

Agents of Change

Author(s): Sue Mendelsohn and Clarissa Walker

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Sue Mendelsohn and Clarissa Walker

Agents of Change: African American Contributions to Writing Centers

Abstract

African Americans and their contributions to our field's first pedagogical models and operational structures are absent from writing center histories. This archival research invokes their presence by recounting the stories of five African American innovators—Bess Bolden “B. B.” Walcott, Coragreene Johnstone, Anne Cooke, Hugh Gloster, and Percival Bertrand “Bert” Phillips—spanning four decades at three historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Their stories invite an expansive understanding of writing center work, moving beyond a focus on traditional tutoring and strictly alphabetic literacies and into “strategic literacies”—the survival skills needed to stand up for oneself and one's community in the face of dangerous times and violently racist places. The writing center leaders described here saw writing as a tool to be used in concert with embodied performances for expression and survival to advance struggles for labor equity, legal justice, and civil rights. This conception of writing center work springs from sites of research such as HBCU archives and popular Black press archives that are less often examined by dominant disciplinary histories. From those sites, a timeline of African American writing center administrators emerges that spurs further research of these under-studied figures, who together constitute a remarkable legacy.

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As I continued and developed in the field and began to professionalize more, attending conferences, reading scholarship, I developed a sense that I was not fully welcome or included. . . . I feel when I read scholarship about race that White scholars in my field are writing about me, but not for me. I feel that I have not been thoroughly acknowledged as an audience to conversation, and I certainly have not been invited to participate. — Talisha Haltiwanger Morrison (2018, pp. 133–134)

I have been compelled to listen to speakers, well-meaning though they may think they are, who signal to me rather clearly that subject position is everything. I have come to recognize, however, that when the subject matter is me and the voice is not mine, my sense of order and rightness is disrupted. In metaphoric fashion, these “authorities” let me know, once again, that Columbus has discovered America and claims it now, claims it still for a European crown. — Jacqueline Jones Royster (1996, p. 31)

Figure 1



Note. Clockwise from top left: Bess Bolden “B. B.” Walcott (Sales, 1920); Cor-agreene Johnstone (Hare, 1960); Anne Cooke (Cooke, 1941, p. 331); Hugh Gloster (“Dr. Gloster Acting Dean of Faculty,” 1963, p. 3); Percival Bertrand “Bert” Phillips (Tuskegee University Archives)

What follows are the stories of five pioneering African American writing center administrators: B. B. Walcott, Coragreene Johnstone, Anne Cooke, Hugh Gloster, and Bert Phillips (see Figure 1.) In the pages that follow, we invite you to encounter them on their own terms in their own times before we then explain the critical frame that guides our history telling. By using oral histories, community newspapers, campus newsletters, memoirs, and so on, this archival project seeks to start these stories from the “subject’ position” (Royster, 1996, p. 31). Of course, the choices we make here represent one interpretive view. Our methodological approach aims to amplify the voices and fortitude of administrators who are among the elders of our field and whose work contributes to conceptualizations of writing center pedagogy and administration today. Part of that conceptualization is to understand the injustice and pressure of racism in the United States that our five writing center administrators faced at so many pivotal turns. These pioneers’ stories push us to expand archival methodologies to register the virtuosity of strategic literacies located outside of the tacitly White history that has already been told and retold.

B. B. Walcott, Tuskegee Institute, 1937

Bess Bolden “B. B.” Walcott was probably the first African American writing laboratory administrator, one contribution in the lush professionalization journey of a change agent. Raised in Ohio by working-class parents who instilled in her a great intellectual curiosity, Walcott became one of the just six Black students in Oberlin College’s 1908 graduating class (Gebhard, 2017, p. 222). She then traveled to rural Alabama to take a research assistant job at Tuskegee University,¹ a historically Black college (HBCU) led by Booker T. Washington (Gebhard, 2017, p. 224), hereafter referred to as “Tuskegee.” Tuskegee played a crucial role in training teachers who would staff rural schools in the South, hiring the best and the brightest from elite northern colleges such as Oberlin to train African Americans to become teachers and skilled laborers (Gebhard, 2017, pp. 224). According to Caroline Gebhard (2017), many faculty were called upon to work not only for the education of students but also for the betterment of the Black communities surrounding the Institute, and Tuskegee administrators quickly learned that when they wanted something done, they should go to Walcott.

A gifted writer and a compelling speaker, Walcott became director of Tuskegee’s public relations and later taught composition and American literature, according to Gebhard’s (2017) biography. She founded several campus publications, produced student performances, and curated a museum dedicated to her friend George Washington Carver (Gebhard, 2017, pp.

1 Tuskegee University was called Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute from 1892–1937 and Tuskegee Institute from 1937–1985. We refer to it here as “Tuskegee.”

224–225). Beyond campus, Walcott was a “firecracker feminist” (Alexander, 2019, p. 353): she was active in the Tuskegee Women’s Club, which pushed for the region’s Black women to get the vote (Alexander, 2019, pp. 141–42). Most significantly, she was a leader in public health; despite opposition from White Southern officials, she co-founded and headed the nation’s first Black-led Red Cross chapter in Tuskegee from the start of the flu pandemic of 1918 through 1951 (Gebhard, 2017, p. 227). She developed essential medical infrastructure for Black Alabamans, who faced segregated and unequal healthcare (Gebhard, 2017, p. 233). Buried amidst Walcott’s accomplishments is the fact that she was likely the first Black writing laboratory director.

Three archival breadcrumbs led to the discovery of Tuskegee’s writing laboratory and B. B. Walcott’s likely role. The first was the minutes of a December 1937 faculty meeting explaining that the education department had “recently initiated a writing laboratory” (Harris, 1937).² The second was a 1938 article in the Black newspaper *Journal and Guide* titled “Experiment With Student Activities: Theory and Practice Go Hand in Hand.” It touted Tuskegee’s industrial education, where students learned by working in the school’s farm, dairy, masonry workshop, and other skilled trade programs; the writing laboratory appeared in a list of activities that connected Tuskegee’s 1,160 students with “real life situations” (“Experiment,” 1938, p. B10; see Figure 2). This press-release-framed-as-a-news-article was likely the work of Tuskegee’s director of public relations: Walcott. The final breadcrumb was a program from the July 1938 Rural Life Conference at Tuskegee, which featured two days of presentations on farming and rural health programs (Tuskegee Institute, 1938).³ It included the talk, “Laboratory Shop Techniques in the Teaching of Composition” by “Mrs. B. B. Walcott, Director of Public Relations” (Tuskegee Institute, 1938). Walcott’s talk likely described the writing laboratory, and the title she chose suggests an alternative etymology of the term. Neal Lerner’s 2009 book *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory* traced the pedagogical and historical affinities between science laboratories and writing laboratories. Walcott’s talk suggests a different taproot for the term: the model workshop, or “Laboratory Shop,” where HBCUs that specialized in industrial education taught their students skilled trades. Her usage shifts our attention from the metaphor of the writing laboratory as a place of scientific experimentation to one of hands-on training for blue-collar skilled trades.

2 Used with permission of Tuskegee University Archives. Another HBCU, Alabama State Teachers College (now Alabama State University), also started a writing laboratory around this time, but the university’s archive does not hint at its founder or founding date (Basler, 1942, p. 142).

3 Used with permission of Tuskegee University Archives.

Figure 2

Image of a Paragraph from “Experiment With Student Activities”

THEORY AND PRACTICE

The curriculum laboratory, the writing laboratory, the science clubs, seminars, technical and literary groups are active agencies in unifying the Tuskegee program into real life situations where theory and practice go hand in hand.

Note. This paragraph lists the writing laboratory as an example of Tuskegee’s uniting of theory and practice. From “Experiment With Student Activities,” 1938, *Journal and Guide*, p. B10. Copyright 1938 by *Journal and Guide*. Used with permission.

The writing laboratory was perhaps a small accomplishment in the context of Walcott’s remarkable life. We have not found any extant documents that can take readers inside of its work. Nonetheless, teaching writing was central to Walcott’s career, as evidenced by her listing her profession as an English teacher in the 1930 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1930), prioritizing that role over many others that made her more publicly visible. In a 1981 interview, Walcott shared insights into the “Laboratory Shop Techniques” she likely discussed in her Rural Life Conference talk.⁴ Walcott (1981) reflected on the students she taught, the majority of whom were older men learning trades in Tuskegee’s workshops:

I learned to speak their language. I taught them in terms of what they were doing. They had seen me in the shop, and I could ask them to tell me what they were doing and to explain to me why they did it, and then when most of them said-thought it was a waste of time for them to take English if they were going out to be blacksmiths or carpenters and I had to say, I had to let them see, let them explain something to me, I said, how can you explain to the people who are working with you if you can’t speak. I had them explain to me and they were learning English in that way and then we would go ahead and write the material. (Walcott, 1981, pp. 10–11)

One interpretation of Walcott’s approach would have us extend the critique against industrial education that W. E. B. DuBois so famously leveled against Tuskegee founder Booker T. Washington; DuBois argued that Washington’s campaign for industrial education siphoned funding and opportunity from African Americans who wanted higher education (DuBois, 1905, p. 51).

4 Used with permission of Tuskegee University Archives.

Washington spoke “with the tongue of an accommodationist,” literary scholar Blyden Jackson (1990) argued, while DuBois responded “with the accent of integrationism” (p. 754). However, Walcott saw the issue in less binary terms. She championed student publications, and she maintained an informal literary salon in her on-campus home, an intellectual haven for students such as Ralph Ellison (Jackson, 1997, p. 115). At the same time, Walcott was committed to teaching writing to tradespeople and teachers of trades. She embraced the aspect of Booker T. Washington’s pedagogy called “correlation,” relating what students were learning to their immediate needs (Walcott, 1981, p. 9).

Walcott realized that, for her students to correlate their learning with their needs, she had to begin with what they already knew—the specialized language of their trades. To do that, she had to become her students’ student, in a sense:

I went every day to the shops and visited them to see what the students were doing and talk with them about their work and so I could learn something about it and it would have meaning for me. And, then I could incorporate it into my teaching. . . . (Walcott, 1981, pp. 10–11)

In the process of visiting workshops and learning students’ lexicons, Walcott accorded students authority over their own language and positioned herself as a co-learner rather than a bestower of writing skills, an approach at the heart of writing center pedagogy today.

Coragreene Johnstone, Bennett College, 1938

In a 1939 article in *Quarterly Review of Higher Education Among Negroes*, Dr. Coragreene Johnstone announced that in 1938, Bennett College had started the Remedial Clinics, a suite of learning clinics, at the all-women’s liberal arts-focused HBCU on a picturesque campus in Greensboro, North Carolina. Bennett was known for providing an elite education to its 400 students, regardless of whether they came from underserved schools in working-class communities or well-funded schools in middle-class communities (Jenkins, 1942, p. 220; Cardwell, 2010). And, while Bennett offered some courses aimed at preparing young women to marry, raise children, and run a household, it also had strong offerings in fields where African American women might find careers (Turner, 1942, p. 6). Johnstone left Bennett in the mid-1940s, but the clinics that she and her colleagues started kept going strong through at least the 1950s and played a substantial role in Bennett’s curriculum (Streat, 1958, p. 1).

Initially, the Remedial Clinics included clinics in writing, reading, speaking, and math, and Johnstone (1939) noted the writing clinic was “the most popular” among them (p. 92). It prefigured many contemporary writing centers: visits were voluntary, writing projects from any class were welcome, and the mode of instruction was individual conferences (p. 92). To distinguish

clinic interactions from the classroom, Johnstone (1939) called the staff “members of the advisory committee” instead of “professors” (p. 92). Rather than correcting student writing, advisors would “make suggestions” and “recommend resources” on a variety of writing concerns (p. 92).

The pedagogical evolution of Johnstone and the Remedial Clinics is complex. The daughter of a North Carolina public school teacher, Johnstone became a serious scholar of Elizabethan literature (Harren, 1960, p. 12; “Three Additions,” 1960, p. 1). When she began teaching at Elizabeth City State University (then called Elizabeth City State Teachers College), a North Carolina HBCU where she spent most of her career, she encouraged interested students to take a similar path, led field trips to Shakespeare plays, and extolled the pleasures of summer classes at Oxford University (Johnstone, 1962, p. 3). At the same time, she also sponsored student field trips to plays about contemporary Black life and dedicated a “Negro History Week” talk in 1961 to the protest writing of Black authors (“Dr. Johnstone,” 1961, p. 4).

Indications are that Johnstone favored the prescriptivist teaching of standard English during her early career at Bennett. For example, in 1941, Johnstone chaired Bennett’s Committee on Communication Arts, which issued a memo to the entire faculty declaring, “The speech and writing of our students are constant reminders of their deficiencies. We have agreed that it is the responsibility of the college to teach the students the language habits of the socially acceptable” (Committee on Communication Arts, 1941, para. 1).⁵ The memo included a list of recommendations for “socially acceptable” writing and asked instructors to encourage students with “deficiencies” to attend the Speech and Writing Clinics (Committee on Communication Arts, 1941, item 6). Johnstone could be seen as teaching students a literacy that was “least likely to attract attention” (Johnstone, “English Discussed,” 1938, p. 6) at a time when young Black women attracting attention in the segregated city of Greensboro might subject them to Jim Crow violence. Much more than notions of what constitutes proper grammar were at stake in the choices students made about their writing and speech.

At Bennett during the Jim Crow era, “anxieties about respectability were acute,” argued historian Allison B. Horrocks (2016, p. 191). Bennett College’s 1943 student handbook asked students to dress and act conservatively in order “to help her demand respect for Negro womanhood in the South” (Bennett College, 1943, p. 5).⁶ Concerns about appearance were enmeshed with anxieties about segregationist violence. The handbook also included pages of rules discouraging students from leaving campus, placing boundaries on where students could walk in Greensboro, and requiring students to walk in twos or

5 Courtesy of the Bennett College Archives at Thomas F. Holgate Library.

6 Courtesy of the Bennett College Archives at Thomas F. Holgate Library.

threes—never alone (Bennett College, 1943, pp. 2–5). Encoded in these rules is the grounding reality that segregationist violence was an ever-present threat. Bennett taught students to become experts in embodied literacies of speech, dress, comportment, and movement to help them survive in a rigidly segregated city. However, it would be a mistake to suggest that Bennett faculty such as Johnstone advanced these conservative literacies in order to teach students to assimilate into the dominant White norms of their segregated society. The faculty members’ aim was not to shelter students from Jim Crow but to send them into the streets to protest it.

In 1941, just a few years after the Remedial Clinics opened, Bennett students took the literacies learned on campus into Greensboro to wage a campaign for fair housing. The city was holding a referendum on whether to accept federal dollars to build much-needed affordable housing for lower-income residents. In spite of White real estate developers and city officials’ opposition to the referendum, Bennett political science students campaigned to pass it; they wrote signs and leaflets and canvassed over 1,200 voters (Taylor, 1942, p. 9). Images from Lois Taylor’s (1942) article about the effort make visible the students’ careful choices not only about writing but also about the embodied rhetoric conveyed by students’ conservative dress (see Figure 3). The referendum failed. However, city officials were caught fabricating the vote totals, and the referendum passed in a re-vote (Taylor, 1942, pp. 9–10). In just one example in a long history of civil rights activism by Bennett students, their reasoned, measured rhetoric defeated more powerful, corrupt officials.

Figure 3

Two Bennett College Students Protesting for Fair Housing in Greensboro, NC



Note. From “Social Action at Bennett College,” by L. Taylor, 1942, Dutton, A. C. (1942, January). *Patrolling the Streets* [Photograph]. *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*, 20(1), p. 8, Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/sim_opportunity-a-journal-of-negro-life_1942-01_20_1/page/8/mode/2up Copyright 1942 by National Urban League. Used with permission.

By the late 1940s, Bennett had added a component to the Remedial Clinics that may appear confounding to us today: the Clothing Clinic. It aimed to advise students on taste, economical clothing choices, and etiquette. By the 1950s, the Remedial Clinics' pairing of alphabetic and embodied literacies emphasized deficits: "When a girl enters the school, she is screened for defects, then urged to correct them in the various clinics. . . . These include clothing clinic, writing clinic, personal hygiene and etiquette courses" (Kyle, 1952, pp. 22K–23K). This enmeshment of literacies taught Bennett students to navigate a segregated city as activists.

In the lunch counter sit-ins of the 1960s, Bennett students transformed their literacy learning under Bennett College President Willa B. Player. Player, the first African-American woman university president, not only supported students' activism but also taught strategic literacies that students needed to be more effective. Here, we briefly define strategic literacies as the survival skills needed to stand up for oneself and one's community in the face of the constraints of the particular time and place. These literacies include performing community advocacy work and disseminating actionable information, such as educating community members on voting registration and civil rights. When asked for her support for a December sit-in, Player withheld her approval until students agreed to reschedule it after the winter break so that they maintained their activist momentum (Hatchett, 2005). And in a pivotal series of sit-ins from 1960 to 1963, when police arrested hundreds of students and incarcerated them in appalling conditions, Player (n.d.) convinced them to remain jailed rather than accept plea deals. Using their bodies as a form of resistance, the students strained the city's capacity to hold them (Player, n.d., pp. 22 – 24) and gave Player leverage to negotiate with local lunch-counter owners to desegregate (Player, n.d., p. 28).⁷ Her activism, alongside that of her students, fed the spark of the sit-in movement that desegregated businesses across the South.

The Remedial Clinics transformed during Player's presidency, too. No longer "remedial," they relaunched in 1964 as the Developmental Services Program, in which faculty provided individual conferences in speech, grammar, math, family life, language, and writing ("Make Good Better," 1964, p. 7), with Professor John O. Crawford, an African American faculty member, leading the writing conferences ("Make Good Better" 1964, p. 7). The program's evolution was recognition that Bennett students' strategic literacies had evolved. As students' work for civil rights changed, so did students' framing of writing instruction; writing and strategic literacies were now mainstream parts of what it meant to be a literate Black woman during the Jim Crow era.

7 Courtesy of Bennett College Archives at Thomas F. Holgate Library.

Anne Cooke, Hampton Institute, 1943

Anne Cooke's pedigree was anchored in academics and activism. Her grandfather, Thomas E. Miller, was a Congressman and president of South Carolina State College. Her father, William W. Cooke, was an architect and an instructor at Wilberforce College. When it came time for Anne Cooke, a Gary, Indiana, teenager, to apply to colleges in 1924, her father sent her to Oberlin, a rigorous, integrated liberal arts school that gave all students, Black and White, access to the same dormitories, facilities, clubs, and so on (Allen, 2019, p. 134). As she moved through her education and subsequent career, she remained a champion of her father's commitment to racial integration. That career took Cooke first to Spelman College, where she became an instructor of English and speech at the precocious age of 20 (Allen, 2019, p. 134), and, where, in 1934, she co-founded the Atlanta University Summer Theatre Program (Giles, 2003, p. 84). At the time, Atlanta's museums, libraries, and theaters were all segregated, and White supremacist violence was common (Giles, 2003, pp. 81–82). True to her integrationist principles, Cooke designed the Theatre Program to unite “the community and the college students through the enjoyment of their productions. A part of the plan was to seek out Negro artists, Negro play-writers, and plays about Negroes” that those participating in the program would then perform for integrated audiences (Cooke, as cited in Giles, 2003, p. 84). Her efforts earned her a scholarship to the Yale School of Drama, where she became the second African American in the country to earn a doctorate in drama (Perkins, 1996, para. 3).

To glance at Anne Cooke's storied drama career, one might not guess she directed a writing laboratory. Yet she did, and understanding why helps us see writing center work more expansively. Cooke strategically enmeshed alphabetic literacies and the embodied literacies learned in her theatre training to form a pedagogy founded on the value of personal expression. From 1943 to 1944, as she was finishing her doctoral work, Cooke took a job directing the Hampton Institute Communications Center. Hampton Institute, now called Hampton University, is an HBCU located on the Chesapeake Bay in Hampton, Virginia. When Cooke arrived in 1943, she would have found a campus bustling with just over 1,000 students and 550 Navy-inductees training on its grounds (“1063 Enrolled,” 1942, p. 1; Executive Committee, 1943, p. 4). She also would have found a campus riven by racial tension over integration; the mostly White board of trustees had just forced out Hampton Institute's president for pushing for campus and workplace integration (White, 1943, pp. 1–2). This push toward developing academic programs preparing students to compete for white-collar jobs in integrated workplaces was a departure from the school's past (Mendelsohn, 2017, p. 55). Like Tuskegee, Hampton in the school's earliest decades specialized in training students for skilled trades and

teaching careers, professions that would provide stable incomes without competing with White trade unions (Mendelsohn, 2017, pp. 50–51). However, the Communications Center, created the year before Cooke came, was built to prepare students to compete for white-collar jobs opening up in communications fields, and the Center’s staff of communications specialists worked with students individually in each of the Center’s laboratories for writing, radio, speech, journalism, and theatre (MacLean, 1942, pp. 11–12).⁸

While the focus in the Communications Center was on job-ready literacies, in her role as director, Cooke brought a pedagogy that understood integrationist literacies more capaciously and politically. She described her approach to the Communications Center this way:

In terms of established forms there are cinema, theatre, visual arts, and dance. The communications center was the academic department that pulled all of these disciplines together in one tiny little frame house and worked out of the center concept—“we all have something to say, and there are many ways to say it.” I can stand up naked and communicate by moving my fanny or my belly or my arms. Or have a thought in voice and language. Or make other kinds of sounds. We don’t have to be tied down to the rigidity. (Cooke Reid, 1993, p. 81)

When compared to, for example, Coragreen Johnstone’s prescriptivist pedagogy, the nature of Cooke’s integrationist politics becomes clear. Johnstone taught literacies to Bennett students to make themselves legible to White community members; Cooke taught Hampton students to use their language and bodies in expressive—and sometimes transgressive—ways. Rather than treating the dominant White language practices as normative, Cooke insisted people of all races learn from one another’s cultures. Cooke (1936) wanted students to be “keenly alive each minute” (p. 59) through communication that would bring language alive on the page, the airwaves, and the stage. She understood that integration was only meaningful when one is free to say what they want to say.

After Cooke finished her doctorate, she left the Hampton Communications Center to take a job leading the Howard University Theatre Department and directing the famed Howard Players (Perkins, 1996, pp. 144–45). At Howard, she brought her pedagogy of self-expression to a generation of great artists: Toni Morrison, Amiri Baraka, Joseph Walker, Roxy Roker, Zaida Coles, Earle Hyman, and Ted Shine, among others (Perkins, 1996, p. 143; Gillespie, 2012, p. 6; Verdelle, 2012, p. 158).

8 Courtesy of Hampton University Archives.

Hugh M. Gloster, Hampton Institute, 1946

As we think about writing center history and the administrators who got us here, it is important to register the heroic strength required to both do the work we know and to contend with the challenges that many of us don't know. In August 1942, young English professor Hugh M. Gloster rode a train from Atlanta to Memphis to visit his mother. Standing in an overcrowded "colored coach" (Swingler, 1942, p. 6), Dr. Gloster asked the conductor if the passengers might sit down in the nearly empty adjoining "white section" (Swingler, 1942, p. 1). The conductor called the Tupelo, Mississippi, police and, according to a newspaper report, three police officers dragged Gloster off the train and tortured him in custody:

Right in front of the colored coach, Mr. Gloster was severely assailed for about five minutes. They took him to a squad car, and all the way to the police station, they beat their victim, cursed him, and asked if he had forgotten that he was a n****r. (Swingler, 1942, p. 6)

Jailed and threatened with further violence, Gloster signed a confession for "trying to break the Jim Crow law" and was taken to the mayor's home to pay a fine before the police released him (Swingler, 1942, p. 6).

The problem of Black Americans' mobility would remain a recurring theme throughout much of Gloster's exceptional career in education—he became leader of the Hampton Institute Communications Center in 1946, taught at universities around the world, and eventually became president of Morehouse College ("Gloster to Receive," 2001, p. 7). Gloster responded strategically to the chilling effect that Jim Crow travel had on academics who relied upon attendance at conferences to advance their careers. Five years earlier, he had founded a professional organization to mitigate these effects. The Association of Teachers of English in Negro Colleges (ATENC), now called the College Language Association (CLA), was dedicated to the concerns of HBCU English and modern language faculty. At annual conferences held on HBCU campuses (rather than in segregated city hotels), the racially integrated membership presented research and examined students' interests and needs. Those needs weren't always met by the National Council of Teachers of English and the Modern Language Association, which sometimes barred Black members and hosted conferences in segregated cities.

The letter Gloster sent inviting HBCU faculty to join ATENC suggests he was, as Keith Gilyard argued, "a linguistic prescriptivist and deficit theorist" (Gilyard, 1999, p. 631). Gloster wrote:

Believing that the main burden of the educational task rests on correct language usage and that a college should at least require a knowledge of the language skills, many institutions of higher education have undertaken critical evaluation of current curricular practices for the purpose

of raising standards of proficiency in the use of the English language. . . . The fact still remains nevertheless, that there is need for further improvement in oral and written expression, and that a valuable and mutually beneficial program might be developed by those who are in daily contact with the problem. (as cited in Fowler, 1988, p. 3)

Gloster imagined a prescriptivist orientation for ATENC, yet his literary criticism offers a more complex stance, as this scholarship attacked racist depictions of African Americans (Gloster, 1943) and rejected arguments that civil rights activists should slow down (Gloster, 1949). He also expanded the canon of African American literature and championed texts featuring Black English and regional vernaculars (Gloster, 1950).

Gloster's directorship of the Hampton Communications Center adds further nuance to characterizations of his pedagogy. Gloster was hired in 1946 to lead the same Communications Center that Cooke led three years earlier, so he inherited the same suite of writing, radio, speech, and theatre laboratories. Through a long tenure, he oversaw its move to two new buildings, one in 1947 ("Hampton Institute Increases," 1947, p. 4) and the other in 1964 ("Communications Center Dedication," 1963, p. A3). In these moves, we see Gloster shaping the literacy education he believed Hampton students needed most. While Cooke placed her pedagogical focus on free expression as a force for racial integration, Gloster faced a different set of needs among Hampton students in 1947. World War II veterans with G.I. Bill funding were flooding into American colleges, and Hampton's enrollment leapt from a pre-war average of 1,050 to 1,688 students in 1947 ("A 'New' Hampton," 1947, p. 13). Many came from underfunded segregated high schools. The 1947 Communications Center was built with a Federal Works Agency grant in order to address the needs of these veterans, and the Center was part of the Institute's "plan to bring every student to a minimum level of proficiency in written and spoken English" ("Hampton Institute Increases," 1947, p. 4). It documents further financial commitments to student writers, veteran writers specifically, and echoes Gloster's prioritization of English language skills, written and oral.

Gloster's new 1947 Communications Center, however, went beyond a back-to-basics approach. The Center provided authentic learning opportunities using traditional and emerging media, as shown through its expanded Writing Laboratory spaces, the latest sound-recording technology, the Radio Studio, film-screening rooms, the Speech Clinic, a theatre workshop, and the Audio-visual Aids Workshop ("Hampton Institute Increases," 1947, p. 4). Students did hands-on work, writing and broadcasting radio programs, producing plays, and practicing the kinds of public speaking students would encounter in the working world ("Hampton Institute Increases," 1947, p. 4). Just as he did for his HBCU colleagues by creating ATENC, Gloster found ways to help his students gain intellectual mobility. He developed a Communications Center

that encouraged students to publish their writing and broadcast their ideas. The role of the Writing Laboratory was not only to help students achieve “correct language usage” (Gloster, as cited in Fowler, 1988, p. 3) but also to make their voices travel far and wide.

Bert Phillips, Tuskegee Institute, 1964

In August 1963, Dr. Percival Bertrand “Bert” Phillips and Judith Phillips, his wife, packed up their toddler son and drove from New York City to Tuskegee Institute, reprising the trip that B. B. Walcott took 55 years earlier from the North to rural Alabama. Just two months after Governor George Wallace stood in the schoolhouse door, Phillips took a job as the Tuskegee dean of students. The trip was, he said many years later, “an eye opener” (Long, 2018, 34:56); unwelcome at motels, he and his family slept in the car (Long, 2018, 36:00). In one town, the travellers were shouted out of a restaurant by a rabid segregationist (Long, 2018, 37:25). Lowndes County offers an example of what they saw on their drive. In 1965, none of the county’s 5,122 eligible Black voters were registered, and the median income of Black families was less than one-quarter that of White families (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1965, p. 1).

Amidst Jim Crow injustices, Phillips saw the strength of Black Alabamans, about which he later said:

We drove around Macon County. . . , and we saw the poverty, and we saw, also, the resilience and the courage and the commitment to living a life and making a better life on the part of many of the residents of the county that we would encounter. (Long, 2018, 1:20:20)

Phillips wanted to join those residents in fighting racial inequity in Alabama, but he felt he was “straddling a high rope” between students protesting for change and White state officials who shut down colleges that did not keep student activists “under control” (“H. Council Trenholm,” 1963). Phillips organized behind the scenes, teaching students how to survive beatings at protests and promoting voter registration in Black churches. But he wanted to do more, and as Phillips later told the story, he spoke at a 1965 student assembly about Tuskegee Institute’s history of community engagement: “And, I challenged those who are interested to join me in the gym the next morning at 5:00, and 150 students showed up” (Long, 2018, 1:22:12). Those dedicated student volunteers began tutoring, fixing up homes, and doing odd jobs for nearby communities (Long, 2018, 1:23:00).

Phillips secured a grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity to fund his program, which he called the Tuskegee Institute Summer Education Program (TISEP) (Long, 2018, 1:25:30). He then secured from that source a second grant of \$2.1 million to expand to a year-round program beginning in

spring 1966 renamed the Tuskegee Institute Community Education Program (TICEP) (“Tuskegee Institute Given Funds,” 1965, p. 5). The program was expected to employ about 700 college students as tutors for about 11,000 Alabamans across 10 counties (“Tuskegee Institute Given Funds,” 1965, p. 5). (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4

Job Posting for Tutors to Staff Tuskegee Institute's Community Education Program

TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE, ALABAMA

June 1 - August 31
Minimum June 8 - August 31

Work in a tutorial program to reach the disadvantaged persons. Two week training by professional supervisor.

200 students. Minimum age 17. College freshmen with an interest in people. Expenses provided, including room and board. Will receive \$1.25 per hour.

Resume should include major in College, previous work experience, reason for wanting to work with Tuskegee Institute Community Education Program. Require references from school Deans and Instructors.

Send resume to: P. B. Phillips, Director
Tuskegee Institute Community Education Program
Tuskegee Institute, Alabama 36088

Note. The town of Tuskegee offered few summer jobs to Black student activists who wanted to stay through the summer and organize, but TICEP jobs made such work possible. From *Summer Volunteer Service in the War on Poverty*, by Office of Economic Opportunity, 1966, United States Printing Office, p. 25, Hathi Trust, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001742403>. Copyright 1966 by Office of Economic Opportunity. In the public domain.

Phillips's tutors went into the rural counties he had seen in his drives through the region; they stayed with local families when possible and worked out of community spaces such as churches. (One might argue, then, that the first writing fellows were embedded not in college classes but in rural Alabama communities.) During the day, these students provided children with subject-area tutoring, while in the evenings they worked with adults on “the development of reading, writing and arithmetic skills” (“Tuskegee Institute Given Funds,” 1965, p. 5). Instruction in writing and reading skills in particular prepared Black Alabamans to navigate literacy tests designed to disenfranchise them. Additionally, TICEP tutors brought arts and cultural programs and basic healthcare to communities (“Tuskegee Institute Given Funds,” 1965, p. 5).

Phillips hired tutors strategically by drawing from two groups of civil rights activists: first, the Tuskegee Institute Advancement League, a group of 1,500 students who fought for integration (Robertson, 2018, p. 14), and, second, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which

registered rural Black voters; TICEP employment provided crucial funding the activists needed and embedded them in the communities they sought to organize (Wright, 2016). SNCC activist Dr. Michael Oshoosi Wright (2016) remembered living “hand-to-mouth,” sleeping on couches or in cars (Working With SNCC section, para. 23), until Phillips hired him and his fellow organizers in 1967: “I definitely was able to improve my ability to survive because I got a job as a tutor in a program in Tuskegee” (Working With SNCC section, para. 24). Wright indicated the writing tutoring he did complemented and enabled SNCC activists’ work registering voters (Working With SNCC section, para. 24).

In order to maintain federal funding, Phillips asked his tutor-activists to walk a fine line. The way he later told it,

They could teach voting rights when they taught civics, and they could teach all those other things about civil rights when they were teaching classes and share with students. Yes. But, as far as going out to actually engage in voters’ rights activities and voter registration activities, they were not supposed to be doing that while they were on the federal dollars, so to speak. . . . I think we all agree that if they wanted the program and all of that, that wasn’t to their best interest to, at least openly go out and do that. (Long, 2018, 1:31:50)

But to Phillips, TISEP/TICEP was never a mere front for voting rights organizers; the tutoring itself served the cause of civil rights: “Our program can be considered part of the civil rights [movement] because it is concerned with human rights—the right to learn” (as cited in “Quiet Rights,” 2015, p. 24).

That right to learn was challenged in many of Alabama’s counties, as White officials defied the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling to desegregate. In response, Black families protested and boycotted segregated schools in rural Helicon, Alabama, where police tear-gassed, beat, and arrested these protesters (Smith, 1966, p. 1) while Klansmen led their own terror campaigns (Deifermann, 1968, p. 8). For Helicon’s Black children, TISEP/TICEP tutoring ameliorated some of the ravages of unequal, segregated schooling; tutors spent a tense summer of 1966 teaching the town’s children, whom police had tear gassed and intimidated with dogs (Lake, 1966, p. 6). One Helicon teenager, Jannie Lee May, believed that TICEP tutoring that summer would prepare her to enter an integrated school in the fall, noting, “we lost a lot of our studies during the marches. I think we’ll be better prepared for integrated school by coming here” (as cited in Lake, 1966, p. 6). And, strikingly, the Helicon students voiced a rather sophisticated understanding of TICEP’s pedagogy. According to fifteen-year-old student Eddie B. Warren,

The tutors act like they’re your own age. You can talk better with them than with the winter teachers. . . . Here, if you ask something, the tutors’ll try to explain it to you. Or if a student knows the answer, they’ll let him

explain. They don't pretend to know it all. (as cited in Lake, 1966, p. 6) Warren described what sounds like a successful interaction with a contemporary peer tutor, someone who would accept the students' questions on the students' own terms, acknowledge that students brought their own expertise, and arrive at answers together.

Reflecting on his time as a TICEP tutor, Floyd H. Griffin (2009) recalled that "our task itself was hard" because the students were sharecroppers, farmers, and laborers who did not immediately trust the tutors, who were mostly from middle-class families (p. 49). However, more difficult than bridging class divides, TICEP tutors faced White supremacist violence. Tutor Lucenia Dunn remembered driving her tutees home and being tailed by a truck with several White men brandishing guns: "I was shaking; the children were shaking. That's terror" (as cited in Jones, 2018, p. 162). Soon after Dunn's frightening drive, Klansmen killed civil rights worker Viola Liuzzo on the same road; every day, TICEP tutors drove past the tire marks where her car crashed (Jones, 2018, p. 162). Then, in January 1966, a White supremacist murdered SNCC organizer and Tuskegee student Sammy Younge at a gas station in the town. Police called Phillips in the middle of the night to come identify Younge's body (Long, 2018, 50:30). Civil rights workers have marked Younge's murder as the tipping point in the move toward Black Power in Tuskegee (Griffin, 2009, p. 59).

TISEP/TICEP was short-lived, though its legacy for many tutors and students was enduring. They found themselves coming together across class differences to fight for the right to learn. Grant funding ended in 1967, and Phillips, tired of "straddling a high rope," soon moved on to a new career that carried his commitments for social justice to development projects in Africa (Phillips, n.d.; Long, 2018, 01:14:45).

A Methodology of Legibility

Now that you have had a chance to look in the eyes of B. B. Walcott, Coragreen Johnstone, Anne Cooke, Hugh Gloster, and Bert Phillips, read these visionaries' words, and imagine these moments in history, we want to explain our approach to this disciplinary history, drawing from two lodestars of African American rhetorics, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Keith Gilyard. Royster's *Traces of a Stream* (2000), a study of African American women's literacy practices, inspired our article's structural choices and our treatment of our five human subjects. Her description of her book's methods appeared in the final chapter, a structure that enabled Royster to spotlight her subjects foremost and then offer her history-telling methods as a final takeaway to inspire further research. The structure of our study aims to do the same. In addition, we adhered to her interpretation of African American figures as "agents of change rather than simple victims of oppression and dominance" (Royster, 2000, p. 253).

Our approach presumes that the history we tell has implications for the whole field of writing center studies, not strictly for Black writing center professionals or for HBCU writing centers.

We further took Royster's (2000) cue to train our eyes on sources primarily written by Black writers for Black readers. Locating those sources required research methods that accounted for America's history of racial exclusion and the silences in HWCU archives about the work of African American scholars and students. Thus, for our readers to understand our methods for researching African American scholars, we first need to be explicit about where we *didn't* find sources before describing where we did find them. With the exception of the Camille Billops and James V. Hatch Archives at Emory University's Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, we found no useful material in HWCU archives. Further, the academic journals sponsored by the field's largest professional organization—journals such as *English Journal* and *College English*—yielded few insights. Instead, we found materials through online searches of the HBCU Library Alliance's Digital Collection, the Internet Archive, the HathiTrust Digital Library, Google Books, and ProQuest's Historical Black Newspapers⁹ databases, as well as issues of the *CLA Journal* and *Quarterly Review of Higher Education Among Negroes*. Those searches brought us to not only academic articles but also Black newspapers, newsletters, oral histories, correspondence, memoirs, and yearbooks. Furthermore, we visited eight HBCU archives—those at Alabama State University, the Atlanta University Center Consortium, Bennett College, Hampton University, Howard University, Morgan State University, Philander Smith College, and Tuskegee University—as well as Emory's Billops-Hatch Archives, the Alabama Department of Archives and History, the Library of Congress, and the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.¹⁰ In particular, we worked closely with several archivists who serve as stewards of these foundational stories of our field: Dana Chandler and Cheryl Ferguson at the Tuskegee University Archives, Danisha Baker-Whitaker at the Bennett College Thomas F. Holgate Library's archives, Donzella D. Maupin at the Hampton University Archives, and Tiffany Atwater Lee at the Atlanta University Center Archives Research Center. The deep knowledge held by these archivists of their schools' histories and of the people who populated these past accounts opened new paths for our research. The documents these archivists helped us find call for more capacious understandings of what constitutes writing center work.

9 ProQuest has recently moved the historical Black newspapers into a larger collection of historical newspapers.

10 Grants from the International Writing Centers Association and the Conference on College Composition and Communication made this archival work possible.

Our second guiding light was Gilyard's 1999 article "African American Contributions to Composition Studies," which informed how we selected figures to focus on. Gilyard took on a subject he confessed was too massive to contain in an article. (We empathize.) So he made bold choices about whom to include and omit. Gilyard was refreshingly upfront about what he called "my bias" in making these choices (p. 626). He selected subjects whose thinking "emphasizes critical pedagogy and values Black culture" (p. 626). In making our choices about which stories to tell, we took seriously the admonition B. B. Walcott (1981) offered when looking back on present-day critiques of Booker T. Washington: "You have to interpret things and compare them with the period in which they took place" (p. 4).¹¹ Thus, we chose people who employed what we have termed throughout "strategic literacies" in response to their times and places. Here we can elaborate in more depth than we did previously: By strategic literacies, we mean literacies that attend to *kairos* (timeliness) and *nomos* (convention) and mobilize modalities of survival, social mobility, and resistance—essential literacies for HBCU students. In favoring strategic literacies, we focused less on the progressiveness of a pedagogy as seen through today's lens than we did its affordances to particular students in particular historical moments and places. This frame made it possible to examine pedagogies as responses to the White supremacist violence that shot like a lightning bolt through our protagonists' lives. And it made it possible to confront the harms of everyday racism that pervaded this history. Certainly the activist intentions that were bound up in, for example, Player's work and Phillips's approach to literacy instruction inspire us today. But by favoring strategic literacies, we also came to appreciate Walcott's job-readiness pedagogy or Johnstone's standard English pedagogy as responses to the most immediate, pressing needs for activist-students' safety.

Strategic literacy makes the otherwise confounding realities of Black writing center administration legible: Tuskegee's Walcott talking about writing pedagogy at a conference on rural life. Johnstone's Remedial Writing Clinic at Bennett College paired with its Clothing Clinic. Phillips at Tuskegee both training students to tutor and to cover their heads and necks when police attacked them. Hampton Institute's decision to hire a drama professor, Cooke, to oversee its writing laboratory. Gloster's decision to build radio studios alongside writing laboratories at Hampton. Each career configuration, local systems of diplomacy, and disseminated wisdoms became what each figure needed at their times and places. By contextualizing these leaders' stories to see the enmeshment of writing instruction with protest literacies, literacies of comportment and dress, criminal justice literacies, radio literacies, and so

11 Used with permission of Tuskegee University Archives.

on emerge. These literacies equipped Black students to fight for economic mobility, for social justice, and, in many cases, for survival.

An Invitation

Our aim in focusing on five figures was to demonstrate a methodology that makes the depth of Black writing center directors' historical contributions newly legible. What follows is a timeline of African American contributions to writing centers, a timeline that illustrates that these figures were not anomalies (see Table 1.) The timeline shows each mention we found of HBCU writing centers and African American writing center administrators from 1937 to 1979. The timeline's length may disrupt the flow of your reading experience. We place it in the body of the article rather than in an appendix to convey the historical disruption this evidence represents: Though typically absent from disciplinary histories, Black writing center administrators' contributions were ubiquitous.

Table 1

Timeline of Writing Tutorial Programs at HBCUs from 1937–1979

(Names of Black writing center administrators are bolded. Unless otherwise specified, unbolded names indicate that we have not been able to ascertain the person's racial identity.)¹²

Year	Description
1937	Tuskegee Institute's School of Education Director William A. Clark notes, "They have recently initiated a writing laboratory," likely led by Bess Bolden " B. B. " Walcott (Harris, 1937).
Pre-1939	Alabama State University (then Alabama State Teachers College) starts a writing laboratory (Basler, 1942, p. 142).
1939	English department faculty member Coragrene Johnstone announces the creation of the Bennett College Remedial Writing Clinic (Johnstone, 1939, p. 92).

12 We ascertained people's racial identities in various ways: through their own self-identification in their writing, through Census data and other publicly available records, through interviews, through their membership in groups or organizations that were racially exclusive, etc.

Year	Description
1941	Atlanta University (now Clark Atlanta University) English Department Chair Nathaniel Tillman announces an initiative to “offer intensive work in rhetoric through individual conferences” for graduate thesis writers. Lucy Lee Clemmons (later Lucy C. Grigsby) provides the conferences (“Students to Get Aid,” 1941, p. 7).
1942	Arthur Burke leads the Hampton Institute Communications Center, which houses a writing laboratory (“Hampton Names Four,” 1945).
1943	Anne Cooke (later Anne Cooke Reid) begins directing the Hampton Institute Communications Center (“Anne Cooke Takes Over,” 1943, p. 2).
1945	White professor Margaret L. Montgomery writes about a writing laboratory started at Talladega College as part of a new communications initiative (Montgomery, 1947, p. 101).
1946	Hugh Gloster begins directing the Hampton Institute Communications Center (“Three New Professors,” 1946, p. 2).
	Blyden Jackson directs the Fisk University Writing Laboratory in 1946 or 1947 (“Rosenwald Awards,” 1947, p. 22; B. Jackson, 1991).
1947	Arthur Clifton “Clif” Lamb creates the Morgan State College (now University) Communications Center to “facilitate the teaching of speech, radio, remedial reading, English and dramatics” (Rea, 1951, p. A3).
1949	Wilberforce University English Department Chair Geraldine Jackson opens a writing laboratory (“Wilberforce Teacher,” 1949, p. 3).
1950	Savannah State College (now Savannah State University) Department of Language and Literature Chair J. Randolph Fisher announces the founding of the English Workshop (Fisher, 1951), an idea conceived by English instructor Luetta B. Colvin (later Luetta Colvin Upshur) (Georgia State College, 1949, p. 5).
	Troy State Teachers College (now Troy University) opens “a communications laboratory for remedial instruction,” the first mention of which we find in 1950 (Harrill, 1950, p. 326)
1951	Lincoln University of Missouri English Department Chair Cecil A. Blue announces the opening of the English Clinic (“Undergraduates Urged,” 1951, p. 6).
1955	English Department Head Ivan E. Taylor announces the creation of the Howard University Writing Laboratory (St. Clair, 1956, p. 57).
1956	Nettie Parler founds the South Carolina State College Communications Center, which contains the Writing Clinic (Parler, 1958, pp. 45–47).

Year	Description
	Tennessee State University (then Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State College) opens its Communications Clinic “to aid in the development of oral as well as written speech” (Brooks, 1956, p. 2).
1957	Frances Austin founds the Southern University (Louisiana) Writing Clinic (“CLA News,” 1958, pp. 70–71).
Pre-1959	Morgan State College (now Morgan State University) reports that it has a writing clinic for juniors whose writing has “regressed” (J. S. R., 1958, p. 16).
Pre-1960	The Knoxville College English Department hosts the Writing Laboratory (“Knoxville Lays New Emphasis,” 1959, p. 20).
1960	Anne Peace Tolliver founds the English Center at St. Augustine’s College (now St. Augustine’s University) in North Carolina (“Accent on Academic Excellence,” 1961, p. 14; “Oral-Aural Skills,” 1961, p. 11).
1961	Naomi Chivers leads the Spelman College English Clinic (Jones Garrett, 1963, p. 8).
Pre-1963	Virginia State University (then College) has a Writing Lab beginning sometime before 1963 (“Virginia State Set,” 1962, p. A18).
1964	Elizabeth Hamlett is at the Virginia State College Writing Laboratory (“CLA News,” 1964, p. 284).
	English Department Chair John O. Crawford offers individual writing instruction and White English professor Amelia Altvater offers individual grammar instruction in the new Bennett College Developmental Services Program, directed by Richard L. Fields (“Make Good Better,” 1964, p. 7).
1965	Percival Bertrand “Bert” Phillips forms the Tuskegee Institute Summer Education Program and later the Tuskegee Institute Continuing Education Program (“Tuskegee Institute Given Funds,” 1965, p. 5).
1966	Carol C. Jones and Katherine Dobbins found the Elizabeth City State Teachers College (now Elizabeth City State University) Writing Laboratory (“Nothing but Writing,” 1967, p. 8).
1967	Nine Lincoln University of Missouri English and Speech Department faculty, again including Cecil A. Blue , start a new Writing Clinic (“Help in Writing,” 1967, pp. 1, 4).
	Jessie Lemon Brown begins directing the Hampton Institute (now University) Communications Center, which includes the Writing Laboratory (“College Happenings,” 1973, p. 21).

Year	Description
1968	Ann Francis and Harrison O’Neal start the Chattanooga City College (now University of Tennessee at Chattanooga) Writing Laboratory (“Chattanooga City College’s Purpose,” 1968, pp. 45–46).
	Tougaloo College receives a grant for a “speech and writing clinic” (“Tougaloo Gets,” 1968, p. 12).
	North Carolina College at Durham (now North Carolina Central University) funds a new building to house its Writing Lab (“Budget Request,” 1968, p. 6). It is unclear whether the lab existed in another location before this.
1969	Bluefield State College starts its Composition Skills Laboratory for first-year undergraduates. English Department faculty additionally run a separate Writing Clinic at this time (“BSC Sets Up,” 1970, p. 15).
	Delaware State College (now University) English Department Chair Winifred Harris opens the Writing Laboratory (“Delaware State Offerings,” 1969, p. 19 ; “Colleges,” 1970, p. 12).
	White professor Jane Margle founds the university-funded Lincoln University (Pennsylvania) Writing Lab (“Lincoln Offers,” 1970, p. 1). Louise Nichols directed the lab through much of the 1970s and 1980s (D. Winchester, personal communication, December 29, 2020).
1971	Charyn Sutton opens the federally funded Lincoln University (Pennsylvania) Reading/Writing Lab to work with disadvantaged students (“Ten Years of TIME,” 1981, p. 2).
Pre-1972	The Fisk University Center for Intensive Instruction in Writing Skills comes into existence sometime before 1972. Fisk English Professor and 1984 Conference on College Composition and Communication’s (CCCC) Chair Rosentene Bennett Purnell writes the Center into a grant for the university’s 1972 Freshman Interdisciplinary Program (FIP), aligning the Center’s individual instruction with FIP’s goal to foreground “the intellectual relevance of the Black experience” (Purnell, 1973, p. 47; see also pp. 49–50).
1973	Florida A&M University creates a writing laboratory (Parler, 1982, pp. 21–23).
	Xavier University of Louisiana creates the Composition Workshop to tutor writers (Bell, 1982, p. 1).
1974	English Department Chair Wilma Lassiter founds the Winston Salem State College (now University) Writing Clinic with Cora Massey, Hazel Harvey , and Carrie Robinson (“English Department,” 1974, p. 2).

Year	Description
1975	Vera Powell founds the Delaware State College (now University) Communications Skills Center (“Delstate to Open,” 1975, p. 7).
1976	White professor George O’Neill opens the Savannah State College (now University) writing laboratory as part of its English Communicative Skills Project (Savannah State College, 1978, p. 4; Hall, 1991, pp. 99–100).
	Virginia Union University’s Writing Skills Laboratory opens (Parler, 1982, pp. 49–51).
1977	Fayetteville State University’s Division of General Studies hosts “Recycling Programs,” which include an English laboratory that helps students “overcome individual deficiencies” (Fayetteville State University, 1977, p. 67).
1979	Beulah Gloster founds the Morehouse College Writing Skills Laboratory (Thornton, 1979, p. 3).
	Shirley L. Coleman starts the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff English Writing Lab (Coleman, 1981, p. 8).
	White professor Donna Grout creates the Lincoln University of Missouri Writing Lab (Grout, 1978, pp. 2–3).

The timeline’s gaps may be glaring to readers who have local knowledge of particular writing centers. We hope those gaps will motivate more research, further proving that those whose stories we have told are not outliers but examples of a far-reaching historical reality.

The long elision of narratives of African American writing center leaders has produced a simply inaccurate picture of our field. As Staci M. Perryman-Clark & Collin Lamont Craig (2019) wrote, “In an era when we as public intellectuals are charged with making the case that black lives matter, we must affirm and acknowledge that HBCU pedagogical narratives matter, too!” (p. 22). In their edited collection, *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration: From the Margins to the Center*, Perryman-Clark & Craig asserted that, while HBCUs play a significant role in how black students succeed, our field must acknowledge that Afrocentric work and contributions of Black WPAs have always benefitted all students and that failing to affirm these narratives exacerbates the alienation that today’s Black writing center administrators express. We hear these expressions in our epigram from Talisha Haltiwanger Morrison and in powerful International Writing Centers Association keynote addresses by Neisha-Anne Green (2018) and Kendra L. Mitchell & Robert E. Randolph, Jr. (2019). Even though Black writing center administrators have been doing innovative work since the 1930s, the field was and largely remains racially segregated between HBCUs and HWCUs. And that separation breeds

inequality. As HBCU faculty members Karen Keaton Jackson, Hope Jackson, & Dawn N. Hicks Tafari (2019) pointed out, structural inequalities have led to chronic underfunding at many HBCUs, along with higher faculty teaching loads, more service, and less time for research. Thus, HBCU writing center administrators have to be “hustling,” they argued; they have to do more with less (pp. 196–97). That need for hustling both spurs innovation—which is why, for instance, technological innovation is a recurring theme in HBCU writing center history—and burdens community-engaged administrators—another theme.

In the face of alienation, history-telling can be reparative: It can show present-day Black writing center administrators they are walking a well-worn path. We hope to entice others to join us in tracing that path. For instance, one might study the work of Nathaniel “N. P.” Tillman, who helped create a graduate student writing support service at Atlanta University in 1941—possibly the first of its kind at any university—the same year he helped lead a national protest against the racially segregated National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Convention, forcing the organization to integrate (“Students to Get Aid,” 1941; Brown, 2007). Or one might uncover the history of Arthur Clifton “Clif” Lamb, a radio and television writer who in 1947 created the innovative Morgan State College Communications Center after forming a similar program at Johnson C. Smith University (Rea, 1951). One might explore the tale of Nettie Parler, who founded the South Carolina State University (then College) Communications Center in 1956, around the time she led the effort to integrate her state’s teacher organization (Parler, 1958). Or one might grapple with the complicated figure of Naomi Chivers, who directed the Spelman College English Clinic beginning in 1961, and in her work as Dean of Students stirred controversy for her stances on student pregnancies and the Black Power Movement (Jones Garrett, 1963; Lansley, 2004; Graham & Poulson, 2006, p. 240). One might delve further into the history of Jessie Lemon Brown’s leadership of the Hampton Institute’s Communications Center and its connection to Brown’s work as the first co-president of the CCC Black Caucus (Gilyard, 1999, p. 636). One might examine the career of Charyn Sutton, the Black Power activist who founded the Lincoln University (Pennsylvania) Reading/Writing Lab in 1971 after working for SNCC, where she campaigned to enroll Black high school and college students “before they are completely brainwashed by ‘the man’s (white)’ educational system” (Porter, 1966, p. 5). Do we run on? We don’t apologize; many stories remain to be told.

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Sue Mendelsohn is the Director of the Columbia University Writing Center. She is working on a book project that examines the teaching of writing and other literacies to Black college students during the Jim Crow era.

Clarissa Walker is Director, Rhode Island College Writing Center, where she is also a First Year Writing Program Instructor in the English Department.