes.

While learning outcomes have become highly valued in the higher education landscape for guiding and unifying assessment, they have also been met with criticism that points to the Tayloristic tendencies in the institutional function and ideologies of outcomes statements. Stoller (2015) has argued that, “while they are often touted as a mechanism to create greater equity and equality in education, learning outcomes should properly be understood as the symbolic heart of neoliberal corporate reform efforts” (pp. 320-321) Stoller justifies this stance by citing the product, rather than process, oriented nature of outcomes and argues that they reinforce an educational structure in which the underclass comes to receive the wisdom of the intellectuals.

Like Taylor’s system, the Learning Outcomes Movement is also built on the back of a deficit perspective of all persons in the system, but particularly the students....It views students, even at the collegiate level, as members of an ignorant class who have come to university for the explicit purpose of learning from the enlightened class. Learning outcomes are, by definition, those things that students are told are important to know as determined by outside experts. (p. 326)

For first-year writing courses in particular, this deficit-based, gatekeeping aspect of learning outcomes is especially significant given that our courses introduce and invite

students into new and potentially unfamiliar discourses. Our learning outcomes can have significant implications for students' sense of agency within the academic institution, for their learning, and for their abilities to communicate effectively and represent themselves and their communities well. As Stoller argues, learning outcomes are often the status quo way of proving legitimacy in the institution. In one sense, they are signs to our schools and colleges and accreditation agencies that we are in fact teaching something, regardless of the idea that our courses are not "content-based." In another sense, learning outcomes communicate to students what will be expected of them, and what they can expect to learn from our courses. Outcomes therefore function multi-directionally, serving many institutional functions and speaking to many audiences at once. However, because they are so commonplace, their ideological heft can be forgotten.

While I do not necessarily agree with Stoller that learning outcomes are by their nature neoliberal and based in deficit models, I do think his argument shows that learning outcomes are not abstract or objective milestones. They are material-ideological standards that require a great deal of labor to meet. In particular, we risk obfuscating the labor that our learning outcomes require of students. For example, there are many forms of labor that contribute to the somewhat nebulous outcome of "demonstrat[ing] confidence in their writing through frequent drafts." Demonstrating this quality requires the material production of texts as well as affective labor, including accepting a degree of emotional vulnerability during peer review and investing time and energy in the revision process. These are certainly worthwhile activities, but they are not typically recognized as forms of labor. Instead, these complex activities are often subsumed under the process of learning and, as such, are seen as intrinsic goods. By obscuring labor required to

“achieve” the learning outcomes, our writing programs may perpetuate a particularly neoliberal logic of individualism in which any obstacles to achieving these goals are failings on the part of the individual rather than possible structural problems.

Rigid programmatic attendance requirements are another way in which students’ labor and material conditions may be obscured in our practices. As educators, we value class time very highly. We see the interaction between students and the creation of a community as central to learning. But, for working students, the labor that goes into class interactions and the time that they are required to spend in class can feel like a burden and an additional limitation on their capacities for agency. An interesting moment in my conversation with Dean and Kristin foregrounds this issue of labor in terms of the attendance requirements in their composition classes specifically. Near the end of our discussion, I asked if there were ways that they could feel more supported by their teachers. Their responses indicated some frustration over attendance requirements and a difficulty that they both had in keeping up with these requirements.

Dean: I don't know what they would be able to do to help. It's hard because not everybody is in this program, but maybe [having] days where you don't have to go to class, you just have to do something like research something for a paper, and then the next class bring that to class and turn it in.

Layne: So like more stuff outside of class that would kind of take the place of an actual class meeting time? Like stuff you could do online?

Dean: Yeah. Like some things in class that we do, I'd just look at it and say 'I could be doing this on my own time.'

Kristin: Yeah, I think I was going to say the same. We have—you know, we pay for the textbooks and stuff. If we were just reading or going through it we could do that and like email the teacher if we had questions, anything like that. That would have made it easier—a lot easier.

Because Dean and Kristin operate in a temporal economy of scarcity, and because their labor conditions are particularly demanding, they see some of the time they spend in class as extraneous. Having to show up for class can thus become a significant exertion of labor in which they are having to drag their physically exhausted bodies to class as well as expend the mental and emotional energy required of large or small group discussion. Because of the strict temporal economy in which these students have to operate, the value of face-to-face time in class can be significantly diminished. While those of us who are writing teachers may bristle at this devaluation of something we value so highly, we should think about these moments not as rejections of what we have to offer, but as indications of the challenging temporal and labor economies that our students are navigating. Furthermore, placing the burden on students to “buy in” to our attendance requirements means assuming that they will exercise their affective mobility (as I describe it in Chapter Three) in order to respond to our classes in a way that we deem appropriate. Possible responses to this situation will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, but in the following conclusion to this chapter, I would like to address the implications of these material conditions for the work of writing program administration.

Conclusion

There are both challenges and opportunities when it comes to addressing these forces in our WPA work. One challenge is to discern how we can attend to our own institutional, mediating role in students’ lives. Writing program administrators are not all-powerful; their own agency is limited by often strict material, bureaucratic conditions. WPA work itself is a networked experience in which a host of nodes or institutional forces constrain individual capacity for action and decision-making. Other scholars have

addressed how WPAs are subject to bureaucratic and managerial expectations as well as challenging labor conditions (Bousquet & Nelson, 2008; Scott, 2009, 2016; Horner, 2000, 2016; Strickland, 2011) However, it is precisely because of this mediating role that we have opportunities to foster a more ecological or networked sense of agency in our students broadly and in our student-workers specifically. To conclude this chapter, then, I will describe some ways we might leverage our institutional positions to make it apparent to working students how our programs can support them.

One strategy is to frame our learning outcomes in ways that expand students' opportunities for networked expressions of agency (in addition to or instead of more individualistic expressions of ownership). For instance, we might include an outcome or series of outcomes that pertain to using writing (understood broadly) to make oneself intelligible and to understand others. This kind of learning outcome would go beyond a diversity or community engagement outcome, which are increasingly popular, to also encourage connection and reflection. Although we have institutional parameters and bureaucratic functions that learning outcomes must fulfill, we can consider how our learning outcomes might simultaneously push back against Taylorist discourses and structures. Developing outcomes that emphasize an awareness of networked interconnectivity over individualistic notions of progress and efficiency is one way to work toward this goal.

A second, and equally important, strategy is to offer new teachers clear ideas for how to respond to and accommodate students' working lives. One way to do this is to present them with models for what accommodations or exceptions to policies might look like. For instance, we might discuss a variety of scenarios with new teachers that are

based in the material realities of our specific student populations. In the case of the University of Louisville and the Metro College program, one such scenario might be: *A student comes to you after midterm grades are posted. They only have one absence left before they will fail the course. They tell you, for the first time, that they are a Metro College student, and they have missed so many classes because they overslept. How do you respond?* We can then discuss the benefits and risks of a variety of options for responding to this and similar situations (such as implementing a labor-based grading contract (Asao, 2019), offering the student opportunities to make up for missed classes by doing additional projects, or simply forgiving the student's previous absences). We can also foreground ways to invite disclosure of such life conditions at the very beginning of the semester (as I discuss in detail in Chapter Five).

Ultimately, this work may require difficult conversations about the differences between equality and equity in enforcing course policies. Specifically, it is important to acknowledge that fairness is not necessarily about enforcing policies across the board, but about meeting students where they are and doing what we can to foster their success. In the following chapter, I explore these issues in greater detail and describe a pedagogical framework for attending to and anticipating the material conditions that students navigate outside of our classrooms.

CHAPTER V

A PEDAGOGY OF INTELLIGIBILITY:

ENACTING TEACHING PRACTICES THAT INVITE DISCLOSURE

Introduction

Rebeka: In the fall semester I feel like the [UPS] students do get kind of hurried and busier around November, December, and I wonder if that has something to do with the business season of UPS... so I'm wondering if it just becomes more stressful as a job.

Carolyn: Yeah, but then they can't be students and do that.

Rebeka: Right, they can't be students.

Rebeka and Carolyn are composition instructors and PhD students at the University of Louisville. Their comments above were shared during a small focus group I conducted early in this research project. While I discuss this phase of my research in greater detail below, I open this chapter with their insights for two reasons: 1) to show the careful attention Rebeka and Carolyn pay to the complicated work lives of their students, and 2) to foreground a common perspective among teachers that there is an often antithetical relationship (as I describe in detail in Chapter Four) between being college students and being UPS workers. Rebeka describes a shift that she notices in UPS students' behavior during what is referred to within UPS as "peak season"¹¹—the period of high shipping traffic between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Rebeka is well-attuned to

¹¹ Many participants in this study referred to the particularly demanding conditions of peak season. Kathleen, for instance, recalled, "There were like two weeks straight that we worked. Like, that was crazy to me. I was like, are we gonna get a day off some time soon? Is that gonna happen?" Ramon also referred to working 8- to 10-hour days in December.

the ways in which the conditions of these students' work lives affect their presence and participation in their school lives. Carolyn builds from this idea, suggesting that there are times when these student-workers cannot fully occupy the role of student. There are two ways I interpret this statement. One is that these instructors believe that these students' work lives prevent them from being able to adhere to the labor structures of the University (as I also describe in Chapter Four). A second way of reading this idea, though, is that students are not *recognized* as fitting this role. The purpose of this chapter is to explore these ideas further—how these students' work lives affect how they are recognized within the institution, and how instructors might use their mediating role between the university and individual students' experiences to increase student-workers' options for intelligibility.

In the previous two chapters, I repeatedly referred to the idea that there is a narrative of the "typical college student" that often underlies our policies, programmatic structures, and pedagogical practices. In other words, we operate on certain assumptions about who our students are, what their material circumstances are, and how their lives will unfold; however, these assumptions can put students who do not fit these expectations at a disadvantage. There are, of course, many ways in which students' identities might not fit this archetype, including race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and religion. In order to connect my discussion of composition pedagogy most directly to my focus in the previous chapters on labor and neoliberal ideology, I will focus particularly on forms of social class difference.

In Chapter Four, I argued that students whose material-economic circumstances do not match that of the "typical student," may be inclined to feel less agency and

ownership over their experiences of postsecondary education because their labor commitments limit their ability to fully participate in their education. I then connected these implications to an ideology of individualism that guides how labor is figured and valued in a university context. In Chapter Three, I described the narrative of the ideal neoliberal worker that leads institutions such as the Metro College program to sponsor literacy practices that are based in economic production and marketability. This ideal identity, in turn, shapes the stepwise, linear structure of postsecondary education. In this chapter, I build from both of these discussions to argue for adopting pedagogical strategies that can help literacy educators better understand and support students' working lives and the complex networks in which their labor circulates. I see these specific, concrete strategies as deeply related to what I refer to in this chapter as a pedagogy of intelligibility. Drawing on the work of theorists such as Judith Butler (2004), Michel Foucault (1988), and Susan Hekman (2010), I describe a pedagogy of intelligibility as a framework for designing inclusive pedagogies that invite the disclosure of lived realities from working students as well as students inhabiting other positions of identity difference.

As I describe in Chapter One, there is a rich history of considering the importance of social class and political-economic realities for the work of composition. When it comes to the particular challenge of how to address social class and the political-economic in the writing classroom, I identify roughly two responses from extant scholarship. One is to argue for making the composition classroom a space that is conducive to considerations of class and class identity, but not to explicitly foreground these as themes for students to engage with in the course. The second is to make

composition courses explicitly about some facet of work or labor. This response essentially argues that issues of labor should shape the curricula of writing programs. While I would place my argument in this chapter loosely in the first of these two categories, I also see my call for particular pedagogical action as diverging from previous scholarship on social class and composition pedagogy for at least two reasons. First, this pedagogical approach is not based in the idea of preparing or priming students for critical participation in economic life; rather, it acknowledges the present, material conditions of their labor and sees them as current actors in the economic landscape. Second, this approach is based in relationship-building and inclusion rather than an external curriculum. In the following section, I briefly review relevant scholarship from each of the two camps I describe above in order to illustrate the history I see my argument participating in and to highlight ways in which I hope to offer a different way to address issues of work and social class in the composition classroom. I begin by describing key arguments for attending to social class in our writing courses and conclude with an explanation of specific calls for designing our pedagogies around issues of work.

In the first of these two approaches, scholars such as Mike Rose (1989), Julie Lindquist (2004), Donna LeCourt (2006), and Russell Durst (1999) argue that traditional thinking about composition pedagogy tends to exclude or obscure issues of social class. Rose (1989) has famously argued that the structures of postsecondary education tend to either confirm or deny students' preconceived notions about their academic or non-academic identities, which often intersect with their class identities. Rose (1989) argues that in order "to understand the nature and development of literacy we need to consider the social context in which it occurs—the political, economic, and cultural forces that

encourage or inhibit it” (p. 237). He subsequently proposes attending to the class biases in pedagogical areas such as a preference for critical literacy and treatment of error as “failed performance” (p. 205). Rose calls for “an orientation to instruction that provides guidance on how to determine and honor the beliefs and stories, enthusiasms, and apprehensions that students reveal” (p. 236). Russell K. Durst (1999) similarly challenges what he refers to as “ground rules”—the tacit assumptions about what constitutes valued work from our students—and suggests that “working-class and some minority students, that is, less privileged students, appear to be disproportionately affected by the problem of a lack of awareness of the implicit ground rules and therefore may have much to gain from an improved understanding of this issue on the part of educators” (p. 71). Durst goes on to argue that one way in which these ground rules disadvantage students is by dismissing students’ “strong pre-professional orientation” (p. 170) as disengaged instrumentalism. This assumption, according to Durst, “has serious negative consequences in our courses, often leading to student alienation, hostility, disengagement, avoidance behavior, and unproductive conflict” (p. 177). Rose and Durst’s arguments resonate with scholars like Lynn Bloom (1996) who suggest that, while our intentions might be to liberate students from oppressive class contexts or transform their learning through critical literacy, our practices—if left unquestioned—may in fact reinscribe the inequalities we seek to change.

Following this early work on writing pedagogies and social class, other scholars argued more specifically about how our teaching practices, in addition to our philosophies of teaching, might be revised through a consideration of social class. Julie Lindquist (2004) argues for challenging a status quo in which “teachers act as

institutional agents of emotional management, while students are asked to render successful affective performances to create viable personae as middle-class critics and producers of discourse” (p. 197). According to Lindquist, in order to create an environment that is conducive to working-class identities, teachers of writing should be intentional about the ethos we adopt. One example Lindquist cites is actively tempering her responses to her students’ favorable views on the “War on Terror” so as to allow them to explore their feelings more fully. In this instance, Lindquist “worked to communicate empathy for their positions *as affective responses*” (p. 204, emphasis in original). Lindquist claims that this stance created an environment in which difference was allowed and students could genuinely explore and process their responses to the war. For Lindquist, this emotional labor “is an ethical imperative when teaching students who are working-class” (p. 204). Donna LeCourt (2006), however, takes issue with the way others in composition and literacy studies have framed social class as though “working-class and academic discourses exist in a dichotomous relationship” (p. 30). For LeCourt, such “oppositional rhetorics” (p. 35) can actually “reinforce the idea that class is a static identity category written into student bodies and minds, something that can only be ‘lost’ or ‘replaced’” (p. 33). LeCourt suggests a performative theory of class as an alternative basis for composition pedagogy, and explains that this approach insists that “class is not predetermined but continually determined by the local situations in which we encode experience” (p. 37). Lindquist and LeCourt thus share in a belief that focusing on social class in how we interact with our students offers us the opportunity to create more inclusive and generative learning experiences for students and teachers alike.

Nancy Welch (2011) similarly cautions against reinscribing class inequalities and argues that working-class discourse is more significant for the work of rhetoric and composition than many have acknowledged. Welch suggests that “in writing classrooms, particularly those concerned with public writing or multimodal composition, historical and contemporary labor struggles can further enrich our understanding of what it means to compose” (p. 237). Welch describes a particular labor strike event, the Republic Windows and Doors sit-down, as an important working-class rhetorical phenomenon in the history of social justice movements, but one that is given no attention in our classrooms. Welch illustrates that in post-Fordist discourse, “working-class people might be figured (if they're mentioned at all) as subject *to* exploitation and oppression but not as subjects *of* substantive social change” (p. 224, emphasis in original). To correct this tendency, Welch (2011) advocates for considering that “when we jettison from the curriculum both working-class rhetorical history and present-day examples of people inspired anew by the ‘actionable vocabulary’ of struggles past (Scott 128), our teaching inhibits the consideration of rhetorical options in the fullest ‘class ways’” (p. 236). By only using classical or upper-class historical examples of argument, our curricula can reinscribe class inequality and subordinate working-class rhetorical traditions.

In addition to scholarship that offers ways to foreground and explore social class in the space of the writing classroom, other scholars have argued for making writing courses explicitly *about* aspects of student’s labor, asking students to engage directly with concepts of fast capitalism, their own work experiences, and their futures as college graduate employees. David Seitz (2004) for example, describes a “work memoir” project that he assigns in a research writing course. His goal for students, as he states it, is that in

the process of creating these memoirs, “they will critically consider the narrative they want to invent for a future self based on those past experiences, images, and influences” (p. 113). Seitz’s curriculum thus combines personal reflection and critique in order to try to prepare students for their future lives as economic subjects. While Seitz’s approach does acknowledge students as workers in the present, the ultimate goal is to prepare them for a particular economic future.

Chase Bollig (2015) operates on a similar assumption that our courses can do more to prepare students for their future work lives. Bollig argues that those of us in composition must “continually ask how our pedagogies prepare students for not only academic writing but also for the realities of the workforce, including how to resist and thrive” (p. 166). While Bollig powerfully argues for the relevance of economic considerations to the work of teaching writing, his argument assumes that students are not already prepared for or engaged with the realities of the workforce. Bollig acknowledges that “thinking about the citizen-worker as the subject of composition also encourages us to consider the ways in which our students are workers and how these roles influence their performance in our classes” (p. 167). However, this pedagogy is still based in future considerations of students’ trajectories rather than attending to the present material and emotional conditions of their working lives.

Like Bollig, James Rushing Daniel (2018) claims that “compositionists should guide students through critiques of neoliberal conditions, debt specifically, in the hopes that students will eventually strive for financial justice in public contexts” (p. 203). His specific argument for how we might accomplish this goal is to foreground the concept of debt in our scholarship and pedagogy. For example, students might “produce public

writing on the rhetoric of the contemporary financial world” as a podcast or video (Daniel, 2018, p. 213). Daniel maintains a somewhat measured description of the benefits of this approach, admitting that we “must remember that regardless of our work in the classroom, college graduates will still necessarily be subjected to the mounting indignities of twenty-first-century fast capitalism” (p. 214). However, as my research illustrates, it is not only college *graduates* who are subjected to this function of capitalism. For the student-workers who participated in this study, and the millions of other college students who are working while enrolled in postsecondary education, the indignities of twenty-first-century fast capitalism are already well known. In positioning students as temporarily safeguarded from such ideology, Daniel—like Bollig—aligns his approach with the stair-stepped model of students’ mobility through postsecondary education and into employment (as I describe in Chapter Three).

In addition to these approaches perpetuating a developmental, hierarchical trajectory by figuring students as *future* employees, this approach to composition pedagogy and social class may be antithetical to what students hope to gain from our classes both materially and affectively. Materially, if we adopt the labor-as-curriculum approach, we may sacrifice other content that students expect to learn from our classes in order to most effectively communicate in academic and professional contexts. In other words, there may be a tension between honoring the genres and discourses that students want or need to learn and encouraging critical analyses of economic forces, class identity, and so on. The material reality is that students *do* need access to certain literacy practices that are valued in university and professional contexts, and denying them this engagement with academic discourse likely does not do them any favors. Focusing on

critical consciousness and liberal pedagogy could have the unintended effect of obstructing students' access to information, conventions, and genres that could offer them more cultural capital in the labor market (in addition to potentially reinforcing other inequalities (Ellsworth, 1989), perpetuating a top-down model of learning (Jay & Graff, 1995), and obscuring considerations of race (Allen, 2004; Leonardo, 2002). In addition to failing to offer students the material benefits they may glean from our classes, I would add that another risk of this approach is in asking our students to participate in a potentially taxing emotional experience of learning. Making our courses *about* work may negatively impact students' emotional experiences in the writing classroom because it forces them to direct their energy and consciousness toward their work lives when they might otherwise have the time and space to think about something—anything—else.

Although I did not ask every student participant whether they would want to spend time during their composition courses analyzing or writing about their work experiences, this issue did come up more than once, with somewhat mixed commentary. Many of the student-workers said they had not considered that option before or thought they likely would not enjoy having to talk about their experiences at UPS in their writing classes. Reya, for instance, recalled, "Last semester I took an English class and we had the freedom to write about anything, but I never really wanted to write about UPS. It's great and all, but I don't really like talking about it, I guess. I feel like I'd be bored writing something about it." At issue for Reya is that she is not interested in her work life in the same way she might be interested in another issue or subject. For Reya, her composition class would not, in fact, be more engaging if it directly pertained to her material labor experiences.

Brandi was much more adamant in saying not only that she didn't see any connections between her work life and her writing class, but also that there should not be any such connections: "I like to keep that kind of stuff separate, just for the sole fact that I enjoy school, and I hate work. There's no reason for me to put something that I hate in what I love and what I love in something I hate. That's not going to make it any better." Like Reya, Brandi enjoys what separation she can claim between her work and school lives. While these perspectives may not be shared by all student-workers in this context, it should give us pause when considering the relationship between course content and our students' lived experiences. Furthermore, Brandi's assertion, "that's not going to make it any better" is particularly salient if we want to consider how we can support students *as* workers (as I ask in Chapter One). Requiring students to actively and explicitly address their work lives as a subject for analysis or reflection in the composition classroom may, in fact, inhibit their feelings of agency because, to use Brandi's words, it could force them to put something they hate in something they love.

Despite the consideration that the best way to support students in their working lives may not be to make our writing curricula focused on issues of labor or debt, the research I have conducted suggests that students *do* want their teachers to understand and accommodate their experiences of labor. Kristin, for instance, noted that it would be helpful to know which composition teachers may have had experience with Metro College participants when registering for classes (also recalling some of the issues with course registration procedures that I describe in Chapter Four). When I asked what she thought might make Metro College participants feel more supported in composition classes, Kristin offered, "Maybe when you search for classes, having teachers more

informed or just having UPS students together in an English class or something.” This kind of outward-facing, visible indication of support for Metro College students could certainly be one way to offer more support. However, there are limitations to the power of writing programs to create such designations or population-specific course sections.¹² It is worth noting, though, that at the heart of Kristin’s idea about programmatic change is a desire for her teachers to be better informed about the conditions of her material life. She wants to know that she is signing up for a class in which her teacher will recognize and understand her work life.

While developing a concrete sense of our students’ extra-curricular lives may seem to be a daunting task, I see this as an opportunity to ask how we can design pedagogies that open up spaces for us to be more informed about who our students are and what their material circumstances are like. The response I offer in this chapter is the concept of intelligibility. While this framework is informed by the local, situated labor program that I explore in this dissertation, I see a pedagogy of intelligibility as an approach that can apply much more broadly. Furthermore, although my focus in this project is on social class, I see the concept of intelligibility offering us ways to attend to the varied and intersectional forms of identity difference that shape many students’ lives and experiences of education. In the following section, I define how I am using intelligibility in this context. To do so, I draw on data from one phase of this research project, which entailed a survey and small focus groups with composition instructors.

Towards A Pedagogy of Intelligibility

¹² For example, in some institutions the course schedule is controlled by the registrar, and “special section” designations are difficult to acquire. Furthermore, acquiring faculty or staff that are well-prepared and consistently available to teach these sections may be challenging.

Intelligibility is an important concept in institutional ethnography because one of the primary goals of this methodology is to understand how institutional texts and narratives make certain kinds of people and experiences intelligible at the exclusion of others. For instance, the personal information section of an application to open a bank account might list only “male” and “female” under the category “gender.” Someone who identifies as nonbinary would thus not be intelligible in this institutional context. In this chapter, I would like to explore how we might use the institutional ethnographic concept of intelligibility, and its attending relationship to texts, as a framework for designing writing pedagogies. While I am not trying to suggest that intelligibility is some pedagogical panacea for attending to social class in our teaching, I believe that it can be a powerful concept for guiding our decision-making and implementing strategies that can help us better understand who our students are and what material and affective networks they operate within on a daily basis.

In Chapter Three, I use intelligibility to refer to ways in which certain forms of mobility are recognized and valued in the institutional mobility network of the Metro College program. In Chapter Four, I define intelligibility as a form of institutional recognition in which an individual’s or group’s experiences and identities are able to be understood, and I use this concept to describe how institutions read certain acts as agential or not. In this section, I will trace the theoretical underpinning for my previous use of this term, then make connections between these theories of intelligibility and composition pedagogy.

Within the field of critical theory, there is a rich history of drawing on intelligibility to talk about how individuals are figured within institutional contexts,

beginning with Michel Foucault. Foucault (1988) describes intelligibility as deeply related to the omnipresence of power. He claims that one might use the mechanisms of power as “a grid of intelligibility:”

Power’s condition of possibility, or in any case the viewpoint which permits one to understand its exercise, even in its more ‘peripheral’ effects, and which also makes it possible to use its mechanisms as a grid of intelligibility of the social order, must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. (p. 93)

I take Foucault here to be saying that one of the ways in which we can understand and recognize power at work is to view its mechanisms as a grid of intelligibility, which enables us to see the omnipresence of power itself. It is also worth noting, though, that we might understand intelligibility to function in at least two directions: the grid of intelligibility is how we make sense of power, but it is also how power makes sense of us.

This second use of intelligibility has been thoroughly explicated by Judith Butler (1990), who connects intelligibility to her theory of performativity. Butler (1990) argues that “‘intelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (p. 17). Recalling Foucault’s “grid of intelligibility,” Butler refers to these categories (sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire) as constituting a “matrix of intelligibility,” which is maintained through regulatory practices (p. 17). However, being intelligible is not necessarily something to be pursued. As Butler explains, “there are advantages to remaining less than intelligible....Indeed, if my options are loathsome, if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred” (p.

3). On the other hand, if there is no matrix of intelligibility that makes certain experiences or expressions of difference recognizable, then there may be significant implications for those who are rendered unintelligible. For instance, in the transgender community and for transgender advocates, the birth certificate often functions as a contentious document because a valid birth certificate must indicate a gender (in the United States). For someone who is transgender, the experience of being constantly misgendered in formal, institutional, or bureaucratic settings until this document is officially changed can be psychologically damaging and traumatic (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). By explicating such a relationship between individual identity and institutional requirements for intelligibility, Butler's theory illustrates the usefulness of the concept of intelligibility for understanding how institutions coordinate individual lives. Butler's description of this matrix also highlights the relationship between intelligibility and assumed identity categories. If someone (operating according to the dominant ideology) always assumes that a direct link exists between someone's expressed gender identity and their sexual orientation (e.g. if one assumes that a man who presents as masculine is heterosexual), then it is very likely that there will come a time that they will misread or misidentify someone.

In a similar way, if teachers of writing operate according to classed assumptions about who our students are and what their lives are like, we risk misreading them, failing to respond appropriately to them, and/or alienating them. Durst's (1999) description of "ground rules" highlights the classed assumptions often at work in college composition. As I mention above, Durst defines "ground rules" as the "tacit or underlying expectations of what students need to know and do in order to successfully carry out an academic task.

Such expectations may carry considerable weight in influencing how teachers interpret and evaluate students' attitudes, comments, and coursework” (p. 66). Assumptions about what our students can and will do in our courses are also assumptions about who they are. Durst argues that these expectations put students who are in marginalized positions (such as students from working-class backgrounds and racial and ethnic minority populations) at an even greater disadvantage. Although Durst was writing about this problem twenty years ago, the issue of failing to consider or understand who are students are and what conditions are coordinating their lives outside of our classrooms is still very much in force. Operating from a disposition of intelligibility is one way to work against assumptions that may lead us to perpetuate class inequalities by obscuring or failing to recognize the material and affective realities of working students.

Intelligibility is therefore a disposition or an active habit of mind in which we might ask ourselves, *who is made intelligible in my practices? What identities and experiences do I acknowledge?* However, thinking about who/what our pedagogies make intelligible also means thinking about ways in which we invite (or discourage) disclosure, or opportunities for intelligibility to be exercised. “Disclosure” can be understood here in two ways. The first is the colloquial use of “disclose” to refer to the act of revealing or making something known. This type of disclosure often connotes the personal—typically, we *disclose* things that are not otherwise apparent or widely known. I will return to this more pragmatic aspect of disclosure, and its relationship to intelligibility, later in this chapter. The second definition, which I will focus on now, is Susan Hekman’s (2010) articulation of “disclosure” as that which “describes the relationship between the material, the discursive, the technological, and the practices they constitute” (p. 127).

Hekman's project is to synthesize new materialist scholarship in order to articulate a feminist, materialist response to a rejection of linguistic constructionism (p. 2). Hekman concludes this project by offering the concept of disclosure as "a yardstick by which to compare different realities" (p. 127). Her argument is that disclosure helps get beyond a language vs. reality divide because "disclosure does not entail getting reality right, but bringing it to light" (p. 92). Hekman goes on to explain that

Different social locations disclose reality in different ways. We can compare those disclosures and their material effects without arguing for the objectivity or truth of one of them. In other words, we can base our argument on effects rather than objective truth. (p. 105)

Although Hekman does not cite Dorothy Smith or reference institutional ethnography, her description of focusing on the material effects that are brought about in particular circumstances dovetails nicely with Smith's (1987, 2005) insistence on tracing the material effects of the ruling relations in people's lived experiences. Furthermore, I would extend Hekman's description and argue that *intelligibility* is the means through which reality is disclosed. As the work of Butler and Foucault illustrates, intelligibility has significant implications for how identities and experiences are recognized, ignored, or obscured. For my purposes, an understanding of disclosure as *a way in which the reality of a social position is brought to light* is therefore deeply important for theorizing intelligibility as a pedagogical framework. I suggest that these accounts of intelligibility, power, and material realities should lead us to ask two related questions when we are designing our writing courses: 1) What affective experiences and material realities are intelligible in the context of our classrooms? 2) How do our pedagogical practices invite disclosure?

The way I see disclosure functioning in relationship to intelligibility is informed by research in higher education and disability studies, which has much to offer about ways to accommodate difference and create spaces in which difference may be disclosed. For instance, scholars in these areas have illustrated the complex issues of power and authority that are bound up in the act of a student disclosing some form of difference to a teacher. Quinlan, Bates, and Angell (2012) draw on an interview-based study with students with disabilities to show that “because the student does not know how an instructor will respond, current discussions of accommodation that make the student responsible for disclosing disability fail to account for the fact that the student takes a significant presentational risk when disclosing” (p. 225). If, alternatively, the teacher accepts some responsibility for disclosure, the classroom may become a more equitable space for all students, regardless of disability status. Specifically, Quinlan, Bates, and Angell (2012) argue that “by observing all students carefully and finding areas where students may need individual help, instructors can avoid a disability-centred focus for accommodation in favour of creating environments in which accommodating everyone’s needs becomes common place” (p. 230). Although Quinlan, Bates, and Angell focus on accommodating a range of learning styles, we can extend this principle to include material life conditions, such as strenuous labor and precarious positionality in one’s educational life.

Shannon Walters (2010) similarly argues for the concept of universal design in the technical communication classroom and suggests that reactionary and disability-specific approaches to accommodating difference “may encourage educators to continue addressing students with disabilities on an individualized basis rather than

comprehensively changing pedagogical practices” (p. 429). Walters’s conception of universal design as a pedagogical disposition shows that accommodations should not be only an individual *reaction*, but rather an anticipatory, comprehensive action. In this sense, one of the ultimate goals of universal design is to circumvent the need for disclosure; students shouldn’t be required to disclose their disabilities or other material conditions in order to learn. It is in this way that I see universal design as similar to intelligibility. Intelligibility is likewise a disposition that actively anticipates and accommodates difference. While it is important that we create structures that make disclosure an easier, more positive emotional experience for students, we should also recognize that if students already feel seen, then they do not need to disclose in order to make their experiences visible.

As these brief examples hopefully show, there is much to learn from disability studies about processes of accommodation, disclosure, and intelligibility. While I do not intend to appropriate disability studies concepts for a context that is not specifically about disability (and certainly do not intend to equate the experience of being a working student with the experience of being a student with a disability), I do think that this kind of emphasis on understanding and anticipating our students’ experiences and on building relationships that foster disclosure has much to teach us about how to accommodate difference in its multiple expressions and forms.

I also want to acknowledge here that, in some ways, the framework I am suggesting is simply calling by another name what educators in our field have done for decades. There are, for instance, resonances between the kind of dispositions I call for here and the basic writing movement. As Durst (1999) acknowledges, “Shaughnessy and

other basic writing specialists were arguing—and demonstrating—that students often viewed as incapable of college-level work could succeed if their teachers would take the time to understand and encourage them, and to work with them in an atmosphere of respect” (p. 125). Like scholars in this movement, I am also working towards a way to better understand the realities of our students’ lives. In addition to research that makes these realities concrete (like this dissertation project), we can also work toward this goal by implementing pedagogical frameworks that help us align our beliefs about teaching with our material, textual practices. In the final turn of this chapter, I offer a brief account of how a group of composition instructors at the University understood and accommodated the experiences of Metro College students as a way into an explanation of how intelligibility might operate as such a framework and disposition for college composition.

What affective experiences and material realities are intelligible in the context of our classrooms?

Intelligibility operates on multiple levels. The question of what experiences are intelligible in our classrooms will, on one level, be unique to the individual teacher. What or who is intelligible to someone is shaped by that person’s own unique identities and experiences. However, intelligibility is also cultural and systemic. Individual habits of intelligibility become integrated into the cultures of our writing programs, and the cultures of our writing programs shape our individual dispositions of intelligibility. In the following section, I consider this complexity of intelligibility by discussing how composition instructors made sense of the experiences of Metro College participants, and

I frame their perspectives as shared narratives and assumptions that circulate on a programmatic level.

As I describe in Chapter Two, an early phase of this research project included research with composition instructors at the University, the goal of which was to gain a sense of what instructors thought about the program and how it influenced their pedagogy. I first administered a survey that was open to all composition instructors. 22 instructors responded. I then conducted two small focus groups with three and four instructor participants respectively.¹³

Many of these participants were fairly critical of the Metro College program with 21 out of 22 survey respondents indicating some kind of negative perception of the program, using words such as “strain,” “trapped,” and “flawed.” In addition to divulging their own perceptions of the program, many instructors grounded these negative perceptions in the ways they had witnessed their students struggling while in the program. Because of these struggles, many instructors made accommodations for these student-workers. In response to a survey question about such accommodations, there were nine mentions of granting extensions on assignments, five mentions of forgiving class absences or tardiness, and three mentions of being generally flexible with deadlines. As I discuss in Chapter Four, one implication of this trend is that the structures of composition courses themselves (such as strict attendance policies and rigid assignment due dates, which are meant to communicate our adherence to community, discussion, and participation) are sources of friction for these student-workers. But from the perception of the instructors who participated in this study, these limitations are the product of

¹³ I did not ask survey respondents to indicate their race or ethnicity. Of the focus group participants, all but one were white (Rebeka is Southeast Asian).

insurmountable tensions between these students' work and school lives. As I mention in the opening of this chapter, during one of these focus groups, two participants, Rebeka and Carolyn, discussed this tension directly:

Rebeka: In the fall semester I feel like the students do get kind of hurried and busier around November, December, and I wonder if that has something to do with the business season of UPS... so I'm wondering if it just becomes more stressful as a job.

Carolyn: Yeah, but then they can't be students *and* do that.

Rebeka: Right, they can't be students.

Carolyn's and Rebeka's insights highlight the antithetical relationship between being a UPS worker and being a college student, as I discussed earlier. This tension cuts to the heart of what is at stake in these students' unintelligibility. Many Metro College participants are only able to become college students because of the financial benefits of the program, but participation in the program simultaneously limits their ability to perform or inhabit certain aspects of this student identity.

Other instructors similarly referred to such tensions, but framed them as a case of UPS limiting students' potential. For example, many instructors indicated that while their "UPS students" were often their most motivated or engaged students, their work lives prevented them from doing well in their composition courses. One survey respondent reported having students who "sometimes expressed that they were doing their best but were sleep deprived and often just didn't have time to do schoolwork of the quality they wanted to." This idea surfaced in focus groups as well. Trevor, a PhD student, lamented the fact that these students were working hard, but also had some of the greatest challenges:

The students who are enrolled in UPS...their level of engagement isn't because of a lack of intrinsic motivation. I think those are often my most motivated students because they're paying probably by themselves for school and they're most interested in doing well in my classes. It just so happens that they have the most hurdles to pass through. So that's kind of a sad irony I think associated with the students.

Other instructors remarked on the embodied effects they witnessed of participation in the program, by, for instance, characterizing these student-workers as “zombies.” In fact, this term came up in both focus group discussions (each focus group had different participants). Bonnie, who has been a composition instructor at the University for decades, used this term when she reflected on the beginning of the program in the late 1990s, recalling that “there were a lot of students affected because they were in the program. And they were already at a disadvantage, and then UPS work made them into zombies, so there were a lot of UPS zombies trying to go to school and work.” This idea was repeated by a participant in the second focus group discussion. Marie used the term “zombie people” to describe UPS students in response to a story Charles (another instructor) told about a student who revealed to him that she was sleeping in her car between her shift at UPS and her composition class. This terminology evokes, of course, dehumanizing and other-ing imagery. Zombies are not-quite-human, not-quite-monster, and not-quite-alive. This is a way that these instructors make sense of their students' experiences, particularly their embodied “non-student-ness.”

According to this perspective, Metro College students are exhausted, barely conscious, and utterly disengaged. That these instructors draw on this quasi-monstrous metaphor to characterize this population shows how difficult it is for Metro College participants to be intelligible in the academic context. Furthermore, the idea that UPS work transforms otherwise “normal” students into zombies positions UPS in general and

the Metro College program in particular as cannibalizing forces. Rather than disparaging these students, though, I understand these instructors to be foregrounding the embodied, affective consequences of participation in the Metro College program. They see the demands of this program as monstrous, so their student-workers who participate in it are automatically (though not through any fault of their own) outside of the norm as well. In either case, whether these students are seen as disengaged zombies or as woefully fettered overachievers, the source of these characterizations is the idea that these students *cannot* participate in the Metro College program and simultaneously function as “normal” college students.

As I argue in Chapter Four, such perspectives indicate that the labor experiences of these student-workers are not intelligible in a traditional university context. The assumptions about who a “normal” college student is inform our decisions about what we can “reasonably” expect of our students in terms of participation, attendance, and assignments. For even the most empathetic educators, these assumptions can work persuasively and surreptitiously, shaping how we read and respond to our students’ identities and academic work. On the level of the individual, how we construct an idea of who our students are is often influenced by a variety of factors that may pertain to the labor structures of our programs, our own experiences and memories of being an undergraduate student, and, of course, our own identity positions. As I have argued, though, there is often an institutionally sanctioned archetype of “college student” that operates on the individual level to varying degrees. As Bronwyn Williams (2017) suggests, “the more narratives and dispositions become normalized, the more we accept assumptions as truths and respond to them in ways that may include implicit biases” (p.

165). By recognizing our assumptions about our students, we can work towards leveraging our institutional positions as mediating authorities to create opportunities for relationship-building and alternative emotional experiences in our classrooms.

Intelligibility in Action: How Can We Design Strategies that Invite Disclosure?

Ultimately, intelligibility is about relationship-building. Rather than placing the burden of disclosure on the individual, a pedagogy of intelligibility asks us to consider how we can create opportunities for communicating that invite disclosure and lead to expanded intelligibility. In this section, I describe three contexts in which intelligibility might operate as a pedagogical framework and practice: 1) How we create relationships, 2) How we compose our course policies and documents, and 3) How we frame our assignments and learning outcomes. In discussing these three contexts, I draw on the experiences of student-workers and my own teaching practices to show how intelligibility can help us achieve an alignment of our philosophies of teaching with our classroom and textual practices.

1) How We Create Relationships

Creating a classroom environment in which students can experience supportive, inclusive relationships is an integral means of facilitating disclosure and working towards intelligibility. As one instructor mentioned in a focus group, we are well positioned to create relationships based on intelligibility because “we do engage with them in 101 and we really get to see them grow, and their lives, and we hear about their lives through their writing.” The importance of relationship-building to learning is illustrated by Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner’s (2016) *Meaningful Writing Project*. In this expansive research project, Eodice, Geller, and Lerner surveyed over 700 college seniors

across three institutions in order to better understand what constitutes “meaningful writing” for students. One of their findings is that engagement—finding a project meaningful—is ultimately a relational and “socially enacted” phenomenon (Eodice, Geller, & Lerner, 2016, p. 56). A student’s relationship with the instructor is one way in which engagement is enacted. As Eodice, Geller, and Lerner found, “student responses recalled faculty *support, attention*, and competence as factors contributing to a meaningful writing project” (p. 59, emphasis added). Assuming that we want our students to be meaningfully engaged in the writing projects we assign, it follows that we should be intentional in creating relationships in which we actively display this support and attention to our students’ lives. Bronwyn Williams (2017) also foregrounds the importance of attending to relationship if we want to offer students educational experiences in which they feel they have agency, and argues that “we should begin with a consideration of how students will make meaning from work over which they feel a sense of control and purpose, and know they will get a thoughtful response from another person” (p. 78). A framework of intelligibility is one way to act on these goals because it can orient us to ways in which we might express our support for students and show them that we are actively attending to their experiences and learning.

The experiences of student-workers illustrate ways in which even small moments of recognition can establish feelings of connection that have powerful implications for their educational experiences. Jill, for instance, reflected on a moment during the first day of her first-year writing class when her teacher explicitly acknowledged the Metro College program: “The first day, she literally asked us, *who’s a UPSer in here?* So that made me feel really comfortable and included that she asked that question, because I was

like, *Oh she actually cares*. So it was cool just to be recognized for that.” This kind of “ice-breaker” activity is a common way of establishing a sense of community in a first-year writing course. But for Jill, this was more than a potentially uncomfortable exercise; it was a powerful moment in which she was able to feel recognized, and therefore “comfortable and included.” Reya also recalled her writing instructor similarly asking students to “raise our hand if we were in the UPS program, and I think there was like two or three people that were.” When I asked why she thought her instructor did this, Reya was unsure, but guessed that it was “probably just out of curiosity or so we could find each other later and be like, *Oh man, we hate UPS*, or something. Just so we could have some friends who understood I guess.” While this moment was memorable for Reya, like for Jill, Reya’s account illustrates that in addition to openly and publicly asking about our students’ lives, we should also make clear *why* we are inviting such disclosure. However, the key takeaway from both Jill’s and Reya’s memories of these moments is that their teachers offered student-workers an opportunity to establish relationships, with the teacher and/or with their peers, through being recognized. Both teachers positioned themselves as aware of the experiences of Metro College participants (or, in other words, made themselves intelligible to the class as someone who is aware of the range of educational experiences of their students), and created moments in which Reya’s and Jill’s experiences were made intelligible.

These stories reveal the impact of educators leveraging their authority to make student-workers intelligible in the classroom: simply mentioning the program or asking for students to disclose their participation in it enabled these students to feel supported and to feel a stronger sense of agency in their educational experience. As my review of

scholarship about social class and writing pedagogy at the beginning of this chapter suggests, the writing teacher does have significant power to shape students' educational experiences and identities. Durst (1999) argues that first-year writing in particular often functions for students not only as an introduction to academic discourse, but also as an introduction to the academic institution and their place within it. While this mediating role of composition presents several challenges, as I discuss in Chapter Four, the two stories shared above show that it also presents opportunities. Namely, we can leverage our mediating role to create opportunities in which students who are considered “non-traditional” can feel that they are intelligible in the academic institution, and may, as a result, feel that they have more ownership and agency over their educational experiences.

It is worth acknowledging, though, that there is some risk involved in asking these student-workers to publicly disclose their participation in the Metro College program. Such a moment can alienate students because it might highlight their difference in terms of social class identity. In other words, asking students to disclose their participation in the Metro College program may also mean asking them to open themselves up to assumptions from their peers about their class identity and financial circumstances. This action could have the opposite effect of that desired—by feeling like they must “out” themselves as Metro College workers, these students may feel like they are stripped of their agency and ownership over the decision to disclose. There are, though, ways to mitigate this risk, such as asking students to write on a notecard or on a confidential first day of class survey about their work, family, and other responsibilities. Nevertheless, as Butler (2004) reminds us, unintelligibility is sometimes preferable if one has no desire to be recognizable within a set of norms or particular institutional discourse. It is therefore

important that we recognize the risk for students in disclosing, and respect their preference for unintelligibility, should that be the case, rather than assume they are being resistant.

One such risk is in challenging or destabilizing the affective responses that students have developed in order to maintain their work position. Ramon, for instance, mentioned several times the frustration he feels when his coworkers complain about their position, and laughed as he said, “There's a lot of people that complain at work, so I definitely don't complain at work,” suggesting that he censors his own reaction to his work life so as to not further lessen the morale amongst his fellow employees. Jill, as I mention in Chapter Four, similarly describes a belief that voicing a complaint “gives power to it,” and talks about making the best of her work situation as an alternative to focusing on the negative aspects of it. Framing participation in this program as a substantial challenge that may require accommodations could contribute to these students’ frustration with a kind of cloud of negativity hanging over their work experience. This potential risk makes it even more important that we explain why we might ask about these material realities—that we want to understand what their lives are like, rather than seeking an opportunity to pity these students or to critique their lives.

Furthermore, Ramon’s and Jill’s aversion to complaining is also indicative of the dominant narratives of the Metro College program, and of working-class ideology more broadly, that tend to align disclosure with weakness or see it as antithetical to a “working-class ethic of solidarity” (Seitz, 2004, p. 25). Asking for help or making it known that you are struggling is read as a sign that you are not tough enough or resilient enough to handle some hard work. For this reason, while some students may take the initiative to

disclose their challenges to the instructor, many do not at all or do not until they are in crisis. To draw again from research on disclosure in disability studies, students tend to disclose immediately at the beginning of the semester, once they are experiencing stress overload, or not at all (Kranke et al., 2013).

Jessica McCrory Calarco (2011) also illustrates that there are social class norms that contribute to a resistance to disclosing struggle. Calarco's study compares the help-seeking behaviors of middle-class and working-class elementary school children. Calarco determines that working-class children are significantly less likely to ask for help from their teachers than their middle-class counterparts, and when they do, this help-seeking takes different forms. As Calarco (2011) explains,

Unlike their middle-class peers, working-class students rarely admitted they were struggling" and "tended to ask for help only when teachers were otherwise unoccupied (rare occurrences in many classrooms), when other sources of help were unavailable (e.g., during tests, when talking to other students was prohibited), and after middle-class peers had made similar requests. (p. 876).

These cultural norms, of course, follows students to college as well. Because working-class students are less likely to ask for help, we need to do more than invite disclosure. Inviting disclosure alone is not enough to accomplish the goal of anticipating the material realities of working students. We must also think more broadly about fostering relationships that invite intelligibility and designing our course texts and policies to work against norms and narratives that align disclosure with "overstepping one's bounds," risk, or weakness.

2) How We Compose Course Policies and Documents

In addition to considering intelligibility as a framework or disposition from which to build supportive classroom relationships, we can also apply intelligibility to how we

design our course policies and documents. Specifically, in the spirit of institutional ethnography, I suggest that we should approach our syllabi as institutional documents that make certain experiences and identities intelligible. In Chapter Four, I discuss the function of syllabi as textual repositories of institutional discourses about time and ownership that coordinate students' labor. Here, I would like to explore the opportunities that such an institutional text offers for expanding intelligibility.

Scholars have addressed the political nature of syllabi in arguing that the types of texts we assign represent a particular canon. However, not enough attention has been paid to the other parts of a syllabus that are often treated as simple bureaucratic requirements: the required policies about accessibility and accommodations, grievances, right to make changes, and so on. Being required to add pages of institution-speak can feel like yet another way the institution exerts its control over us as teachers. However, we should acknowledge that we also have an opportunity to frame or re-frame these policies as inclusive invitations for disclosure.

One such policy is the "Accommodations Statement" or "Statement on Behalf of Students with Disabilities." The required language for this statement at the University of Louisville is as follows:

Students who have a disability or condition which may impair their ability to complete assignments or otherwise satisfy course criteria are encouraged to meet with the instructor to identify, discuss and document any feasible instructional modifications or accommodations. Please inform instructor about circumstances no later than the second week of the semester or as soon as possible after a disability or condition is diagnosed, whichever occurs earliest. For information and auxiliary assistance, contact the Disabilities Resource Center.

While the language of this statement is somewhat unwelcoming, it is important that syllabi include this specific language because students with disabilities are a protected

class. Composition instructors are often encouraged, though not required, to add their own, more personal and less bureaucratic accommodations statement to frame this required policy. This programmatic practice offers a valuable opportunity to enact intelligibility and invite the disclosure of multiple forms of difference. A policy that has appeared on my own syllabi in the past states: “If there is anything (physical, emotional, psychological, etc.) you think I should know about that will allow me to improve your chances of success in this course, please let me know.” When reviewing course policies on the first day of class, I often list out loud some examples of things that might be helpful for me to know about (if you are a caregiver for someone, if you work off campus, if you have a disability or learning difference). Students typically respond well to this invitation, often sharing things with me immediately after class ends. However, while this statement invites disclosure, it stops short of creating specific structures for doing so and ultimately reinforces the idea that disclosure is the sole responsibility of the individual student. Keeping these things in mind, I would revise my policy to look something like the following:

If there is anything about you or your life that you think I should know about, please let me know at a time and in a way that you are comfortable with (after class, via email, during office hours, or during a separate appointment that fits with your schedule). You and I will then work together to decide on next steps that will best support you. I do not need any documentation in order to work with you to make sure this course helps you learn in ways that are best for you.

My goal with this revision would be to maintain students’ ownership over their decision to share things about their life with me, whether those things are related to their work lives, family lives, physical or psychological health, or disability status. However, I would also want to make clear that “letting me know” is not the last step, but rather the first step in the two of us collaborating to make the student’s needs and experiences

intelligible to me and the course content and structure intelligible to them. Rather than placing the onus of disclosure and intelligibility on the student, this statement ideally positions accommodation as more of a collaborative process.

My hope is that this example shows how writing our own supplemental course policies from a framework of intelligibility can help us invite disclosure and create more inclusive relationships with our students. This framework might similarly lead us to revise statements or policies such as those related to late work, attendance, course goals, and the overview of required work. Like the accommodations policy, these policies can be created to invite relationship and disclosure rather than threaten students with failing grades. For instance, an attendance policy might include language such as, “while I expect you to make an effort at regular and consistent attendance, I do understand that life circumstances may prevent you from attending every single class meeting. You have four absences allotted for such situations (physical or mental health concerns, car trouble, family emergencies, work demands, etc.) If you find that you need more than these four allotted absences, I ask that you notify me ahead of time or as soon as possible. You and I will then work together to determine how to proceed and to make sure you feel on track with the class.” These textual practices can further confirm the relationship-building approaches I describe in the previous section and communicate to students who might be considered “non-traditional” that the instructor is committed to acknowledging the material circumstances of their lives.

Of course, there may be situations in which such policy revisions or supplements are not permitted due to rigid institutional or accreditation policies or instructor positionality (e.g. faculty may have greater freedom with syllabus design than adjunct or

part-time instructors or graduate teaching assistants). In these cases, Michel de Certeau's articulation of tactics and strategies may be helpful. In describing the relationship between individual lives and institutions of power, de Certeau (1984) differentiates between strategies (the means through which power defines relations and conformity) and tactics (the means through which individuals push back against the established relations in "isolated actions") (pp. 35-37). Such tactics are often incremental, everyday practices in which "the weak make use of the strong" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xvii). While a given instructor may not be able to use the syllabus as a document that expands opportunities for intelligibility, they may be able to guide students through analyzing the institutionally-mandated policies and discussing how they would revise them. Explicit discussions of the relationship between intelligibility and assumptions or biases could be particularly generative for such an exercise. There are countless other ways that individual instructors could implement similar tactics, and my hope is that intelligibility can function as a guide in such moments.

3) How We Design Assignments and Frame Learning Outcomes

A pedagogy of intelligibility is not only about the teacher or students understanding the experiences of a student-worker; it is also about how our students' lived realities are made intelligible *to them*. It is important that we ask how we can encourage the types of reflection that offer students terms and concepts through which to make their experiences intelligible, whether those experiences pertain to labor, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or some other facet of lived reality.

One way of working toward this goal is to assign genres that offer students multiple ways that they might make their lived experiences intelligible to themselves. As

Zebroski (2006) argues, “we must teach genres which open up a space for student experience, that acknowledges their legitimate contributions. Forms like creative nonfiction, ethnographic writing, and multigenre projects are not nice supplements or alternatives to academic discourse; they are central if students are going to find form for their experience and stay in university” (p. 28). I agree with Zebroski that asking students to engage with genres that allow them to explore experience is a powerful way of making the classroom a space in which those experiences can be made intelligible, both to the individual student and to the rest of the classroom community.

I do not, however, want to suggest that student-workers or others who come to postsecondary education from a position of difference do not understand their own experiences. In fact, many of the student-workers I spoke with were very attuned to the ways institutions structure their experiences. Kathleen, for example, reflected, “I think it's funny because whenever I'm watching infomercials now, I can't think of ‘packaging and handling’ the same way anymore. I'm like, ‘I'm the handling part of that.’” Kathleen enacts here what I would identify as a “critical engagement” with her labor experiences. She is highly aware of her situatedness within a particular network and the material and social forces that hold that network in relation. However, that critical perspective does not lead her to feel alienated or disenfranchised; rather, it enables her to adopt a networked perspective on her circumstances by reflecting on how her work experiences have shaped her perceptions. Kathleen's perspective suggests the generative possibilities of drawing on concepts such as critical engagement and networked reflection for framing our course learning outcomes to incorporate intelligibility. Rather than “critical thinking,” critical engagement may offer a learning outcome that encourages students to reflect on

their lives as operating in networks of relationships and structures that affect them in particular ways, and to make those effects intelligible.

Ultimately, if we use intelligibility as a framework to align our teaching philosophies, textual practices, and course content, I believe that we can create opportunities for networked agency as I describe it in Chapter Four. Kathleen also shared an experience in her first-year writing class that illustrates how class discussion topics might contribute to this sense of agency. In recalling a feeling of community that developed among the Metro College students in her English 101 class, Kathleen describes a powerful moment of intelligibility:

There was a lot of kids in that class who were Metropolitan College students, and so they understood, like we were all yawning in that class. We were like, *Alright we've been in school all day, we're about to go to work, we're about to try and catch a nap after this class.* But I think what really sprung that whole conversation anyways was that we were talking about socioeconomic status and how a lot of kids can't even go to college because finances are, you know, limited. And we were like, *Well we couldn't do it either if we weren't going to UPS.*

Kathleen refers to this experience as an important moment of relationship-building that helped her feel included and supported in her writing class. It also illustrates the relationship between agency and intelligibility. Kathleen and her fellow Metro College participants felt comfortable enough and supported enough to make their experiences of postsecondary education intelligible to their classmates. In doing so, they felt that they had the agency to challenge their classmates' assumptions about who gets to go to college and how they get there. Kathleen said she did not remember why they were discussing socioeconomic status, but we can infer that the instructor made the decision to incorporate some kind of reading, discussion topic, or assignment that opened up the opportunity for this moment of intelligibility. This concept may, ultimately, be the most

productive for using intelligibility in how we design assignments and learning outcomes: like with our course documents and policies, we can how our assignments and learning outcomes create opportunities for intelligibility. While I do not, therefore, want to prescribe particular assignments or activities that will “automatically” invite disclosure, I do think that using intelligibility to think carefully about what we assign and how we frame learning outcomes offers us many opportunities to respond to the challenges of students whose lives and identities do not align with assumptions about the experiences and trajectories of the “typical college student.”

Conclusion: Anticipating the Emotional Labor of Intelligibility

In the previous two chapters of this dissertation, I have tried to show how institutional narratives, norms, and discourses contribute to the challenges of working students. In this chapter, I have tried to show how writing pedagogies can intervene in how institutions coordinate individual lives according to neoliberal ideologies. I suggest that focusing on intelligibility and disclosure is a way to accomplish this goal. This approach is not about implementing a particular curriculum, it is about adopting an orientation towards intelligibility as a multifaceted, powerful concept for creating relationships and learning. Furthermore, I see this framework adding something new to discussions of inclusivity and diversity—namely, that intelligibility is a textual practice as well as a disposition. It can inform how we compose our courses and establish our ethos as well as how we design our policies and course documents. Beyond thinking of our classrooms as safe spaces or inclusive spaces, we can consider them as spaces of intelligibility in which disclosure is an expression of agency rather than an admission of some perceived shortcoming.

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to acknowledge the emotional labor that accompanies this focus on intelligibility. First, intelligibility requires vulnerability and risk on our part as teachers; it means giving up some of our own control by approaching our expectations of student academic labor with openness and flexibility. Some may resist this openness on the premise that students could take advantage of such broad accommodations policies. We may already feel somewhat defensive of relinquishing control because of the way our courses are figured in our curriculum; in my relatively short time teaching college writing, I have come across many students who are either apathetic or outwardly angry that they have to take an introductory writing course. While these concerns and tensions are valid, I maintain that approaching a pedagogy of intelligibility as a process that is based on anticipatory textual practices (in our policies, syllabi, and other course materials) and relationship-building will help guard against possible negative outcomes. In this sense, we should think of intelligibility as a collaborative process in which students are taking ownership of their education and enacting their agency as active participants in the learning process.

Second, working from a framework of intelligibility means committing our attention and our energy to understanding our students' lived experiences and accommodating the multiple forms of difference that those experiences bring to the networked spaces of our classrooms. To do so requires a disposition of empathy, as Eric Leake (2016) describes. Leake's articulation of a rhetoric of empathy indicates how empathy is connected to intelligibility. "Much of empathy is determined by how we read and write the world, is mediated by language and rhetoric, and is concerned with our relationships to one another" (para. 25). Just as our practices of empathy are determined

by how we read and write the world (or, how we make the world intelligible), how we read and write the world is also informed by our practices of empathy. To illustrate this aspect of empathy, Leake describes class activities that require perspective-taking, which is essentially what I advocate in this chapter: that we, as educators, take the perspective that our students have complex, networked material experiences in which school is likely not the most important institution in their lives. The emotional work of empathy also entails resisting a tendency to pity. Leake (2016) explains that “empathy is prone to exploiting differences in circumstances and social positioning. It tends to give the empathizer the benefit of the doubt when ignoring differences and presenting interests, those of the empathizer and the empathized, as converged” (para. 19). This understanding of empathy informs the type of emotional labor required in intelligibility. Intelligibility, like empathy, is not about pity, but rather is about anticipating, recognizing, and welcoming difference.

This is challenging work. However, I also believe that reflecting on the identities and experiences that our teaching practices make intelligible is a way to enact the kind of self-reflective practices that our field has long acknowledged as central to building strong pedagogical foundations. Moreover, as students seeking postsecondary education increasingly have to do so at great personal and economic sacrifice, often accepting precarious economic situations in order to earn their degree, we have a responsibility to make our teaching practices more accessible and inclusive of students’ working lives. As I hope this chapter has shown, we are quite well-equipped to implement incremental changes that can lead to broader revisions in how working students are figured in an academic climate.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION:

IN OUR NEOLIBERAL ECONOMY, WHO IS A “NON-TRADITIONAL” STUDENT?

“I believe that Metro College students are becoming less and less a unique cohort and more and more reflective of the general community. I think it has become very uncommon that you will have someone accessing postsecondary education like I did, when I had no other competing demands in my life. I think a good majority of folks have to work while they're in school—it just so happens that this one is third shift work. But I really don't think that our demands or our students are really any different than a good portion of the general population.”

—Caroline, UPS Metropolitan College administrator

I entered this research project with an assumption that student-workers in the Metro College program experienced unique challenges that offer opportunities for us to learn how to better anticipate and respond to the material circumstances of our students' lives. Particularly because of the way this program was framed during my training as a new composition instructor, I came to think of these students as a “special population” with particular needs. However, after Caroline shared her belief that Metro College participants have more in common with their peers than differences, the way I thought about this population of students began to change. In many ways, I believe Caroline's assessment is correct—the vast majority of college students have to navigate competing demands on their time, labor, and emotions. However, as the experiences of students like Kathleen, Brandi, Reya, Ramon, and others illustrate, there are several unique and significant challenges that accompany this third shift work. What makes these students unique is not the fact that they are working students—it is the structure of their work and

the sacrifices they have to make to pursue postsecondary education. Their networked experiences of learning and earning, however, are likely shared by many students across a range of postsecondary institutions.

According to the U. S. Department of Education, 5.6% of students enrolled in postsecondary education from 2011–2012 received some type of employer aid (Cominole & Paslov, 2015). Since then, Walmart, Starbucks, Chipotle, Papa Johns, and Disney have implemented tuition assistance programs for most or all employees, including part-time, low-wage laborers. Although the Department of Education has not released data about employer assistance since 2012, it is possible that this percentage has increased in the past seven years based on the rise of tuition assistance programs at major employers. This increase in learn-and-earn programs has led to a need for new kinds of companies that manage these tuition benefits and serve as mediators between corporations and degree-granting institutions. The primary broker in this new industry is Guild Education, which manages the tuition assistance programs of several major companies including Chipotle, Walmart, and Disney. On the Guild Education website, the company claims to offer a 208% return on investment for employers and an increased retention rate from a 71% baseline to 98% for “Guild students” (“Guild Education,” n.d.). Shortly after Walmart’s announcement, Rachel Carlson, the CEO of Guild Education, claimed that “Walmart’s latest move is part of a shift in the landscape for higher education tuition benefits, which traditionally were offered by corporate offices but are now increasingly being offered to frontline employees” (as quoted in Morad, 2018, para. 3). While tuition assistance has been offered by employers for decades¹⁴, there are significant shifts taking place in terms

¹⁴ A U. S. Department of Education report from 1999 indicates: “According to the National University Continuing Education Association (NUCEA), 90 percent of companies currently offer

of *how* this assistance is being offered and to whom. This shift is particularly important for those of us who teach college composition because we encounter and form relationships with such a significant percentage of the student population, often at a critical point in their educational experience.

Broadly speaking, I hypothesize that these kinds of corporate-educational partnerships will continue to grow. In the specific context of the Metro College program, I similarly expect we will see this program continue to expand as alternative options for students from working-class backgrounds are few and far between. Just during the time I conducted this research, the Metro College program grew in significant ways. In 2016, UPS implemented a new residential extension of the Metro College program called the LOOP (Living Options and Opportunities Path) program (“Kentucky LOOP,” 2017). In this program, students from some of the rural counties in the state of Kentucky can receive the same tuition and financial benefits as Metro College students as well as a stipend for housing at a local apartment complex. These students also have the choice to work day or night shift. Furthermore, in February 2019, UPS announced a \$5 million donation to Louisville athletics as part of a 13-year plan (Bradshaw, 2019). The plan will include a UPS Leadership Academy for sophomore-level student-athletes, a UPS Executive Speaker Series, and internships at UPS for student-athletes (Bradshaw, 2019). This recent development indicates that, as precarity for students seeking postsecondary education increases, so will profitable opportunities for this economic-educational partnership.

continuing education benefits and 97 percent plan to offer them by the year 2000. Another survey found that 75 percent of the surveyed employers provided tuition benefits” (Lee & Clery, 1999, p. 1).

The growth in learning-and-earning programs indicates that the corporate is increasingly connected to the educational beyond the neoliberalization of education itself. There are other ways that economic institutions and structures matter to us. Specifically, there are networked relationships between our educational institutions and corporate sponsors of education that are due more consideration in our field. This embedded, networked nature of our postsecondary institutions to corporate sponsors of education is important for how we think about our work and our students' lives, particularly as we consider how students' labor conditions affect their experiences of education and what practices or dispositions toward literacy are being sponsored within the networks in which they participate.

The Metro College program is an extreme example of this networking of the educational and the economic, but its structures and narratives offer several lessons for how we might think broadly about our students' lives, the labor they perform, and the ways in which institutions shape their identities, perspectives, and senses of agency. In this dissertation, I have described the experiences of student-workers who struggle to navigate the antithetical structures of their school and work lives, who undergo physical and emotional processes of adapting to their labor conditions, and who feel a greater sense of control and ownership over their futures because they are putting themselves through college. While it is tempting to write the Metro College program off as exploitative, it is important to recognize and honor its complex role in students' lives. The program offers access to postsecondary education that many students would not have otherwise; however, it also limits the terms of students' participation in their educational lives. In short, the material circumstances of their labor affect every aspect of the

networks that comprise the activity of their lives: their social relationships, their ability to do the school work required of them, their sleep schedule, their professional goals, and so on. In this dissertation, I have tried to explore these complexities and foreground the ways in which they manifest in student-workers' lived realities and perspectives. I see the primary contributions of this dissertation as follows.

First, this project foregrounds and makes concrete the labor experiences of working students in postsecondary education and the forms of literacy sponsorship and economic interpellation that accompany these experiences. While composition and literacy studies is well-practiced in considering social class as an important aspect of identity (as I discuss in the literature review in Chapter One), the field is less practiced in considering the material labor practices that our students engage in as important, shaping forces in their literate development and experiences of postsecondary education. For student-workers who participate in the Metro College program, being sleep-deprived and struggling to pay attention in class is not a simple inconvenience or a sign of disinterest, it is an unavoidable consequence of the structure of their work lives. These material conditions also influence how students value their time in class. As I describe in Chapter Four, students like Dean and Kristin have to operate in a temporal economy of scarcity that leads them to think of their time differently than other students might. In other words, they tend to have a higher threshold for an educational experience to be considered worth their time. In Chapter Three, I describe the other, less visible forms of labor that these student-workers perform—namely, the affective labor required to follow the mobility script of the institution. This mobility script perpetuates narratives about the structure of postsecondary education as a linear, stepwise, developmental trajectory. In

the process, it also coordinates student-workers' dispositions to their work and school lives according to neoliberal narratives about individualism, grit, and efficiency.

Foregrounding the material and emotional labor that these students perform illustrates the need for attending to our students' labor experiences, not as future roles they will inhabit, but as current, material conditions that shape their engagement with their education.

Second, because I foreground this aspect of working-students' lived experiences, this project also encourages a broadening of scope outside of the (physical and affective) boundaries of our academic institutions. While scholars in community engagement and community literacy have encouraged and acted on this goal for many years (Cushman, 1996, 1999; Goldblatt, 2004, 2007; Flower, 2008; Sheridan, 2008), there remains a tendency to overlook the embeddedness of other "non-academic" institutions in our day-to-day work in college composition. In Chapter Four, I consider the University and the Metro College program as embedded, co-constitutive institutions that shape individual decision-making and capacities for action in both contexts. I also consider the labor demanded of these students in both their work and school lives and describe the embodied and emotional consequences of these labor conditions for students' feelings of agency in their educational contexts. Both chapters Three and Four thus examine how the Metro College program's claims of expanding access and instilling ownership in its participants play out in the actual lives of said participants. In the process, this project illustrates how this particular labor program matters for how students perform and inhabit their identities as college students. In a fast-capitalist, neoliberal economy, it matters what the terms are of our students' access to our classes because these forms of access shape their *participation* in their learning. In turn, we need to consider our own

disciplinary role and function as one part of a larger network of institutions that shape our students' lives. In Chapter Four, I suggest ways we can attend to our role in these networks from a programmatic perspective. In Chapter Five, I explore how this broadening of scope can inform our teaching practices and dispositions. I argue for a pedagogy of intelligibility, which is a way that we can actively anticipate and respond to our students' networked experiences of learning and earning.

Finally, by exploring the role of texts in these processes of coordinating individual student-workers' lived experiences, this dissertation also contributes an institutional ethnographic perspective on the processes of mediation in educational-economic networks. As I argue in Chapter Two, composition and literacy studies has not taken up institutional ethnography to its fullest advantage. However, we can benefit from research out of this methodology that explores not only how texts connect macro-level ideologies to micro-level contexts, but also how this process of the networking of the macro and micro affects the lives of real people. I discuss the role of the College and Academic Planning Program (CAPP) in coordinating literacy practices aimed at efficiency and economic marketability in Chapter Three. In performing this function, the CAPP connects neoliberal values of efficiency and individualism to individual literacy practices. In Chapters Four and Five, I describe student-learning outcomes and syllabi as texts that coordinate students' time and labor according to institutional discourses about ownership, individualism, and efficiency. These considerations illustrate how texts function as material-ideological coordinators of people's activities and dispositions. Processes of textual coordination matter because, if we can understand and make concrete these processes, we can intervene in them in incremental and structural ways. As

I argue in Chapter Five, even seemingly trivial moments of recognition can create impactful relationships for student-workers in which they feel seen and valued. An institutional ethnographic perspective can, therefore, guide us to strategies and frameworks that offer our students alternative experiences of learning that may, in turn, help them develop networked and critically engaged perspectives on their lives.

Opportunities for Future Research: Where Do We Go From Here?

I see these contributions also opening up several opportunities for future research. First, this project focuses specifically on a learn-and-earn program; however, there are other types of labor programs that should be considered if we are to work toward a richer understanding of the lives of working students. For instance, the Federal Work-Study program may have implications for students' lived realities and literacy development that resonate with those of the Metro College program. Learn-and-earn programs only exist because of the labor of these students who feel that they have no other option. The institution gains from these students' precarity and immobility. Similarly, colleges and universities benefit significantly from the labor of Federal Work-Study students. In 2016, there were 616,988 recipients of Federal Work-Study at 3,186 participating institutions (U. S. Department of Education, 2018). This is a pervasive labor program that is implemented across a wide range of postsecondary institutions. The structures and ideologies of this program are worth examining, and my sense is that the experiences of Work-Study participants may parallel the experiences of Metro College students in interesting ways. Specifically, it would be informative to learn how these student-workers think of their mobility, agency and ownership, future trajectories, and literacy practices as well as how the texts and structures of Federal Work-Study coordinate these dispositions.

Therefore, one way to further develop this research is to expand it horizontally by applying the methodology and analytical approaches I use here to a different kind of labor program. However, another important way of building from this research will be to expand it vertically by doing a more longitudinal, nuanced consideration of student-workers' identities, backgrounds, and literacy practices. One trend I noted amongst the participants in this study is that many of them have a parent or both parents who worked for UPS at some point. While I did talk with some of them about how this history influenced their perspectives of UPS, I did not do a deep dive into the significance of this family history. Furthermore, a limitation of this study is that my analysis focuses on social class and labor experiences as important forms of difference, but I do not analyze the role of race, gender, disability, neurodiversity, or sexuality in how the participants experience and enact labor, literacy, and education. A more longitudinal study, such as a three or four-year study that follows student-workers through several semesters would likely be better able to account for their intersectional experiences and identities, and how student-workers' perceptions of their work and education shift over time.

In addition to expanding the types of labor programs studied and the depth of analysis, it will also be important to investigate the experiences of other stakeholders in these networks, specifically writing program administrators and writing instructors. Although I did include a limited study of composition instructors in this project, much more research is needed that addresses how composition instructors perceive student-workers, how writing programs accommodate the needs of working students, and how texts coordinate both writing programs' and individual instructors' responses toward working students and toward institutional labor partnerships like the Metro College. For

instance, future research could include an ethnographic study of new graduate student instructors that would illustrate how these instructors accommodate the needs of working students while simultaneously navigating demands on their own labor. This work could offer a more holistic examination of the educational-economic network and how individuals in various positions navigate or negotiate the network.

A more holistic vision of this network should also give more attention to the specific materials that student-workers use to move within the network. For instance, Jill described how important her planner was for making sure she was allocating enough time in her day for meals, exercise, studying, and sleep. She described color-coordinating and planning each day to the hour so that she could stay on top of her work and feel like she had a degree of work-life balance. Do other student-workers similarly rely on time management journals or calendars to manage their time? What other materials might they rely on to manage their work-school lives? How do these materials shape student-workers' senses of agency? How do these materials shape students' literacy practices? Pursuing these questions could better illustrate the shape of student-workers' work-school networks and account for the role of material resources within them.

One source of such materials could be public advertisements and other recruiting materials of the Metro College program. For instance, since beginning this research project, I have noticed a significant increase on my own social media accounts of advertisements about the Metro College program. I have heard advertisements for the Metro College and LOOP programs on the radio and seen brief, animated advertisements on Snapchat and YouTube. In addition to these public documents, the materials that the Metro College uses to recruit participants on campus and at local high schools would be

informative about how the institutional discourse manifests in specific texts, and how these texts influence individuals' decisions to participate in the program.

Finally, the increasing implementation of online writing classes (and of online courses and degree programs in general) may be a fruitful context for expanding our research on pedagogical strategies for responding to “non-traditional” student populations. Online education is often touted as the ultimate solution for non-traditional students, particularly those returning to school and/or those who have to work full time while pursuing their degrees. In Chapter Four, I reference Dean’s and Kristin’s desire to do more of their writing assignments or activities online as an alternative to face-to-face class time, but we would benefit from research that explores more directly how working students perceive and engage with online classes. A recent report from the Babson Survey Research Group indicates that “distance education enrollments increased for the fourteenth straight year, growing faster than they have for the past several years” (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018, p. 3). Furthermore, public institutions continue to grow steadily in distance enrollments, ahead of private non-profit and private for-profit institutions (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018, p. 3).

The financial benefits of online courses for postsecondary institutions are well-documented. Online courses are major sources of revenue for universities. If these trends continue, then composition programs at public institutions will likely face increasing pressure to implement online writing classes. While there are many implications of this shift, the one that I will note here is that, in an online context, we often must rely heavily on assumptions about who our students are because we may never actually see or hear or interact face-to-face with them. If we don’t question our default assumptions about the

lives and labor conditions of who we think of as the “average,” “typical,” or “normal” college student (or the “typical” *online* college student), then we may perpetuate inequalities and practices of unintelligibility that disadvantage students who do not fit this narrow category. If we can’t directly intervene in the online education shift, we can develop a greater awareness of how to support students in this context. One way to do so is to understand how working students engage with online learning or distance education, and how they see it fitting in to their networked experiences of learning and earning.

Conclusion: Where Are We Now?

This project is an effort to describe the lived realities for a specific population of students at a particular institution. However, it is also indicative of more general realities about the complicated, networked, labor-oriented lives of the students in our classrooms. It is likely that we will continue to see shifts in who is coming to postsecondary education, how they are getting there, and what forms of education they are seeking. While there are many forms of difference that may be highlighted in these shifts, I advocate that we attend specifically to students’ working lives and the multiple, often conflicting, forms of labor they are required to perform in their pursuit of a college degree. By directing our attention to who our students are and what their lives are like, I hope to call attention to how our default approaches to our students’ identities and material conditions can reinforce middle-class norms about labor and successful student-hood.

In some sense, then, I am building on elements of the basic writing debates by suggesting that ill-defined markers such as “non-traditional” may do more harm than good. As Donna Strickland (1998) has argued, the field of basic writing operated on a

central practice: “the act of diagnosis, the act of seeing and saying” (p. 27). Similarly, what we see and say about various populations of “non-traditional” students matters. In the particular case of the Metro College program, when instructors talk about “UPS students,” they are diagnosing students according to a kind of deficit model—these are students with not enough time, not enough sleep, and not enough resources. More broadly speaking, though, when our institutions look for ways to support or expand services to “non-traditional” students, we should attend to how these discussions may set up a false binary in which the assumption is that most of our students are traditional, but that a small portion of the student population is not. However, as Carriero and Kapitulik (2016) note, “recent reports from the US Department of Education and the American Council on Education that suggest ‘traditional’ no longer accurately describes the majority of college and university students” (p. 233). The curricular position of our classes as required general education courses means that this trend is particularly important for composition teachers. Regardless of the type of postsecondary institution we teach in, we will likely continue to see more students who are working students, who are student-parents, who are caregivers, and so on. In short, we may see increasing numbers of students whose lives are composed of complex networks of learning and laboring.

Particularly with more high-achieving (read: well-resourced, likely middle class, likely white) students testing out of first-year writing, we may see a greater percentage of “non-traditional” students than our counterparts who teach “content courses” or courses “in the major,” whatever that major may be. While, historically, one response to such shifts has been to reinforce standards and policies (Fox, 1999), I would argue that we have a responsibility to work to remove students’ obstacles to learning or to achieving

goals that may materially improve their lives. Not only are the stakes of earning a college degree significant for our students, but so are the sacrifices they make to do so. A recent report from the Lumina Foundation indicates that:

Though students fail to complete postsecondary programs for a variety of reasons, financial pressures are one of the largest factors. A 2009 survey of young adults (ages 22-30) who had left college confirms this phenomenon: 71 percent of students said one reason for leaving was because they had to “go to work and make money;” 54 percent listed this as a “major reason.” These numbers are striking, but may not even reflect the magnitude of the financial challenges facing students. It is difficult to come up with accurate estimates since many students who cite having challenges frequently have financial difficulties as well.... Research shows that both working more than 20 hours a week and attending part-time to accommodate work can negatively impact college completion. (Duke-Benfield, 2015, p.1)

In this context, it is important to recognize that our own disciplinary institutional context and history (both locally and broadly) shape how we respond to our students’ material conditions. In other words, our disciplinary identity conditions us to respond to “non-traditional” students, particularly working students, in certain ways. Often, this response is based on an assumption (whether implicitly or explicitly) that these students have poor time management skills, that they aren’t as dedicated to their studies as they should be, or that they are simply disinterested or dismissive of our classes.

Moreover, it may be that our somewhat precarious institutional and curricular positions place us in an ambivalent relationship to upholding standards and policies, which may lead us to further disadvantage working students. This adherence to standards (often coded as “rigor”) is likely connected to anxieties about proving our educational value beyond the instrumental, and it can lead us to assume close relationships among unilateral policy enforcement, upholding high standards, and intellectual rigor. These

assumptions can become obstacles in our efforts to accommodate students who do not fit the mold of the “typical” or “traditional” college student.

At the same time, it is valid to be concerned about how to respond to a felt tension between our own goals for our students and their often more instrumentalist perceptions of our courses. Several scholars in our field have tackled this instrumentalist vs. critical pedagogy debate, including Bollig (2015), Durst (1999), Lu and Horner (2009), and Scott (2009). A common response to this issue is to recommend that we leverage our pedagogies to orient students to their subjecthood in a particular way. For instance, Bollig (2015) advocates for a pedagogy focused on students inhabiting the identity of “citizen-worker.” Although I agree that there are pedagogical frameworks and strategies that can better support working students (as I discuss in detail in Chapter Five), I also think there are additional actions we can take to support students as workers. Namely, we can work to understand and make concrete the experiences and perceptions of our specific students toward their current and future work at our specific institutions.

Concretizing the material conditions of our students is not about moving them toward some kind of more acceptable (to us) disposition toward their lives, but rather is about changing our own dispositions about who our students are and what their lives are like. Rather than operating according to assumptions about our students’ instrumentalist perceptions of first-year writing or getting bogged down in the seeming inevitability and ubiquity of oppressive neoliberal structures, we can focus on the specific lived experiences of the people coming to our classrooms. This work can, and should, be done on a programmatic level (for instance, by offering workshops or discussions during instructor orientations about the characteristics of the student population they will be

working with) as well as on an individual level (for instance, by taking time at the beginning of the semester to acquaint ourselves to who our students are beyond their major, future goals, and reasons for taking our classes). Once we understand our students' lives, we can better create literacy experiences for them that honor their agency as economic subjects (rather than objects), and that offer opportunities to explore, make intelligible, and reflect on the networks in which they participate.

In Chapter One, I suggest that, because we are often so attuned to our students' anxieties, challenges, and successes as well as to the institutional dynamics of our colleges and universities, we have a unique perspective on how neoliberal ideologies function in the postsecondary landscape. The task is to turn our attention towards the particular manifestations of these ideologies in our locally situated contexts and act on what we see. Education scholar Margaret Ann Miller (2018) has written for *Victorian Studies for the 21st Century* that:

There has been a presumption that undergraduate education is all about becoming-adult (to perhaps usefully misappropriate/misquote Deleuze and Guattari), which includes learning responsibility, prioritization, time management and any number of supposedly 'adult' life skills and to 'tough love' students who fail to meet these alleged minimum requirements. However, in this time of crisis ordinariness, do we, pedagogically, need to reconsider what we deem skills of responsibility and how we meet our students? The fact is, for most students, their education cannot be their number one priority because of the lived realities affecting their everyday survival. (para. 13).

How, then, do we meet, understand, and honor students where they are, not only in their development as writers but also in their material realities?

In the case of the Metro College program, understanding students' material realities led me to realize that what they most need in order to feel supported is not to be given the opportunity to develop some kind of enhanced awareness of their labor

experiences and economic precarity. They are already well aware of these conditions.

Kathleen, for instance, reflected with great insight on the context of her work life:

You're leaving and you see everything, and you're looking at all these buildings, and you're looking at all these planes, and all these trucks, and all the lights, and you can't even imagine what the electricity bill is there. And it's insane. And you're like, this is all for boxes. This is billions and billions of dollars' worth of stuff, and it's all for the sake of boxes.

Kathleen is well aware of the capitalist consumption practices that organize the network of her work-school life. She doesn't need to be "given" a specific framework through which to think and write about her experiences. Furthermore, I doubt that such a framework offers the kind of support that most benefits working students. After all, as Seitz (2004) suggests, critical consciousness is often best exercised by those with the time and resources to practice it.

Alternatively, student-workers may benefit from opportunities to consider their experiences of mobility and feelings of ownership in their writing. We can work with them to develop a mutual understanding of these phenomena in their lives and how the networks they participate in affect these experiences or dispositions. We can also look for ways to expand their opportunities for decision-making and control.

First-year composition is an ideal place for students to be supported in this kind of exploration. We work with students at a crucial moment in their literate development. Many of our students are at the beginning of their postsecondary experience. They may come from high school experiences that framed writing as primarily about correctness. They are often aware of and anxious about the communicative demands placed on them as they progress in their higher education curriculum. Because of this position, we are able to develop relationships with our students—and encourage students' relationships

with their own writerly identities—that offer them alternative experiences of labor and agency than what might be available to them in other institutional contexts. The same mediating role that makes us somewhat vulnerable to reproducing neoliberal ideologies of individualism, ownership, and efficiency also makes us well positioned to intervene in neoliberal processes that restrict students’ participation in their education to simply following the prescribed steps.

Our working students do not need to be liberated from some sort of naivete about their labor conditions. They are making informed decisions about how to achieve their goals, and many of them are doing so with a great deal of hope. As I mention in Chapters Three and Four, there are very real, material benefits for students in participating in the Metro College program. For those of us who make a living attending to the power of texts to coordinate and coerce, it can seem easy to write off learn-and-earn programs as exploitative. However, the solution to the “problem” of learn-and-earn programs is not to disparage or try to dismantle them. But we also do not have to simply accept the existence of these programs and adhere to the institutional narratives that develop around them, and neither do our students. We can compassionately support students in navigating the terms of access that they have accepted in order to be in our classrooms, and we can offer a variety of genres, discourses, and platforms from which to consider their own dispositions towards these forms of access. What these students may need most from us is, fortunately, something we are well-positioned to offer. What they may need most is to feel that their labor, in its multiple forms, is recognized and honored.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION

- Ph. D.** Rhetoric and Composition, University of Louisville May 2019
Dissertation: "Learning and Laboring: Student-Workers' Networked Experiences of Literacy, Agency, and Mobility in the Neoliberal University" (Committee: Bronwyn Williams (director), Mary P. Sheridan, Beth Willey, Karen Christopher)
- M. A.** English, University of Louisville May 2015
Culminating Project: "Teaching Composition in a Digital, Fast Capitalist Culture: Toward a Circulation-Based Pedagogy"
- B. A.** Major: English, Minor: Philosophy, Bellarmine University May 2013

RESEARCH

Peer-Reviewed Publications

Gordon, Layne M. P. "Beyond Generalist vs. Specialist: Making Connections between Genre Theory and Writing Center Pedagogy." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 11.2 (2014): n.p., Web. <http://www.praxisuwc.com/gordon-112>

Alvarez, Sara P., Michael Baumann, Michelle Day, Khirsten L. Echols, **Layne M. P. Gordon**, Ashanka Kumari, Laura Matravers, Jessica Newman, Amy McCleese Nichols, Caitlin E. Ray, Jon Udelson, Rick Wysocki, and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss. "On Multimodal Composing." *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*. 21.2 (2017): n.p., Web. <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/21.2/praxis/devoss-et-al/index.html>

Book Chapters

Gordon, Layne Porta. "Transformation and Agency in Activist Scholarship." *Making Future Matters*, edited by Mary P. Sheridan and Richard L. Wysocki. CDDP, 2018. <http://ccdigitalpress.org/book/makingfuturematters/gordon-response-essay.html>

Under contract:

Gordon, Layne Porta. "Genre Theory." *Theories and Methods of Writing Center Studies: A Practical Guide*, edited by Jo Mackiewicz and Rebecca Babcock. Routledge, 2019.

Conference Presentations

"Student-Workers' Lived Realities and Performances of Mobile Identities." Conference on College Composition and Communication, Pittsburgh, PA, March 2019.

"Theories and Methods of Writing Center Studies: A Roundtable Discussion." with Jo Mackiewicz, John Nordlof, Heather Hill, Beth Boquet, Terese Thonus, and Steve Price. IWCA Collaborative, CCCC, Pittsburgh, PA, March 2019.

"Learning and Earning in the Neoliberal University: Making Composition Pedagogy Matter for Student-Workers' Networked Experiences." Thomas R. Watson Conference, University of Louisville, October 2018.

"Writing Center Pedagogy, Affective Labor, and Fostering Engaged Centership." The International Writing Centers Association Conference, Atlanta, GA, October 2018.

"Designing Pedagogies for Critical Engagement." National Women's Studies Association, Baltimore, MD, November 2017.

"The Genre-Bounding of Transmedia Storytelling: Considering the Implications of the Transmediation Practices of Popular Film Genres." Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association National Conference, San Diego, CA, April 2017.

"On Multimobile, Multimodal Composing." with Dànielle DeVoss, Laura Sceniak Matravers, Ashanka Kumari, and Michael Baumann. Thomas R. Watson Conference, University of Louisville, October 2016.

"Spreadable, Student-Centered, and Reflective Framework for Circulation." Conference on College Composition and Communication, Houston, TX April 2016.

Reviewed: Sweeney, Meghan A. "M.10: Framing Circulation for Action: Frameworks for Enabling Action via Circulation Studies." *CCCC 2016 Reviews, Kairos*. 21.2 (2017): 92-96. <https://goo.gl/Gbv5Eq>

"Women's Viral Production: Considering Circulation as Meaning-Making." Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference, Arizona State University, October 2015.

"The Economy of New Media Writing: Production, Consumption, and Circulation in the Composition Classroom." Thomas R. Watson Conference, University of Louisville, October 2014.

TEACHING

Courses Taught

University of Louisville

Scientific and Technical Writing , ENGL 303	SP 2018
Business Writing , ENGL 306	FA 2017
Intermediate College Writing , ENGL 102	SP 2015 and SP 2017
Introduction to College Writing , ENGL 101	FA 2014

Pedagogy Development Leader and Co-Teacher, Digital Media Academy

University of Louisville

January–June 2017

Created the assignment sequence and daily lesson plans for a digital production camp for rising 6th-grade girls.

Collaborated with co-teachers to coordinate camp logistics and assessment methods.

Composed grant and donation requests.

Tutoring Positions

University Writing Center, University of Louisville

Writing Consultant

August–December 2016

Tutored 10 hours per week, half of which were conducted in the Virtual Writing Center.

Consultant, Dissertation Writing Retreat

May 2016

Consulted daily with two Ph.D. students.

Summer Writing Consultant

July–August 2014

Tutored 30 hours per week.

Contributed to the faculty resource page of the Writing Center website.

Writing Consultant

August 2013–May 2014

Tutored 20 hours per week including three hours in the Virtual Writing Center.

Created resources on implementing transitions and writing cover letters.

Bellarmino University Writing Center

Peer Tutor

August 2011–May 2013

Tutored 10 hours per week.

Selected by the office of International Student and Scholar Services to pilot a tutoring program for international students.

ADMINISTRATION

Assistant Director, University Writing Center

University of Louisville

August 2016–May 2018

Community Literacy Project Coordinating

Collaborated with two nonprofit organizations (Family Scholar House and the Western branch of the Louisville Free Public Library) to develop tutoring programs, outreach strategies, and events for writers in the local community. Acted as Field Supervisor for undergraduate interns in the Community Literacy Internship program.

Facilitated the service-learning component of ENGL 508: Literacy Tutoring Across Contexts and Cultures.

Assessed partnership efficacy and growth.

Other responsibilities:

Mentored and trained new writing consultants.

Partnered with the Digital Media Suite and Composition Program to create resources and workshops to support faculty in designing and assessing multimodal projects.

Created the policy on accessibility and accommodations.

Assisted with leading discussion for Writing Center Theory and Practice, the graduate-level seminar for new writing consultants.

Led workshops and conducted daily consultations during the 2017 and 2018 Dissertation Writing Retreats.

Blog posts published (titles are hyperlinked):

“Writing Center Receives the College of Arts and Sciences Community Engagement Award.” 18 April 2018.

“Showing Up Over and Over Again: Some Updates on Our Community Literacy Projects.” 29 Jan 2018.

“Accessibility and Accommodations in the Writing Center.” 17 Jan 2017.

AWARDS

Doctoral Fellow

University of Louisville, August 2015–May 2019

2017–2018 Faculty Favorite Nominee

University of Louisville, Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning

Community Engagement Award for 2017-2018

University of Louisville College of Arts and Sciences, awarded to the University Writing Center staff

Barbara Plattus Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching

University of Louisville English Department, April 2015

Graduate Teaching Assistant

University of Louisville, August 2013–May 2015

SERVICE

Workshops

“Working with UPS Metropolitan College Students.” University of Louisville Composition Program, March 2019.

“Designing and Teaching Professional and Technical Writing.” WPA-GO Webinar, April 2018.

“Understanding and Getting Started on New Writing Assignments.” Family Scholar House, Louisville, KY, January 2018.

“Creating Successful Dissertation Committees.” English Graduate Organization, University of Louisville, November 2017.

“Creating Effective Digital Assignment Descriptions.” University Writing Center, University of Louisville, March 2017.

“The IRB Process: A Graduate Student’s Perspective.” ELFH 705: Qualitative Data Analysis and Representation; Educational Leadership, Evaluation, and Organizational Development Program, University of Louisville, February 2017.

“Writing a Curriculum Vitae.” University Writing Center and the Minority Association of Graduate Students, University of Louisville, October 2016.

“Culminating Project Workshop.” English Graduate Organization, Department of English, University of Louisville, November 2015.

Departmental Service

Volunteer Writing Tutor, Family Scholar House August 2018–December 2018
University of Louisville Writing Center

Offer weekly writing tutoring hours for FSH participants.

Ph.D. Peer Mentor February 2016 and February 2017
University of Louisville English Department

Communicated regularly with prospective graduate students and mentored new students.

Participated in Ph.D. recruitment events.

Faculty Liaison, English Graduate Organization August 2015–May 2016
University of Louisville English Department

Facilitated graduate student attendance and participation in department meetings.

Surveyed graduate students about desired course offerings.

Designed and implemented workshops for English graduate students.

M.A. Peer Mentor Coordinator January 2014–January 2015
University of Louisville English Department
Oversaw new MA mentoring and coordinated campus visits for prospective MA students.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional Writing Reading Group September 2017–May 2018
University of Louisville Department of English

Southeastern Writing Center Association-KY, Directors' Day Out February 2018
Asbury University

Southeastern Writing Center Association-KY, Directors' Day Out March 2017
Transylvania University

Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition Mentorship Program
Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference October 2015
Mentor: Dr. Dev Bose, University of Arizona

Digital Composition Colloquium August 2015
University of Louisville Composition Program