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ANTIRACIST CHALLENGES TO WHITEWASHED PEDAGOGIES: DIVERSIFYING  
FIRST-YEAR WRITING FROM A POSITION OF WHITENESS

By

Angela Morris

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for a Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

English: Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication

University of Memphis

August 2023

## Acknowledgements

It seems an impossible task to truly do justice in acknowledging just how collaborative this dissertation was and how many people guided, supported, and influenced me as a researcher and writer. A few pages cannot capture my love and appreciation for all those involved in this project, but I'll do my best.

First, I must acknowledge my dissertation chair, mentor, and friend, Katherine Fredlund. She introduced me to “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” my first semester of the Ph.D. program, which subsequently led me to change my area of concentration in the department and shift my entire focus of research. She was the first person to challenge my predilection for white language supremacy, and she taught me what it truly means to be an ethical and methodical researcher. Katie’s the epitome of the person you want in your corner. She never stopped believing in me even when I stopped believing in myself. She’s the perfect amalgam of support, encouragement, advocacy, and empathy, while also refusing to suffer any B.S. or half-assed work. She always knew when I needed encouragement and support and when I needed to be challenged and pushed. She ultimately guided me through every step of this process while also putting up with my stubbornness and endless shenanigans.

This work is also due largely in part to each member of my committee. Terrance Tucker remains a monumental figure in my own racial consciousness growth. He put all the right books in my hands at all the right times. He invited me to have difficult conversations, always posing the right questions to help me develop my understanding of functions of race through an intersectional lens. Liz Lane also served as a prominent guide to intersectional feminist work. I’ve watched her practice what she preaches every day in the classroom and in her own scholarship. Her door always remains open for guidance and support, and she continues to

remind me just how punk rock this kind of work truly is. Joseph Jones brought years of experience to this project, as a former writing program administrator, historian of the field, and expert in assessment. He remains continually generous and open, offering unique perspectives to this work and posing questions that continue to shape and develop the critical thinking behind this dissertation. I cannot imagine a better committee.

This work would have also not been possible without the collaboration and support from my fellow colleagues in the University of Memphis (UofM) Ph.D. program. Brennah Hutchison and Sylvia Barnes were instrumental collaborators within these studies, and Alexandra Thomas, Shanna Cameron, and Shima Faresh served as infinite inspiration and sounding boards throughout this process. To all my UofM colleagues who participated in these studies and trusted me with your narratives and experiences, I seriously owe you one. Also, to the 160 undergraduate students at UofM who also participated in these studies, your generosity, voices, thoughts, and feedback are at the core of this dissertation.

To my California friends, who made sure I was fed and took the occasional break while writing the second half of this dissertation, I could have never finished this project without your love, support, and friendship. And to my Oklahomies who were there from the very beginning to the very end, I owe you everything! Hailey McDermid, Katie Nicholson, and Kelsey Lugsch gave me love and unwavering support from the moment I applied to Ph.D. programs all the way through my dissertation defense and beyond. I love you each more than I can ever put into words as you've been there for me through thick and thin in ways that could fill an entire book series.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I dedicate this work to my goddaughter Lelu Moon. May we continue to work to ensure you and your generation grow-up and thrive in a more antiracist and equitable society.

## **Abstract**

Within the current kairotic moment where political attacks against Critical Race Theory and “woke” curriculums continue to gain traction, this dissertation refutes such attacks by offering investigations on how to best implement more inclusive classrooms that explore and examine the intersections of race and writing using antiracist pedagogical approaches. This dissertation features three separate mixed-methods studies all set within first-year writing (FYW) classrooms. Each study engages with one of the three questions: (1) how do we challenge white language supremacy in our writing classrooms through encouraging and investigating code-meshing, (2) how do challenge predilections towards white meritocratic discourse through the integration of racially diverse rhetorical traditions into core FYW curriculum, and (3) how do we train culturally responsible and socially effective teachers to engage with these topics?

Traditionally, scholarship regarding acceptance towards linguistic and rhetorical diversity, as well as antiracist teacher training, have utilized a top-down approach (scholar/teacher to scholars/teacher then to student). However, all three featured studies were designed to center student voices and feedback on these issues, therefore reversing the flow in a bottom-up manner (student to scholar/teacher then to scholar/teacher). In centering students’ thoughts on these conversations, results engage with lesson plans designed to encourage students to code-mesh within their academic and professional prose. Results also offer vetted curriculum designs and classroom assignments that pair both Greco-Roman rhetorical traditions and African American rhetorics side-by-side in core FYW curriculum. This unique pairing includes racially diverse theoretical framework from which students can appropriately analyze and apply these various traditions within their writing. Lastly, this dissertation offers tangible steps towards training graduate Teaching Assistants (TA) on these antiracist approaches. Such steps include

teacher-training reading lists, guided discussion prompts, exercises on antiracist assessment practices, and ideas for antiracist professional development opportunities.

This dissertation also acknowledges the white positionality of its author and therefore situates this research as supplementary text in the antiracist movement—to be read in tandem with scholarship by our colleagues of color. Testimonials written by the author and woven throughout this dissertation prompt discussions on how to best serve as an antiracist ally.

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## **Chapter 1: Confronting Whitewashed Pedagogies: A Baseline Understanding of the Intersections of Race and Writing**

The first winter break after having entered the Ph.D. program at the University of Memphis in 2017, I went back to Oklahoma City to visit friends and family. I sat on a second-hand couch in my friends' living room—a space adorned with Joe Strummer paintings, vintage horror movie prints, and skate-deck art—as a small group caught me up on what I had missed the last four months while living in Tennessee. We shared stories while Netflix played in the background.

At one point, there was a brief pause in the conversation, and Mark, who had his eyes on the television, asked, “What’s that name you would’ve been called in high school as a white kid who talked black?”

One of my friends spoke up, “A Wigger?”

“Yeah, that’s it,” Mark responded with the same indifference he’d used to ask the question.

While my friends’ attentions moved elsewhere, I sat quietly for a moment. I could have easily answered Mark as well. I immediately knew he was referring to the conjoined title for a “Wannabe N\*\*\*\*\*r.” I, like everyone else in that living room, all white, had heard white kids who talked black called that in grade school. If you had asked anyone in the room that day what it meant to “talk black” our responses would have been less centered around a Geneva Smitherman-inspired conversation of the historical elements of Black Vernacular English and more about the cultural stigma of the dialect and accent. It would have leaned less on problematizing why one version of English is perceived as “ghetto” and segregated from

standardized notions of language in America and more on why the dialect sounded weird coming from the mouths of white kids.

Maybe that's why, regrettably for the first time in my life, that question and response made me uncomfortable. Maybe it was because I had just spent my first semester in graduate school feeling regularly uncomfortable by the things I learned in my African American Literature course, like Toni Morrison, Ralph Ellison, and E. Franklin Frazier's critiques of how black students were only demeaned "properly" educated if they utilized white English standards and white etiquette. Or maybe it was because I had recently been shocked to learn that my elderly neighbor, born and raised in the South, had vivid memories of his grandfather who was a former slave—a reality that helped me understand how recent that so-called distant past is. Or maybe it reminded me of feeling unable to respond to one of my freshman students my first semester of teaching who wrote that he loved reading the dictionary and learning new words but felt he must hide this passion so his friends wouldn't think he was trying to "act white."

"What would you call a black guy in high school who spoke like a white kid?" I asked Mark, my mind still using training-wheels when it came to investigating whiteness, my own included.

Mark shrugged. "Normal."

Normal?

Years prior, I'd watched Mark get into a near physical altercation with a white man in the Asian District of OKC who'd called an employee at a Vietnamese restaurant a racial slur. Mark had grown up watching videos of the Clash at Rock Against Racism call on others to join against the "Take England Back" mentality of the 1970s following a rise in Pakistani immigration.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rock Against Racism was a well-attended outdoor concert held in 1978 and organized by a grassroots antiracist movement.

Mark spoke openly in favor of Black Lives Matter after the tragic murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012. Yet this conversation left me wondering, were we in fact the white liberals Richard Wright responded to with *Native Son*? The white liberals Martin Luther King Jr. said were more dangerous than the KKK? The white liberals who in fact allowed our whiteness to blind us from the various nuanced and daily ways we'd actually been acculturated into white supremacist society.

Like me, Mark grew up in a street punk scene where the impulse is to fight for the disadvantaged and challenge oppressive authorities. But also like me, Mark was born white and into a racialized society that projects a racialized understanding of American English and meritocratic discourse. And even after decades of a fight-the-system, protect-the-outcast mentality, we hadn't yet learned just how successfully we both had been acculturated into the oppressive white system we thought we so vehemently opposed. We never challenged why white versions of American English or anglopatriarchial rhetorical traditions are often perceived as THE normal, forcing any other ethnicity's dialect, accented speech, or rhetorics to be abnormal. With approximately nineteen years of schooling under my belt (seven of which I spent in a university for a bachelor's degree in English, a bachelor's degree in Journalism, and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing), I had never once been asked to even think about the segregation of Englishes. In the seven years I worked as a professional writer, editing the writing of diverse peoples, I'd never once been challenged to confront my own myopic view of what constitutes "professional/acceptable" writing—a myopic view heavily influenced by my whiteness. My entire life I recognized the differences of Englishes spoken in the United States, but was never challenged to discuss it, much less investigate and celebrate those differences. This new

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awareness that slowly began forming that first semester shook me. Hard. In many ways, it felt like both the roots of my studies and the career I'd built throughout the last twenty-nine years had been planted on tainted soil.

The only way I felt I could move forward as a person, a scholar, a writer, and a teacher was to begin reading a lot more on this topic. I quickly learned the very conversations I was beginning to have with myself, others had had out loud for decades. I learned how others struggled with the internalization of white language supremacy and how they challenged it. I started with one question: How can we halt the nourishment of white language supremacy and stop it from preventing the growth and validity of other racialized Englishes? In other words, how could I halt any further growth of my own white language supremacist ideologies and breakdown their damaging structures before I perpetuated more harm. That question quickly grew into another: How has white supremacy influenced my predilections for white meritocratic discourse and anglopatriarchal rhetorical traditions? What racially diverse rhetorical theories were out there, theories I'd never heard of that were born from communities of color? Then another question arose: How do we successfully equip teachers to challenge these notions of white language supremacy and white meritocratic discourse and rhetorics in our own classes? How do we, as teachers, resist these whitewashed pedagogies?

As I read and read and read, a healthy consciousness of my own positionality within the context of race slowly grew its first bud. Without knowing it, I was watering the seeds for this dissertation. I was taking the inaugural step towards my own antiracist pedagogical journey. I began investigating how my own whiteness intersects with the wonderful scholarship that exists within these three particular areas:

(1) the challenging of white language supremacy,

- (2) the investigation of racially diverse rhetorical traditions, and
- (3) the means to train culturally responsible and socially effective teachers to engage with these topics in their first-year-writing (FYW) classrooms.

I began conceptualizing what allyship looks like within these topics. How could I build supplementary scholarship to be read in tandem with these voices of color? Where were gaps that I could help fill? How could I further help hold up a mirror to a white audience, the way the mirror had been held up to me? This dissertation therefore asks questions less discussed in these areas:

- (1) While scholarship dismantling white language supremacy through methods such as code-meshing is rich, how do we adapt these theories into praxis for our FYW students? How specifically do we encourage all students to embrace their own diverse Englishes and incorporate them within their own writing?
- (2) While a lot of fantastic work has been done to establish the rhetorical traditions of racially marginalized communities, how do we incorporate these diverse rhetorical traditions into our core FYW curriculum, rather than solely rely on the upper-class, heteronormative, anglopatriarchal rhetorical theory that for too long has dominated our field of writing studies?
- (3) How do we successfully train and support graduate teaching assistants to incorporate the antiracist pedagogical practices born from discussions of racially diverse linguistics and rhetorics? What tactics should we share to help all teachers productively investigate and celebrate the intersections of race and writing with our students.

Before diving into how these questions are addressed in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, it's important to first highlight how race has previously been presented within the

overall field of writing studies. Therefore, the following section of this chapter offers a literature review on the intersections of race and writing before providing definitions for antiracism to be used moving forward. Next, this chapter discusses the political context regarding antiracist pedagogies that existed during the early stages of this dissertation. Finally, this chapter outlines the content of the chapters to come while also addressing the theoretical frameworks utilized to answer the above questions as well as specifics regarding why a bottom-up approach for finding said answers became necessary.

### **Race and Writing Studies**

In 2009, Jennifer Clary-Lemon published a seminal piece investigating the rhetoric of race in two top-tier journals, *College Composition and Communication* and *College English*, since the 1990s. In this study, she developed six subgrouping categories of language used to replace the word “race”: (1) marginalized communities, which includes lexical choices like “culturally disadvantaged,” “underprivileged,” “minority,” “at risk,” “other,” etc.; (2) diversity, often referred to as “cultural diversity,” “of color,” “ethnicity,” “multiculturalism,” “inclusivity,” etc.; (3) difference; (4) authentic experience; (5) linguistic variation; (6) and social construct (W6). These substitutions, Clary-Lemon contends, which occurred nearly 150 times, often mask the word “race,” as if the word alone produced too much discomfort for dominant (i.e. white) society, a reality that negatively impacted the field of writing studies for decades.

While Clary-Lemon specifically tracks these two key journals in the 1990s and 2000s, the avoidance of and/or problematic references to race within writing studies can be drawn back significantly further. Curriculum in the United States higher education system has long lacked diversity. From the opening of Harvard in 1636 to the first American-centric university, UPenn, in 1740 to the inaugural Historical Black College and University, Cheyney University, in 1837

and beyond, curriculums in this country, and in the field of English/rhetoric particularly, have longed been centered on whiteness (Mailloux, 83-96; Frazier, 60-85). It's not until after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s that we see the cultures, histories, and languages of non-white racial groups gain notoriety as fields of study within academia, first with Black Studies introduced at San Francisco State College in 1968 (Rooks, para 2). That same year, California State University at Los Angeles implemented the first Chicana(o) and Latina(o) Studies department (Escobar, para. 2), and two years later, the First Convocation of American Scholars at Princeton University called for the development of "Native American Studies as an Academic Discipline" (Cook-Lynn, 9).<sup>2</sup> With the development of studies into cultures presented outside a Eurocentric (and white supremacist) lens, sociolinguists began investigating the language uses of these historically marginalized communities, forcing writing studies to confront the intersection of race and writing. While such conversations first became an area for discussion at the College Composition Communication Conference in 1968, the term "race" was substituted with "diversity" in the description for Panel 9. Conversations on the panel quickly and problematically turned to the "ghetto" language of "Negros" ("Workshop Report" 247)—a demeaning adjective all too commonly linked to the Englishes spoken by people of color.

This formal masking or side-stepping of "race" under terms like "diversity" and "multiculturalism" led Pendergast, in 1998, to explore "race as the absent presence in composition studies... undertheorized, unproblematized, underinvestigated," though still very much present. Pendergast confronts how this dictated invisibility allowed no means to examine "the racialized atmosphere of the university and no way to account for the impact of the

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<sup>2</sup> These three highlighted areas of study are in no way inclusive of all communities of color in the United States nor are they indicative of a vast and diverse area of study when it comes to a racialized focus in academia. I mention Black, Indigenous, and Latina(o) studies to demonstrate a growth in diversifying areas of focus.



persistence of prejudice on writers and texts” (36). Following Pendergast’s lead, Victor Villanueva investigated the rhetorics and precedents of racism in his 1999 article, going all the way back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and denouncing the masking of race under umbrella terms like multiculturalism. He offers that while “multiculturalism appeal[s] to the common sense in ways that can address racism,” it’s fails to “improve things much, not even at the sites where students are exposed to such things” (650). Goodbe et al. contend that within the embrace of multiculturalist education, which gained currency in the 1980s, discussions of race and racism, among white people particularly, “often either fail to recognize difference (‘I don’t see race’) or uncritically celebrate difference (‘Everybody eat some Chinese food for Lunar New Year!’). They then address the problematic nature of how both referenced approaches “flatten the difference” (74), a common critique that led to the post-multiculturalism movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The post-multiculturalism approach sought to be more accommodating of diverse cultural beliefs and practices. Yet, as Barlow states, it continued to lack a critical dimension to the celebration: “one that generates awareness of contemporary racisms and that dares to prioritize new understandings of, discourse on, and potential solutions to emerging and entrenched forms of injustice” (414). Pimentel et al. further problematize the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s “diversity approach to teaching writing,” as they find it to simply be the “infusion of non-WEA [White European American] text into an already existing WEA writing curriculum” (110). They contend such an approach creates an “othering effect” as well as negates the ability to deconstruct race and thus perpetuates race’s undertheorized, unproblematized, and underinvestigated structure.

When looking at race, rhetorics of whiteness cannot go unchecked, especially for white scholars engaging in post-multicultural approaches. For more than 300 years, the academy built

all its curriculum through the lens of whiteness, particularly heteronormative, anglopatriarchal experiences of whiteness. Therefore, as Pimentel et al. discuss above, it's important to acknowledge the ways in which curriculum celebrating and investigating historically marginalized groups can and have been polluted through white supremacist lenses. Pedagogical approaches that illuminate the cultures and languages of Black, Indigenous, Latina(o), Asian American, Pacific Islander, and other racial minorities, must be allowed to do so without being co-opted by white supremacist biases. This can be difficult as we've all been acculturated into white supremacist society on some level. Therefore, scholarship dedicated to investigating whiteness and it's far reaching impacts must also be considered.

In 2005, *Rhetoric Review* dedicated a special issue on whiteness studies within rhetoric and composition in which nearly all contributors called for "making visible the invisibility of whiteness" (Greis and Bratta, 417). This invisibility of whiteness allows for Eurocentric and white supremacist lenses to escape criticism. In their introduction to *Rhetoric of Whiteness: Postracial Hauntings in Popular Cultural, Social Media and Education*, Kennedy et al. call on scholars to "contemplate how whiteness haunts twenty-first-century U.S. culture" and "submit antiracist and antiwhiteness projects that expose as fantasy the idea that we live in a post-racial world" (4). The collection's editors situate this call in the wake of what one anonymous reviewer deemed a stagnant demise of white culture studies (1). The reviewer's perceived stagnation reflects the false post-racial narrative proliferated in the United States after the inauguration of its first black president in 2008. However, Kennedy et al. highlight the fallacies of such a belief as their introduction responds to the events in Ferguson in 2014. Two years after the publication of Kennedy et al.'s edited collection, Frankie Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young discussed specific incidences in which such haunting whiteness continues its permeation in society.

Through Condon and Young's anecdotes, they challenge readers to investigate the intersections of race and writing through a critical lens—a lens that denounces the othering of non-white individuals and critiques white frameworks of Englishes.

In their introduction to the edited collection *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*, Condon and Young expose how words like “professional” are often used as synonyms for “white” when discussing language use. Both Condon and Young recount instances when their own Black Englishes were weaponized as “unprofessional,” a prevalent microaggression mirroring how my friend Mark, as discussed in my opening, unmaliciously yet still harmfully conflates white Englishes as the “normal” Englishes. Condon and Young contend such microaggressions function to conceal the benefits of linguistic difference in writing studies. Young previously highlighted such concealment as a key function of white language supremacy in “Nah, We Straight,” an article that addresses the dismissal and segregation of any linguistic difference outside of white language meritocratic discourse. Such dismissal, Young contends, is founded on the false belief that linguistic diversity is not compatible with academic and professional writing.<sup>3</sup> Condon and Young assert that in order for the field to address the often-uncomfortable conversation of race and the problem of racism, the field must first unveil how racial prejudice intersects with writing and then “counter [such prejudice] with antiracism” (7).

But how do we define antiracism? In 2000, Bonnett offers a broad definition of the term as “forms of thought and/or practice that seek to confront, eradicate and/or ameliorate racism” (4). Confront, eradicate, ameliorate—all active verbs. For Ibram X. Kendi, the ACTIVE part of antiracism is crucial. In his book, *How to Be an Antiracist*, Kendi asserts that simply claiming

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<sup>3</sup> This particular conversation regarding linguistic diversity will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

something or someone is “not racist” isn’t antiracism (9). Such a claim neglects just how intrinsically woven racism is within everyday functions of our society—the society in which we were all born and which influences us all. Therefore, antiracism can’t be passive; it can’t be neutral; it can’t simply be “not racism.” As Kendi states, “the only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it—and then dismantle it” (9). Within the field of writing studies particularly, scholars have espoused similar requirements of antiracism for decades. In his 2000 article, “Literacy, Identity, Imagination, Flight.” Gilyard demands that antiracism include “criticism of racism’s domination and its impact on education, including composition curricula” (Gilyard, 47)—criticism that then must be confronted with action (Condon and Young, 7). We’ve seen said action manifest through published code-meshed scholarship and a growing usages of grading contracts.<sup>4</sup> We’ve also witnessed antiracism in action with certain textbook curations that include articles and chapters centered on race and writing, such as Wardle and Downs’s growth in their editions of *Writing about Writing*. We’ve definitely seen the call for antiracist scholarship proliferate in CFPs following the international demonstration of Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 and subsequent university statements endorsing the movement. However, during the process of this dissertation, we’ve also seen a massive pushback to such work, specifically on political mainstages.

### **Resistance to Antiracism**

Two key assertions have been made in this chapter thus far: (1) Racism is a daily occurrence, featured specifically in predilections for white language supremacy and white

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<sup>4</sup> For definitions of code-meshing and its acceptance, see Vershawn Ashanti Young’s “Nah, We Straight” and “Should Writers Use They Own English”; Young and Y’Shanda Young-Rivera’s “It Ain’t What It Is: Code Switching and White American Celebrationists”; Young, Rusty Barrett, and Young Rivera’s edited collection, *Other People’s English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy*; and Sharma Ghanashyam’s “Rethinking Language and Writing in Composition.” For definitions of grading contracts and its endorsements, see Asao Inoue’s *Antiracist Writing Assessment: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future* and Inoue and Mya Poe’s edited collection *Race and Writing Assessment*.

meritocratic discourse, and (2) we have all been impacted by our society that fosters racism's daily occurrences, whether we are always consciously aware of it or not (i.e. my opening reflection on just how much I'd been acculturated into white language supremacy without initially recognizing it). One of the first people to theorize racism's daily occurrences was American lawyer Derrick Bell. In the 1970s, Bell spearheaded the theorizing of the critical frameworks later to be known as critical race theory (CRT). CRT espouses five main tenets: (1) everyday racism is common, (2) race is largely the results of interest convergence, (3) race is socially constructed, (4) racism often takes the form of differential racialization, and (5) everyone's identity is a product of intersectionality (Delgado and Stefancic). Such frameworks stand pertinent to investigating the intersections of race and writing as antiracism requires recognition of daily racism in order to uproot it from educational systems. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, interest convergence long ensured curriculum in the United States' education system benefited and supported the power structures of a heteronormative, middle-to-upper class, Anglopatriarchy. However, whether the things I've stated above can even be uttered in a classroom quickly became challenged at a heightened level under the auspice of the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States.

Attacks against antiracist curriculum design in publicly funded schools, inspired in part by CRT, isn't necessarily new (Purnell, para 1). Yet under the 45<sup>th</sup> president, such attacks became elevated to a national level. Gloria Ladson-Billings, who pioneered the application of CRT within broader educational systems outside of law in the 1990s, recalled hearing CRT enter mainstream discourse for the first time in the fall of 2020 (Harvard Edcast, minute 1). Prior to that fall, CRT had been primarily housed within graduate-school reading lists. But that fall, the then-president stood behind in his upcoming re-election bid in the polls. Thus, a new danger was

presented to the general public: CRT. In a White House conference on Sept. 17, 2020, the 45<sup>th</sup> president denounced the theory, and any subsequent application, as “toxic propaganda” and “a form of child abuse in the truest sense of the words.” On September 28, 2020, while I was reading and researching (1) how to train antiracist teachers and (2) through which appropriate methods, the 45<sup>th</sup> president signed Executive Order 13950 “Combatting Race and Sex Stereotyping.” The order censured the “destructive ideology... of nineteenth-century apologist for slavery... [who] maintained that our government ‘was made on the white bias’ ‘by white men for white men’ (sect. 1, para. 5). Therefore, the order prohibited training that engages with “divisive concepts” such as “the United States is fundamentally racist” (sect. 2.a) and any training that seeks to uproot daily racism and sexism (sect 2.a, 2.b, and 2.c). This executive order extended to publicly funded institutions, such as universities attempting to enact antiracism through investigating how racism has been woven throughout our varying areas of studies. In response to the Executive Order, the University of Memphis Office for Institutional Equity sent out a university-wide email on October 27, 2020 recommending “that any equity, diversity, inclusion, unconscious bias, or multi-cultural sensitivity training scheduled for employees during the fall semester be suspended” (received by Angela Morris). Thus, it was “recommended” that the very antiracist training this dissertation investigates be stopped, immediately.

This Executive Order was just one assault within the anti-CRT movement that threatened the work within this dissertation. Federal and local congresspeople parroted similar disdain for CRT. In June of 2021, Alabama state legislator Chris Pringle argued that, “[CRT] basically teaches that certain children are inherently bad people because of the color of their skin” (quoted in Pember, para 7) and in July of that year, Maine’s former state legislator Lawrence Lockman denounced CRT as “poisonous, toxic, anti-American criminal ideology” that when applied

within the education system “brainwashes the kids next door” and “teaches kids to hate their country and hate themselves.” (quoted in French, para. 4-5). Thus, in the fall of 2021, when the actual writing of this dissertation first began, nine states, including Tennessee where this dissertation is set, passed legislation banning or restricting the teaching and influence of CRT in educational curriculum. Nearly twenty more states that fall introduced bills and education policies following suit (Ray and Gibbons).

In a 2021 interview with the *Atlantic Monthly*, Kendi explains that the congresspeople “who dismiss the expositions of critical race theorists and antiracists” have conjured a fictional monster, “a boogyman,” (para. 4) to scare the American people into denouncing curriculum that teaches the historical significance of how education traditionally upholds white ideologies. As a researcher who has extensively read about CRT, never once have I read that I am inherently a bad person because I’m white nor that I should hate myself. Ray and Gibbon state, “Scholars and activists who discuss CRT are not arguing that white people living now are to blame for what people did in the past. They are saying that white people living now have a moral responsibility to do something about how racism still impacts all of our lives today” (para. 4). As a white person, did learning about the realities of how race functions in this country and how I’ve benefited from it (and at times upheld problematically racist structures) make me uncomfortable? Absolutely. However, bell hooks explains in *Teaching to Transgress*, “the first time there can be, and usually is, some degree of pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches” (43). As I continue to investigate CRT, the functions of race in this country, and antiracism, I’m surrounded by dozens of educators and scholars providing space for me to lean into this discomfort and learn from it—to treat it like the healthy growing pain it is. These educators mirror hooks recommendation to recognize how learning about race can be

difficult, “that is to say, [when] I teach about shifting paradigms, [I] talk about the discomfort it can cause” (43). The antiracist learning process isn’t one of unmanageable shame pointing hatred inward towards me as white person, as legislators contend. But rather, the antiracist process says that as a white person, turning a blind eye to (or banning) such work only further enables these oppressive structures to continue. And my own temporary discomfort in learning about these oppressive structures pales in comparison to the damages these structures inflict on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), as this dissertation investigates.

Yet in January 2022, as data continued to be collected for this dissertation, local legislators across the country voted to prohibit discussions of race in classrooms that could even potentially make students “feel uncomfortable” (Alfonseca, para 3). Yet, as this dissertation contends, there is no comfort in knowing that systemic racist ideologies and functions are banned from discussion, therefore enabling them to flourish. By asking my own white generation to ignore the innerworkings and impacts of systemic racism in areas like writing and rhetoric, we draw out the discomfort required for the necessary paradigm shifts. We essentially say, these structures can continue to inflict harm and force us all to bare the impact either as the perpetrator or victim. Furthermore, not one of these proposed bills included any research investigating exactly how a broad demographic of students responds to curriculum that adheres to antiracist charges. Rather, these decisions often rely on individual, loud voices, not research built from collective studies, as became apparent in an incident regarding UofM that first month of 2022.

While researching my three dissertation questions—how do we incorporate more diverse Englishes and more diverse rhetorical traditions into our classrooms and how do we train teachers to do so successfully—UofM offered a diversity, equity, and inclusion incentive to faculty. Faculty (not graduate students like me) could apply for a stipend to infuse racially



diverse pedagogies and incorporate antiracist curriculum designs within their own classrooms, writing and rhetoric courses included. However, this incentive was halted when three students from UofM, a university with an average population of 20,000 students, went on *Fox News* and claimed this “bribe” was tantamount to “indoctrinat[ing] students with propaganda” (“Memphis University Students Fighting Woke Curriculum”). Tennessee Senator Marsha Blackburn responded in favor of these three students, stating, “Taxpayer dollars should not be used to fund a woke social justice agenda” (quoted in Moran, para. 5). And Tennessee State House Representative Tim Burchett backed Blackburn, saying, “Leadership at the University of Memphis should be ashamed for bribing professors to advance this useless teaching” (quoted in Moran, para. 9). Thus, UofM halted the incentive. But, do the majority of students at UofM find the teaching of diverse Englishes useless? Do UofM students, and FYW students as a whole, benefit from learning diverse rhetorical traditions, a “woke” agenda? Does every student who walks through a university campus think a broader approach to education, featuring more diverse voices and more diverse points of view, is tantamount to propaganda?

In the wake of these political conversations, it became further apparent that a broad range of student voices needs to be included within the investigation of antiracist curriculum designs and pedagogies. Previously, scholarship on antiracist interventions to white language supremacy and to the privileging of white meritocratic discourse have utilized a top-down approach (scholar/teacher to scholars/teacher then to student). However, this dissertation relies on reversing that flow in a bottom-up manner (student to scholar/teacher then to scholar/teacher). As we investigate antiracist pedagogies while legislation outlawing this very work continues to proliferate, it’s important that we listen to one of the main stakeholders in these conversations: the broad range of students impacted by these pedagogies. Therefore, the following section

briefly outlines the methodologies in the upcoming chapters and the theoretical frameworks applied to the analysis of such data collection.

### **What's to Come**

As a means to challenge white language supremacy, Chapter 2 specifically engages with my first research question: How do we adapt code-meshing theories into praxis for our students? In other words, how specifically do we encourage ALL students to embrace their own diverse Englishes and incorporate them within their own writing? Therefore, this chapter features a mixed-method study set in FYW classrooms that investigates (1) students' opinions and thoughts on the theory and practice of code-meshing and (2) the effectiveness of a proposed activity encouraging students to mesh features of their own linguistic backgrounds within academic prose.

This Chapter 2 study started with a pre-student-survey, gauging students' opinions on their own personal and academic writing. The survey then asked whether students believe the two could/should be meshed. Next, students were presented with published scholarship that discusses the hierarchical structures of languaging. Discussions prompted by said scholarship ensured arguments both for and against code-meshing were introduced. Students then drafted a pro-and-cons list regarding the implementation of code-meshing, identifying both how code-meshing could benefit writing and how it could be problematic. Results from these two steps enable students' voices to be represented within these conversations, following that bottom-up approach. Next, students participated in a two-part activity. First, they were challenged to identify and investigate a word or phrase representative of their own identity markers, including but not limited to cultural, generational, and regional influences. Secondly, they were tasked with producing a brief argument regarding how such word or phrase could be meshed successfully in either academic or professional writing. Following the activity, students were given a post-

survey to gauge whether this prompt helped them conceive various ways they could code-mesh within their writing. This survey also asked students how specifically instructors could further encourage the incorporation of diverse Englishes within the classroom. Results from steps three and four provide writing samples that reveal actual rhetorical moves students made while code-meshing. Said samples are analyzed to learn whether or not these moves were successful. Post-survey results provide further input from students regarding pedagogical steps teachers should consider, again reversing the flow of information: student to teacher/scholars then teacher/scholar. Such results also prompt discussions regarding how to encourage students to enact their own agency in their choice to either code-mesh or acculturate a more hegemonic approach to academic writing.

Chapter 3 challenges predilections towards white meritocratic discourse by asking: How do we incorporate diverse rhetorical traditions into our core FYW curriculum? This chapter investigates how one FYW program—which previously relied solely on Greco-Roman traditions of rhetoric in FYW classrooms, as is common across universities—incorporated African American rhetorics into their curriculum. For this study, a section on African American rhetorics was composed and then incorporated into four FYW classrooms in spring of 2020.<sup>5</sup> This addition of African American rhetorics served as an intervention to predilections towards white meritocratic discourse. The study then featured a mix-methods approach to investigate the success of the curriculum and again receive student feedback regarding the intervention. Four classrooms featuring solely the traditional Greco-Roman curriculum on rhetorical theory were included as the controlled group and then the four classrooms that featured both Greco-Roman theory and African American rhetorical traditions served as the experimental group. Teacher

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<sup>5</sup> The reason African American rhetorics were chosen is because the city in which this study is set, Memphis, has a majority African American population.

observations were collected in all eight classrooms to learn how both students and teachers interacted with the various curriculums. Then, at the end of each course, students completed a survey that documented their responses to the presented curriculum. This survey ensured student voices remained present within the conversation of including racially diverse rhetorical traditions into core curriculum. Teachers from the experimental group were also interviewed to gather further information regarding their thoughts on introducing African American rhetorics into FYW classrooms. Lastly, student writing samples from all eight participating classes were collected and an assessment performed to learn if student writing benefited from the inclusion of a more diverse approach to rhetorical theory. Ultimately, this chapters investigates how/if the addition of racially diverse rhetorical traditions equips students with a stronger rhetorical toolkit they can use throughout their academic and professional careers. As the chapter discusses, the onset of the pandemic impacted the study and therefore required an extension, which allowed data to also be collected from three more classes in the Spring of 2021.

With Chapters 2 and 3 investigating specific antiracist interventions in FYW curriculum, Chapter 4 explores how exactly to train college writing teachers to incorporate such antiracist pedagogies. What tactics and steps should be implemented to support all teachers investigating and celebrating the intersections of race and writing with our students? This chapter, therefore, features an ethnographic study of a FYW program from the Graduate Teaching Assistant perspective. Scholarship regarding teacher training typically takes place at the administration level, but this study centers instead a different stakeholder within these conversations, the Teaching Assistants (TAs) being trained on antiracist pedagogies. The study was set in a program that has longed espoused antiracism. Therefore, this ethnography first collected all syllabi, orientation materials, and professional development agendas regarding TA training

within the program. This ethnography also included a TA survey and TA interviews that gauged both TA feedback on their antiracist training as well as how much of their antiracist training materialized within their classrooms and in what ways. Furthermore, this study also considered a TA's own positionality when acculturating an antiracist approach. Therefore, survey and interview questions also asked how various TAs navigate their positionality and the positionality of their students when engaging with race work. This chapter ultimately argues the importance of institutional support and buy-in within these endeavors—the same institutional support Tennessee legislation and three UofM students lambasted on a national level.

Analysis of all the data collected within these three chapters utilizes an intersectional critical feminist lens—one that endorses transparency and seeks to recognize my own potential biases while challenging hierarchal structures and acknowledging the intricacies of interdependent systems of discrimination. The Combahee River Collective instrumentally highlighted such intricacies with their 1977 statement, an approach Kimberle Crenshaw named “intersectional” twelve years later. bell hooks coined the critical aspect of feminism with her 1994 monograph *Teaching to Transgress* to address not only the political aspects of feminism within education but also the marginalization of feminists of color within the movement, a reality she further addressed in *Ain't I a Woman*. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie defines feminism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a system that must be rooted in inclusion, awareness, equality, and equity across all anti-oppression lines. In other words, in order to be an intersectional critical feminist, one must inherently be antiracist.

To ethically check my own positionality and biases while doing this work, I weave my own testimonies throughout Chapters 2, 3, and 4 to foster the required transparency, as demonstrated in this very chapter. These analytical frameworks require me to consider how my

own positionality and identities (a cisgendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, white woman) coalesce within often-difficult realities for those from different positionalities. Such testimonials investigating these intersections and their impacts culminate in Chapter 5, which offers a reflection on the nature of doing such work as a white woman. Said reflection includes how quickly this work can be harmful co-opted by white saviorism and performativity void of any real change.

This dissertation came to existence due to the realization that the health of my own being and research are intrinsically linked to that of my BIPOC colleagues and students—colleagues and students replete with an amalgam of various identities that contribute to their being. This dissertation responds to Asao Inoue’s contention that white people “should be first in line to do this [antiracist] work” (Forward, xiii), because, as aboriginal activist Lilla Watson said, “your liberation is bound up with mine” (quoted in “The Origin of Our Liberation,” para. 2). This dissertation, therefore, follows the inaugural steps of my own antiracist journey, full of growth, mistakes, revelations, and outlined actions.

## Chapter 2: When I Mesh, You Mesh, We Mesh: Challenging White Language Supremacy through Classroom Writing Activities

I knew I was a white girl moving to, and soon to be teaching first-year writing in a majority African American city.<sup>6</sup> I was still unpacking boxes at my new apartment when orientation for first-year teaching assistants began and I was assigned James Baldwin's "If Black English Isn't a Language Then Tell Me, What Is?" Baldwin writes, "that language is also a political instrument, means, and proof of power. It is the most vivid and crucial key to identify: It reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger public" (para 4). Thus, the discussion in orientation turned to writing and identity. As a desert-born kid from Arizona, near the Navajo and Hopi reservations, and red-dirt raised teen in Oklahoma, the end of the Trail of Tears, I thought about how my k-12 education neglected to discuss the colonialization of indigenous peoples in my own homegrown states. It was never addressed how tribal children were sent to "re-education programs" intended to strip them of any indigenous cultural markers, including any reminiscence of their native tongue (Pember). In orientation, I asked, "So where do we draw the line in first-year writing between teaching students English and restricting their own cultural identities?" A faint smile formed on my advisor's face as she responded, "That's *THE* question to begin asking yourselves right now."

Ten days later, I collected my first short writing assignment from students: 500-words on their reading and writing practices, a warm-up for the literacy narratives they'd soon be assigned. As Chapter 1 mentioned, one student wrote that he loved reading the dictionary and learning new words but felt he must conceal this passion so his friends wouldn't think he was trying to act white. I didn't know how to respond. As a white, middle-class woman, I never had to face such a

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<sup>6</sup> The 2020 census collected the following racial demographics of Memphis: 65.5% African American, 24.5% White, 3.7% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian, and 4.7% Other.

dilemma in all my years of school. The educational system caters to my Anglo culture. I'd never considered how the system historically (and often presently) forced racially marginalized individuals to believe that in order to be successful in academia, they had to lose or compartmentalize their own cultural identities, both within themselves and among their friends. Now as an educator, was I perpetrating this harmful environment?

In the wake of this looming question, I fortunately had faculty mentors who pointed me towards answers. The dilemma that in order to teach students the language of social and economic mobility, we have to commit acts of cultural violence against members of marginalized communities, I would learn, has been debated for more than 50 years. This chapter, therefore, provides a literature review of this argument ending with code-meshing, the most recent development in the Students' Right to Their Own Language debate. This lit review further highlights the need for more scholarship on pedagogical applications of code-meshing and the lack of current first-year writing students' (a key stakeholder) input on this contentious debate. Next this chapter presents a study that asked current first-year writing students to participate in a lesson plan encouraging them to code-mesh in their academic prose. The study then asked students' opinions regarding the debate of linguistic diversity in academic and professional writing through discussion posts and pre- and post- surveys. The chapter concludes with a discussion about (1) how lesson plans on code-meshing can invite each and every student to include their culture in their writing; (2) what we learned from this particular study, including what we could have done better; and (3) how to best move forward with the teaching of code-meshing.



## The Much-Debated Catch 22

The discussion of diverse Englishes and dialects made its official appearance on the College Composition and Communication agenda at its national convention in 1968. Panel 9 was fully dedicated to language issues of historically marginalized groups. This controversial topic concentrated on: “the education of ‘disadvantaged’ students, especially Negro students, and the approach that should be taken towards their training and language use” (“Workshop Report” 247). Within the panel’s debates on employability and the cultural violence committed by the suppression of various Englishes, implicit and often explicit support for white language supremacy was evident. “We discussed whether it would be best to teach a ghetto Negro ‘standard English’ or to teach his future employers something about the nature of linguistic prejudice” (247), the report shares.

As scholarship from James Sledd (“Bidialectalism”) and Geneva Smitherman (“English Teachers”) continued to support the latter, CCC’s formed the Committee of Language, tasked by the executive officers to address questions regarding the hierarchy of dialect, its effects, the linguistic options accepted in the classrooms, and dialects’ relationship to employability. By 1972, the committee proposed the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution, which stated: “We affirm the students right to their own pattern and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style” (19). The white paper accompanying the resolution in 1974 recognized the homogeneous “standard” of American English as a myth (25) and explained the classist and racist origins of such structures (30). It encouraged classroom assignments that helped students shift their tone, style, sentence structure and length, vocabulary, and diction to best meet specific rhetorical situations while still calling for the utilization of an Edited American English in some formal writing. Ultimately, the

white paper charged English composition teachers with leading the movement to demolish century-old hierarchies of language and open society's acceptance of various dialects of English without predisposed beliefs of a superior dialect. "Since English teachers have been in large part responsible for the narrow attitudes of today's employers, changing attitudes toward dialect variations does not seem an unreasonable goal, for today's students will be tomorrow's employers," the white paper stated (39).

While many extolled the resolution (Koper, 3), claiming it expanded students' rhetorical choices (McPherson, et al., 8) and broke down dangerous notions that harmed students' sense of worth (Kelly, 255), others attacked the resolution as "sham scholarship" (Berthoff, 121) that both prevented marginalized students' from social mobility and encouraged sloppy writing (Smith, 164). Over the following decades, others used the resolution as an endorsement of code-switching (Wheeler and Swords) while some contended the resolution was too conservative (Parks, 111), with Edited American English (EAE) simply a "soiled term" for Standard American English (Clark, 122). Some who contended the resolution was flawed and didn't go far enough in correcting the classist and racist power structure of language still believed it to be a step in the right direction against "teaching the compulsory, mandatory, imposed, coerced, enforced, obligatory regimented use of standard English simply to flatter the prejudices of the powers that be" (Sledd, 671). Even still, some who recognized the importance of highlighting diverse Englishes continued to believe these Englishes held no value in academic and professional texts.

In 1986, during the wake of a movement throughout the United States to establish English as the official language, both in various states and the nation as a whole, the National Council of Teacher of English (NCTE), the parent organization of CCCs, released the

“Resolution on English as the ‘Official Language’” which condemned “any attempt to render invisible the native language of any Americans or to deprive English of the rich influences of the language and cultures of any of the peoples of America” (para. 1). While a rejection to deprive English language of its diverse influences might appear a precursor to what others would later deem code-meshing, in 1988, CCCs published “Guidelines on the National Language Policy” in further response to efforts to make English the “official” language of the U.S. with its “three inseparable parts”:

1. To provide resources to enable native and nonnative speakers to achieve oral and literate competence in English, the language of wider communication.
  2. To support programs that assert the legitimacy of native languages and dialects and ensure that proficiency in one’s mother tongue will not be lost.
  3. To foster the teaching of languages other than English so that native speakers of English can rediscover the language of their heritage or learn a second language.
- (para. 2).

To reiterate, this policy was written in response to the gaining popularity of a movement to establish one singular, official language for a country founded on slavery and immigration. Therefore, one must consider the nuance of teaching every native and nonnative speaker English, “the language of wider communication,” when lawmakers were deeming an “official language” necessary. Yet still the question remained: “Whose English are we teaching?”

Sledd openly discussed in 1968 that the English being taught was a “white notion” of English, a reality that Young and Inoue would extend into current conversations on white language supremacy. The CCC’s policy was updated in 1992 and revised again in March of 2015 to include works such as Matsuda’s “The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in the U.S. College”

and Rosina Lippi-Green's *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States*. Both works further discuss the fluidity of languages and the plurality of Englishes. However, the debate regarding diverse linguistic acceptance would continue into the 1990s during the wake of a cultural shift in popular culture. Leading scholars, such as Peter Elbow, continued to endorse code-switching, claiming it's the only way to guarantee students the writing skills of social mobility ("Inviting the Mother Tongue") while scholars like Keith Gilyard discussed the "educational schizophrenia" associated with asking students to constantly switch between two codes, deeming the language one associates with their own identity inferior to the writing of academic and professional discourse (*Voices of the Self*). Meanwhile, CNN tracked how on the national front, black celebrities were increasingly becoming idolized and endorsed by white America, centering black culture (and therefore black languages) at the heart of all popular culture ("Isn't It Ironic"). This phenomenon set an even larger precedence than Baldwin anticipated in his 1979 *New York Times* essay, where he tracks the influences of black American Englishes throughout the United States.

In 2005, the NCTE released a document titled "Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in English Education." The document's eight core beliefs recognized the wealth of knowledge students bring to the classroom, including their own cultural heritage, and how teaching requires a cross cultural, socially conscious stance as it is always a political act. Belief 6, however, reaffirmed that, "All students need to be taught mainstream power codes/discourses and become critical users of language while also having their home and street codes honored" (para. 4). Four years later, Young challenged what should be accepted as the mainstream code moving forward.

In his essay, “Your Average Nigga,” Young discussed the damage inflicted by growing up in an educational system that exaggerates the differences between dialects and deems one’s own identity and heritage inferior to the standard norms. In 2009, he coined the term code-meshing in ““Nah, We Straight: An Argument Against Code-Switching,”” an essay that reflected on the speech patterns of the first black president and argued for the complete endorsement of students meshing their own cultural dialects within academic and professional prose and speech. Young discussed how black Englishes have already become mainstream in popular culture and are used by all races in daily speech practices. Therefore, Young contended that anything less than the acceptance of code-meshed communication in academic or professional settings is the equivalent of a Jim Crow segregation of Englishes that will inevitably continue to foster a DuBoisian sense of double-consciousness in students’ whose cultures are viewed as inferior. For Young code-meshing isn’t an invitation for sloppy writing but rather a high register of writing that incorporates one’s native tongue. To demonstrate how code-meshing maintains rhetorically savvy prose, Young linguistically code-meshed both essays, mirroring earlier rhetorical moves heralded by Geneva Smitherman (“English Teachers, Why You Be Doing That Thang You Don’t Do”).

In 2009, *JAC: A Journal of Rhetoric, Culture, and Politics* dedicated a section of its first issue for responses to Young’s essay. Mirroring the previous 40 years of the linguistic diversity debate, some opposed code meshing and some fully endorsed it. Scott L. Rogers discussed his discomfort in “investing a student’s non-standard ‘workings’ of English with a credibility she may see undermined in her everyday experience” (278), while scholar Ghanashyam Sharma believed that “as Young suggests, composition should stop reifying language varieties in ways that can quietly replicate and perpetuate a racist past” (254). Sharma claimed this “disruptive

rethinking about language and writing” allows for a truly organic means of communication to take hold of society. Such conflicting sentiments were carried outside of *JAC* as many composition scholars chose sides in the code-meshing/code-switching battle. In one corner, those like Joseph Harris advocated for code-meshing: “To talk with students about codemeshing is to tell them not only that we respect their cultures and languages, but also that we value difference and innovations in writing” (124-125). Other scholars, however, like Wheeler and Swords, continued to gain popularity for their promotion of code-switching.

In defense of Wheeler and Swords’ landmark texts promoting code-switching, *Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms* and *Code-Switching Lessons: Grammar Strategies for Linguistically Diverse Writers*, Wheeler and Julia Thomas responded to Young’s scholarship in their 2013 essay “And *Still* the Children Suffer: The Dilemma of Standard English, Social Justice, and Social Access.” Ultimately their essay embraced high versus low dialects in diglossic communities as a reality that “is what it is” (387). They contended code-switching seeks to make best of the structures afforded. Young, alongside co-author Y’Shanda Young-Rivera, responded that same year with “It Ain’t What It Is: Code-Switching and White American Celebrationist.” Their response opened with a discussion on Rosa Parks and her refusal to accept “it is what it is” standards by remaining in her seat on the bus, consequentially getting arrested, and sparking the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Young and Young-Rivera drew on the comparison that they too refuse to succumb to the racially motivated code-switching. They refuse to give up their code-meshed seat and demand real systemic change that, if endorsed by all universities today, could provide a space for tomorrow’s leading generations to endorse code-meshing in academic and professional settings.

Within the mists of this code-switching versus code-meshing debate, CCCs released a statement after their 2011 annual business meeting in Chicago endorsing code-meshing. The statement cited Yi, who contends that a writer's identity and investment in education is best fostered when the distance between home and school is reduced. The statement claimed, "The ability to incorporate both home language and the language of wider communication in writing is a valued skill beyond school" (para. 4). The statement then included several well-known authors who have code-meshed successfully, both in fiction and nonfiction, and in the fields of science and law.

Edited collections on the theoretical, administrative, and pedagogical sides of code-meshing soon followed: *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy*; *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*; *Code-Meshing as World English*. Within these collections, authors advocated for code-meshing of not just various Englishes but various languages as well. Featured scholars (1) investigated policies that endorse code-censoring before sharing insights on code-meshing available through Cajun culture (Standford), (2) demonstrated how "English con Salsa" can improve students' writing (Milson-Whyte), (3) validated the importance of studying "Chinglish" through the lens of rhetorical listening (Lu and Horner), and (4) applied the argument to k-12 education (Young-Rivera, et al.). Young himself advocated for Spanglish in "Should Writer's Use They Own Language." Horner, et al., further discussed how the differences in language is not a barrier to overcome nor a problem to manage, but a resource to be utilized by writers and readers. This idea, which they termed translanguaging, has been fused with code-meshing in studies produced by Canagarajah to demonstrate how translanguaging limits writing anxiety within international

students (“Codemeshing in Academic Writing: Identifying Teachable Strategies of Translanguaging”; “Negotiating Translingual Literacy: An Enactment”).

At his 2016 plenary address at the Council for Writing Program Administration (CWPA), Inoue categorized the judgement against code-meshed speech and writing as racist. He further doubled-down against the endorsement of white language supremacy in his 2019 CCCs address. NCTE, the parent organization of CCCs, would also revise their 1986 position, “Expanding Opportunities: Academic Success for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students” in 2018 to request that teachers encourage “students’ abilities to use all their languages in creative and critical ways” (para. 4)

While published scholarship against code-meshing may be limited during the 2010s, its opposition still remains evident within various platforms of academic debate. For example, when Young phonetically code-meshed his call for proposals for the 2019 College Composition and Communications conference, the WPA list serv exploded with several emails denouncing Young’s linguistic choices. On one thread, black scholar Eric Smith discussed the “inefficacy of code-meshing as a pedagogy and its utter negligence of Kairos” before claiming in several other emails that Young should “GROW UP” and realize that composition teachers need to aptly prepare students for the professional and academic situations to come (WPA-L: March 2018). Smith concluded another email by stating: “People, stop letting Young and others guilt you into neglecting our charge [to teach students to acculturate the current English of power] as a composition teacher.” While some argued against Smith, many quickly sided with him on the thread, contending: (1) there is not enough evidence to prove hybrid-discourse as a valuable source, (2) that in writing across disciplines, code-meshing isn’t accepted nor is it truly welcomed in the professional realm, (3) that code-meshing is naïve and prescriptive, and (4) that



code-meshing forgets the importance of audience, especially future employers. Thus, while current scholarship promoting code-switching may be scarce, opposition against code-meshing still remains prominent within the field.

Also limited on the publication front are lesson plans and strategies for how to encourage students to successfully code-mesh in their academic and professional writing. As teachers who endorse code-meshing seek to further prove it's neither naïve, nor prescriptive, nor lacks an acknowledgment of audience but rather serves as a valuable rhetorical approach that can and has gained traction across multiple disciplines, we need publications that share practical, easily adoptable ways to teach code-meshing. While there are publications regarding how to incorporate the discussion of languaging hierarchies in the classroom (Graff and Sohn) as well as how to code-mesh in creative writing (Welford), the published repertoire on how to successfully help students hone the rhetorical acumen of code-meshing in their own academic and professional writing remains sparse. In 2012, Behm and Miller discussed having students read Franny Lou Hamer and Smitherman as models of successful code-meshed speech and prose.<sup>7</sup> Four years later, Neisha-Anne S. Green published "The Re-education of Neisha-Anne S. Green: A Close Look at the Damaging Effects of a 'Standard Approach,' the Benefits of Code-meshing, the Role Allies Play in this Work." This article includes an activity encouraging students to practice code-meshing in the low-stakes environment of the first-year writing classroom. Drawing a circle-graph, students are asked to identify four types of discourse in which they personally participate. Green, a Bajan immigrant who was taught British English before immigrating to the states where she was not only introduced to more traditional academic versions of English but also African American Vernacular English (AAVE) chose: her Bajan

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<sup>7</sup> Young also advocates having students read Thomas Kochman's "Cultural and Communication: Implications for Black English in the Classroom" to demonstrate the successes of using Black Englishes across multiple disciplines.

Dialect, AAVE, Writing Center Talk, and the “Standard” English she spoke at work. She then asked students to respond to a prompt using at least two of the dialects they had written. Green, who prior to introducing the activity spoke of the emotional struggle with believing certain aspects of her language (and therefore identity) to be inferior, suggested that peers go around and cross-out one of the personal dialects a student has access to, recreating the emotional toll taken on those whose primary Englishes are deemed inferior.

Having been required to personally participate in Green’s activity by a faculty member, I can attest the exercise’s brilliance. It challenges students to investigate how their various discourses intersect with their identity. Still, our field needs more tangible examples of how to encourage our students to code-mesh in rhetorically effective ways. Furthermore, such scholarship needs to include student voices within this debate, as they are a primary stakeholder. Therefore, the next sections of this chapter will introduce another potential writing activity to promote code-meshing and the study conducted to gauge the activity’s effectiveness.

### **Code Mesh It, Y’all**

In my second year of teaching, I introduced code-meshing in my first-year writing classrooms. It did not go well. Having assigned Young’s “Nah, We Straight” as homework, I started the class by writing the three words on the board. I then asked students to translate the sentence into more “traditional” academic prose. I used this as impetuous to introduce code-switching and code-meshing before asking students to discuss what Young cites as racism and cultural violence against one’s identity. Two students very quickly began denouncing Young’s argument. A white male explained that he code-switches when talking to his grandmother and talking to his friends, so it’s not a big deal that students are asked to code-switch in the classroom. An Asian American male added that code-meshing was detrimental to non-native

speakers, like his parents, who already struggled to learn English. I tried my best to respond to the students points, discussing the history of Black English in this country beginning with Jamestown, the difference in register shifts and coding shifting, and sharing experiences with my own immigrant mother who first moved to the states and learned English when she was 32 years-old. Yet the voices of opposition remained the loudest. I left class that day feeling completely defeated.

The following year, I was named the Graduate Assistant Director (GAD) of my First-Year Writing (FYW) Program and my close friend and colleague, Brennah Hutchison, was named the GAD of the Center for Writing and Communication at our institution. In her GAD application, Hutchison discussed doing workshops in classrooms to booster the visibility of the writing center while I, along with the help of my mentor, piloted a section on African American rhetorical traditions with the FYW curriculum (discussed in Chapter 3). Hutchison suggested that we create a writing center workshop to be performed in FYW classrooms that specifically aligned with the additional African American Rhetoric curriculum. This additional curriculum included rhythm and cadence, a rhetorical effect often reliant on the blending of academic and various cultural Englishes. We devised the below two-class-period lesson plan on code-meshing.

In the first class period, we asked that students as a whole come up with a pros and cons list in regards to including elements of everyday speech practices within academic prose. To help foster this conversation we introduced lexis common in southern dialects that have rhetorical significance (Bless your heart; y'all). We then provided examples of successfully code-meshed writing, using Young's inaugural CCC publication to introduce lexical and syntaxial code-meshed prose and using Young's welcome letter in the 2019 CCCC's conference program to discuss phonetic meshing. During this conversation, students almost always began investigating

stereotypes of various Englishes. At the conclusion of the class period, we asked for homework that students, “think of a word or phrase that is rooted in a community you participate in. It can be regional, cultural, and/or generational.” We did this to ensure (1) that each student recognized their own abilities and communication styles within languaging while (2) also encouraging students to pick something authentic to them. Green and Jacqueline Jones Royster have each discussed how black languaging has been projected onto them as “authentic” based on being scholars of color. Green addressed being stigmatized by not code-meshing more defiantly in her 2016 essay while Royster shared in her 1996 article the frustration of colleagues assuming only her black speech was authentic when she found her academic voices to be just as much a crucial part of her identity. Each individual marginalized group does not share a monolithic experience nor a monolithic language (hence the intentional pluralization of Black Englishes above) nor does code-meshing only relate to marginalized racial groups. However, we hoped that by asking students to think of their languages as cultural, generational, and/or regional we could invite conversations on the fluidity of languaging as well as address the heterogeneity of various dialects.

We started the second class period by projecting the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution on the classroom screen, to help continue fostering conversations around linguistic diversity. We then asked students to get in pairs or groups of three and complete the following task:

## Rhetoric Y'all

Choose a word or phrase generated from the homework assignment and write a 2-3 paragraph analysis of the word. You may consider the first four questions below. However, you must address the fifth prompt.

- 1 What is the origin of the word?**  
 i.e. Boujee and/or Bougie - an abbreviation of "bourgeois" - also hip-hop lingo for expensive lifestyle
- 2 Is your word or phrase cultural, regional, and/or generational?**
- 3 Is your word or phrase persuasive or powerful?**  
 a.) Does it have more than one meaning?  
 b.) What does it evoke tonally and/or emotionally? For example, is it sad, sarcastic, or funny?  
 c.) What is it representative of your culture, region, and/or generation?
- 4 Can most people relate to or at least understand this word or phrase?**
- 5 Consider when and where you could use your word or phrase in academic. Then persuade a scholars audience to use this work or phrase in academic writing**  
 For example, would it made a good greeting for an email? Is the right context, could your word or phrase be used in a research paper, narrative, or persuasive essay? How should your word or phrase be incorporated into one or more of these academic situations

Figure 1. “Rhetorical Y’all”: Code-meshing exercise for students.

We hoped this activity would encourage students to consider their word or phrase being used successfully within any genre of academic or professional writing.

Hutchison and I responded to dozens of requests that first semester from colleagues asking us to facilitate this workshop in their FYW classrooms. Based on the insightful results and conversations produced from a semester’s worth of workshops and feedback from our

colleagues, we decided to conduct a more formal, in-person mixed-methods study for Spring 2020, replete with pre- and post-surveys, more discussions (this time to be documented via classroom observations), and the above writing prompt.<sup>8</sup> However, shortly after recruiting participating instructors who would let us host our two-day, IRB-approved workshop in their ENGL 1020 classes, COVID-19 struck our community. Our university moved all classes online and safer-at-home mandates took affect across the state (and country).

In Hutchison's and my own classrooms students contracted COVID-19, forcing them to miss weeks of coursework and take an incomplete for the semester.<sup>9</sup> Other students moved back home from campus, sometimes losing direct access to computers and the internet. Some students dealt with higher-levels of unemployment within their immediate family, compelling students to agree to 60-hour work weeks in fields deemed essential during the pandemic. Realizing similar situations plagued classrooms who had agreed to participate in the study, we redesigned our initial ideas to best fit the needs of participants within an online platform.

The workshop was sent to participating students in five different Composition II (ENGL 1020) classes over two course periods. Participating students were instructed to take two four-question surveys using the online platform Qualtrics: one before and one after the workshop took place (see Appendix A for the pre-survey questions and Appendix B for the post-survey questions). The pre-workshop survey was meant to gauge first-year writers' capacity to define academic writing within comparison to their personal or everyday writing standards. This initial survey was also meant to determine whether students ever considered integrating aspects of regional, generational, idiomatic, and world vernaculars and/or dialects they may identify with in

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<sup>8</sup> A huge shout out to Shima Farhesh, a fellow graduate student at UofM studying linguistics. She was very supportive of the project and encouraged us to adapt it into a study.

<sup>9</sup> Our own classrooms were not included in the study to avoid biases.

their academic and professional writing. The post-workshop survey asked first-year writers if they believe it possible to code-mesh successfully in their academic and professional writing considering that Edited American English (i.e. white English standards) is often still endorsed. The second survey also informed us if the workshop was effective in helping students brainstorm specific ways to code-mesh. In addition, students were invited to include their advice for writing tutors and instructors facilitating and teaching code-meshed writing.

After students completed the pre-workshop survey, they were asked to watch an introduction video Hutchison and I created that incorporated information on “Students’ Rights to Their Own Language” and discussed supplemental materials written by Young. The video recognized examples of phonetic, syntactical, and lexical code-meshing within Young’s work so students could better understand the different ways a piece of academic writing can be code-meshed.

The next step of the online workshop was more conversational. Students were asked to list the “pros” and “cons” of code-meshing in academic and professional writing on their class’s eCourseware discussion board in attempts to spur conversations regarding the practice. Due to the new online setting of this workshop, we did not have direct access to engage with students on their classroom discussion boards, but rather worked with instructors to respond to student questions. Instructors sent these questions anonymously to us and we helped address both concerns and excitement. In terms of analyzing the anonymous discussion posts we received, we organized students’ responses to the idea of code-meshing, grouping posts into common categories based on excitement to code-mesh, fear of code-meshing, etc.

Next, each student completed the writing prompt listed in Figure 1 of this section and then submitted their analysis to their Composition II class’s eCourseware Dropbox. Lastly, the

participants completed the post-survey. Afterward, the instructor sent us all the writing samples of participating students anonymously.

Even though we had to transition the workshop to an online platform, our primary goal remained. We wanted to encourage students to deliberately code-mesh in an academic assignment so they could begin to contemplate various rhetorical moves in order to successfully incorporate their own languages within any written genre. Furthermore, we wanted student input on this discussion. As mentioned in Chapter 1 and this chapter's literature review, previous scholarship regarding code-meshing primarily features academic points of view, building a top down approach (teacher/scholar to teacher/scholar then to student). Undergraduate students' actual voices are rarely included in the conversation. We wanted our study to emulate a more bottom up approach (student to teacher/scholar to teachers/scholar), with an emphasis on what we can learn about students' input on the debate. And learn we did. Due to the mixed-method approach of our study, the following sections are organized using corresponding headings that blend both results and discussions regarding what we learned within each utilized research method.

### **Whatchya'll Think? Pre-Survey Responses and Discussion Posts**

Bartholomae's landmark essay "Inventing the University," often came to mind when coding the data results from the pre-survey and discussion posts. In 1986, Bartholomae discussed the process of students acculturating the language of academic prose, for each student "has to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of community" (403). He then described how students gain insight into this discourse through sound research practices that familiarize them with academic lexi, syntax, and genre structure. As they gain such exposure,



students eventually must take a messy leap and try to elevate their prose patterns and critical thinking to mirror the critical thought of such academic discourse as well as the lexical register. He wrote, “to speak with authority student writers have not only to speak in another’s voice but through another’s code...with power and wisdom” (408). This article has always bothered me for several reasons, but two in particular: (1) it presents a one-dimensional view of academic writing and (2) it wrongly privileges academic writing over all other genres. However, this essay reflects how several students view academic writing as one-dimensional and how they have previously been trained to solely equate academic writing with “professional” writing, even though the nuanced differences are vast.

In pre-survey questions, we posed two different statements with multiple-choice answers ranging between strongly agree and strongly disagree: (1) Your personal writing style is very different than your academic writing style and (2) If you believe that your personal and academic writings are stylistically very different, do you ever wish they were more similar. Ninety percent of students agreed that their personal and academic writing styles differed, with the highest percentage, 38%, strongly agreeing. As discussed in the literature review, Yi argued this distance is problematic. Fifty percent of students answered that they wished their styles were more similar, 23% of students didn’t have a strong opinion either way, and 27% of students didn’t mind that the styles were different. In between these two questions, we asked students to identify the similarities and differences within their academic and personally writing styles through open-ended questioning. Essentially, we were trying to get students to consider how they define or view academic writing in comparison to their own writing practice.

### Themes within the Open Survey Responses

Using grounded theory, I identified different themes and patterns that arose in responses regarding how students' define personal writing in comparison to their academic prose and used said themes to discern three main categories that included subcategories to best capture the nuance of responses. Such main categories included rhetorical effect, casual versus formal, and grammar, as seen in Figure 2 below. Some of the categories bled into each other and therefore I allowed a single response to occupy more than one category if it specifically represented both categories' themes and thoughts, as is typical of qualitative coding.

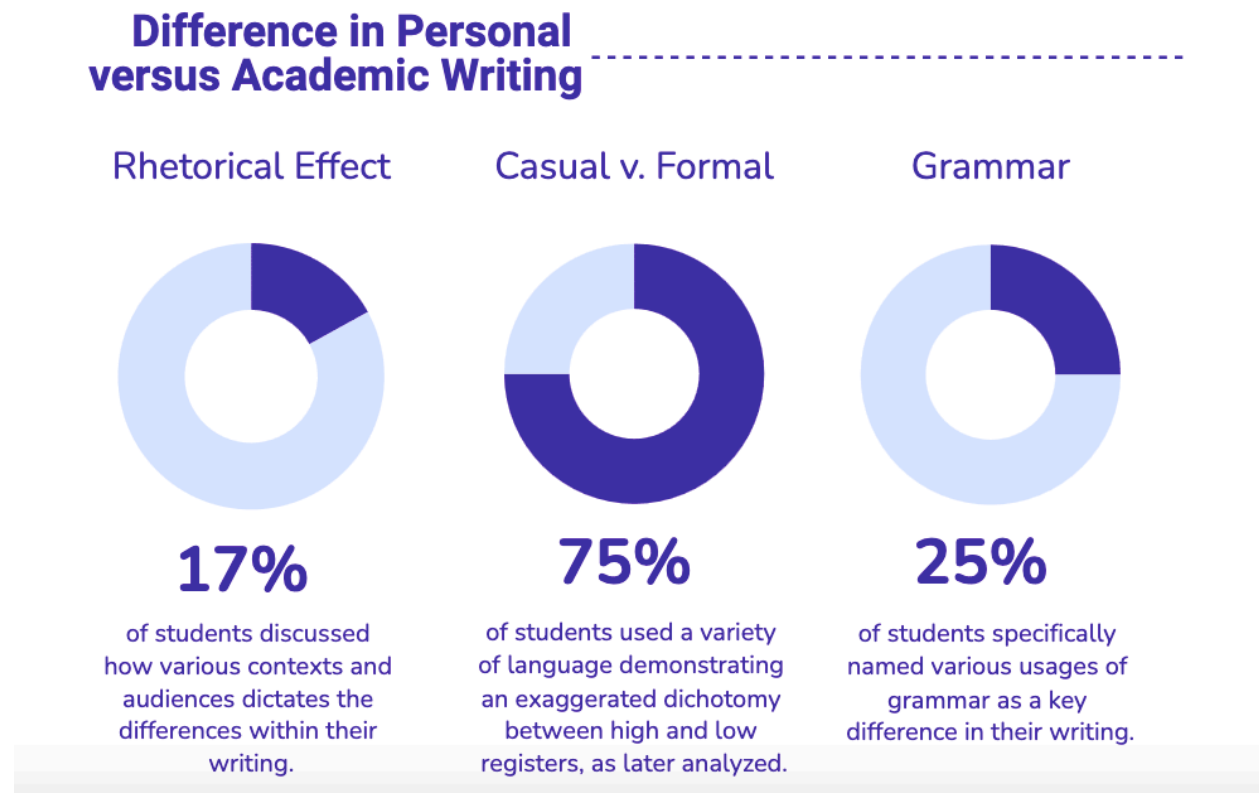


Figure 2. Difference in Academic versus Professional Writing

Seventeen percent of students discussed how different rhetorical situations impacted how they approached personal versus academic prose at the undergraduate level. Responses in this category included: “I’m often trying to accomplish different things within different writing” and

“My personal writing is typically just for me while my academic writing is tailored for my audience.” Such responses demonstrate students’ understandings of how different situations require different appropriate responses—responses that analyze and utilize specific linguistic and rhetorical choices based on the intended effect on a target audience.<sup>10</sup> While academic scholars have not contested such an understanding of the rhetorical situation, the exaggerated dichotomy in different rhetorical options surrounding the rhetorical situation—specifically the difference in the linguistic performance of home and work life—have been contested (Yi and Young). We see a student’s understanding of this perceived exaggerated dichotomy in the following response:

For school, I have to lock in and be professional. I don’t see anything wrong with this. Think of an individual who keeps things strictly to the book when at work but then lets (sic) loose a little at home. I see a correlation in writing. School is a center of academia, so it only makes sense that one would try to be as academic as possible in whatever they do. An individual’s personal life is usually not academic. I feel like away from academics is when people feel comfortable to use language that they are used to.”

While yes, we often switch registers between family, friends, and work, those registers are still constantly influencing each other. As Young discussed in a 2021 anti-racist roundtable at the University of Memphis, one register, dialect, or language can never fully be separated within a speaker/writer, i.e. no one ever fully switches to a completely opposite linguistic performance between home and work. Clifford explained how his academic discourse often became meshed within his discourse at home (“The Subject is Discourse”) and we see Victor Villanueva’s home discourse often meshed within his academic prose (*Bootstraps*). As John Paul Gee explains in “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction,” the transference between one discourse to

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<sup>10</sup> These sophisticated student responses mirror’s Lloyd Bitzer’s argument in “Understanding the Rhetorical Situation.”

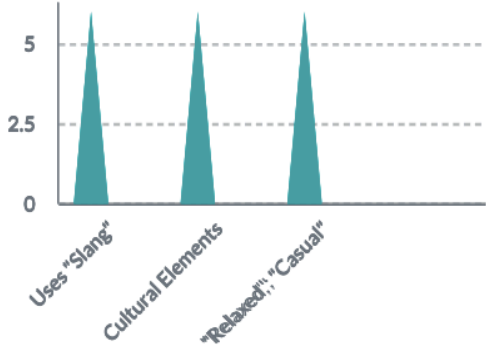
another is natural. It's only perceived as unnatural when hazardous hierarchal structures of languaging become enforced.

The second recurring theme in the pre-surveys also featured a false dichotomy within language usage—a hazardous hierarchal structure between academic and personal writing. Seventy-five percent of students' responses were categorized for specifically highlighting the difference between the formal and casual nature of the two writing approaches (academic and personal). This category was further broken down into subcategories. Three subcategories emerged to better understand how students described their casual forms of writing. A third of students specifically used the word “slang” when discussing their personal writing; a third discussed cultural elements of their personal writing; and a third discussed the relaxed nature of their personal writing, as seen in Figure 3 below.

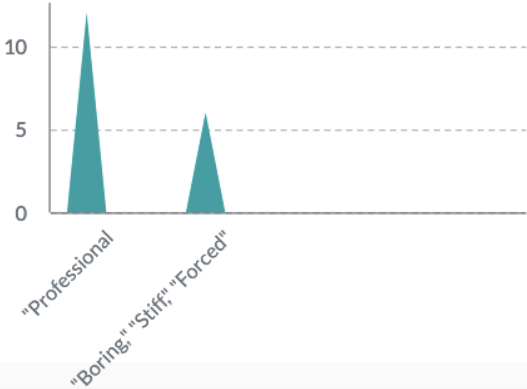
## Sub Categories Casual versus Formal

The 75% of students responses coded in this category were futher broken in sub categories

Descriptors Used for Casual Writing



Descriptors Used for Formal Writing



### Figure 3. Subcategories of Casual versus Formal Writing

Of the third of students who specifically used the word “slang” within the descriptor of their personal writing, responses include: “I like to use proverbs, southern slang, and a composition of words and phrases that I have collected throughout my years of life in my personal writing. I try to sound more professional in my academic writing” and “my personal and academic writing is different because I use more slang and abbreviations in my personal writing. My personal writing is more similar to how I actually talk.” Now “slang,” according to its Oxford definition, is all “words or phrases that are regarded as informal, are more common in speech than writing, and are restricted to a particular context or group of people.” This idea that informality is understood to be “restricted to a particular context or group” fails to consider the reality that all discourse is contextually used to reach a particular group. Rather, this definition (and therefore the students’ understanding) of informality appears to be “restricted” to those outside of elite power structures. For example, the first student response mentions the use of “southern slang” as not acceptable in formal writing, yet when a congressperson uses southern slang to connect with their constituents, it’s not considered informal. The second response groups slang with abbreviations, yet the federal government and journalist accept abbreviations for phrases like sports utility vehicle (SUV) in car registrations and reports; that abbreviation is the formal usage. Furthermore, in grouping “informality” with “more common in speech than writing,” the definition privileges cultures where information has historically been passed down through written language (Anglo cultures) rather than cultures that historically privileged orality (Afrocentric cultures, Indigenous cultures, etc.).

Another third of students in the causal/formal category didn’t use the word “slang” when discussing the false dichotomy of languaging but rather highlighted the cultural elements of their

personal language—elements they believed should be avoided in their academic prose. Examples of such responses include: “My personal writing style includes its own lexis, words that friends and family from my cultural background will understand, whereas my academic writing is strictly for professors and maybe a job interview.” Here, the student (whether consciously or unconsciously) assumes the professor/employer will likely not be able to understand lexis from their cultural background. The believed cultural background of the professor/employer can be illuminated in the use of the word “professional” as seen in the next response: “While my personal writing style includes terms commonly used by my age group or within my geographical setting, my academic writing style is much more professional.” I coded responses that included the word “professional” in their understanding of academic writing, totally half of all responses in this category. As discussed in Chapter 1, Condon and Young address how “professional” as a descriptor for writing really signifies white languaging practices. They state, “We have learned (unless we slip up) to substitute words like ‘professional’ for white so that any racism that might be revealed is semantically concealed” (6-7).<sup>11</sup>

The last third of students in the “formal versus casual” category used words like “relaxed” or “casual” to describe their personal writing and “forced,” “stiff,” and “boring” to differentiate their academic writing, as outlined in Figure 3 on page 51. When we look at how these examples reveal students’ beliefs that they must rid themselves of any authentic markers within their academic writing, it’s not a surprise that “forced,” “stiff,” and “boring” become the adjectives used. Students from the study believe they can’t include proverbs, syntactical structures, or any lexical choice reflective of their identities, cultures, and/or experiences. Their view of academic writing, at no fault to them, is as one-dimensional as Bartholomae suggests. The kind

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<sup>11</sup> The impact of this reality will further be discussed in this chapter’s conclusion.

of discomfort Bartholomae endorses when rising to the occasion of academic writing is not merely represented in these responses as a growing pain, but as an alien that strips students of their own agency as embodied writers with various experiences and expertise.

We further see how some students are stripped of their agency in the last main category derived from the pre-survey. I coded grammar as its own category to represent responses that specifically addressed the grammatical differences of personal and academic writing. Of the 25% of students who addressed grammar, half discussed how their grammar is simply more lax with responses such as, “My personal writing isn’t proper, yet I strive to make my academic writing grammatically correct” and “I believe that the two styles are so different because mentally, I know there are so many grammatical rules for academic writing. I know that I have to place commas in the right places and that I have to make sure I cite this book correctly, etc. With my personal writing, I am just writing my ideas and feelings down.” While the first example nods to audience, it also reflects the remnants of current traditionalism in which good writing is solely defined as correct writing. The second example represents more the casual nature of shifting from a register your familiar with to a register less familiar yet still it mentions that there are “rules” to grammar. More than half of the responses in the grammar category specifically referenced arbitrary rules such as “I use pronouns in my personal writing” or “I struggle trying not to use ‘I’ or ‘we’ or ‘you’ in academic writing.” Such arbitrary rules present grammar as a barrier to overcome rather than as an available rhetorical tool—a resource for expression that provides writers with greater agency within their writing, regardless of whether the audience is a personal friend, teacher, employer, or stranger.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See John Dawkin’s “Teaching Punctuation as a Rhetorical Tool” and Laura R. Micciche’s “The Case for Rhetorical Grammar” for more in-depth conversations on teaching grammar as a rhetorical tool.

Within each of these three main survey response categories and their subcategories, it becomes evident why 50% of students wished academic writing could be more similar to their personal writing. These responses demonstrate the belief that *all* academic writing must be falsely distanced from the writer, void of any authentic prose, and written for a one-dimensional audience with zero cultural background. So how do we redirect these misconceptions?

### *Discussion Post Responses*

After completing the pre-survey and then watching videos that challenged and complicated what constitutes academic prose, both in terms of linguistic and genre conventions, students were then asked to discuss the positives and negatives associated with incorporating linguistic diversity and potential outcomes from the “Student’s Right to Their Own Language” (SRTOL) resolution. In each individual classroom, particular words and phrases were repeated from post to post. One might surmise this reality spawns from students reading another’s posts and mirroring said language. While the verbiage was repetitive within each individual class, the ideas remained consistent across all participating classrooms. To best understand the narratives that arose from the posts, I again used grounded theory for coding. This section will look specifically at posts coded for their discussion of comfort/ease and culture/identity/agency.<sup>13</sup>

Sixty percent of students discussed “comfort” or “ease” in the opportunity to mesh their home languages within academic prose. This category was then further divided into subcategories: (1) students who misunderstood meshing to mean they no longer need abide to any rhetorically savvy conventions of writing and (2) students who better understood the specific nuances of which SRTOL and Young advocate. Slightly less than half of the students in this category misinterpreted code-meshing to mean they no longer needed to consider or strive

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<sup>13</sup> Responses regarding grading practices was another major category that arose in discussion posts, but will be discussed later in this chapter as it also became a prominent theme in the post-survey responses.



towards rhetorically effective prose. They instead misunderstood the movement towards linguistic justice to “allow people to write in their own words rather than *worrying about using vocabulary and structure* that is necessary to the topic” (Student b.6, italics added for emphasis). This is incredibly false. Said responses overlook SRTOL’s admonishment of “ill-organized, imprecise, undefined, inappropriate writing in any dialect” (29). These students rather solidify Smith’s fear that the resolution negated certain techniques of “tightness, clarity, precision, specificity, and logic which can be borrowed from the best surviving examples of the past” (167). The fact that nearly half of students failed to understand that successful code-meshed writing includes deliberate choices in phrasing and lexis, painstaking contemplation regarding what word choice and sentence structure is most effective, demonstrates our study’s own failure to address this reality. Our videos and classroom discussions need to better explain that neither code-meshing nor SRTOL endorse sloppy writing, but rather advocate that students learn how to best incorporate their own languages in rhetorically savvy ways.

The other half of students who mentioned ease/comfort when writing, however, used such language not to condone sloppy writing but to represent the inclusivity and cultural representation provided through code-meshing. For example, one student wrote, “If students can use lexis they are comfortable with, their writing will be more fluent and inclusive” (Student a.7). Others discussed how students “will be able to use words that represent their identity and culture” (Student a.3) and breakdown the “Gatekeeping” the forces students to “hold back in fear of what certain people consider ‘correct’” (Student b.3). In effect, such ease will enable “the writing [to] come off as passionate” (Student c.1) Within such responses, once again Bartholomae’s contention of the necessary discomfort in acculturating an academic voice is

challenged since said responses regarding comfort sometimes cross categorized with responses addressing agency and identity.

As will be discussed in Chapter 4, educators shouldn't shy away from student discomfort. Such discomfort is natural when learning about and discussing topics like the intersection of race and writing and linguistic justice. Yet, while requiring students grow as writers, which can cause a necessary discomfort in first-year-writing, are we doing so in a manner that compromises students' own agency? If we demand a particular one-dimensional style of academic writing, we strip students of the identity and culture that's long contributed to their sense of agency, as was evident in the 44% of responses coded under culture/identity/agency discussed below.

Bartholomae provides different examples of student attempts at producing academic prose, sharing verbose writing with limited substance, logic, and originality. This reality is mirrored in one student discussion post that mentions they add “fluff and buffering” because they fear that including their own cultural Englishes prevents them from “answering the prompt in a way that will give earn them an A.” Other students wrote how in attempting “to speak our [academic] language, to speak as we [academics] do”—a manner that forces student writers to “not only to speak in another's voice but through another's code,” as Bartholomae discusses—they forfeit their agency and identity (Student c.5). This forfeiting disconnects students from proposed writing assignments. One student of the 44% who discussed agency and identity wrote:

One of the pros of letting students use their own language is it will give them a deeper connection to their reading and writing style. They will be able to express their thoughts fluently which can strengthen their grasp of identity and make it easier for students to relate to one another. Furthermore, it will give them an incentive to finish their work because they would actually enjoy the assignments (Student a.8).

Another student wrote that allowing students to utilize their own Englishes might result in “greater participation” for “it allows students to feel more involved within the conversations, instead of having to worry about using some correct ‘Standard American English’ (that people typically struggle with)” (Student a.10). Mike Rose discussed in “Rigid Rules, Inflexible Planning and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer’s Block” how such fear in writing “correctly” often stalls students from writing at all. That’s why Anne Lamont’s “Shitty First Drafts” is so widely anthologized. Peter Elbow contended that students should first express themselves in that shitty first draft and then revise to acculturate the language of power in his article “Inventing the Mother Tongue” Yet still, revising out cultural markers of language serves as a barrier for that “deeper connection to [one’s] reading and writing style” (Student a.8). Within this approach students forfeit that right to “represent their identity and culture” (Student a.3) within their writing.

So how exactly did these students present their culture and identity within this proposed writing prompt? Did it lack the “tightness, clarity, precision” as Smith warned? Or were students able to blend rhetorical lexis and tools in an effective manner, producing quality prose?

### **They Done Meshed It: Student Writing Samples**

We asked student participants to “think of a word or phrase that is rooted in a community you participate in. It can be regional, cultural, and/or generational.” Students were then asked to argue that word/phrase’s potential rhetorical effectiveness in academic prose. Within this prompt we saw all sorts of identity markers represented. Some students wrote of the rhetorical effect of “spill the tea,” a “term that started within the gay community in San Antonio, Texas as a means to ‘share gossip.’” Students argued the effectiveness of generational abbreviations of words like “Bougie” (short for bourgeoisie) and “Bro” (short for brother); denotative meanings of words

like “salty” (irritated), popularized terms like “shook” (nervous), and “throw shade” (criticize). They also argued the effectiveness of regional spellings of words like “Aye mane” (a phonetic spelling for the pronunciation of “hey man” common to Memphis, TN). How students discussed such phrasing and lexi can be analyzed in three separated examples.

One student argued the rhetorical effectiveness of a regional word: Junt.

What is “**junt**”? Junt is a noun. A Memphis made noun. It is rooted in the Memphian culture and is tied to multiple generations. Junt is local, but it is universal! Say you got invited to the cookout. Aunt Sheryl just made a sweet potato pie with a new recipe, but you didn’t taste the sweet potato. You actually didn’t know what the pie was made out of and you didn’t want to hurt her feelings, so you go up to her and say “Aunt Sheryl, this junt good” with a very polite but fake smile. Aunt Sheryl was very happy with my praise for her, and she made sure to send me home with two more slices. Yikes. But at least we spared her feelings by using “junt” instead of *assuming* what her dish was.

Because junt is so universal and has no ties with a specific noun, it can take the place of any person, place, thing, or idea that you want to talk about without actually saying what the thing is. Junt can be intensely general, as well as contextually specific. Because of the utilitarian nature of the word, it can be thoroughly integrated within an academic work with little to no preparation. But really though, that junt is easy to use.

Within this example, the student both meshed rhetorical tools (like narrativizing and declarative statements) while also meshing the regional word “junt” with more traditional academic lexis like “utilitarian.” The example does all this without sacrificing clarity or tightness. The student rather aptly contextualized their chosen word through a detailed, hypothetical rhetorical situation in paragraph one, enabling audience members who may not be familiar with “junt” to understand

how specifically the word functions out in the wild. While this hypothetical situation has a comical effect, behind the humor, the student still argued that through the inclusion of broader lexical options they are afforded a better chance at offering a successful rhetorical response to their direct audience within this hypothetical situation, Aunt Sheryl. In the second paragraph, the student then cohesively blended more traditional argumentative prose regarding the benefits of the word “junt” while further demonstrating its smooth incorporation within the closing sentence. Overall, the student blended their cultural identity within an academic setting while maintaining their agency, both within the hypothetical position posed and their argument.

Another student explored the use of meshing English with Arabic:

Salam. I'd like to discuss with you a word commonly used by Muslims all over the world. The Arabic word “Salam” means peace but it is usually used to both start and end a conversation. It can also be put in emails, text messages, and letters. For example, you might start off a text thread with “Salam, how are you.” While historically Salam is used amongst Muslims, the word's reach has grown and is now used as a greeting for many different religions and races.

If Salam can grow outside the Muslim community, why can't it grow within an academic one? We constantly talk about the major role of audience. Greeting our audience within the essays and letters we write with the word “Salam” not only grabs the reader's attention it also exposes them to diversity.

By confidently opening the response to this particular academic prompt with a non-English-origin greeting, the student instantly demonstrated how the chosen Arabic word seamlessly functions right beside English languaging. The student then strengthened their argument for inclusion by highlighting how the word is already successfully being used amongst various

written genres, thus reinforcing how meshing multiple languages in a single written text already occurs daily throughout society, including professional settings (i.e. emails). The student's complex understanding of how languaging truly functions is further solidified in their discussion of why exactly the meshing of two languages in one cohesive text can benefit the target audience. This is exactly what we hope students realize: the impact of languaging on their audience. Thus, this student's example debunks Smith and Zorn's argument that including one's own language fails to consider audience. Rather this student demonstrated how successful code-meshing requires a very keen and sophisticated understanding of its intended impact on said audience. In other words, when taught successfully, code-meshing further highlights to students the importance of considering one's audience within the context of writing.

Another student chose to address how the phonetic spelling of the word "periodt" provides rhetorical emphasis. This student wrote:

Periodt is a word used at the end of a sentence, meant to add emphasis to a point that has been made. It is often regarded as a more extreme or intense version of "period."

...Periodt, articulated and spelled with a last T, is commonly credited to Black English. It has been explicitly credited to Black Women slang. The last T of periodt follows an example in Black English where a last D can get articulated as a T or a type of one. While reflective of speech, in its written form the added T demonstrates that the announcement is conclusive, that there is nothing else to be said or discussed.

It is difficult to trace whether occurrences of periodt date as early as the 2000s as it may have been seen as a grammatical mistake rather than a deliberate choice. Be that as it may, periodt, intentionally spelled in that capacity, unquestionably spread during the 2010s....

[Periodt] would benefit the argument because it would allow the audience to know that the writer is actually standing behind the points that they have made in their writing. For example, if the writer was to say, “This is the best movie of all time, periodt,” the author is adding more emphasis on the point that they just made to back it up.

Within this example, again the student acknowledged how meshing their own cultural dialect reinforces the goal of the rhetor towards the audience. The student highlighted the cognitive intention behind the spelling and analyzed how the deliberate linguistic act accomplishes a strong rhetorical effect, one that adds emphasis to text in a manner similar to other revered rhetorical choices, like punctuation, capitalization, and italics. While disciples of Current Traditional Theory have historically trained teachers to mark the spelling as wrong, the student underscored just how rhetorically saavy this move truly is. Furthermore, the student called attention to the spelling’s origination amongst Black women, a demographic historically overlooked for their notable contributions to academics as a whole and languaging specifically. Such an acknowledgement is key in the educational experience of students who for far too long have been underrepresented.

While these code-meshed examples demonstrate quality writing, debunking Smith’s contention that such a writing practice produces sloppy writing and debunking the argument that the application of SRTOL doesn’t consider audience, they also represent concerns students listed in their discussion posts when it comes to code-meshing’s impact on audiences. Fifty-six percent of students mentioned fear of a communication breakdown between the writer and audience when using vocabulary with which the audience might not be familiar. Students wrote how “cons include a disconnect forming between the student’s use of language and the teacher’s understanding” (Student a.2), and how audiences may “not be familiar with the language”

(Student a.3) nor “understand [the writer’s] slang” (Student a.4). Junt and Salam could easily fall into this category. As a non-southern, I did not know the definition of junt prior to reading that participant’s writing sample. However, this was not the first time during my academic career I’d read a word that required me to research the definition, and I guarantee it won’t be my last. I imagine such an experience is not a foreign concept to any academic across any discipline. Scholars constantly expand their vocabulary. Compositionist, rhetoricians, and linguists, in particular, often take extra joy in this. Therefore, why should resistance, and frankly laziness, now be reserved for previously unknown words or terminologies written by students, especially lexis reflective of historically marginalized communities in the U.S.? As an undergrad, I remember having to look-up words like abstemious and loquacious. Researching junt or Salam is no different. Furthermore, two student discussion posts included excitement towards “allow[ing] for a wider exposure to different forms of vernacular that other students may be unfamiliar with” (student b.5) and gaining “a heightened exposure to languages” (student b. 6).

To encourage and celebrate a student expanding their “academic” vocabulary—one’s code, as Bartholomae suggests—while belittling historically marginalized terminologies reflects the endorsement of oppressive languaging hierarchies within the reader rather than the intelligence of the writer. In advocating for the use of lexis such as junt, Salam, and periodt, students are advocating to break down languaging power structures that say someone is inferior based on their identity markers and culture. Within these writing samples, students aptly challenge white supremacy, heteronormativity, prejudice against non-Western religions, and discrimination based on geographical location. In a time when diversity, equity, and inclusion statements serve as key tenets for most universities, shouldn’t we encourage this? Furthermore, as the SRTOL resolution discusses, we, English scholars and teachers, set the standard for



language practices across the country. If we teach, across the board, that using such lexical choices for rhetorical effectiveness is equal to the terminology historically used in the academic writing of straight white men, then society will follow said lead. Scholars in all disciplines will be more accepting of the plurality of Englishes if they too are taught its acceptance in undergraduate courses, as will future CEO, managers, and hiring panels.

In order for this change to materialize and code-meshing to be taught effectively, several revisions to pedagogical approaches must take place. Student discussed such necessities both within their discussion posts and their post-survey responses—one of the first being grading practices and teacher feedback.

### **Grade It, Y'all**

Thirty-two percent of students addressed a fear of negative grade results when practicing code-meshing within their discussion posts. One student wrote, “A con would be that it may make it harder for teachers to grade and/or determine the validity of a paper” (student b.9) while another student displayed reticence if “teachers would really learn each students’ writing style and learn how to critique them” (student a.7). As mentioned in a previous section, students fear that being “misunderstood” by a teacher would result in a poor grade. However, as SRTOL discusses, the issue is rarely about miscommunication: “That is to say when a dialect of American English claim not to understand speakers of another dialect of the same language, the impediments are likely to be attitudinal” (24). What several students discuss as misunderstanding is really prejudice—a prejudice they fear will result in a lowered GPA. So how do we negate this prejudice or biases within our grading practices?

Within the post-survey, when asked “How could an instructor or writing tutor assist you with code-meshing in your academic writing?”, 42% of students said teachers’ grading practices

and feedback should reflect their endorsement of code-meshing. Comments included: “Maybe allow code meshing in the rubric of the assignment,” “Not count off points for using code-meshing,” and “assist me with code-meshing in my academic writing by giving me feedback on my code-meshing.” Quality scholarship exists regarding assessment practices that best reflect antiracism; and while a full conversation dedicated to this discussion is not feasible within the constraints of this chapter, some such scholarship will be highlighted for the purpose of addressing these three particular student responses regarding rubrics that reflect an openness to code-meshing, students’ fears of penalization, and productive feedback.

Balester conducted a study in 2012 on “How Writing Rubrics Fail: Towards a Multicultural Model.” Balester highlighted the reality of how rubrics—specifically sections on grammar, mechanics, style, and voice—often and problematically standardize English. She therefore outlined three categories of rubrics: The first, acculturationist rubrics, “aim for ‘standard’ English, posited as a stable and single entity...the sole language variety to be used in academic circles” (66). These rubrics seek to eradicate slang, meshed codes, and translanguaging from writing. The second, accommodationist rubrics, seek to “embrace multilingual students with the goal of bridging home and academic literacies” (67) in the form of code-switching. Somewhat similar to acculturationism, these rubrics share a tendency to refer to a standardized version of English. The last, and most efficient in meeting the post-survey response that rubrics account for code-meshing, are multiculturalist rubrics. These rubrics embrace the value of language diversity, giving all language varieties equal stature. This approach incorporates specific wording in usage and mechanic statements to account for the rhetorically effectiveness of diverse grammatical and lexical choices, thus providing space for code-meshing within the rubric. With several teachers (and writing programs) relying on rubrics, Balester’s essay

provides apt recommendations for how to make our rubrics more antiracist; however, even within her suggestion, Balester addressed how all rubrics are born from Western educational practices, and therefore, eliminating all bias within the constructs of rubrics is nearly impossible.

Inoue mirrored such a discussion in his 2015 monograph as he addressed how “racism is one product of all writing assessment,” and that gender bias, economic bias, and biases against non-heterosexual orientations, certain regional affiliations, and/or certain religions affiliations also must be considered (5). Such biases leading to penalization is well documented in Fowler and Oschner’s 2012 study, “Evaluating Essays Across Institutional Boundaries: Teachers Attitudes Toward Dialect, Race, and Writing,” thus justifying students’ concerns. Inoue presented labor-based grading contracts as a best practice for combating penalization based on conscious and unconscious biases or prejudices. These grading contracts prioritize student labor and are developed with buy-in from both teachers and students through transparent and dialogic conversations that “share power and redistribute authority self-consciously” (82). Furthermore, these contracts prevent teachers from exerting biases onto grades and negate the fear of penalization mentioned above in a featured student’s response. Instead students have the space to experiment, take risks, practice, and hone all their afforded rhetorical tools within the safe space of the classroom. Both Bartholomae and Smith acknowledged that student writing, by nature, can be messy when students practice their acculturation of an academic voice. This remains true even when the student hones their academic voice while including code-meshing. Whenever a student grows as a writer with heightened intentions and audience in mind, they need practice and feedback, not fear and punishment. With grading contracts alleviating teachers’ requirements to assign a numeric grade to each assignment based on their individualized assessment, teachers’

sole focus becomes formative feedback. And what kind of feedback teachers provide is extremely critical, whether using multiculturalist rubrics or grading contracts.

Students in the post-survey specifically requested that our feedback help them hone their code-meshing skills. One way to do this is to approach each individual paper not as riddled with mistakes but full of intention and cultural identity; we need to guide students through how to make said intentions rhetorically successful—highlight areas where their code-meshing was rhetorically effective and areas where it can be improved and how. This is no easy task, especially for teachers trained to mark “mistakes” in students’ writing. Yet, once again, if we are asking that students continually put in the hard work of honing their academic voice, we need to put in the hard work of continually learning and honing our practice of providing beneficial feedback. All English teachers, whether specifically studying rhetoric or not, can identify when languaging is working and when it can be improved once we learn to question our bias and confront our own prejudice. It further helps to ask students to attach a brief letter to each major assignment in which they discuss their intentions within their assignments and the current rhetorical choices and moves they are practicing. Such a letter helps teachers offer the best constructive feedback while keeping our students’ agency and identity intact. Said letter can also help us provide constructive feedback to the students who choose not to code-mesh.

It would be misleading to report that all students in the study wanted to further explore code-meshing. Seventeen percent of students directly mentioned in their discussion posts the types of prejudice against dialects and languages that exist outside the classroom, thus making them resistant to the practice. Students, like scholars mentioned throughout this chapter, recognize that while yes, acculturating hegemonic practices of writing (i.e. white supremacist, heteronormative, classist languaging) can strip them of their cultural identity, *not* doing so can

prevent them from socio and economic growth. Of the 17% of students reluctant to code-meshing, one student wrote: “Due to prejudices against certain vernaculars, certain writing may be negatively judged or seen as poorer quality if the reader holds one of these prejudices” (student b.5). Another student wrote that code-meshing “could leave students vulnerable if the reader doesn’t like their style” (student a.7), while others said code-meshing “may make a writer seem uneducated” (student c.5), leading audiences to “choose not to read [their writing] at all if they do not like how it is written” (student c.1). This reality makes student-written letters that accompany all major writing assignments that more important, as I came to learn from my mentor Katherine Fredlund. It ensures that our feedback is truly tailored to the wants and needs of student, not just the wants of the teacher. If a student decides to hone their code-meshed writing, then our feedback can be tailored to respond accordingly. If a student wants to hone a more historically hegemonic practice of writing, then our feedback can ensure they do. Either way, said letters ensure that our feedback respects our students’ agency.

### **When I Mesh, You Mesh, We Mesh**

While the majority of students addressed how a revision to grading practices and feedback would best help assist them with code-meshing, two other responses were also common. When asked the open-ended question in the post-survey, “How could an instructor or writing tutor assist you with code-meshing in your academic writing?”, 17% of students requested that we provide more examples of rhetorically successful code-meshed prose and another 17% of students requested that we, as teachers, code-mesh in the classroom to better demonstrate its effectiveness.

Regarding the request for published examples of code-meshing, one student wrote, “[Teachers] could provide more examples, since I am so unused to code-meshing. It would help

me to see how others have incorporated their own home languages in their writing.” Luckily for us, plenty of rich scholarship incorporating code-meshing exists, several of which are featured in the literature review of this chapter and the reference section of this dissertation. However, once presented in published form, code-meshing, outside of more explicit grammatical choices like the “habitual be” and phonetic spellings, often goes unnoticed.<sup>14</sup> As Young argued in “Nah, We Straight,” each one of us are constantly code-meshing in our daily speech practices, whether we realize it or not. The student who wrote this response is likely more used to code-meshing than they realize. We’re just not trained to notice its more nuanced versions unless scouting for these so-called errors. I personally made the mistake of thinking Young didn’t start code-meshing until he became an established scholar with tenure—i.e. I didn’t see the multiplicity of his languaging practice until he started code-meshing more explicitly (see “Should Writer’s Use They Own Languages). It wasn’t until he challenged me to reread his inaugural CCCs article (“Your Average Nigga”), that I noticed the subtle ways in which he code-meshed—ways that often go unrecognized as they are so reflective of common daily languaging. Therefore, in addition to providing students with examples, we need to also train students to recognize the often-subtle and normalized ways in which code-meshing already successfully exists among all races and ethnicities. Whenever a student of Young’s believes a code-meshed choice or arbitrary grammatical rule is unacceptable, he challenges them to find a similar rhetorical choice in a published piece for class credit. Not one of his students has come back empty handed when attempting this challenge (Young, “Deb Talbot Roundtable”).

Both (1) exposing students to academic writing that reflects their cultural languaging practices and (2) training students to recognize those nuanced existent practices provides a sense

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<sup>14</sup> I’ve tested this in multiple debates where those who oppose code-meshing often don’t even recognize when it happens in published texts.

of validity for our students. In July 2020, CCCs released “**This Ain’t Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice! PeriodT!**” The aforementioned student who chose to investigate the rhetorical acumen of adding the T to PeriodT was sent this article and responded with excitement to see her languaging practice utilized within such a prominent academic setting. Similar to the demand, which contends “we cannot claim that Black Lives Matter in our field if Black Language does not matter” (para 5), it mattered to this student to see herself and her language represented in the field. She felt validated in knowing that her cultural use of the phonetic spelling of periodt has space in academia and doesn’t have to be subjugated to lower standing.

While students discussed the need for more published examples, some challenged us, as teachers, to demonstrate code-meshing in both our own writing practice and our daily speech in the classroom. One student wrote, “[teachers] could give examples of their own code-meshed writing” while another said, “[teachers] could assist me with code-meshing by just putting it in their own common language while teaching.” These comments personally forced me to really reflect on what I was asking my students to do. In 2005, NCTE published a statement on “Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in English Education,” in which one of their eight tenets requires that educators “*model* culturally responsive and socially responsible practices for students” (Tenet 5, emphasis added) In order to walk the walk I had to investigate how I talk, and write, the talk. Using Green’s earlier mentioned code-meshing activity as well as the one outlined here, I explored the influences on my own languaging practices and investigated how I incorporated and represented such cultures in my own writing. What southwestern lexis and grammar exist within my identity? How did being raised in a bilingual household with an immigrant mother impact my own languaging practice? How much of my paternal

grandmother's southern Baptist dialect and my maternal grandfather's Judaism influence my rhetorical patterns? What parts of popular culture experienced as a millennial appear in my speech and writing practices? Was the punk scene in which I grew up apparent in my phrasing? What about my own whiteness, the identity marker too-often left unscrutinized in scholarship, as Chapter 1 discussed.

As a straight, white woman who doesn't check many identifiable diversity markers, I had to investigate my own various speech patterns, just as I asked of all my participants, including those who, like me, might not recognize all their own various writing and rhetorical influences at first glance. I too first misunderstood code-meshing to simply depict the meshing of AAVE or multilingualism, even though Katherine Kelleher Sohn highlighted how varying languaging practices of other white people, such as White Appalachian dialects, influence the practice ("Language Awareness in an Appalachian Composition Classroom"). I too still see my own code-meshing practice as a rough work in progress. However, since code-meshing is beneficial not only in breaking down white language supremacy but in also equipping ALL students with a more enhanced lexical and grammatical toolkit for their writing, teaching by our own example is a fair request. One we've long measured as tried and true. So, let's code-mesh it too.

### **Conclusion**

In the post-survey, 90% of students said the study's featured exercise helped them practice code-meshing and conceptualize ways to incorporate meshing within their own writing practices. As this study shows, by incorporating code-meshing into the classroom, students (1) gain a broadened understanding of the rhetorical effectiveness of languaging, (2) maintain their agency, (3) participate in both validating and celebrating their cultural identity, and (4) gain more exposure to diverse approaches to language. We need to be teaching code-meshing. And we also



need more resources and scholarship on how to do so. From the time this study began to the time I'm writing this conclusion (Fall 2022), Young published an exercise that expands on the exercise presented in this chapter. In his curated textbook *This Ain't Yesterday's Literacy*, Young has students read June Jordan's "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan" and "analyze the essay through the lens of code-meshing with your group or as a class" ("Unit Four Activity," para. 6). He then provided two videos in the "Furthering the Conversation" section that complicate the question of standardized American English before asking students to:

Write down your best likes and worst fears about code-meshing.

Then write how you can incorporate your best likes in your own speech and writing.

Provide examples of how you might express yourself using code-meshing with your own cultural context.

Then discuss how you can overcome your own worst fears about code-meshing (para 9).

While the addition of this publication is wonderful, three published pieces regarding how specifically to encourage students to code-mesh within the classroom is not enough (Green, Hutchison & Morris, and Young). We need more. The research in this chapter works to further help equip teachers to invite their students to practice code-meshing.

Within this research, it also became clear that in order to incorporate code-meshing as a viable option in the classroom, teachers must do more than simply have students complete one code-meshing exercise. A truly successful incorporation requires a reconceptualization of the writing classroom as a whole in order to best encourage diverse and inclusive languaging practices. The thought can be overwhelming. We already only have one or two semesters to try and prepare students for the various writing demands of both college and professional life;

adding the destruction of deep-seeded languaging prejudice might seem like the tipping point towards joining the abolitionist movement against first-year writing.<sup>15</sup> However, deep-seeded languaging prejudice is precisely *why* we must incorporate code-meshing and the discussion of Students' Right to Their Own Language in our classrooms, as this prejudice comes with a high cost. A study conducted by Harvard University in 2017 disclosed that African American and Asian American job candidates received more job calls if they “whitened” their languaging practices in their resumes, even when applying to job postings that claimed a “pro-diversity” status (Gerdeman, para. 8-9). Furthermore, minute insertions of Black Englishes during job interviews often result in interviewees not being hired, as they are wrongly accused of being “unprofessional” based on their languaging practice (Ferlazzo). Therefore, any time I’ve personally thought that attempting to break down white language supremacy is a task too big for FYW (after all, I still need students to recognize their writing practice, understand genre conventions, conduct research, learn how to revise, get comfortable with multimodal compositions, and the list goes on and on), I’m forced to remember that I’m white. I’m personally not punished for my Englishes. My privilege exempts me from worrying about whitening my language practices on resumes or in job interviews. While the direct effects of racism are less obvious against me, no one makes it through a discriminatory system unscathed. As MLK and Lillian Watson discuss, our liberation is constantly tied to one another. Compliancy, the willingness to *not* incorporate these conversations and practices in the classroom, is a violence that speak volumes and leaves an all-encompassing, damaging injustice intact throughout our society.

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<sup>15</sup> See Marjorie Roemer, Lucille M. Schultz, and Russel K. Durst’s “The Great Debate on First-Year Writing” for a detailed overview of the abolitionist debate in FYW.

Therefore, while the task is large, the code-meshing exercises presented here, as well as requests to model code-meshing in our own languaging practice and feedback, are tangible steps towards both breaking down language prejudices and providing a more enriched rhetorical toolkit for our students, in regards to races, genders, physical abilities, sexualities, nationalities, regions, and more. And while this study had faults in (1) solidifying the rhetorical acumen required to code-mesh successfully and (2) directly addressing all the implicit prejudicial languaging practices acculturated deep in our society, it offers some tangible moves towards truly making writing classrooms a diverse, inclusive, and equitable space—moves reinforced by students' own feedback on the topic.

### **Chapter 3: Let Me Hear You Write It: Challenging Predilections for White Meritocratic Discourse through the Teaching of African American Rhetorics**

Several cultural markers contribute to Memphis holding its own on international maps. This “Home of the Blues” garners recognition for its rhythm, its cadence, its narratives. Its deep roots in social activism brought Memphis testimonials to a national stage, and its long-standing history with slavery signifies the resilience and perseverance of those who call the Bluff City their home. Memphis has long called on people through music and protest, and the national and international response lives through sites such as Stax Records, Sun Studios, the National Civil Rights Museum, the Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum, numerous homages to Ida B. Wells, and more. The rhetoric of Memphis—a rhetoric indicative of the city’s long intertwining of music, protest, and deep roots in Blackness—is the thread that holds the city together, and sometimes threatens to tear it apart.

When investigating Black rhetorics to identify its origins and define its frameworks, Geneva Smitherman turned to Black spirituals. These sung words served as a lifeline through the hardships of slavery—signifying means for escape and challenging daily horrors with artistry and poetics. The sounds and beats of these spirituals still linger in the air that brushes over the Mississippi River and meets downtown Memphis. Smitherman looked at Black abolitionist speeches, whose narratives and testimonials calling for social justice still reverberate through the streets of Orange Mound, Southhaven, Midtown, and beyond. These rhetorics—call and response, rhythm and cadence, narrativizing and testifying, and signifying—are at the core of the city and its community. Yet for decades, these representational rhetorics remained absent from the required, core curriculum of UofM’s First-Year Writing (FYW) program, a program dedicated to teaching rhetorics to Memphians.

The year before I attempted to teach code-meshing in my FYW classrooms, my institution's Writing Program Administrator (WPA) completed a full revision of our institution's second-semester, rhetoric-intensive, FYW curriculum. Using a localized, Memphis-focused approach, the WPA edited a new textbook that included reading examples from a diverse group of authors engaged in crucial arguments central to Memphis: lynching campaigns, Jim Crow, Civil Rights, unequitable housing practices, police violence, the rebuilding of Beale Street, and more. She also devised assignments that engaged in power, literacy, multimodality, and argumentation. In the first edition of the new *Writing Memphis* textbook, the argumentation theory, however, still solely relied on Greco-Roman traditions.

UofM is not unique when it comes to this reality. The rhetorical traditions taught in the majority of FYW classrooms across the board primarily focus on scholars such as Aristotle, Plato, Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintilian, individuals born of cultures where only white, upper-class men were afforded education and a voice in their community.<sup>16</sup> In the FYW textbooks I researched, those who did branch out from Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical theory only went as far as Toulmin and Rogerian argumentation theory, both also composed by white men. Thus, the canon of rhetorical and argumentation literature utilized in FYW classrooms across the nation commonly lacks theory written by voices of color, women, and individuals of varying economic backgrounds.

The semester I started teaching code-meshing, the WPA encouraged me to curate a presentation on the use of Critical Race Theory as a research methodology for scholars of writing and rhetoric. During this research project, I read articles, monographs, and edited collections on African American rhetorics and reflected on how I'd never formally been taught this rhetorical

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<sup>16</sup> In his monograph *Stolen Legacy*, George G.M. James discusses how all Western Philosophy (including rhetorical theory) is actually an appropriation of Egyptian ideology.

tradition. Such rhetorical theory had never once been included in a single syllabus I'd personally come in contact with during my nine years as a student of higher education. At the conclusion of my presentation, the WPA and I discussed the absence of such theory in UofM's own second-semester, rhetoric-intensive FYW course, one that had specifically been revised to better represent our community. It quickly became clear: we needed to revise the curriculum again to include African American rhetorics if we were truly gonna teach students how to *Write Memphis*.

Now full disclosure, I tried hard to get out of spearheading this kinda work. After all, I'm a white woman. I didn't have any background in African American rhetorics prior to that ONE presentation. I didn't believe it was my place. I would've gladly helped contribute, but this couldn't be my charge.

That same semester the decision to pilot African American rhetorics in the curriculum was decided, I went to the College Composition and Communication Conference in Pittsburg and attended a panel where Vershawn Ashanti Young and Michell Bachelor Robinson released their new edited collection on African American rhetoric for the Routledge Reader. After the panel, I introduced myself to Young and told him my institution was in the initial stages of laying the groundwork to featuring African American rhetorics into our core FYW curriculum. I also mentioned that I wasn't exactly sure who was gonna spearhead this initiative at UofM. Young asked me if we had any Black faculty in our writing, rhetoric, and technical communication concentration. I said no. I mean our field is still debating even the recognition of white language supremacy. It's not always the most welcoming environment for scholars of color.<sup>17</sup> Young then looked at me and said, "Well, I guess it's you spearheading it." He did tell

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<sup>17</sup> Just review the 2021 boycott of the Council of Writing Program Administrators.

me, however, that I had to work collaboratively with scholars of color on this initiative for it to actually work and that I had to really listen to their input, not just pat myself on the back for inviting Black bodies to be present. This initiative would have definitely failed without a Black perspective and intersectional collaboration. Young then gave me some wonderful recommendations for who all I should start reading if we wanted to do this thing right. So, here's how we did it and what we learned.

This chapter will first discuss the previous scholarship written on African American rhetorics before diving into how specifically my institution collaborated towards building a unit on African American rhetorical traditions a part of our core, FYW curriculum. This chapter will then address the methods used to evaluate the success of this unit (classroom observations, teacher interviews, student surveys, and student writing samples) as well as the shortcomings during the project's initial implementation. Lastly, this chapter will discuss approaches to successfully teach African American rhetorical traditions and other historically marginalized rhetorical theory as a means to further enrich student writing and materialize a more inclusive writing curriculum.

### **The Deeper the Roots**

Melbourne S. Cummings opened his 1972 essay, "Problems of Researching Black Rhetoric," with the following line: "Black rhetoric, as an academic discipline, is one of the newest and most challenging in the field of Black Studies" (503). With Black studies only recognized as an academic discipline four years prior, Cummings responded to the recent publications on this topic. Athur L. Smith, later Molefi Kete Asante, published *Rhetoric of Black Revolution*, the inaugural scholarship on Black rhetorics, in 1969. The monograph begins with an analysis of the then-contemporary Black militant rhetorics before working backwards towards

the context, content, and audiences of Black speeches ranging from “Fourth of July” delivered by Frederick Douglas to Bobby Seale’s “Free Huey.” Throughout the next few years, other scholars followed suit with monographs investigating Black rhetorics through the data collection of Black speeches: *The Oratory of Negro Leaders, 1990-1968* by Marcus Hanna Bouleware and the edited collection *The Negro Speaks: The Rhetoric of Contemporary Black Leaders*.<sup>18</sup> Based on both American slavery’s deep roots in a culturally Afrocentric orality and its 200-year ban on teaching enslaved peoples to read, the oral origin and nature of such rhetorics is understandable. Yet, Cummings critiqued the difficulty with these initial research approaches to Black rhetorics relying solely on Black speeches, due to the extremely precarious nature of such preservations. He contended first that such historical speeches very rarely made it into print, and second, that papers which have published such speeches were often intentionally destroyed or simply lacked the funding and means necessary to implement appropriate preservation standards (504-505). Cummings also critiqued such books and publications for not defining a Black theoretical framework for analyzing such rhetorics. He wrote: “It is impossible for [the researcher] to study black rhetoric within the traditional framework for rhetorical criticism. Black rhetoric, with its concentration on NOMMO, rhythmical patterns, audience assertiveness, and so on cannot be dealt with by using the conventional tools of analysis of rhetorical criticism. Others must be devised and instituted” (506). While a Black theoretical framework for Black rhetorical criticism took another two decades to address,<sup>19</sup> Smitherman’s broadened approach for identifying and defining a uniquely African American rhetorical tradition came to fruition in 1977.

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<sup>18</sup> Other prominent scholarship to come out at this time includes *The Rhetoric of Black American* by James L. Godlen and Richard Rieke and *The Voice of Black Rhetoric* by Arthur L. Smith and Stephen Robb.

<sup>19</sup> Initiated by Asante’s *The Afrocentric Idea*, to be discussed late in this literature review.



Smitherman not only scoured abolitionist speeches to help define Black rhetorics, she also investigated slave narratives and spirituals in order to identify themes and patterns of Black communication. In 1977, she published her finding in her landmark monograph, *Talkin' and Testifyin.* Her chapter “The Forms of Things Unknown” identified five modes of Black discourse—call and response, signification, tonal semantics, rhyme, and narrative sequencing. While the book’s initial fame and citations in the field of writing studies came from its insights into the linguistic discoveries of Black communication, Smitherman took the rhetoric aspects of writing studies by storm when she published her 1994 study, “The Blacker the Berry, the Sweeter the Juice.” During the previous 20 years, Smitherman gathered 2,764 essays which had been rated by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). She then separated the 800+ essays written by African American students in her data collection and analyzed said essays based on a model of African American discourse constructed by several writing instructors experienced in teaching African American students and one sociolinguist. Her study found that African American students who demonstrated Black Englishes’ rhetorical traits in their writing received higher scores by the NAEP than essays written by African American students who did not demonstrate said traits.

Enthused by such findings, Keith Gilyard and Elaine Richardson began teaching basic writing courses that specifically focused on African American rhetorical traditions in each of their respective universities. From the winter of 1996 to the winter of 1998, they collected 52 essays from Black students enrolled in said classes with the aim of further revealing what constitutes Black rhetorics. Their findings included fifteen features of Black discourse identified as key to Black rhetorical theory. Gilyard and Richardson hoped such a discovery would further legitimize African American rhetorical strategies as a tool to be taught in mainstream writing

classrooms. However, even though several publications addressing Black rhetorics came out between the late 1980s and early 2000s, a study published in 2017 by Williams Farrier revealed that not much had changed in regards to the position of Black rhetorics within core pedagogical writing studies curriculum, as discussed in the next few paragraphs.

In 1987, Asanti published *The Afrocentric Idea* in response to the need for a Black theoretical framework for analyzing Black rhetorics. This monograph placed “African ideas at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behaviors [both those from the mainland and the diaspora]” (6). This monograph further outlined three fundamental themes as a basis for the Afrocentric perspective: human relations, humans’ relationship to the supernatural, and humans’ relationships to their own being (168). The book was heralded for its ability to address how “Afrocentric rhetoric confronts and extends beyond the negations imposed by Western society in which Eurocentric ideals have often stood atop knowledge and culture hierarchies with the result that Black difference typically has been construed as deficiency” (Gilyard and Banks, 47). Asanti’s landmark piece was followed by *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*, an edited collection curated by Gilyard that worked to center such theories within writing studies. The collection featured an essay by Robert Murray that complicated views on the reliance of Western intellectual strategies and offered examples of an “intersubjective stance” for graduate students of color (135). While the collection helped spur conversations regarding Black rhetorics at the graduate level and beyond<sup>20</sup>, Bonnie J. Williams-Farrier 2017 essay demonstrated the slowly-rolling, trickle-down transference of these conversations into FYW classrooms.

Williams-Farrier spent three years reading several essays written by African American Language speakers in her own FYW writing classrooms—courses which featured the base theme

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<sup>20</sup> See, Victor Villaneuva’s “Reading Rhetoric Outside and In.”

of “race and ethnicity.” In her study, Williams-Farrier identified five rhetorical strategies most frequently used in student writing: (1) repetition, linked to the Afrocentric term “Nommo”, (2) signifyin(g), the verbal art of ceremonial combativeness, (3) call and response (4) testifying/narrativizing and (5) sounding, when a speaker expresses extreme displeasure with a particular outcome deemed undeserved, unjust, or demeaning. William’s-Farrier discussed why these Black vernacular tools often go overlooked in the classroom: “The prevailing notion in the field of composition is that rhetorics of orality should be kept separate from the rhetorics of written language. Yet, rhetoric as a field builds on traditional classical rhetoric, which is oral based (e.g. Aristotle, Plato). It’s the African American and Latino rhetorics of orality that many educators may have been trained to dismiss” (241). Following the methodological steps of the Smitherman, Gilyard, and Richardson, William-Farrier’s study promoted the sophisticated uses Black rhetorical strategies and how these strategies effectively enhanced writing from a diverse pool of students, including African American students, European-Americans, Asians, and Latinx students.

The following year, in 2018, Gilyard and Adam Banks released *On African-American Rhetoric*, which featured a clearly defined section on African American rhetorical theory geared directly for writing studies. Their chapter “Rhetorical Theory,” highlighted Afrocentric ideological approaches to rhetorical criticism, emphasized Black rhetorical strategies (such as signifyin(g) and call and response), and discussed the impact of Black Feminism on the African American rhetorical tradition. As mentioned in the introduction, Young and Robinson also released an edited collection titled, *The Routledge Reader of African American Rhetoric: The Longue Duree of Black Voices*, around the same time. Part One of the collection is dedicated to African American rhetorical theory and the following sections include key examples of writing

from scholars, journalists, revolutionaries, creative writers, and more who utilize these African American rhetorical tools. Both books also feature chapters that address the intersection of African American rhetorics, multimodality, technocultural expressivity, and digital composition.

With this rich pool of scholarship to draw upon, the collaborative work to implement the teaching of African American rhetorical traditions into our FYW curriculum began. With initial models outlined by Gilyard, Richardson, and William-Farrier at hand, we wanted to build on such scholarship with one expanding goal: this additional curriculum would be required teaching for ALL teaching assistants, instructors, and faculty within our department, rather than a wonderful yet isolated effort made by a few. In order to do so, our approach to teaching rhetorical theory would uniquely pair both Western-based rhetorical traditions with African American rhetorical traditions, rather than focus on one or the other. The next section, therefore, discusses what African American traditions were featured, why, and how. This section is not intended as a model for excellence, but rather as a potential building blocks towards the materialization of a more diverse, inclusive, and antiracist approach to FYW.

### **The Unit on African American Rhetorics**

As is common in most FYW courses, the *Writing Memphis* curriculum for our second-semester, rhetoric-intensive, course (ENGL 1020) is scaffolded so each selection of readings builds towards an assignment and each new assignment builds on its predecessor. The main assignments for ENGL 1020 include a rhetorical analysis, a researched argument, a revision of said argument into a digital composition, and then a further revision of the argument into an expanded textual submission (which can include multimodal methods such as visuals).

Therefore, whatever groundwork we laid for African American rhetorical traditions needed to further equip students with the ability to both (1) analyze rhetorics through more inclusive

rhetorical theories and (2) further utilize effective rhetorical strategies in their own linguistic and digital writing.

As stated in the introduction, our previous curriculum relied solely on Greek rhetorical traditions and our textbook chapters (and assignment sheets) highlighted ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos (Verbist 333-343; Powers 345-361). For balance, four African American rhetorical traditions needed to be paired with these four Western approaches. After extensive research, I scheduled a meeting with the then-director of African American Literature at UofM in the summer of 2019 and pitched the idea of including (1) call and response, (2) narrativizing and testifying, (3) rhythm and cadence, and (4) signifying. As Young recommended, this had to be a collaborative effort and I needed feedback from scholars of color to do this right. So, the director and I talked through my proposal to ensure these four traditions provided an apt representation of African American rhetorics for FYW students. The director approved the four features, so the two of us then considered how to best introduce the material pedagogically.

I relayed this conversation to the WPA, and in the fall of 2019, the WPA and I worked with these traditions in our own ENGL 1020 classrooms. We experimented with (1) how exactly to introduce these four featured African American rhetorical traditions in the classroom and (2) how to keep them at the forefront of all major writing assignments throughout the semester during our initial piloting phase. We met often during that semester and discussed what approaches worked and what needed revisions. This section, therefore, continues to address the content of how we presented these African American rhetorics to students before discussing in-depth the methodologies utilized in the study to investigate the effectiveness of this additional unit.

### *Presenting the History of the Tradition*

When the study first began, no text featuring all four African American rhetorical traditions written specifically for FYW students was available, so I produced a handout to help introduce the material to students (see Appendix C). Since these four African American rhetorical traditions were to be uniquely paired with Western-based approaches (as opposed to other studies where the curriculum was strictly Western-based or Afrocentric-based), the handout first briefly recognized the stark contrast in the realities that shaped Greek traditions in comparison to African American rhetorics. In other words, this introduction opens with a praxis of Aja Y. Martinez’s “A Plea for Critical Race Theory Counterstory.” The bullet points in this introductory section were to prompt further teacher explanation of how Socrates died advocating for individualist thought and how individualism influenced Plato in his pursuit of absolute truth. Discussion included how Plato feared that poetic influence led to the manipulation of that divine truth (*Republic* 607b5-6, *Phaedrus*) and how such ideology inspired Aristotle’s often contradictory approach to emotive elements of rhetoric, leading him to privilege logos and pisteis (*On Rhetoric*, Book 1, Chapter 3).<sup>21</sup> This introduction also included Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (see Figure 2) to address the realities that impacted this individualistic pursuit for truth above all.

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<sup>21</sup> This of course is a simplified version of Greek rhetorical traditions. Freshman textbooks must often provide simplified versions based on the limited time available to address and digest these complex theories in a comprehensible manner.

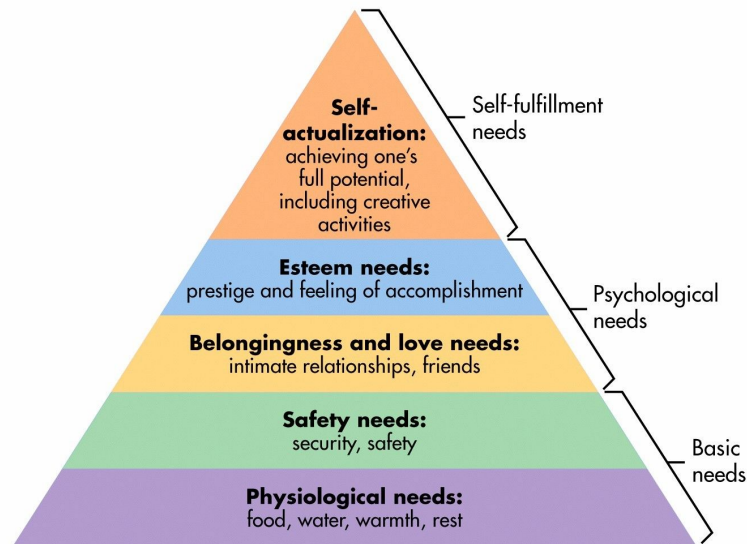


Figure 4. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, originally published in "A Theory of Human Motivation"

This reiterated that those afforded education in Ancient Greece had to be white men who were wealthy enough not to work for their living. Therefore, they had their basic needs met, could gain esteem through education, and thus spend ample time focusing on self-actualization.

With these realities introduced, the handout then nods to the context of African American rhetorics and how they were born out of slavery. Those relying on these rhetorics went without adequate food, warmth, or rest and constantly faced threats to security and safety. Family relationships were often decimated by slave trades and no master, nor the system of slavery, readily afforded personal esteem to those enslaved. These realities shaped an emotional reliance on the poetics (the rhythm and cadence) of spirituals, as discussed in Frederick Douglass's *Slave Narratives*. Furthermore, the signification espoused in these spirituals (escape routes) often served as the sole life raft. These escapes (and basic needs for survival in slavery) required a communal approach embodied in the tradition of call and response. And the emotive narratives and testimonies regarding the grueling realities of slavery became instrumental in dismantling this horrific structure. Thus, by providing the drastically different contexts for both Greek and

African American rhetorical traditions, this introduction attempted to create space for Afrocentric thought outside of Western realities and perceptions.

Once this context was established, the handout then prompts a deeper dive into how these four African American rhetorical tools—call and response, narrativizing and testifying, rhythm and cadence, and signifying—work both as analytical frameworks for rhetorical analysis and as potential strategies for writing arguments.

### *Call and Response*

Smitherman stated that “the African-derived communication process of call-response may be briefly defined as follows: spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all the speaker’s statements (‘calls’) are punctuated by expressions (‘responses’)” (*Talkin’ and Testifyin’*, 104). The tradition “seeks to synthesize speakers and listeners in a unified movement” (108), and therefore actively engages the audience in meaning making. While some might be inclined to draw a similarity to post structuralism—in which the power structure of argument and communication is distributed evenly between writer and reader/speaker and listener—call and response is equally concerned with power distribution AND community building. “Call-and-response is the communal invocation of ‘word-force’ established harmony...the speaker consciously operates under guidance from the audience, and effective performance cannot be ascertained apart from the audience participation, or, more precisely, audience demands relative to expressions, gestures, and tone” (Gilyard & Banks, 48-50). In other words, call and response stands in direct contrast to the sole focus of individualism typically espoused by Western culture. Afrocentric and Indigenous cultures commonly prioritize the community over the individual, and in order for Black individuals to survive the horrors of slavery, community became mandatory. Call and response embodies building that community



through communication, through having both an active writer/speaker and reader/audience striving towards a common goal.

While writers are typically a level removed from immediate engagement with their audience (as opposed to a speaker standing in front of a crowd), students in our piloted classrooms were encouraged to punctuate their writing (through grammatical, lexical, and syntactical choices) in order to directly call on a response from their audience within the context of the Afrocentric tradition. Students were also challenged to identify and analyze how Black writers specifically incorporate call and response in their published works through active questioning, repetition that builds a desired response, and strong declarative statements sought to arouse.<sup>22</sup>

### *Rhythm and Cadence*

In Smitherman's chapter on "Black Modes of Discourse," she identified rhythm and cadence as "the use of voice rhythm and vocal inflections to convey meaning in black community...the voice is employed like a musical instrument with riffs and all kinds of playing between notes" (134). Because of the oral relation to rhythm and cadence, Young & Robinsons chose to not include it as a written African American tradition in their edited collection. After all, writing, by its linguistically textual nature, is often void of on-sight aural elements. However, Smitherman, Gilyard & Richardson, and Williams-Farrier all decided to include rhythm and cadence in their respective writing-based studies as rhythmic prose can build between the lines of text, creating a musical beat for the reader. Several scholars cite the Reverend Jesse Jackson's quote—"Africa would if African could. America could if American would. But Africa cain't and

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<sup>22</sup> The specific published examples we used to demonstrate call and response in writing to students (as well as the other three African American rhetorical traditions) will be discussed later in this section.

America ain't"—as rhythmic prose based on its rhyme pattern, repetition, and play-on-words (Lippi-Green, 8; Smitherman, *Talkin' Testifyin*, 3).

Therefore, FYW students were challenged to investigate how rhythm and cadence enhances engagement through building an authentic voice and style when presenting an argument. They were also further encouraged to experiment with creating rhythm within their own writing through repetition, creative rhyme patterns, and various lexical and syntactical choices.

### *Narrativizing and Testifying*

Making arguments through story-telling (narrativizing) or utilizing one's own experience to make a point (testifying) are common rhetorical elements of the African American tradition. "The story element is so strong in black communicative dynamics that it pervades general everyday conversations," Smitherman wrote while doing her initial research (*Talkin' and Testifyin'* 161). She noted, "Black speakers will render their general, abstract observations about life, love, people in the form of a concrete narrative. The relating of events (real or hypothetical) becomes a black rhetorical strategy to explain a point, to persuade holders of opposing views to one's own point of view" (147-148).

Students within the pilot were challenged to investigate the persuasive nature of both narrative sequencing (narrativizing) and testifying (one's own personal narrative) in writing. They were encouraged to add narrativizing and testifying to their own researched argument in order to expose readers to an alternative viewpoint that might successfully sway opinion.

### *Signifying*

Often the hardest for students to initially grasp, signifying plays on the layered nature of language—the connotative versus the denotative—as a means of survival, humor, and expression

of shared experiences. Uses of signifying were first identified in spirituals, such as “Wade in the Water,” that enabled slaves to share escape routes while in the owner’s presence. We explained signifying to students as:

A way to communicate in code. For example, if you see a mobster on television tell the boss, ‘I’ll take care of it,’ you know he really means he is going to kill someone, but in order to give the boss plausible deniability if the law ever gets involved, the mobster signifies. Often people might purposely misunderstand what is being signified for a humorous or witty effect. If someone says ‘screw you’ and you respond with ‘you have to kiss me first,’ then you are purposefully misidentifying what the initial speaker was signifying with the words ‘screw you’ (Morris & Barnes, 23).

Smitherman defined signifying as something that “can be indirect yet directed at a person in the situational context...[it] can be humorous, ironic, teachy but not preachy, punning, a play of words. (121). Following up on signifying’s “use of indirection to make points,” Gilyard and Banks discussed how signifying “may employ oppositional logic, overstatement, understatement, and/or reliance on the reader’s knowledge of implicitly assumption that is taken to be common knowledge” (221).

Therefore, while signifying can be one of the harder African American rhetorical strategies for students to initially understand, it can become one of the funniest to analyze and experiment with in one’s own writing. It can help students understand the importance of audience in more sophisticated way than Western discussions often allow.

#### *Weaving These Traditions throughout the Semester*

After introducing these four elements of African American rhetorics with the help of the handout, students were then provided written examples of these traditions in the work of two

Black Memphis writers: Selections from Ida B. Well's *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, and Troy Wiggins's "Letter to My City."<sup>23</sup> This pairing enabled students to see these traditions used in both historic and contemporary writing.

After the framework was established and solidified through examples, revised assignment sheets for the rhetorical analysis and the researched argument included African American rhetorics alongside the already established Greek traditions. When introducing the multimodal assignment (which highlights linguistic, aural, visual, spatial, and gestural modes of communication), we continued to weave in the multimodal nature of African American rhetorics into the conversations, with help from Gilyard and Banks's chapter "Technology and African-American Rhetoric."

After the WPA and I ironed out the first-round of wrinkles, I then implemented a study to investigate how these African American rhetorics functioned in four more ENGL 1020 classes. These four additional classes could not be taught by either me or the WPA as to not interfere with the organic process of introducing these features into a broader base of FYW curriculum. This study sought to investigate (1) how a diverse pool of teachers interacted the additional African American rhetorics in their classrooms and (2) how/if the proposed African American rhetorics worked to benefit students and their writing.

### **Research Methods**

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach that featured classroom observations, student surveys, teacher interviews, and student writing assessment. The design, initially implemented in Spring 2020, included four controlled classrooms (which featured solely

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<sup>23</sup> Smitherman's "African American English: From the Hood to the Amen Corner" was also an optional reading and instructors were encouraged to include other pertinent sources, such as James Baldwin's "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?"

Western approaches to rhetoric—the traditional UofM curriculum) and four experimental classrooms (which included the unit on African American rhetorics in addition to Greek rhetorical theories). The determining factor for choosing participating classrooms depended upon including a diverse pool of teachers, both in terms of demographics and in terms of research areas. Both the control group and the experimental group needed an equal representation of teachers specializing in various English concentrations and occupying various identity markers. More than 80% of FYW classrooms at UofM are taught by non-tenure-track-faculty and TAs, several of whom do not come from a writing and rhetoric background. Additionally, the positionality of the teacher (in regards to race, gender, nationality, etc.) could impact how material regarding race is presented and received (more about this in Chapter 4). The study considered how such factors impacted classroom dynamics in regards to the African American curriculum. The demographics of participating teachers are represented in Figure 3 below. All participants' names have been changed in guidance with the IRB protocols for this study.



Figure 5. Demographics of participating teachers.

While several demographics are not represented in this teacher pool (non-binary individuals, trans individuals, various scholars of color such as Indigenous and Latinx, people with physical disabilities, etc.), the study tried to be as inclusive as possible.

After all participating teachers signed consent forms, teachers from the experimental group were prepped for teaching the additional African American curriculum. The prep lasted two hours and discussed (1) teaching the origin of the tradition, (2) teaching specifics of the four featured rhetorical tools, (3) what published writing served as strong examples of these strategies, and (4) how to encourage students to investigate and incorporate these rhetorics in their own writing. Teachers from the experimental group were then provided with a sample

syllabus including the additional curriculum and the self-made handout. Teachers were encouraged to ask questions both throughout the prep and the semester. Nazia, the Iranian linguist who'd only spent a few years in the United States at the time of the study, requested a second meeting to better grasp Black U.S. history and its impact on African American rhetorics.

The next step in the study featured classroom observations. As the principal investigator, I visited each of the four controlled classrooms the day Western rhetorical traditions were presented. As for the experimental group, I visited classrooms twice: the day Western rhetorical traditions were taught and the day African American rhetorics were introduced. Classroom observations were designed to gauge student engagement with the curriculum and investigate how specifically each teacher introduced the rhetorical strategies. I took notes regarding how teacher individualized the features of the lesson plan and marked the number of times student responded to questions presented. I also noted specific questions or comments students made that could help us further understand how the curriculum was perceived.

Classroom observations concluded at the end of February 2020. Surveys regarding students' feedback to the curriculum in both the control and experimental classes were disseminated the final week of the Spring 2020 semester. Additionally, the study collected all final researched arguments from participating students, as each class initially had the same core requirements for this assignment. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the onset of the pandemic and the emergency transference of all classes to remote learning impacted this study as well. Students and teachers equally struggled. Assignments changed. Some participating teachers removed the multimodal assignment (as we lost two weeks during the transference) and others reduced the required page count and required sources for the final researched argument (as access to resources became limited, especially with students leaving dorms and moving home,

where some encountered less internet bandwidth and fewer library services). Ezekiel, a participating teacher from the experimental group, changed the final assignment for his classroom all together to best fit the emotional needs of his students. Instead of a final revision of their researched arguments, his students were asked to write a reflection regarding the recent events. Out of the 117 initial student participants, only seventy responded to the survey disseminated in April of 2020.

Eighty-six student-researched-arguments were collected at the end of the semester from the seven classes that kept said assignment as their final. However, the question quickly became, how should we assess these student writing samples knowing each class received substantially different requirements, varying access to the required tools for the assignment, and fluctuating instructions to revisions (at absolutely NO fault of the participating teachers). Initially, the double-blind holistic assessment to be performed by outside hires was to determine if students from the controlled group versus the experimental group scored higher, lower, or the same on average. With so many variables at play with the onset of Covid, though, the methods changed in the following ways: (1) The study was extended into the Spring of 2021, with three more classes added in order to get another pool of student-writing samples not interrupted by the onset of Covid. (2) The extension of the study also provided a larger pool of teachers to interview who had taught African American rhetorics. (3) The assessment process became two-fold. (3a) First, the primary investigator (me) completed a reading of all submitted essays to better understand how many students used African American rhetorical techniques in their writing. (3b) Second, the holistic rubric was revised to focus primarily on the persuasive elements of each assignment.

Participating students in the Spring of 2021 completed the survey portion of the study and submitted their final researched arguments. While the study sought to include another four



classrooms taught by a diverse pool of teachers, the study only successfully recruited three more classrooms. Two of the Spring 2021 participating classrooms were taught by straight, white women—one an instructor of writing and rhetoric and the other a graduate teaching assistant concentrating in 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature. The third participating classroom in 2021 was taught by Nazia, the female Iranian linguist who also participated in the 2020 portion of the study.

The Spring 2021 group varied from the previous controlled and experimental group due to the introduction of a textbook chapter on African American rhetorics geared specifically towards FYW students. During the summer of 2020, Sylvia Barnes (a graduate student of early African American rhetoric at UofM) and myself wrote the chapter, which was published in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the required textbook, *Writing Memphis*. Therefore, while the experimental group from Spring 2020 were only afforded a self-made handout with limited information, the group of student participants in Spring 2021 learned about the tradition through an elevated platform. This allowed for the study to now investigate another aspect: Did access to an official textbook chapter geared towards the target audience help students better understand and incorporate African American rhetorics in their own writing? Did those who had access to the additional chapter score higher, lower, or the same overall during the writing assessment portion of the study?

Furthermore, due to the introduction of the textbook chapter, African American rhetorical traditions became a part of core curriculum throughout the entire FYW program. Therefore, within the extension of the study, I recruited a total of twelve teachers to interview regarding the additional curriculum, both teachers who had only taught the additional curriculum with the new textbook chapter on African American rhetorics, and teachers who had experience teaching the

curriculum with either the African American rhetorics handout or the textbook chapter.

Therefore, the study also became posed to answer the question: did access to an official textbook chapter geared towards the target audience help teachers present the curriculum more effectively?

As mentioned, the assessment became two-fold due the extension of the study. I worked with the then-director of African American literature and a scholar of African American communications to devise a heuristic for identifying the use of African American rhetorics within student writing. I also worked with a writing, rhetoric, and technical communications faculty member who specializes in assessment to build a rubric that focused solely on gauging the effectiveness of the persuasive elements of each researched argument based on varying page and source requirements. While the assessment bore results important to the field, during the process of writing this dissertation it became clear that such assessment, paired with all the other data collected during the study, stood outside the scope of a single dissertation chapter. And in light of the other two IRB approved research studies performed for this dissertation, a thorough dive into the assessment section of this particular study is currently tabled until the completion of this dissertation.<sup>24</sup> Since the assessment portion was funded by the CCCC Emergent Researcher Award, it must be completed by 2024. However, the remainder of this chapter includes a deeper dive into the results from the study's teaching observations, teacher interviews, and student survey. Due to the complex nature of this mixed-method study, each result section blends discussion under the appropriate section headings.

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<sup>24</sup> Earlier drafts of this chapter included more detailed information on the assessment approach, yet this information has been deleted as to not overwhelm current readers and better direct energy towards the methods featured throughout the chapter. However, if current readers have further questions about the assessment, details of the initial groundwork and the results are available upon request.

## Teaching Observations

While Memphis is a majority black metropolitan area, our university is still categorized as a primarily white institution. Yet, our FYW classrooms often feature more racial diversity than the campus's student population as a whole, as seen in the demographics shown in Figure 4 below.

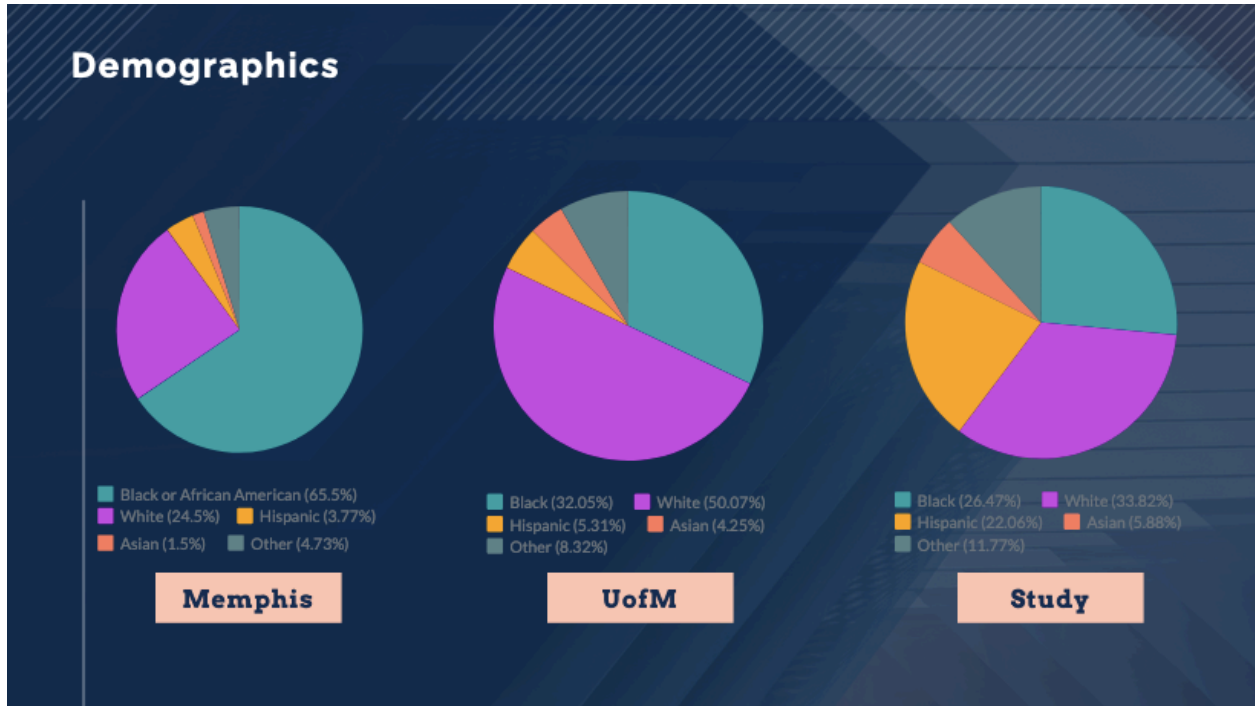


Figure 6. Racial demographics of Memphis, the UofM student body, and participating students. While UofM's student population during the time of the study was 32% Black, 50% White, 5% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 8% Other, the racial demographics of the participants were slightly more diverse with 26% Black, 34% White, 22% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 12% identifying as Other.<sup>25</sup> The largest identifier under Other were those of mixed races. This imbalance in the city's population and its student body results from multiple factors—one possible factor being whether students see themselves represented in the university's core curriculum.

<sup>25</sup> Numbers in the text were rounded to the closest one-percent decimal.

This study therefore investigates varying levels of student engagement with the curriculum. While participants in all eight classrooms displayed an even level of engagement with the Greek rhetorical traditions of ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos, the real point of interest is the varying level of engagements within the experimental group when comparing the traditional curriculum to the additional African American rhetorical tools introduced. To understand these varying levels of engagement, one first must understand the context in which the African American rhetorical traditions were taught by each individual teacher. Each participating teacher from the experimental group presented the curriculum in a specialized manner, pulling from their own research strengths. Therefore, subheadings delineate how each teacher introduced the material and how the students responded and engaged with the manner in which the material was presented.

*Nazia (Cis Female, International TA from Iran, Linguist Scholar)*

As a linguist, Nazia's dissertation centers on linguistic prejudice for accented speakers. She therefore brought in pertinent linguistic elements to her conversations on African American Englishes and rhetorics.

During the class period where Nazia discussed Greek traditions in preparation for students' rhetorical analysis, she had students read James Baldwin's "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?" She opened the class period by first asking students to discuss what constitutes the definition of a language. She then shared the origins of African American Englishes (AAE) and discussed AAE's own grammatical rules: like zero copula, the habitual be, and double negatives. Within the conversation of AAE one student, who appeared to be white and male, got defensive when Nazia discussed the slave-related origins of AAE. He

asked whether Nazia intended to make him feel guilty for his own white heritage. Nazia, appearing shocked, said no.

Next, students were divided into groups and asked to identify the purpose of Baldwin's essay, its target audience, and the essay's use of ethos, pathos, and logos. When the group work ended and class discussion resumed, each question (What's the purpose of Baldwin's essay? How does he harness ethos in his argument? etc.) received at least three student responses, which including textual examples. Some questions received up to five student responses, as seen in Figure 5 at the bottom of this section.

Nazia's choice to discuss the nature of African American discourse with assistance from Baldwin and her own linguistic knowledge served as a strong primer, pedagogically, for scaffolding the follow class period where students were given the handout on African American rhetorics and a short essay by Troy Wiggins, an author who utilizes all presented African American rhetorical traits and builds rhythm and cadence from his use of Black linguistic structures. However, when African American rhetorical traditions were introduced and discussed, student engagement lowered in comparison to the class period regarding Greek traditions.

In the class dedicated to introducing African American rhetorics, Nazia opened with a discussion regarding the origins of the tradition and highlighted how such origins contributed to these rhetorics' communalistic and poetic nature. She played spirituals like "Go Down Moses" and "Wade in the Water" to give examples of rhythm and cadence, call and response, narrative sequencing, and signifying. She then asked that students again get in groups and identify purpose (discussing unjust policing practices against Black individuals), audience, and African American rhetorics in Troy Wiggin's "Letter to My City."

When class discussion resumed, only two students responded to questions regarding Wiggins’s use of rhythm and cadence, one student responded to Wiggins’s use of call and response, and one student discussed an example of narrative sequencing in the essay, as seen in Figure 5. When the question of Wiggins’s use of signifying was raised, one student asked if this tradition could further be defined. Two students (who appeared to be black) instantly responded, not only further explaining the tradition but also offering examples—both from personal experience and the text.

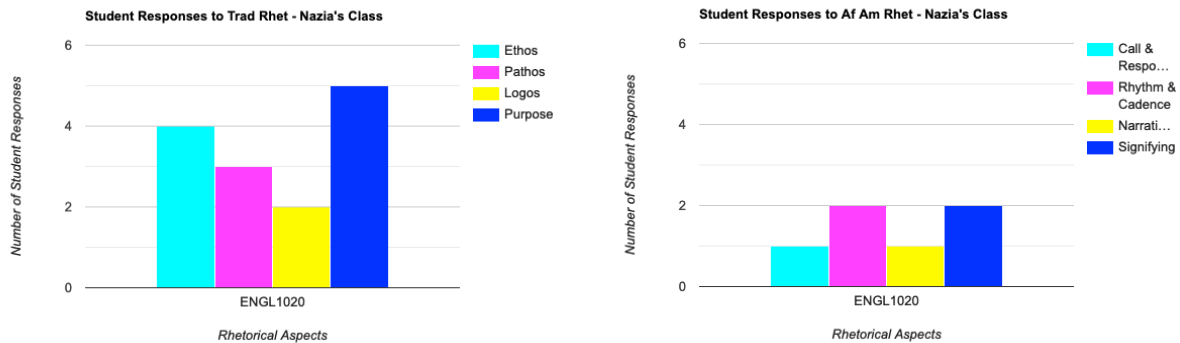


Figure 7. Student responses in Nazia’s classes

*Ezekiel (Cis Male, Black American, Technical Communications Scholar)*

Ezekiel’s class engagement in regards to the two curriculums were similar to Nazia’s. In looking at neo-Aristotelian notions of the rhetorical triangle, students located the use of ethos, pathos, and logos in a series of essay titled “I’m a Memphian.” In this series, the author provides short vignettes that engage in Memphis culture. Students quickly addressed the arguments made within the series and at least two students offered examples of how the author utilized appeals to authority, emotions, and logic, as outlined in Figure 6 below. While the class wasn’t necessarily talkative, they did offer answers when asked.

Ezekiel then introduced African American rhetorics in the following class period, having students read both the produced handout and Baldwin’s essay prior to class. When Ezekiel asked

“What is Baldwin’s argument?” One student who appeared to be Black and male said the piece was hard to understand and made him slightly uncomfortable. A student who appeared to be a racially ambiguous female then said, “It’s really talking about where AAVE came from.” When asked again, “So what is Baldwin’s argument,” the class remained silent. Ezekiel explained three key takeaways: (1) Language tells us something about the speaker/rhetor. (2) Historically, those in power decide what language practices are considered “standard.” And (3) language, and by extension rhetoric, comes into existence by brutal needs of necessity.

Ezekiel then used a power point to introduce the four African American rhetorical traditions. When asked if anyone had previously heard of call and response, the class remained silent. Ezekiel explained the tradition and provided examples aided by his power point: “If I was to sing the Queen song, ‘we will, we will...’ you would respond?” Two students answered, “rock you.” Ezekiel then added, “And if I said, can I get an Amen?” with two other students responding, “Amen.” Next, he provided (from my point of view) the most comprehensible understanding of signifying to students. As a scholar of writing, rhetoric and technical communication, he discussed the connotative and denotative meaning of words, getting several students to chime in with examples such as saying someone feels “blue” or describing a song as “sick.” Ezekiel then provided examples of signifying in his power point and continued to approach rhythm and cadence and narrativizing in a similar manner, explaining the rhetorical significance of each tool.

However, when students were then asked to read Troy Wiggins’s essay together as a class and stop after every few paragraphs to see how these tools were being utilized, the class remained silent. After long pauses, one student highlighted a use of call and response, another a use of narrativizing, and a third the use of signifying. With no student response when asked to

provide examples of rhythm and cadence, Ezekiel pointed out a few. The whole conversation regarding finding these rhetorical tools utilized in the text, of which there are many, only garnered a total of three student responses, as shown in Figure 6 below.

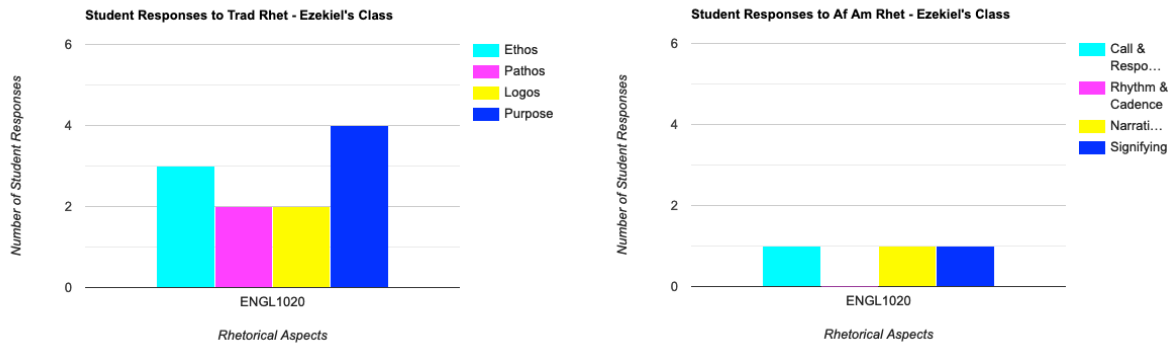


Figure 8. Student responses in Ezekiel's classes

*Logan (Cis Male, White American, Writing and Rhetoric Scholar)*

Due to scheduling availability, the first time I visited Logan's class he taught Rogerian Argumentation (which isn't formally discussed on the ENGL 1020 textbook). Logan explained the elements of Rogerian Argumentation: (1) summarize the points of opposition, (2) establish common ground, (3) counterargue by highlighting common ground. When asked how exactly to address an argument through the Rogerian framework, each proposed question only received two or three student answers, as seen in Figure 7 below. After practicing Rogerian Argumentation as a class, students were broken into pairs and asked to further practice the framework.

When teaching African American rhetorics, Logan opened class with a direct question: "How many are currently skeptical of the fact that I'm teaching you African American rhetorical theory today?" After a brief pause and no student response, Logan continued: "After all, I'm White; not Black. Well, last week I taught Greek rhetorical theory, but I'm not Greek. The reason for introducing various rhetorical frameworks is to broaden our understanding of where various languages and rhetorics come from."



After nodding to his own positionality, Logan broke the classroom into five groups, and first had them discuss their basic reactions to Baldwin’s “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?” Once students shared their groups’ responses, Logan read aloud Old English, to highlight the fluid nature of languages and discuss the political instruments at play that determine what is considered correct and incorrect in wake of the fluidity. Logan utilized etymology to further reify points in the continued discussion of how power structures influence languaging practices, including rhetorical theories. Students were then asked to find examples of call and response, narrative sequencing, and rhythm and cadence, offering at least two responses each, as seen in Figure 7. Further clarification was requested when discussing signifying before two Black students raised their hands and explained the tradition to the class and offered examples of signifying from the text.

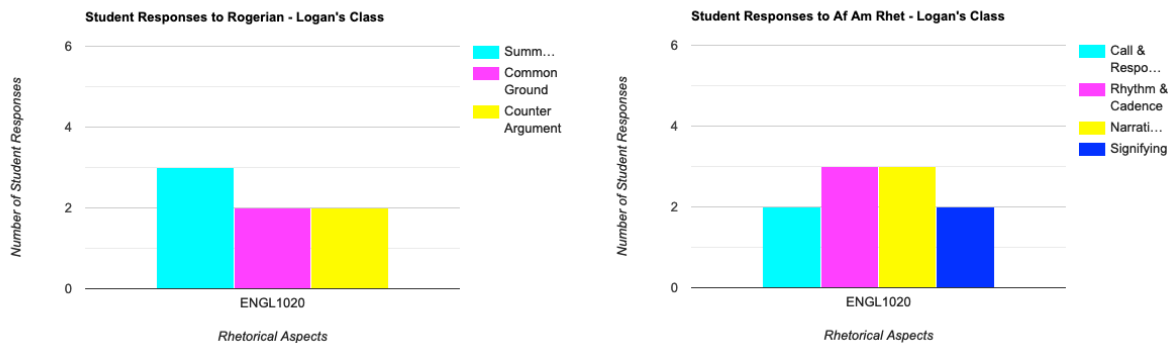


Figure 9. Student responses in Logan’s Classes

*Shakura (Cis Female, Black American, Literature Scholar)*

For the class period that focused on the Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical triangle, Shakura asked students to analyze Baldwin’s essay. Each question (how does Bladwin utilize ethos, logos, pathos) received at least three student responses, as seen in Figure 8 below, with an overall discussion on Black English receiving larger classroom engagement. One student who appeared to be female and Black said, “I absolutely love talking about this shit!” Within this

analytical discussion of Baldwin’s work, Shakura repeatedly utilized Black rhetorical traditions in her own speech practice, deploying call and response and rhythm and cadence when responding to apt student examples. When a student read a strong textual example, Shakura followed with phrases like “I know that’s right” to add emphasis in her response. Before the class period ended, Shakura passed out the African American rhetorical traditions handout and another student at the conclusion of the class exclaimed, “I loved having these discussions.”

The next class period, Shakura, whose area of research is African American literature, brought in examples of Amiri Baraka and Henry Louis Gates Jr. when introducing the four African American rhetorical traditions. Similar to her last class period, she presented the information while also modeling the featured African American rhetorical techniques in her own speech. She then asked students to find examples of the African American rhetorical traditions in Troy Wiggin’s “Letter to My City” with each question (where do you see Wiggins’ harnessing call and response, etc.) receiving between four to six student answers, as outlined in Figure 8.

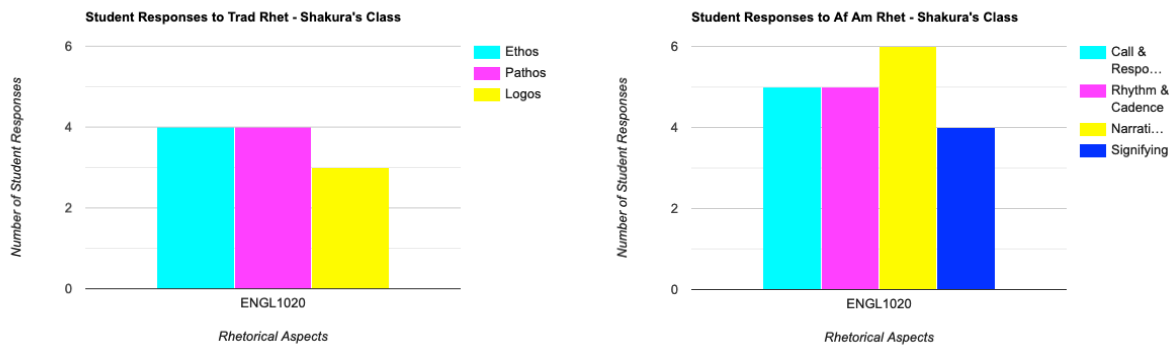


Figure 10. Student responses in Shakura’s classes

### *What these Results Reveal*

The first notable aspect of these results includes the varying yet effective methods of how each participating teacher introduced the material on African American rhetorics. Logan, who studies writing, rhetoric, and technical communication (WRTC), used his knowledge of the

intersections of discursive practices and power to present the information, while Ezekiel, who also studies WRTC, focused on the rhetorical acumen of each discursive element. Nazia and Shakura, however, are not WRTC majors, yet they equally pulled from their strengths in linguistics and African American literature when presenting the material. Nazia was able to thoroughly discuss the linguistic historiographies of the rhetorical elements in a manner that gave her students a deep understanding of the material while Shakura provided the best examples of the rhetorical elements in action through her vast knowledge of African American literature. This demonstrates that while the curriculum centers on rhetorical traditions, it invites every college English instructor, regardless of their background in higher education, to effectively interact with the material. As argued in Chapter 2, African American history and discourse is engrained in daily American life and therefore within the field of English; its multidimensionality provides multiple avenues to enter the conversation.

Secondly, as the principal investigator, I initially hypothesized that African American students would equally engage with the African American rhetorical traditions as they do with the Greek traditions, if not more. After all, I'd witnessed daily uses of these featured African American rhetorics throughout Memphis in my previous three years as a resident. I also hypothesized that signifying would be the hardest rhetorical element for students to grasp. While the former hypothesis did not fully actualize, the later did.

Signifying garnered the most questions from students in three of the four experimental classrooms: Nazia's, Logan's, and Shakura's. Ezekiel's approach of discussing connotation and denotative meaning of lexis proved the most successful in helping students understanding its rhetorical use. Yet, in introducing signifying, students in both Nazia's and Logan's classrooms were able to organically assume the role of teacher when others asked for clarification. In both

classes, when questions arose regarding signifying, Black students were eager to respond with answers, explanations, and examples. Within FYW's move towards literacy studies, this is a desired outcome—students recognizing their own authority within their literacy and rhetorical acumen and then also sharing their own expertise of their cultural discourses and rhetorics. This outcome materialized naturally in half of the experimental classrooms.

Still, engagement in African American rhetorics was lower than the traditionally featured rhetorical theories in half the classrooms, which did come as a surprise. This lower engagement took place in two diverse classrooms taught by teachers of color: Ezekiel (a Black American) and Nazia (an Iranian). It wasn't until observing Logan's classroom that the possible reason for this lowered engagement presented itself.

Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical theory (i.e. ethos, pathos, and logos) is often introduced in high school. In the student surveys (to be discussed in detail later), 64.7% of students mentioned having been taught rhetoric in school prior to college. When asked what rhetorical tools with which they were previously familiar, 30.0% of students said ethos and pathos, and 21.9% of students said logos. However, only 6.7% of students said they were familiar with call and response, 5.9% of students said they were previously familiar with testifying and signifying, and 5.2% of students said they were familiar with rhythm and cadence. Logan was the only participant where I observed his classroom on a day that featured Western rhetorical traditions outside Neo-Aristotelian theory. When he introduced a new Western rhetorical framework, Rogerian argumentation, his engagement was equal to the class where he introduced African American rhetorics, an equally new theory. Therefore, I surmise the lower engagement was less about student representation and more about familiarity with the topics in an academic setting.

The one class that did have higher engagement with African American rhetorics than Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical theory was Shakura's class. During my two observations of Shakura's class, it became notable that Shakura regularly features African American rhetorics in her own pedagogical discourse. She commonly uses call and response, rhythm and cadence, and testifying in her own speech practice when working with her students. I believe this constant exposure to these rhetorical tools within a formal educational setting both helped promote student understanding of the material and promote vocal student engagement on the topic. More than just engagement, students were excited in Shakura's class at the invitation to utilize these tools, both in classroom discussions and within their writing.

While it's important to both highlight and celebrate Shakura's success with student engagement of the curriculum, I recognize that if I tried to force the exact same rhetorical elements into my daily pedagogical discourse, it would come off as inauthentic. My speech patterns do not mirror the rhythm and cadence of black oral practices. Black oral practices are also not present in my own uses of call and response and narrativizing. As the study in Chapter 2 discusses, students crave exposure to diverse languaging practices and use this exposure as motivation to make such moves in their own writing. So, while I cannot provide students with the same rhetorical exposure of black discursive elements as Shakura, I can pull from my own diverse rhetorical practices to better encourage students to do the same.

### **Supporting and Equipping Teachers for this Work**

While some students in the classroom observations demonstrated hesitancy when engaging with Black rhetorics (mainly due to lack of familiarity with the content in an academic setting), they were not alone. Interviews also revealed several teachers felt some anxiety when presenting the curriculum, similarly due to lack of familiarity.

In the initial study design, teachers from the four experimental classrooms were to be interviewed on their experiences with the curriculum. However, with the interruption of Covid and the extension of the study, three of the teachers from the experimental group were interviewed and nine more teachers were recruited for interviews.<sup>26</sup> During the course of this study, the additional unit of African American rhetorics became a mainstay in UofM's FYW curriculum, accompanied by the new textbook chapter written by myself and Sylvia Barnes and published Summer of 2020. Therefore, these nine additional teachers taught these theoretical frameworks with the assistance of the new textbook chapter.

All interviews were conducted either face-to-face or over zoom. Interviewees were asked to identify their race and nationality, gender, and area of research. The demographics of all the teachers interviewed are represented in Figure 13 below. Interviewees were then asked to discuss their own experiences teaching Classic and African American rhetorical traditions side by side (See interview questions in Appendix D). These interviews revealed (1) varying levels of confidence in teaching non-traditional rhetorics as well as (2) the utility of the textbook.

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<sup>26</sup> One of the teachers from the experimental group left the program at the end of the 2020.



Figure 11. Demographics of the teachers interviewed

### *Confidence in Teaching African American Rhetorics*

Six teachers of the twelve interviewed mentioned some lack of confidence, slight discomfort, and/or anxiety when teaching African American rhetorics, especially in comparison to teaching Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical theory. Of those six, two study linguistics, two study literature, one studies writing creative, and one studies writing and rhetoric. All six mentioned that their prior exposure to Neo-Aristotelian notions of ethos, pathos, and logos provided them a level of confidence and comfort teaching this framework in relation to researched argumentation. The prior lack of exposure to African American traditions was a main source of where their confidence fell short.

Callen, a white American male studying creative writing, said “I’ve learned about one [set of the rhetorical traditions, the Greco/Roman set] since I was eight-years-old. I’ve just now started learning about African American rhetorics.” Such sentiment was echoed by Erica, a white American, female TA whose area of concentration is writing and rhetoric. Erica mentioned that in all her schooling, she’d never formally been introduced to African American rhetorics. The two linguists (both international TAs: Nazia is from Iran and Kahee is from China) discussed how previously their education of American Englishes and rhetorics was limited to white and/or Eurocentric notions and theories. While Nazia completed an additional 2-hour training on the new curriculum as a member of the original experimental group, both still cited that their lack of exposure to African American rhetorics also made them less confident teaching the subject. Two other interviewees (both white American women, both studying literature) cited two reasons for their lack of confidence/discomfort in teaching the topic: (1) classic rhetoric is their rhetorical theory default and (2) they always “feel anxious teaching outside of [their] own positionality.” Ironically, however, a follow up question revealed that neither of these two women have any



known Greek or Roman ancestry. Therefore, they already teach outside of their gender and ethnic positionalities when presenting classic rhetorical theory in their classrooms, as Logan discussed when I observed his class.

My research is not the first to present this irony. In her 1977 Modern Language Association presentation, Audre Lorde discussed fear from her white American female colleagues who claimed, “I can’t possibly teach Black women’s writing—their experience is so different from us” (43). Yet Lorde quickly highlighted how these women spent years teaching Plato and Shakespeare, both people of different genders and from different nationalities, without hesitancy (44). The two interview responses I cite represent the continued conflation between exposure and teacher identity. My two female interviewees, who both spent the vast majority of their life in education, had never previously been asked to investigate the ways in which these classic theories, born from male dominated, upper-class, European societies thousands of years ago, might diverge from their own experiences and positionalities. They instead were educated in a manner that allowed these theories—borne from communities vastly different from their own—to serve as their “default.” It’s understandably natural to then replicate this same hierarchal structure of rhetorical theories in their own classroom. Yet, if these two white women can be trained to feel confident teaching men from nations and class rankings outside their own positionalities, they can learn, with the right exposure and prep-work, to feel confident teaching rhetorical theory built by several of whom share their gender and their nationality.

This particular insight from these teacher interviews further reveals why exposure to rhetorical theory from historically marginalized communities needs to start as early as possible for teachers as well, if academia is to truly espouse diversity, equity, and inclusion. The two white interviewees (Logan and Renee, both scholars of writing and rhetoric) who did not

mention anxieties or discomfort when teaching African American rhetorics discussed their more extensive educational background in racially diverse rhetorical traditions. While they both admitted limited knowledge of African American rhetorics prior to teaching it, they noted how having previously been asked to investigate race, as white scholars, built their confidence in teaching diverse curriculums. The other four interviewees who said they felt equally comfortable and confident teaching both theoretical frameworks are not scholars of rhetoric (two literature scholars, one creative writer, and one linguist) but are members of African American communities. Drake, a Black American scholar studying linguistics, did mention that while he was familiar with some of the Black rhetorical traditions included in the curriculum, he conducted further research on the Black frameworks that were/are not a part of his own discourse practice.

As this interview response illustrates, we can't assume a teacher's (or student's) exposure to race work based on their race. While two Black American interviewees and one Black Indigenous American interviewee discussed how the featured rhetorical frameworks are a part of their daily languaging practices, one Black American scholar was open about the African American rhetorical traditions of which he was unfamiliar. Similarly, we can't assume someone's prior exposure with diverse race rhetorics just because they study rhetoric. The semester these interviews were conducted, Erica was finishing up all the required coursework for her Ph.D. in rhetoric, and yet stated that she had no background in diverse racial rhetorics. As I discussed in this chapter's introduction, I did not start reading about African American rhetorics until the early conceptualization of this project. Building confidence and acumen in teaching diverse racial rhetorics takes work. A lot of it. And while it can be daunting, we all have to start somewhere. These interviews revealed that for several teachers the somewhere-in-which-they-

started was the newly composed FYW textbook chapter. “African American Rhetorical Traditions.”

### *The Utility of the Textbook Chapter*

While the impact of the textbook chapter on student writing in this study will be discussed in future research, the impact of the textbook chapter on teachers was also significant. In his 1974 monograph, *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English*, Arthur Applebee’s research revealed that writing textbooks often train teachers on the subject of writing prior to its introduction to students. In 1987, Katherine Welch expanded on this idea in “Ideology and Freshman Textbook Production: The Place of Theory in Writing Pedagogy.” In this article, Welch posits that “textbooks are instructional material more important for the writing teacher than for the writing student” and that “the [text]books act as persuasive places where new teachers of writing are trained and where experienced ones reinforce training” (271). Interviews revealed that several teachers first learned about African American rhetorical theory (which they were required to teach) through the textbook chapter. While Logan and Nazia were introduced to this rhetorical tradition through a 2-hour workshop, as members of the initial experiment group of this study, Callen (creative writing), Erica (writing and rhetoric), Brandy (literature), and Adrienne (literature) all discussed learning about this rhetorical tradition for the first time through the textbook chapter. This reality is important to address as writing studies scholarship continues to push for more diverse and inclusive practices in the writing classroom, as discussed in Chapter 1’s literature review.

Also, as mentioned previously, the structure of FYW programs often rely on courses being taught by teaching assistants and instructors, many of whom do not have an extensive background in writing and rhetoric scholarship. To be honest, I taught a FYW curriculum that

focused on ethos, pathos, and logos for a year before actually reading all of Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* and subsequent scholarship on his work. I've overheard scholars discuss that FYW programs too often approach ethos, pathos, and logos with a truncated and oversimplified understanding of the topic. This is partially due to the limited time offered to breech these subjects in the classroom and partially because several of those teaching ethos, pathos, and logos are academics whose vast areas of research understandably limit the time they dedicate to Neo-Aristotelian scholarship.

In asking all FYW instructors at UofM to teach African American rhetorics in their classroom, we cannot request that each teacher extensively read Smitherman, Asanti, Kilyard, Banks, and Gates. Such an expectation would quickly halt forward progress of the program. Therefore, a comprehensive and easily digestible undergraduate textbook chapter that engages with this material becomes imperative for equipping teachers for such work, not just students. There are dozens upon dozens of texts produced for undergraduates that engage with Western rhetorical theories, written in a style that is easily accessible, digestible, and aids in training teachers to teach Western rhetorics. We need more similar publications on diverse racial rhetorics. Such publications would not only provide FYW students with a more rounded rhetorical toolkit, but would also better equip teachers on how to introduce more diverse rhetorical theories in their FYW classrooms.

### **Better? Binary? Both? Student Responses and Teacher Feedback on the Curriculum**

As stated earlier, there were several different motivating factors for this project, two of which included: (1) to better equip students with a more rounded rhetorical toolkit and (2) to provide a more diverse curriculum where students could better locate themselves and their

cultures within the classroom. One of the ways in which we sought to gauge whether the project achieved these goals was through both teacher interviews and student survey responses. One-hundred-and-six participating students completed surveys during the last week of their respective ENGL 1020 course. Both methods (surveys and interviews) proved instrumental in highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses with our curriculum design.

### *Rhetorical Toolkits for Students*

To help gauge whether the curriculum succeeded in better equipping students with a more rounded rhetorical toolkit, survey questions included: (1) which rhetorical traditions students found to be most beneficial in their writing, (2) which tools did they use in their researched argument, and (3) whether or not they believed their understanding of academic writing shifted due to the rhetorical tools presented in the classroom (See Appendix E for full survey). Responses on whether or not students' perception of academic writing shifted due to the inclusion of various rhetorical approaches and why (Questions 16) lent some revealing results.

Students from both the experimental classrooms and controlled classrooms responded fairly evenly to the first part of the question, with 58% responding yes in the experimental classrooms and 52% of students responding yes in the control classrooms. In explaining their answer, the vast majority of responses in the controlled group discussed how the course helped them “produce better essays,” “write better arguments,” and/or “think critically.” While responses in the experimental group shared a similar sentiment, some responses in that group went further.

In the controlled class, only one student used the word “interesting” when describing the growth of their writing: “I realized with the use of rhetoric writing can have more detail and seem more interesting.” No students in the control group used the word “unique” to describe how their writing improved. However, in the experimental classes, 23% of students mentioned that

the class not only helped them write better papers but that they felt more equipped in acculturating an “interesting” and/or “unique” voice. For example, a student wrote, “I learned that you can use different types of rhetorical tools to make your arguments sound more interesting and unique,” while another mentioned, “I learned...how to best develop my own unique voice.” Similar, when asked during teacher interviews, to compare the traditional curriculum to the additional curriculum, three teachers mentioned, without specifically being prompted, that their students who included more diverse rhetorical traditions in their researched argument produced more dynamic prose that provided a more enjoyable read.

Furthermore, when asked the open-ended question, “Have your thoughts regarding academic writing changed during this semester due to the tools you learned, and if so, how?, 31% percent of students from the experimental group directly highlighted the impacts of learning a diverse variety of rhetorical approaches. A student in the experimental group mentioned they “didn’t realize there were so many different rhetorics/languages that could be used to enhance your writing” and another wrote, “I didn’t previously understand that I could get different audience responses based on using different rhetorical tools.” Such sentiment was mirrored by another who discussed feeling more engaged with their audience through the use of tools like call and response. Such results demonstrate how introducing an Afrocentric approach to rhetoric prompts students to further consider the role of their audience within their writing. Not one student in either group mentioned ethos, pathos, logos, or kairos when discussing exactly how the featured rhetorical tools enhanced their writing.

Thus, while African American rhetorical frameworks garnered less direct student engagement during classroom observations, students were more likely to highlight the impacts and influences of these specific tools on their writing when reflecting on the curriculum.

Scholarship and research that investigates the transference of a writing curriculum onto students' future writing practice contends that student reflection serves as the best indicator for said transference (Giles; Lindenman, et al.). Based on the results of this survey question, students demonstrated that the additional African American rhetorics curriculum did indeed equip them with a more substantial rhetorical toolkit they can then apply to their future writing practice.

The next questions, then, are whether students were better able to locate themselves and their culture within our curriculum. The student survey inquired the following:

Questions 7 – Was space provided in the classroom to investigate your own culture and/or race?

Question 8 – Was space in the ENGL 1020 classroom given to recognize/celebrate your own culture's rhetorical traditions?

Question 9 – Has your home language and/or rhetorical tradition(s) ever been represented in an English class prior to enrolling in this course? (see Appendix D)

Only forty percent of respondents across all three survey pools (the control group, and both experimental groups: one with a textbook chapter, one without) reported that their cultural rhetorics/language had been represented in previous English courses. Yet when asked if their cultural rhetoric/language was represented in the experimental groups, 81% said yes. This 41% increase indicates that we were able to develop a curriculum that better represents our student population.

While students of color who do not identify as Black may not see their own cultural rhetorics valued in this curriculum, many still found value in being introduced to more diverse rhetorical traditions. A journalism student who participated in the pilot, Hira Qureshi, was inspired by the curriculum and wrote how it impacted students for a local magazine, *Memphis*

*Mirror*. After interviewing her classmates, Quershi's article discussed how students felt validated after investigating and reflecting upon Black language and its role in American culture. In her article, Quershi quotes a peer: "A lot of the typical coursework doesn't touch on race. It doesn't really touch on a lot of the present things that we go through revolving around our skin color. So, I think [the addition of African American rhetorics] opens that door, period, for everyone to discuss it." Within survey responses, some who identified as Indigenous American, Asian, or Other discussed great enjoyment in "learn[ing] about AA rhetorical traditions and their use by Civil Rights activists and their necessity for surviving slavery." They shared how not "shying away" from the discussion of race opened space for deeper rhetorical analysis and argumentation within the class. While the numbers and detailed responses of the survey indicate that the additional curriculum successfully forwarded our goals, the survey results and interviews must continue to influence the growth of this work in order to reach the 19% of students who still don't feel represented within the overall current structure of our curriculum.

#### *The Curriculum's Binary Structure*

In his teacher interview, Logan discussed how the pairing of traditional rhetorics (often associated with Whiteness) and African American rhetorics (primarily associated with Blackness) sometimes led to a binary dynamic of race discussions in his class. Logan specifically mentioned how his Hispanic students felt ousted in those discussions. Kahee, a participating teacher interviewee who immigrated to the United States from China as a college student, also mentioned that at times in his class, the overall curriculum structure, designed to invite discussions of race and racially diverse rhetorics, tended to foster discussions of race as either Black or White. While it's impossible to feature every diverse racial rhetoric in a FYW curriculum, we responded to this (the WPA and myself) by adding in-class activities to our



textbook chapter that ask students to complete research into their own cultural heritages and their subsequent rhetorical traditions, including those who may not see themselves in either the traditional Western rhetorics or African American rhetorics. The prompt also provided space for those whose certain identity markers were represented to think about the intersectional elements of their cultural identities and how those intersections impact their rhetorical approaches.

Having taught this prompt myself, I can attest to its qualities in providing space for male identifying Middle Eastern students and female identifying Hispanic students to begin investigating their cultures' own rhetorics. Furthermore, pairing two different racial rhetorics does not have to lead to binary discussions of race, as I later learned and will discuss further in Chapters 5. My own approach in training teachers on this curriculum during the initial stages of the study is very likely a culprit of the binary presentation of this curriculum and its subsequent binary discussions of race. Reflecting on this data (just as participating students and teachers reflect on the curriculum), it's increasingly clear that the manner in which I initially addressed race while training teachers for this study, was in fact binary. Building this curriculum forced me to take large strides in my own racial consciousness, yet gaining racial consciousness is a marathon without a final mile. And during the early miles of this study, my own racial consciousness focused heavily on Black and White, and didn't provide much space for the broader spectrum of race that exists in between. I admit this. I must.

As a white woman who helped spearhead this initiative to include more diverse racial rhetorics, I must constantly investigate my own racial biases and shortcomings and appropriately revise my work based on revelations and feedback. My hope in such transparency is to support other white scholars also currently working as allies as well as those taking their inaugural steps towards the antiracist charge. It's a learning process and mistakes will be made along the way, as

the two subsequent chapters discuss in detail. Yet, we must foster open conversations regarding our own growth and our resolutions during such a process.

### **Conclusion**

This initiative to include African American rhetorics in FYW core curriculum and its subsequent study sought to be a step towards cultivating writing classrooms that don't solely rely on rhetoric borne from upper-class, heteronormative, Anglopatriarchal society but rather include rhetorics from historically marginalized communities as well. As I mentioned in the introduction, we focused on African American rhetorics because Memphis's population consists largely of Black Americans. The initial thought was if we successfully paired African American rhetorics with Classical rhetoric in a manner that deepens students' rhetorical toolkits, this study could help outline some groundwork for other FYW programs currently in the process of diversifying their rhetorical curriculum.

As several scholars who focus on racially diverse rhetorics are aware, there's wonderful scholarship on Latinx and Chicana rhetorics (Garcia; Ruiz; Ruiz & Sanchez; Vega & Chavez), Asian American rhetorics (Hsu; Mao & Young; Monberg & Young; Young, Morris) Indigenous American rhetorics (Cole; Gross; Martinez; Morris & Wander), and more. And for emerging researchers and scholars, like myself, the work referenced in this chapter personally served as a strong starting point towards including diverse racial rhetorics into FYW classrooms. While it's impossible for any first-year writing curriculum to feature extensive scholarship on all the various racial rhetorics, beginning with one (African American rhetorics) proved extremely beneficial for our students, as evident in the survey results. I look forward to further investigating its impact on the student writing sample collected within this study.

Classroom observations also demonstrated that teachers can pull from the strengths of their own research when entering material regarding diverse racial rhetorics. Still the study raised some important questions regarding best methods towards training teachers on such work. How do we successfully steer away from binary conversations? How do we learn to foster meaningful and rich discussions regarding race and other diverse identity markers within our classrooms? How exactly do we successfully accomplish this work while simultaneously navigating our own various positionalities? Thus, began the impetus for my next study, as outlined and discussed in Chapter 4.

#### **Chapter 4: Those Who Can(’t) Do: Training Writing Teachers in Antiracism**

As any scholar knows, successful research often relies on institutional support. A key factor enabled me to complete the study discussed in Chapter 3. The year the Writing Program Administrator (WPA) and myself piloted the initiative to include African American rhetorics in our core First-Year Writing (FYW) curriculum, I was appointed the Graduate Assistant Director (GAD) of the FYW program. The application for this appointment required a research proposal to be completed during the two-year tenure of the position.<sup>27</sup> I pitched the African American rhetorics idea and was offered the job, which came with a three-hour course release from my regular six-hour teaching load.

In addition to course release for FYW-based research, the GAD position also entailed that I serve as the apprentice to the WPA. I was tasked to work with the incoming Teaching Assistants (TAs) alongside the WPA in preparation for the upcoming academic year. I attended the week-long TA orientation that takes place prior to the semester and helped lead workshops to train incoming Ph.D. and MFA students to teach writing, many for whom this was their inaugural semester as a teacher of record. It was during that same orientation two years prior that I had gained my first exposure to the discussion of teaching students with diverse linguistic backgrounds (see the introduction in Chapter 2), and now I was tasked to help foster those same discussions with incoming college writing teachers—introducing topics and conversations that changed and shaped the entire trajectory of my Ph.D. research. But training novice incoming college English teachers for the demands ahead is no singular task.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The position is typically one-year, but due to the interruption of the Covid pandemic in the spring of 2020, my GAD position was extended to a second year.

<sup>28</sup> I use “college English teachers” in this sentence intentionally, as featured TAs in this chapter study writing, rhetoric, and technical communications; literature; linguistics; and/or creative writing. However, moving forward in this chapter, I reference inaugural training for college English teachers as preparation for teaching college writing courses, as all TAs are required to initially teach FYW.

Retrospective research confirms that discussions on how to train graduate students to teach college writing date back nearly to the implementation of college writing courses themselves (Pylik, Marting). These early discussions often concluded with giving graduate students the required textbook from which they would be teaching, and then wishing them the best of luck and sending them on their way, sans any actual training. However, such discussions and approaches evolved alongside the centering of composition as a field of study, and within the last 40 years, the conversation regarding training college writing teachers has become its own specialized area of scholarship. This chapter therefore contributes to those discussions, looking specifically at how we add antiracism as a ground-floor building block to all pedagogical training afforded of postsecondary teachers, specifically TAs.

This chapter first situates antiracist training within the conversation of college writing pedagogy education and asks specific questions regarding its effects on TAs. This chapter then builds on an IRB-approved ethnographic study that investigates, through TAs' perspectives, how such training has been implemented in one particular institution between 2017-2021. Results from the study seek to illuminate both practices that work well and potential areas for growth in order to continue the conversation regarding how to best equip TAs who seek to include antiracist pedagogies in their own classroom. The previous two chapters offer lesson plans and curriculum design that help with this endeavor. This chapter, however, argues that such work requires a full holistic approach in regards to both the environment of the department and how TAs are presented such concepts and supported to internalize such work. Furthermore, this chapter argues that in preparing writing teachers for such work, we must consider the individual identities and positionalities TAs possess. Lastly, this chapter offers an activity that could further help prepare post-secondary writing teachers for such work.

## **The Evolution of College Writing Pedagogy Education and Where Antiracist Training and Support Currently Lies within this Conversation**

As first-year writing courses proliferated following the end of World War II and the enactment of the G.I Bill, it became “obvious to composition directors during the entire period of the 1950s that they needed to build courses and programs in teacher education—and fast” in order to staff the growing need for FYW classrooms (Tremmel 12). Thus, by the 1980s, WPAs in universities throughout the nation were tasked with spearheading mandatory graduate courses specifically dedicated to preparing graduate students to teach (13). However, by the time such courses became a mainstay of graduate school requirements, only a dozen or so publications addressed the topic of how to best prepare novice college writing teachers.<sup>29</sup>

To meet this new and growing demand for writing teacher training, the Conference of College Composition and Communication (CCCC) published the “Position Statement on the Preparation and Professional Development of Teachers of Writing” in 1982.<sup>30</sup> The statement was met by more than 100 subsequent publications regarding writing teacher preparation that emerged in the following two decades (Reid, 695). Thus, the goal to establish college writing pedagogy education as a fully formed subfield of compositional studies came into existence. And by the 2000s, Shelby Reid organized a Special Interest Group (SIG) under CCCC to work on this pursuit.

In her article, “Preparing Writing Teachers: A Case Study in Constructing a More Connected Future for CCC and NCTE,” Reid discusses how the SIG quickly recognized the full

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<sup>29</sup> None of the early publications addressed teaching students with diverse backgrounds, but rather breakthrough scholarship included teaching the underpinnings of current composition theory from the 1960s and 70s, as seen in Richard Gebhardt’s 1977 article, “Balancing Theory with Practice in the Teaching of Writing.”

<sup>30</sup> The statement is no longer available in the CCCC’s archive as it was replaced in 2015, as will be discussed later.

vastness of varying approaches to college writing pedagogy and identified the localized nature of such work as the primary culprit. In researching said approaches, a theme quickly emerged: WPAs tasked with offering required courses on college writing pedagogy were often concerned with “strategies to prepare ‘our’ teachers for ‘our’ programs and students” (692). Such siloed practices prompted this SIG to morph into a CCCC Committee on Preparing Teachers of Writing in 2005, and after years of work, the committee released the CCCC “Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing” in 2015, which replaced the previous 1982 CCCC position statement. In the section dedicated specifically to TAs, the statement reads:

In preparing graduate teaching assistants to teach writing, graduate programs should provide students with varied opportunities to cultivate and apply a theoretically informed writing pedagogy by participating in and completing:

- Coursework in composition theory, research, and pedagogy; in rhetorical theory and research; in writing assessment, both formative and summative; and **in working with diverse populations** such as non-native speakers of English, students with special learning needs, non-traditional students, and at-risk student populations (emphasis added). Para 17.

We often see the emphasis above materialized in the emergence of a newer required academic job market material: Diversity Statements. In preparing TAs for the profession, one must not only help TAs acculturate successful teaching practices (communicated to potential employers through teaching philosophies and teaching portfolios), one must also prepare TAs to reflect on how they incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into both their research approach and pedagogical practice. The question, then, is *how* do we successfully train TAs to best meet the charge of successfully incorporating DEI practices into their own pedagogical approach?

Furthermore, how does institutional support and the environment of a department impact such work?

This dissertation has already engaged with the current scholarship regarding antiracist pedagogical approaches, including the incorporation of linguistic diversity and diverse rhetorical curriculum, as well as how to assess such writing in the classroom. However, the successful incorporation of antiracism throughout the field of writing studies requires a fully-rounded holistic approach that also investigate how teachers are trained to do such work. The offered lesson plans and curriculum designs with which I previously engage are pieces of the puzzle, not the full picture. As I nod to in the conclusion of Chapter 3, how we help TAs learn to best utilize such pedagogical approaches needs to be consider. The following questions then arise:

1. In an environment where DEI practices are a benchmark tenet of nearly every university, what are some tangible steps to best ensure antiracist pedagogical approaches are presented at the ground floor of teacher training?
2. With dozens of different pedagogical approaches novice teachers can incorporate into their own practice, how do we ensure antiracism is a fundamental building block?
3. What does successful and continual professional development opportunities look like for TAs dedicated to utilizing antiracist pedagogical approaches and fostering antiracist classrooms? And how does institutional support factor into these opportunities.
4. How do departments and programs best support TAs who are navigating a myriad of differing positionalities and identities while doing such antiracist work?

While CCCCs has attempted to organize scholarship on teacher training to define best practices for such a pursuit, research that engages specifically with these questions are as siloed, and quite frankly scarce.



Since WPAs are typically charged with the initial round of TA teacher training, this chapter first investigates scholarship focusing on the intersection of race and writing program administration, which has received some attention albeit limited.<sup>31</sup> In 2017, Genevieve Garcia de Mueller and Iris Ruiz surveyed more than 59 respondents, including tenure-track professors, instructors/lecturers, and graduate students. The survey sought to explore the current position of race within discussions of writing program administration. Their study revealed that those dedicated to combating racism within their writing programs were doing so more or less on an individual level rather than through supported programming initiatives. Therefore, the broader responses received “[did] not illustrate anti-racist institutional practices that initiate dialogue beyond recognition of the racial and linguistic minorities as the outside other” (29), a reality that can negatively impact graduate student training towards antiracist teaching practices.

In response to de Mueller and Ruiz’s article, Staci M. Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig published an edited collection in 2019 titled, *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration*, and the *WPA: Writing Program Administration Journal* published a special issue in the summer of 2021 titled, *Black Lives Matter and Anti-Racist Programs in Writing Program Administration*.<sup>32</sup> Through these featured chapters and articles, two things were further confirmed: (1) only a handful of institutions have documented their steps to incorporate antiracism within teaching training for the pursuit of wider study and (2) when doing antiracist work, the identity of the teacher has major implications.

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<sup>31</sup>As Kynard addresses in “Teaching While Black: Witnessing Countering Disciplinary Whiteness, Racial Violence and University Race-Management,” the limited scholarship available has primarily been produced by the unequal labor tasked to scholars of color.

<sup>32</sup>The shifting discussions of race following the murder of George Floyd also serves as a moment of exigence for the special WPA issue

In “Programmatic Approaches to Antiracist Writing Program Policy,” Branson and Sanchez highlight the Antiracist Writing Across the Curriculum Toolkit from Syracuse University as a prime example of one strong method towards equipping and supporting teachers doing such work. The toolkit, which includes sample syllabi, reading lists, and more, “is designed to open up a space for teachers to rethink pedagogical assumptions in writing and confront implicit biases that can emerge in writing assignments and assessments” (pg. #). Branson and Sanchez further write, “What makes Syracuse’s antiracist WAC toolkit a model example of the kind of work we are calling for is the way it frames antiracist writing pedagogy in terms of broader shifts in program values, not just a set of innovative teaching strategies” (Pg. #). Branson and Sanchez also investigate antiracist writing pedagogy workshops and professional development events at five different university; however, they are quick to point out that such practices are not nearly widespread enough and that far too often, “workshops on race and pedagogy exist in a reactionary capacity, developed in response to the most recent racial atrocity” (pg. #). As far as published scholarship on how to specifically train novice teachers seeking to include antiracism as a mainstay of their pedagogical practice, I only found one article after an extensive search: Alice McIntyre offers suggestions on how to help prospective teachers explore their whiteness (not all teachers are white) to better improve their own multicultural pedagogical practice. However, as Branson and Sanchez highlight, we need to frame antiracism as a broader shift in program values, especially when training and supporting TAs. This cannot be a siloed endeavor. It requires full buy-in from the department.

McIntyre’s article, though, ties into my second mentioned point: recent scholarship continues to confirm that a teacher’s identity impacts how one approaches antiracist work. While Carmen Kynard, Shiela Carter-Tod, Frankie Condon, and Scott Wible, among others, have

produced valuable and eye-opening work on how their own positionalities have coalesced with their antiracist work as junior and tenured faculty, this chapter specifically seeks to investigate graduate students' experiences on the topic. TAs must learn a lot of new pedagogical theory as novice teachers while simultaneously discovery the intersections of their own positionality and teacher identity. Furthermore, they must do all this while occupy the vulnerable space that is a graduate teaching assistantship. Therefore, how do we best support TAs in building their own teaching identity from their various positionalities while also equipping them to incorporate authentic antiracist pedagogical practices. Within this topic, scholarship is even more limited (and depressing). Staci Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig discuss the intersections of race and gender in their own professional development as graduate students—experiences rife with micro and macroaggressions—in “Troubling the Boundaries: (de)Constructing WPA Identities at the Intersections of Race and Gender.” And in “Black Lesbians—Who Will Fight for Our Lives but Us: Navigating Power, Belonging, Labor, Resistance, and Graduate Student Survival in the Ivorty Tower,” S. Tay Glover investigates how universities taut institutionalized “feminism and diversity” while “evok[ing] continued doubly invisibilized violence, exploitation, and silencing of Black feminist women and queer graduate students in particular ways” (161).

This chapter seeks to expand on both Perryman-Clark, Craig, and Glover's work by investigating the culture of teacher preparation, professional development opportunities, and institutional support of a TA program from the perspective of all its TAs, not one or two siloed few. Through an ethnographic lens of one English Department TA program, this chapter also seeks to contribute to conversations regarding how to best prepare post-secondary teachers for DEI work while further illuminating how to specifically support TAs in such endeavors. Outside of Perryman-Clark, Craig, and Glover's scholarship, these conversations typically take place at

the faculty level. Yet, one of the primary stakeholders of these conversations regarding teacher training are the actual TAs being trained. Furthermore, TAs are often the front face of FYW classroom—a section of writing studies with an extremely large public reach. Therefore, how (and if) TAs feel prepared and supported in helping to lead the movement of antiracism in writing studies should be investigated. Thus, this chapter utilizes a bottom-up approach, in which a broad range of TA voices are included in the conversation. Rather than narratives of teacher training, and antiracist training specifically, that follow a top-down approach (from faculty/administration to faculty/administration and then to graduate teaching assistants), this chapter uses an ethnographic study to reverse the flow (graduate teaching assistants to faculty/administration then to other faculty/administration).

### **The Program Investigated and the Study's Design**

In 2005, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) published a statement on “Supporting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners in English Education,” which proposed potential research agendas, stances, and questions in order to best fulfill its outlined tenets. The statement listed ethnographic studies as a prime methodology for producing scholarship that best helps English teachers achieve two of the eight tenets: (1) “model[ing] culturally responsive and socially responsible practices for students,” and (2) “be[ing] willing to cross traditional personal and professional boundaries in pursuit of social justice and equity” (para 4) This study heeds this call by specifically investigating the culture of an entire TA program within an English Department, through the TA perspective, in regards to training and support afforded to novice teachers seeking to acculturate these practices.

This ethnographic study took place at a Research 1 university in the mid-South whose population consists of approximately 20,000 students each year. While the community that

houses the university is primarily African American, the university itself is primarily white. Data from the study was collected between the fall semester of 2017 to the fall semester of 2021, and the racial demographics of the student population upon the conclusion of the data collection is as follows: 45% White, 34 % Black, 7% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 4% Non-resident Alien, 3% Multiracial, and 2% Non-specified. The specific demographics of the English Department itself are not available, however the demographics of the participating TAs will be shared later in the chapter.

The English Department of the featured University has publicly espoused a commitment to antiracism throughout the years—one reason the ethnographic study took place at this particular institution. The other deciding factor for featuring this particular department is that principal investigator (me) served as a TA of the department throughout the entirety of the data collection. While this reality granted me personalized access to participants, all with whom I've maintained strong relationships, it also leads to some inevitable bias. However, the primary intent remains to feature a broad spectrum of voices even though some autoethnographic reflection on my own position as a member of the community and some potential bias are included. Both the chair of the department and the WPA (tasked with leading the TA program) agreed to the study. And in order to protect the study's integrity, the approved IRB proposal ensured all information produced remains completely confidential, with only the primary investigator (myself) and the IRB board granted access to gathered notes, interviews, and survey results.

The featured English Department offers PhDs in the following concentrations: Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication; Literature; and Linguistics. They also offer an MFA in Creative Writing. Therefore, the teaching assistant program is comprised of graduate students

from all four areas of concentration. Each TA is required to attend a weeklong orientation prior to their inaugural semester of teaching for the department, and they must also enroll in the Theory and Practice of Teaching Writing course coinciding with their initial semester as a teacher. TAs teach a minimum of two consecutive FYW courses. And while concentrations competitively offer upper division courses in a TA's specific area of study, such courses are not guaranteed. The majority of TAs primarily teach FYW courses throughout their graduate school tenure. The department also requires that TAs participate in Collaborative Academic Professionalization (CAP) meetings—which occur weekly or bimonthly, depending on TA experience within the department.

The study's ethnographic approach included collecting syllabi from the mandatory TA orientation and the Theory and Practice of Teaching Writing course between 2017-2021, as well as information regarding CAP meetings that occurred within those four years. Furthermore, the study features a survey sent to all TAs in the fall of 2021 (see Appendix F). The survey gathered demographic information for the study as well as gauged individual opinions regarding antiracist training, equitable practices, and departmental support. Thirteen TAs who completed the survey were then asked to participate in an interview, performed individually, that elaborated on how individuals incorporated antiracism within their own classes and how their various identities impact such work (see Appendix G). The study sought to include a diverse pool of TAs to be interviewed, based on years in the program, varying areas of research, gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, age, and abilities. Lastly, the study allowed for observation notes to be gathered within the TA office—a large room that houses of forty desks assigned to TAs. Observations and their consequent notes sought to capture the culture of the program from the TA perspective as it relates to teacher training and departmental support.

Because the study included multiple elements—gathered syllabi and materials from professional developmental workshops, surveys, interviews, and observations—the following sections will often blend results and discussion under appropriate headings. Some sections analyze gathered documents while other sections discuss themes that arose from surveys, interviews, and observations.

### **Syllabi Design: Antiracism as a Base for the Theory and Practice of Teaching**

#### **Writing**

The initial required TA orientation broaches an array of topics, including (1) an introduction to the department’s particular FYW curriculum and assignments, (2) lesson planning, (3) introductions to composition pedagogy, (4) discussions regarding developing a teaching persona, and (5) conversations addressing linguistic diversity.<sup>33</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, the second day of my own teacher orientation in 2017, we were tasked with reading Baldwin’s “If Black English isn’t a Language Then Tell Me, What Is?” However, in studying the subsequent teaching orientation reading lists and participating in orientations as the GAD for the WPA, a recognizable growth occurred. In fall of 2018 and 2019, a second reading on linguistic diversity was added to the orientation schedule: Jennifer M. Cunningham’s “African American Language is not Good English.” And by the fall of 2020, a third reading also addressed the topic: Vershawn Asanti Young’s “Should Writer’s Use They Own English?” Said additions did not take the place of other readings on other topics, but rather required a little extra labor to prompt more rounded workshop discussions. In reviewing all four orientation schedules from 2017-2020, the only noticeable shift in covered topics occurred in the fall of 2020. The typical readings regarding how to lead a class discussions and lesson planning evolved to provide

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<sup>33</sup> Information gathered from orientation schedules and reading lists from Fall 2017 to Fall 2020

knowledge on best practices for online teaching and demonstrations regarding available online technologies as the university continued holding classes remotely due to Covid. Therefore, according to the reading schedule, the additional readings on linguistic diversity did not detract from any of the other needs in preparing TAs to begin their inaugural semester as a teacher of record for the department.

The additional labor of the additional readings, however, did lead to deeper discussions regarding investigating linguistic diversity as an antiracist pedagogical approach. The 2017 orientation discussion following Baldwin's reading focused on identity and writing and led to questions of how to best prepare FYW students without enacting cultural violence. As the GAD present for orientation in 2019, the additional Cunningham reading from *Bad Ideas About Writing* deepened the conversation further. Not only was the intersection of identity and writing broached, the second reading prompted discussions regarding false ideas of what constitutes "correct" writing. While Baldwin introduces the power structures of Englishes and highlights the contribution of Black Englishes in particular, Cunningham situates the argument directly in the writing classroom. Her article builds on Baldwin by requiring teachers to question their own conflation between linguistic bias and "error" (91). This enabled space for novice teachers to confront the false idea that collegiate and professional writing is synonymous with white languaging practices. Confronting any such prejudice and bias is important groundwork to lay early within a writing teacher's career, as the longer such false narratives are upheld, the harder they are to reverse.

In 2020, the addition of Young's phonetically code-meshed article again enabled conversations on linguistic diversity to enter a new realm. While Baldwin and Cunningham's articles discuss the theory behind Black Englishes, Young's piece rhetorically demonstrates its



usage in practice. The addition of this reading allowed for orientation facilitators (myself included) to combat the false believe that code-meshing inevitably leads to miscommunication and/or sloppy writing. When discussing the theory of incorporating diverse Englishes in academic writing, one TA understandably said, “I’m scared that if I let students code-mesh, I won’t be able to understand them.” That TA was then asked, “Did you struggle to comprehend Young’s article?” The answer, “No.” Again, the act of dispelling that fear early on better equips teachers to welcome code-meshing into their classroom, as became evident in the study’s survey results and interviews, thus making the additional readings well worth the time.

The Theory and Practice of Teaching Writing (ENGL 8003) syllabi gathered from Fall 2017 to Fall 2020 also demonstrated a similar growth in the breadth of required readings addressing linguistic diversity. Each syllabus included readings on compositional theory; pedagogical practice; and specifics on assigning, responding to, and evaluating student writing. Each syllabus also included readings from Perryman-Clark, Kirkland, and Jackson’s edited collection, *Students’ Right to Their Own Language: A Critical Sourcebook*, building on the conversations introduced in orientation. In 2017, students were required to read Chapters 1-2 of the source book (“Students’ Right to Their Own Language” and Geneva Smitherman’s “CCCC’s Role in the Struggle for Language Rights”) as well as Chapters 6-8, which includes John Timbur’s article on institutional policies towards multilingualism, Smitherman’s retrospective account of the resolution, and Jeff Zorn’s counter-argument against Students’ Right. However, in the 2018 and 2019 syllabi, the last two listed chapters were replaced by a phonetically code-meshed article from Young as well as an article from Neisha-Anne Green, which features a classroom activity encouraging and promoting students to code-mesh in their own writing.

The shift in these readings impacted TAs' own approaches to antiracism in their classroom. The study's disseminated survey asked TAs what year they were enrolled in ENGL 8003 and which antiracist approaches they remember learning within that class. Every TA checked either linguistic diversity and/or code-meshing. Surveys then asked if TAs believed they performed antiracist pedagogical techniques in their own classrooms, and if so, which ones. Only 18% of responders said they were unsure whether they did or not. The other 82% gave a resounding yes. Of those who said yes, 14% said they include discussions on linguistic diversity and 29% said they actively encourage students to code-mesh. Most of the TAs who said they included discussions on linguistic diversity started the program in 2016 or 2017. As one interview revealed, a TA who completed ENGL 8003 in 2016 said she addresses the current power structures and myths of "standardized" Englishes in her classes, but she "doesn't advertise code-meshing as an option" as she's unsure how to encourage students to do so successfully. When further asked, the TA discussed articles she'd read about the value of code-meshing; however, she'd never read any articles featuring lesson plans that encourage FYW students to stretch their code-meshing legs. Most the 29% of TAs who actively encourage code-meshing, on the other hand, had enrolled in ENGL 8003 in 2018 or afterwards. In other words, TAs were twice as likely to incorporate code-meshing into their own classrooms when equipped with (1) prime examples of successful code-meshed prose as well as (2) a lesson plan outlining how specifically to promote this antiracist languaging practice within one's class. Just think of the possibilities if more scholarship existed that included lesson plans encouraging code-meshing, as argued for in Chapter 2. Those 14% who discuss diverse Englishes but do not actively advertise code-meshing as an option could be better equipped to do so with access to various code-meshing lesson plans and activities.

While the growth in TAs who incorporated code-meshing in their classrooms coalesce with the growth of the ENGL 8003 syllabus, another antiracist pedagogical writing approach was incorporated into the Theory and Practice of Teaching Writing course in 2020: contract grading. Syllabi from 2017-2019 focused on responding to student writing through apt feedback, as outlined in readings by Nancy Sommers and Lad Tobin. The 2020 syllabus, however, engaged with questions of how to best assign value to said work through grading contracts. While TAs enrolled in ENGL 8003 in 2020 still read Sommers and Tobin, they also read Inoue's *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies*. Then, at an all TA CAP meeting, the 2020 cohort of TAs presented on grading contracts in groups to the rest of the TAs, with each group providing a different approach to this equitable and antiracist practice. A year later, more than 43% of TAs mentioned utilizing grading contracts in their classrooms, as revealed in surveys. While only 25% of surveyed TAs were members of the 2020 cohort (i.e. those required to read Inoue's monograph in ENGL 8003), their presentations helped equip other TAs to implement this practice too. The simple act of having the newest cohort of TAs present on the topic to all had real impact. Not only did it provide a reversal in any falsely conceived hierarchy of TA status, it allowed TAs who had been teaching a little longer to catch up on newer and innovative antiracist practices. To further support teachers in this endeavor, an example contract was added to the FYW course materials and instructors were encouraged to use/revise it in their own classrooms.

The growth of the syllabi and its reflective growth in TAs' implementations of antiracist pedagogical approaches demonstrates that such work does not simply occur over night. In "Collaborating Towards an Anti-Racist Writing Curriculum," the WPA of this studied program wrote,

When Katie began to consult the research on how to develop an anti-racist writing program, she felt overwhelmed by how much needed to change. Yet the anti-racist writing pedagogy discussed was implemented in steps and continues today. Making a single change or intervention each semester can and will slowly build an anti-racist program (118).

The highlighted growth within the syllabi occurred over four years.

Now, it's important to note my own bias within this analysis. The WPA studied in this chapter is, after all, my mentor. We co-wrote the above featured article. As discussed earlier, my insider status exists as a former TA of this particular program. To say that doesn't impact my views on the WPA's crafted syllabi would be false. Therefore, I turn back to what other TAs wrote in the anonymous surveys collected.

The curriculum in ENGL 8003, as well as its reflection in the FYW curriculum (which focuses on both linguistic and rhetorical diversity), led several TAs to note that they believe UofM's English Department is committed to diversity and inclusion. When asked in the survey to explain their answer, 55% of those who said yes, the department is committed, specifically mentioned material covered in ENGL 8003 and/or the FYW program as a reason. In interviews, two different TAs compared their teacher training at this study's institution with teacher training they'd received during their master's program at different universities. One interviewee said:

I took a similar class while getting my masters, and nothing like that [code-meshing/grading contracts] were ever brought up. Some faculty included BLM statements and highlighted that they were including works by non-white people, etc, but they weren't adamant [on antiracist work] other than that.

Another interviewee echoed such sentiments discussing that they'd never received antiracist training in a similar class during their master's program, but noted that such training was included "on day one" at this study's institution.

However, a single class cannot be tasked with providing TAs every single thing they need to know as novice teachers. Such work requires full departmental support, through avenues like mentorship and professional development opportunities, as the next section addresses.

### **Modeling Antiracism**

In 2015, the "CCCCs Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing" listed a requirement that graduate TAs have "mentoring partnerships with experienced teachers of college writing, which should include regular formative assessments of teaching (classroom observations, course evaluation reviews, syllabi and assignment reviews)" (para 13). The statement also discusses how TAs need opportunities to attend frequent pedagogical workshops throughout their tenure. As mentioned earlier, the study's institution has a CAP program. The program features monthly professional development workshops and assigns each TA a CAP mentor for the academic year. Both non-tenure-track and tenure-track faculty who have a breadth of experience teaching the same classes as TAs serve as CAP mentors. TAs meet with their CAP mentor at least once a month. CAP mentors also observe TAs teaching at least once a semester and provide feedback. While surveys asked about CAP, TA interview responses better engaged with CAP's impact, as well as other antiracist training opportunities.

As discussed in the methods section, the study sought to include in-depth feedback from a diverse pool for TAs. Therefore, interviewed TAs were chosen to ensure that each area of concentration was represented and a wide range of teaching experience was included.

Furthermore, the study sought to represent TAs of different races, nationalities, and genders. The demographics of the interviewed TAs breakdown as follows:

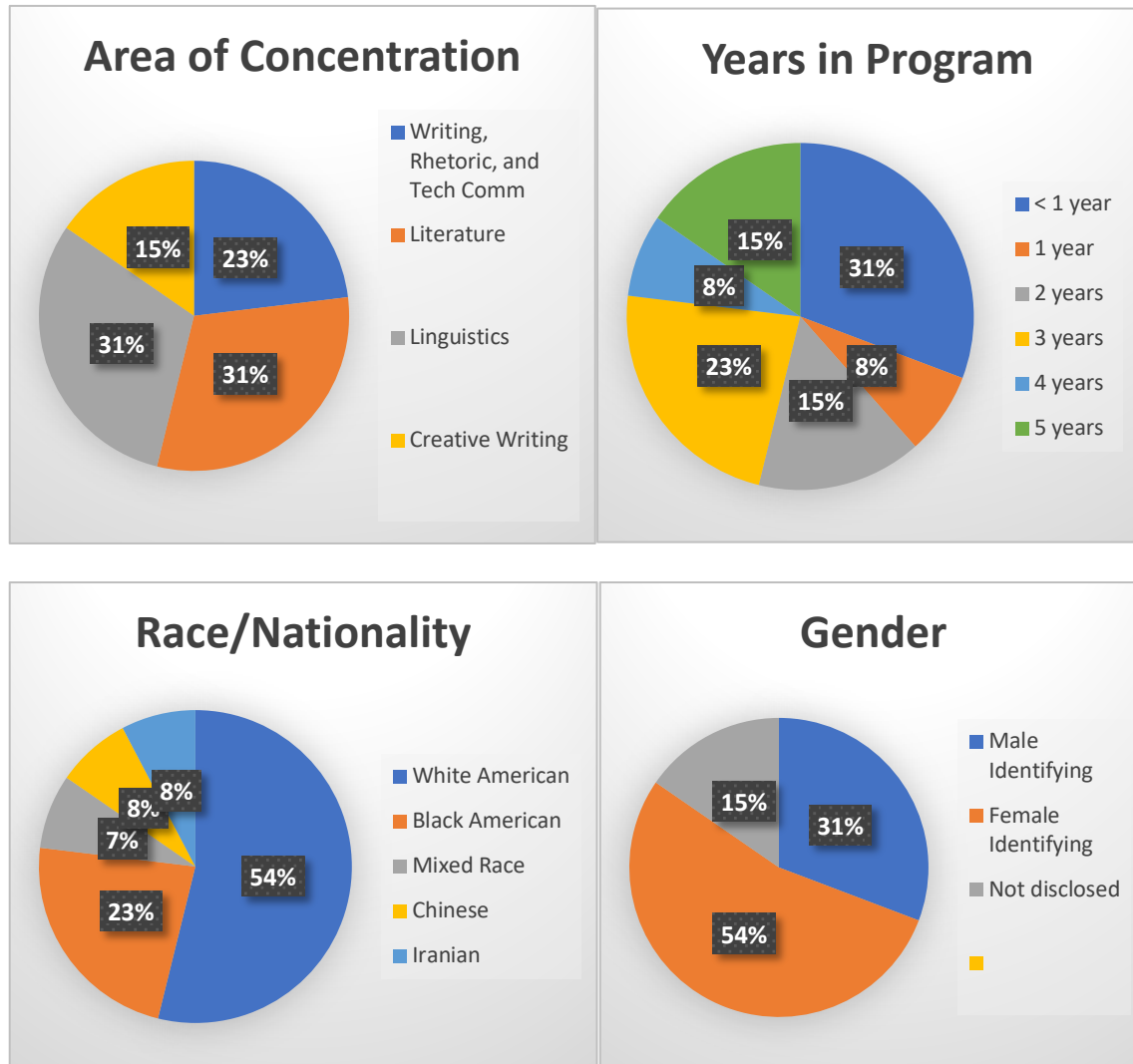


Figure 12. Demographics of Interviewed TAs

Interviewees were asked to “Briefly discuss your experiences with antiracist training in the English Department” – an open-ended question crafted to provide the most organic response.

Every interviewed TA mentioned ENGL 8003 as an initial training ground for such work; however, TAs also mentioned having received training through CAP, through their peers, and in other classes.

Thirty-percent of interviewed TAs mentioned antiracist training they'd received during CAP workshops. At least once a year, a CAP workshop features an antiracist session, whether that be effectively teaching writing to second-language learners, investigating code-meshing and grading contracts, or bringing in a psychologist to discuss the impact of race on students. Interviewed TAs best remembered workshops their peers helped facilitate. During a workshop on teaching second-language learners, one multilingual international TA was included on the panel. That workshop was discussed by every TA who mentioned CAP as an antiracist training space. As many scholars can relate, special bonds are built amongst peers during graduate school. While one might hypothesize that those with institutional authority wield more influence, such a result proves otherwise. The TA who presented not only had insider knowledge of second-language learners and how to best include and celebrate other languages in the classroom, that TA held the trust and respect of her peers. Her presence as a TA leading a workshop stood out amongst the dozens of other workshops that TAs could have discussed. Thus, pulling from all available resources, including that of graduate students, when striving towards antiracist training can be very valuable.

Another CAP workshop that received praise as antiracist amongst interviewees didn't actually cover a pedagogical topic. Fourth- and-fifth year TAs are encouraged to attend monthly "professional CAP" workshops that focus on approaching the academic job market. The particular job market workshop discussed in this study's interviews featured a presentation given by a faculty of color. When asked about antiracist training, two TAs of color, one Black American and one Iranian, specifically mentioned the importance of seeing such representation at these specific workshops. "To hear another academic of color discuss the troubles and obstacles of the job market made me feel supported" one TA said. The other TA similarly

mentioned the comfort of knowing they weren't alone while undergoing the job market experience as a person of color. The fact that this particular workshop stood out as an antiracist training space demonstrates how antiracist training goes beyond classroom instruction. It requires institutional practice and institutional representation, i.e. full departmental support. This was further highlighted in another common response from TAs regarding their training experiences.

Fifty-four percent of interviewees addressed just how much of their own antiracist pedagogical training relied on watching faculty in their required graduate classes demonstrate antiracist work well. While TAs discussed that ENGL 8003 taught them how to implement antiracist classroom structures through things like contract grading and encouraging code-meshing, the best training tool for the *daily* practice of welcoming productive conversations regarding race in the classroom came from watching others do it well. Two black American TAs who were interviewed discussed heeding the pedagogical tactics of black faculty members. One interviewee discussed taking notes on how a black faculty seamlessly weaved critical race theory and the white lens through required readings while simultaneously touching on the intersectionality of queerness and gender—strategies this TA now deploys regularly. The other spoke of how black faculty members taught her how to avoid overgeneralization and how to best respond to diverse writing by simply reading the feedback she'd received from black faculty. In other words, this TA learned how to best provide feedback to her students' writing by mirroring the types of helpful feedback and responses she'd received from faculty.

Two white American interviewees mirrored the sentiment of learning from black faculty members on how to teach students to lean into feeling uncomfortable in a manner that produces growth. As Inoue discusses, "When it comes to race, racism, and antiracist work, it is important



that everyone feels safe, but equally important that many also feel uncomfortable” (“On Antiracist Agendas,” xviii). In watching how black faculty foster such space, these two TAs now rely on similar tactics when discussing race in their own classrooms. Other white American interviewees also noted how white faculty addressed race, and their own whiteness, when teaching diverse writing practices and reading diverse authors. These white TAs now mirror how those white faculty highlight and navigate their own positionality while addressing antiracism in the classroom. One international Chinese interviewee discussed the importance of watching faculty present on the impact of diverse languaging as this is now a staple for their own writing classrooms.

Such results illuminate a particular benefit in being TA. While many find themselves in a vulnerable position being both a graduate student and a teacher of record simultaneously, there is one great advantage. We have ample opportunity to continuously watch other teachers teach well and then turn around and immediately attempt such practices in our classrooms. This duality can provide wonderful teacher growth, especially in relation to antiracist work.

I can personally attest that sitting in one classroom as a student and then turning around and standing in another classroom as a teacher greatly impacted my own pedagogical practice. My inaugural semester of teaching, I watched how a professor in one of my graduate classes presented often contentious racial topics. Whenever difficult and/or controversial questions were raised, such as a pro-segregation stance, the professor would poignantly revert back to the readings, “Well, Booker T. would say X, while DuBois and Ralph Ellison would say Y.” This simple yet effective approach was a game changer for me when prompting discussions of race in my own classroom. As someone who has zero authority on the experiences of people of color, rather than getting flustered about what I don’t know, this approach taught me how to refer back

to what I do know when helping facilitate these discussions. As a TA, when students asked questions or conversations got heated, I began practicing reverting to an array of leading and varied voices on the topic, just like I'd watched that faculty member do. If a student didn't think the writing classroom was the appropriate space to discuss race, my response would mirror that faculty's tactic: "Well, here's what Vershawn Asanti Young, Frankie Condon, and Stacy Perryman-Clark have said on this issue." When a student commented that code-meshing has an othering effect on black students whose first language isn't AAVE, I could incorporate how Jacqueline Jones Royster approached that issue. I had watched said faculty member answer difficult student questions with poignant published texts and I watched how said approach kept contentious classroom discussions focused and full of necessary nuance. Therefore, I still mirror this faculty's approach today.

Now modelling effective teaching cannot be the *only* training TAs receive, as was the initial approach in the 1930s (Pylik). Yet its role remains vital. As stated earlier, in 2005 NCTE discussed the importance of educators modelling "culturally responsive and socially responsible practices" in order to support linguistic and cultural diversity. The matter further extends to antiracist training. TAs who reflected during interviews on daily antiracist pedagogical approaches successfully modeled by faculty were the same TAs who mentioned successfully weaving antiracist practices through the entirety of the semester. A handful of interviewed TAs admitted that while they address code-meshing in one class session and African American rhetorics in another, these options are not further discussed and/or encouraged throughout the entirety of the course. They are often discussed once and then never spoken of again, according to interviews. While other topics deserve their turn in the FYW classroom, TAs who mentioned antiracist pedagogies modeled by faculty were the same who discussed how they seamlessly

weave code-meshing and diverse rhetorics throughout the semester, not just one session, without detracting from other topics. Therefore, it might be helpful practice to require TAs to complete a reflective writing on how occupying space in the classroom as a student impacts how they occupy space in the classroom as a teacher. Said prompt should include how watching others model antiracist pedagogical approaches impacts their own classroom practice. Similar to how reflections ensure transference of classroom lessons within one's writing practice (Giles), said reflection could enable TAs to further internalize helpful teaching strategies. During my own TA orientation, we were asked to recall a teacher who positively influenced us. At that time, I hadn't been in a classroom in more than five years, so the prompt was slightly difficult for me. However, asking a TA to reflect on productive antiracist teaching strategies they witness in real time as a graduate student could further help them incorporate these modeled antiracist pedagogical approaches.

### **It Ain't All Perfect**

While the last two sections discuss the positives illuminated during the study, negatives existed as well. Two separate negative incidents were discussed by multiple TAs, and the culprits in both incidents were white female faculty, those who look like me. While such a revelation was personally difficult to reckon, it's sadly not isolated. Staci Perryman-Clark wrote in the introduction of *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration* how "as the only black woman on specific committees," she often found herself "arguing continuously" for antiracist curriculum reform (3). "Resistance to these efforts did not come from white men alone, but also, and more often, from white women, who could readily champion gender equity, but remained obstinate—or, at best, silent—when Staci raised concerns that applied to students of color" (3-4).

The first negative incident involved a white female CAP mentor who completed a teaching observation of a black female TA. Shakura, a member of the inaugural group to teach African American rhetorics in my third chapter's study, also participated in this study, completing both the survey and interview. As discussed in Chapter 3, Shakura had the highest classroom engagement when presenting on African American rhetorics. Furthermore, her students were among the highest to successfully incorporate African American rhetorics into their own writing. Chapter 3 surmises, through its own observations of Shakura's teaching, that such results occurred due to Shakura incorporation of such rhetorics in her own classroom speech practices. However, when observed by this white female CAP mentor, Shakura received a scathing review regarding how "unprofessional" she is in the classroom.<sup>34</sup> In an hour-long, one-of-one follow-up meeting between Shakura and the CAP mentor, the CAP mentor told Shakura she was just being "straightforward" with Shakura because she knew Shakura could "handle it."<sup>35</sup> Shakura mentioned in the interview that this comment felt tangential to the false belief that black women should naturally have a higher pain tolerance than others—a belief, Shakura mentioned, that has left hundreds of black women receiving less than adequate care, even in life-threatening situations.

Furthermore, Chapter 2 discusses in-depth how "professionalism" is code for white etiquette and white languaging, as noted by Frankie Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young (6). Chapter 2 also addresses students' desire and need to witness successful code-meshing in their teacher's own languaging practices. In other words, Shakura's use of black languaging within her classroom demonstrates a highly successful antiracist pedagogical approach backed by

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<sup>34</sup> The review was collected for this study.

<sup>35</sup> Other TAs in this study discussed how their meetings with the same CAP mentor only lasted about twenty minutes.

results from two separate studies. Yet, her use of Black English in the classroom was lambasted and falsely categorized as “unprofessional” by a white female CAP mentor. Shakura’s spot on tactics for how to best encourage inclusivity and diversity were shamed by someone who holds the same positionality as me—a white woman.

The WPA, who also received the teaching observation evaluation, was quick to reach out and apologize to Shakura on behalf of her colleague. However, such an incident demonstrates how critical institutional support for antiracist work truly is. We can’t simultaneously encourage TAs to take on such practices and then belittle them when they do. In order to materialize an antiracist writing program, complete faculty buy-in is mandatory. This contradiction within the outlined incident spread amongst TAs quickly and led to complete distrust when that same CAP mentor served on an inclusivity panel two years later. TAs of color who participated in the study and attended the panel were swift to surmise that the CAP mentor’s presence was merely white saviorism at its finest and her panel presentation was dismissed as performative. This incident further impacted responses to the survey question regarding whether or not TAs believed the English Department was actually committed to DEI practices. A handful of anonymous responses cited this incident as reason for answering “no” to the question. Again, in order to encourage TAs to implement antiracist pedagogies in their classroom, they must feel supported in doing so.

In his forward to *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*, Asao Inoue states, “Antiracist work in classrooms is not an easy task. We all will make mistakes” (xviii). He then contends, however, that not attempting the work is far more damaging. Inoue’s sentiment mirrors that of bell hooks, who in *Teaching to Transgress* wrote:

In all cultural revolutions there are periods of chaos and confusion, times when grave mistakes are made... If we fear mistakes, doing things wrongly... we will never make the academy a culturally diverse place where scholars the curricula address every dimension of that difference (33).

Therefore, I bring up this incident not to simply through shade at the CAP mentor, but to open conversations about productive measures for addressing such a mistake. The CAP mentor never reached back out to Shakura in regards to her comments. Would the bad taste have remained in several TAs' mouths had the CAP mentor done so? Had the mentor addressed her comments head on, would TAs have been more receptive to later hearing the mentor speak on a panel regarding diversity and inclusion? What if that mentor had used the panel to address what she'd learned from mistakes she'd made within her own white positionality regarding DEI practices, rather than taut how she "helps" black students? We'll never know. Now, of course it's easier to make these suggestions as someone not directly involved in the incident. And it's important to note that this study focused on antiracist training and support from the TAs' perspectives, so no information regarding the incident was gathered from the CAP mentor's point of view. No space in the study was provided for the CAP mentor to explain herself. Yet, the question remains, how do we confront the mistakes we make while striving to implement antiracism, because we will make mistakes.

The second problematic incident raised in interviews and surveys included how another racially charged moment in a classroom was addressed. In a graduate course held via Zoom during the pandemic, the topic of linguistic diversity was broached. While a white female faculty member was teaching, an international, non-black student of color used the word n\*\*\*\*r, with a hard R, in the chat function of Zoom. A handful of students quickly responded in the chat, some

speaking out against using that word and other's contending it was merely used as an example. During the course of the conversation, which was retrieved via screenshots for this study, the word was typed out in its entirety six times using the hard R by various students and only once was it typed out to argue *against* the use of the word. Now, it can be challenging for a teacher to moderate the chat function of Zoom while simultaneously giving a lecture. Yet, when a student informed the teacher that the chat thread needed to be addressed, the white female faculty member paused momentarily, as if reading the thread, then continued with her lecture like nothing happened. After class, a student voiced her concern to her respective faculty mentor of how the situation was handled (ignored) by the white female faculty member. The next class period, a black faculty member, who at the time was still an associate professor, was present to speak on the usage of the n-word in the previous class while the white teacher of record, who holds the rank of full professor, continued to remain completely silent on the subject. This troubled TAs for several reasons.

First, several TAs interpreted the white female faculty member's silence as complacency for how that word was thrown around in class. Again, due to the nature of this study, this chapter cannot speak on behalf of that faculty member. This ethnographic study can only share how the white faculty member's silence on the use of that word during class spoke volumes to TAs. So again: when we (especially white faculty) make a mistake, how do we address it? Bringing in a black faculty member, whom you outrake, to mitigate the issue was not perceived as a productive response. Rather, it raised questions from TAs regarding unequal labor expectations of academics of color. Was the expectation that anytime an incident regarding race occurred, academics of color were required to step in and address it, adding both emotional labor and

greater time demands to their already established research and teaching loads? This incident left some black TAs questioning how the department valued them and their labor.

Earlier, this chapter referenced Carmen Kynard and her discussion of the uneven distribution of labor required of people of color when it comes to tackling racism and promoting antiracism. This coalesces with a well-documented trend regarding larger labor loads expected by faculty of color with little to no recognition—a trend that has culminated in increased health risks, higher levels of burnout, and lower retention of black academics (Davis and Brown, Anthym and Tuitt). Therefore, encouraging and fostering antiracist practices amongst TAs must include demonstrating institutional practices that model how to combat such unjust labor expectations. And combating these unjust labor expectations requires white academics (myself included) to speak up and out when conversations regarding race go awry in the classroom. We cannot require that our black colleagues step in and address the problem. We must commit the same energy and labor, if not more, to the topic as we ask from our colleagues of color.

Now, in addressing such a problem as a white teacher of record, it's important to also consider one's own positionality. Inoue opens "On Antiracist Agendas" with one of his earliest childhood memories of school. Inoue was joking around with his black friend Shawn, who called Inoue a "honkey."<sup>36</sup> Both Inoue and Shawn were quickly called over by their white female teacher who conflated the use of "honkey" with the n-word, not taking into account the difference in the history of violence and differing power structure in play between the two words. Inoue discusses that while the teacher's impulse "to stamp out" racism in her classroom was the right impulse, the delivery remained flawed (xiii). He concludes:

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<sup>36</sup> Inoue discusses how his neighborhood's understanding of race was binary, either black or white, so as a Pacific Islander, Inoue was sometimes labeled as a "honkey."



Am I saying that Mrs. Whitmore and other white teachers should stay out of the anti-racist activism business in classrooms? No. On the contrary, they should be first in line to do this work. What I'm saying is that white teachers must tread differently than teachers of color.

In reviewing the situation raised in interviews and surveys, TAs wanted the white teacher of record to address the use of the n-word herself. However, this white teacher would naturally need to deploy a slightly different strategy than her black colleague. She wouldn't be able to speak from personal experience about the damaging effects of that word on black people. Yet, TAs still wanted her to speak to the issue from her own positionality. Therefore, it's important to investigate what that "treading," as Inoue calls it, looks like for different TAs of varying positionalities. The following sections investigate how TAs navigate their own positionality while teaching race in the classroom to further encourage conversations of how-to best support TAs doing such work.

### **Teaching Race from the Context of Our Positionalities and Identities**

During the thirteen interviews conducted for this study, TAs were asked three questions regarding their identities and how they navigate their identities within the classroom:

- 1.) What identity markers do you possess?
- 2.) Do you feel that these identity markers impact your interactions with students? Please explain.
- 3.) Do your identity markers impact how you present certain materials in the classroom. Please explain.

The first question was crafted as to not assume how any one person identifies. The second and third questions were written as to not lead the interviewees in their answers, but rather allow for

a more organic response. A previous question in the interview did ask participants about their experiences with antiracist training and another about whether or not they believed the English Department to be committed to DEI practices. However, the other seven previous questions simply asked about how long the TA has taught, their area of concentration, etc. (see Appendix G). Therefore, while race was already on the table in the interviews, the featured questions in this section did not directly prompt race as a variable when teaching. However, teaching race within one's positionality was addressed when answering these three questions in twelve out of thirteen interviews.

Since race, and antiracism particularly, stands at the center of this dissertation, the following sections are organized under two subheadings: "Teaching Race in Writing while White" and "Teaching Race in Writing while BIPOC."<sup>37</sup> However, this chapter recognizes that individual racial identities are not monolithic and while differing racial identities are represented in the following sections, no single interviewee serves as the spokesperson for their race. Rather, these thirteen featured interviews seek to provide insight into individual experiences, and recognize trends that occurred amongst interviewees. Furthermore, this chapter realizes that every single person's identity is composed of intersectional social constructs. Therefore, both following subsections also take into account how gender, age, nationality, physical abilities, and economic status intersect with one's racial identity when teaching. In order to demonstrate just how greatly intersectionality impacts this work, no further subheadings are utilized other than the two racial groupings, white and BIPOC.

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<sup>37</sup> BIPOC is an acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

### *Teaching Race in Writing while White*

Inoue notes that teaching race while white might feel like “cooking in someone else’s kitchen. You don’t know where all the spices are...you don’t know what set of plates or silverware to use. You don’t know that their oven runs a little hot” (Inoue, “On Antiracist Agendas”). Frankie Condon also discusses the topic of suspicion and trust when white people engage with antiracist work in her monograph *I Hope I Join the Band* (164-176). However, race isn’t the only identifier that impacts how white TAs approach such work. Other identifiers, such as gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, and years of practice, can impact such an approach as well, as was solidified in this study.

The below figure features direct quotes in which white interviewees outlined identity markers they believe to possess. Figure 11 lists the identifiers in the order mentioned by each interviewee. The dates added in parentheses by each name signal the year the interviewee became a TA for the English Department. All interviews were conducted in the spring of 2022. Therefore, interviewees had a minimum of six months of practice teaching for this department particularly. Some interviewees had taught prior to their teaching assistantships for the department, as noted, which can factor into antiracist pedagogical exposure and practice.

<p><b>Callen (2021)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- White</li> <li>- Straight</li> <li>- Cisgender</li> <li>- Man</li> <li>- Nerdy / into Popular Culture</li> </ul>	<p><b>Hailey (2021 – taught prior)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- White</li> <li>- Heterosexual</li> </ul>	<p><b>Adrienne (2020 – taught prior)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Woman, identifies and presents as such</li> <li>- Young-ish, looks younger than I am.</li> <li>- White</li> <li>- Heterosexual</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Renee (2018 – taught prior)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Female (she/her)</li> <li>- Queer, bisexual</li> <li>- Grew up poor but now middle-class</li> <li>- Christian</li> <li>- Trauma survivor</li> <li>- Yankee</li> <li>- Wife</li> <li>- Oh, wait, wait, white. I am white. I'm white.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Logan (2018)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Obvious things students see: white, straight, male, who talks about my wife and children.</li> <li>- Often disclose that I'm a Christian based on class discussions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Brandy (2016)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Female.</li> <li>- White female.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Erica (2016)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disabled, a wheelchair user to be exact</li> <li>- Queer, a-sexual,</li> <li>- White, very white. Irish/German white.</li> <li>- Woman</li> <li>- Cisgender</li> <li>- Giant fucking nerd</li> </ul>

Figure 13. Identity markers of TAs interviewed who identify as white.

As shown in the above figure, different interviewees listed identifiers in different orders. Three out of four interviewees who identify as female brought up their gender first, while for men it was lower on the list. For one participant, gender wasn't listed at all. Sexuality, when mentioned, was among the first two listed identifiers in five out of six interviews. The only interviewee who mentioned disability as an identifier mentioned it first. And while one's race was shared in each interview, the order in which it was stated greatly varied. Three interviewees mentioned it first, one mentioned it second, two mentioned it third, and one mentioned it last. The order of mentioned identifiers often correlated with how each TA addressed the various ways in which their positionality impacts their teaching. To best engage with how these white TAs navigate

their positionalities while broaching intersections of race and writing in the classroom, I weave results from various interviews with discussion and analysis.

Two out of the three white interviewees who mentioned gender first as an identifier spent a fair amount of time discussing how their gender impacts their teaching, specifically with establishing their authority. Brandy discussed how she is naturally soft spoken and viewed as passive, sometimes leading to disciplinary issues:

If I'm upset with a student, I don't show them. As a woman, I'm easily labeled as hysterical. Any emotions outside of pure positivity aren't seen as warranted. It's assumed that I'm either on my period, or I got in a fight with my partner, or I'm simply irrational.

Adrienne mirrored such sentiment towards how her gender impacts her teaching and compounded it with her young age. "When I first enter the classroom, students aren't quite sure that I'm even their teacher. So, I come off no-nonsense that first day so they don't take advantage of me for being young and a woman." Adrienne mentioned that she steers away from disclosing any personal information so "students don't question my authority." Research has shown that female teachers, in comparison to their male counterparts, struggle to gain the respect of students, as both Brandy and Adrienne discuss (Miller and Chamberlin, 293-295). However, this dynamic of "authority," as Adrienne mentions, get complicated when discussing race in the FYW classroom. "I don't think we shouldn't be talking about race, but whenever we do, I feel that students of color lean in a little more so I'm careful of what to say." Unfortunately for Adrienne, completely steering away from disclosing any personal information, including addressing her whiteness, could hinder class conversations regarding race and writing. As NCTE states, "teachers must be willing to cross traditional personal boundaries in the pursuit of social

justice and equity” (Tenet 6). And sometimes the best place to start these conversations in the classroom as a white woman is just by being honest about our positionality and background, crossing some of those more traditional personal boundaries. Such honesty is crucial in building that necessary trust, as Condon discusses.

Now, this necessary honesty can be difficult in at least two ways. First, in being honest, white teachers may need to acknowledge our lack of first-hand experiences of being oppressed for our race. In other words, when it comes to how race functions for people of color, our knowledge *is* limited. Miller and Chamberlin’s “Women are Teachers, Men are Professors: A Study of Student Perceptions” revealed that female teachers in academia are often viewed as less knowledgeable by students than their male colleagues (292-293). Therefore, admitting limitations in our knowledge while being simultaneously aware that we, as women, must work to prove our knowledgeability may seem counterintuitive. However, (1) admitting limitations demonstrates knowledgeability and (2) in denying such limitations, white women will never gain the necessary trust of our students. Secondly, in being honest, some of us might have to be open with our students about some less-than-great realities from our backgrounds. For example, for the seven years I served as a professional writer, tasked with editing writing from diverse people and serving on hiring committees, I one-hundred-percent enacted white language supremacy and privileged white meritocratic discourse. My hands aren’t clean in these conversations and, as I mention in Chapter 1, it was extremely uncomfortable for me to learn the very things I now espouse. But I cross that traditional personal boundary and have shared all this honestly and openly with my students. Sharing this with students can too be uncomfortable. But I’ve seen it build trust between me and my students of color while also sidestepping defensiveness from my

white students. In being transparent about my own discomfort, I open space for other students to lean into their discomfort as well. Other white female TAs interviewed shared in this sentiment.

Brandy too addressed skepticism from her black students when incorporating race in the classroom: “As a white female teaching texts regarding race, I see a division within students from those who welcome that interaction and students that might be skeptical because I’m white.” However, when broaching the topic, Brady notes, “I try to be extremely transparent about my own positionality and am conscious to not talk *at* students.” Brandy discussed how her own transparency is key in these conversations. For Brandy, coming right out and acknowledging her whiteness and how its represented in black texts helps build trust amongst her more skeptical students. Furthermore, in not talking *at* students, Brandy affirms her role as a facilitator, not the top authority, enabling conversations to go deep. As a sixth year TA during the time of this interview, Brandy was quick to mention that “[this approach] came to me late.” It took practice. While Adrienne, then a second year TA, had taught previously during her master’s degree at another university, it wasn’t until beginning her Ph.D. at the study’s institution that she received any antiracist training. Therefore, Adrienne’s approach may be a reflective of her amount of exposure and practice to antiracist pedagogies. However, one way to encourage Adrienne to be more open when discussing the intersections of race and writing with her students is to model such an approach. Again, successful antiracist teacher training requires buy-in from the whole department, not a select few. Furthermore, as Inoue and hooks discuss, we have to allow TAs to make the inevitable mistakes and then encourage them to try again.

The third interviewee who mentioned her gender first, Renee, had less anxiety about her female status than her two colleagues. Renee also has the most teaching experience of any other interviewee, more than fifteen years. Renee discussed how her gendered positionality as a

mother, paired with her experiences as a trauma survivor, fuels the empathy with which she approaches the classroom. When working with students of color, Renee loves, “encouraging students to discover their own vocabulary in order to verbalize experiences linked to heightened emotions.” Rather than fearing she’ll come off as “overly-emotional” with students, a label often reserved for women, Renee leans into her emotional intelligence. She also values transparency with her students: “I feel it is my responsibility to acknowledge my identity to students and that the things I’ve come to value have been informed in part by my whiteness and my age.” One of the things Renee has come to value is a complete restructuring of her classroom approach to best build equity and reinforce student agency. Inspired by Inoue’s scholarship, Renee relinquishes a lot of her power, her “authority,” in the classroom on day one by having her students spend the first week negotiating their own grading contracts. Then throughout the semester, students receive lesson plans a week in advance and are welcome to make recommendations leading up to the day said lesson plan is implemented. Assignment sheets are also built collaboratively with student input. “Students actually respond with feedback to both lesson plans and assignment sheets and get excited that their feedback is followed. Furthermore, it builds student trust of my own feedback on their papers.” As argued in Chapter 2, encouraging students to enact their own agency is often at the crux of antiracist pedagogies. However, Renee was also quick to point out that she “could have never done this as a first-year teacher. My own confidence in acquiring such an approach came from years of teaching and reading a lot of pedagogical texts.”

Now to this study’s knowledge, no one expects newer TAs to fully incorporate all these approaches in their first few years of enacting antiracist work. Similar to how Fredlund discusses that incorporating antiracism in a FYW program can be an extremely daunting task, so can it be for TAs striving to implement antiracist pedagogical practices in their own classrooms.



Interviews demonstrated how it takes years for TAs to productively incorporate these strategies. This is where continual TA development workshops become extremely valuable. If once a year, a professional development workshop geared specifically towards an antiracist pedagogical approach is offered, then TAs can begin implementing such work step-by-step, similar to how the program grew in its antiracist approach. Then, by the time a TA graduates, they'll have a grounded antiracist toolkit in their pedagogical arsenal.

While Renee highlighted a benefit of her female positionality, other benefits were illuminated in Logan's interview. Logan was assigned a male gender at birth and continues to identify and present as such. "Being a straight white man greatly impacts my interactions with students. I've spoken with other white male teachers about how we just have to say, 'hey guys,' and we immediately have our students' full attention," Logan shared. "But being a tall white man also sometimes limits conversations with students. They're often scared to disagree with me." Logan discussed his frustration when trying to facilitate deep discussions regarding race. Logan acknowledges his positionality in the classroom—openly addressing how even when code-meshing, his race and class often prevent him from being the target of linguistic prejudice. However, even with being open with students, he wonders if his positionality still intimidates students from reciprocating, as students in his classroom still rarely openly share their own experiences. None of the white woman I interviewed mentioned having such a problem. While female teachers may struggle to establish their authority, their gendered positionality often leads some students to feel more comfortable being uncomfortable—more open about their own personal experiences regarding race. Therefore, being gendered as a woman can be beneficial when performing antiracism in the classroom.

For one female identifying interviewee, Erica, her gender *and* disability compounded into how she navigates her positionality as a teacher in the classroom. As addressed in Figure 11, Erica mentioned her disability first, “a wheelchair user to be exact.” Erica pointed out that as far as disabilities go, “it’s easier being in a wheelchair. I can physically point to my disability in a way neurodivergent people can’t, and I don’t ever get asked weird questions like, ‘why are you walking funny?’ It’s clear that I have a disability.” However, Erica discussed her struggles as well. One must climb stairs to access the main floor of the English Department building, so Erica takes the ramp to the lower level, the same ramp used to haul the building’s trash. Furthermore, the classrooms in the English Department aren’t designed for teachers in a wheelchair. The teacher computer is on a podium in FYW classrooms, which Erica can’t reach in her chair. And the classroom chairs and desks are often configured in a manner that prevents Erica from maneuvering around three-fourths of the room. Therefore, Erica can successfully teach in only one classroom in the four-story building. While Erica mentioned the ways in which departmental faculty have gone to bat in accommodating her disability, she still sometimes questions if the university’s lack of things like sidewalk upkeep demonstrates value to her existence. Again, full institutional support is mandatory in DEI practices.

When it comes to teaching race specifically, Erica has some anxieties due to her disability:

I went to a primarily white high school in Florida, so I’m well aware of just how racist white people can be and how quickly conversations about race can get heated with white people. When discussing race with white students, I’m terrified that they’ll get super upset to the point of a physical altercation. As someone who’s in a wheelchair, I’m well aware just how vulnerable I am when it comes to physical altercations.

Erica's comments reinforce why intersectionality is crucial in understanding how to best support TAs approaching antiracist work, as able-bodied individuals might not consider the threat a disabled person may face. For example, Hailey, who identifies as white and heterosexual, had a completely different outlook on the topic of utilizing antiracism to confront the impact of systemic racism within white students. "As a white teacher, white students often come in with the expectation that I'm going to understand them in ways that they wouldn't with a black teacher," Hailey shared. "They often feel emboldened to talk about race in their response papers in a way that they wouldn't if they knew a black teacher read said responses." While Erica fears her positionality as a white disabled person makes her vulnerable when handling racism from white students, Hailey views this aspect as a plus. For Hailey, the reality that white students sometimes more willingly share their racism with other white people provides space for white teachers to confront it. Hailey's able-body precludes her from sharing in Erica's fear. My own able-body precludes me from sharing in Erica's fear. Therefore, the best this chapter offers is validation of Erica's concerns by highlighting that not every antiracist pedagogical approach is one-size-fits-all and that factors of positionality, such as ableism, must be considered.

As an able-bodied white person, however, Hailey's statements definitely resonate with me. As shared earlier, Inoue argues that white people should be first in line in confronting racism. White teachers can use the expectations of our white positionality to our benefit when engaging other white students in antiracist work. During my own Ph.D. coursework, a Black Nationalist colleague and I would often discuss teaching race over dinner. My colleague remained adamant that I, as a white person, must tackle race with my white students. He contends that white students would listen to me in a way that they wouldn't listen to him. "The second I open my mouth on the topic, white students often just right me off as an angry black

man,” he’d say. “But you have an in with white students. You’re white.” As mentioned earlier, I have the opportunity to discuss with white students how I myself have been acculturated into a white supremacist society. Again, this openness, paired with sharing my own experience of uncomfortable growth, can sidestep defensiveness from my white students when discussing how race intersects with writing. So, as white teachers, we do have that “in” with some of our white students.

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach for how white teachers broach the topic of race in the classroom, holding open and candid conversations regarding the various manners in which we do approach this work can help white TAs feel supported and encouraged to implement such work as well. In such discussions, it’s important to investigate how teachers of color navigate their various positionalities in the classroom in order to ensure support for all. Therefore, this chapter includes interview responses to such questions from six BIPOC TAs.

### *Teaching while BIPOC*

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks discusses her own educational background as a black woman being taught courses on black history and literature solely by white professors. She writes:

Truthfully, if I had been given the opportunity to study African American critical thought from a progressive black professor instead of a progressive white woman...I would have chosen the black person. Although I learned a great deal from this white woman professor, I sincerely believe that I would have learned even more from a progressive black professor, because this individual would have brought to the class that unique mixture of experiential and analytical ways of knowing. 90

In ways that the previous section suggests that white teachers have an “in” with white students when discussing race, BIPOC teachers can offer “the passion of experience, the passion of remembrance,” as hooks discusses. Now hooks is quick to challenge the term “authority of experience” as a means to “silence and exclude” white teachers from doing similar work. However, that does not negate the reality that for black students it’s beneficial to see themselves represented at the helm of a classroom, as was acknowledge in two interviews with BIPOC TAs.

Before delving into how specifically BIPOC TAs navigate their positionality when teaching race in the classroom, it’s important to first discuss how these TAs chose to identify themselves. The figure below features the exact language and order in which TAs from this category listed their identifiers, as done in the previous section.

<p><b>Kahee (2021)</b> – taught prior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Asian, not American</li> <li>- Speak English as a second language</li> </ul>	<p><b>Tyee (2021)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Half indigenous/half black</li> <li>Obviously brown-skinned</li> <li>- Grew up on a reservation</li> <li>- Male</li> </ul>	<p><b>Jada (2019)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Black woman</li> <li>- Zillionial yet identifies as a millennial.</li> <li>- Spicy but not stupid</li> </ul>
<p><b>Drake (2019)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- African American, Black</li> <li>- Male</li> <li>- Straight</li> <li>- Married</li> <li>- Well educated</li> <li>- Middle class</li> <li>- Involved in a fraternity</li> <li>- Engages in volunteering and service</li> </ul>	<p><b>Shakura (2018)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Black woman. Periodt. That’s who I am.</li> <li>- Sometimes I say, black woman from the South.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Nazia (2017)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Middle Eastern woman confronted with all the labels associated with Muslim women, well not all because I don’t wear the hijab.</li> <li>- Dark hair, dark skin</li> <li>- Speak English with an accent, so people might not think I sound as intelligent or lovely or rich.</li> </ul>

Figure 14. Identity markers of TAs interviewed who identify as either Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color.

As one can see, each BIPOC TA mentioned their race first, differing from white TAs who mentioned it second, third, or even eighth. Such results seem representational of how white

people can choose to ignore race in ways not always afforded to people of color, as discussed in the Chapter 1. Furthermore, two of the TAs in this category who don't (solely) identify as Black, added descriptions of the skin color as an identifier: Tyee who is half indigenous, half black added "obviously browned skinned," and Nazia, who is Middle Eastern, added "dark hair, dark skin." In other words, those whose skin tones are not explicitly signaled in the category of Black or White felt it crucial to highlight how their skin tone is regarded in relation to race.

For every person in this the BIPOC category who identifies as female, their race and gender went hand-in-hand; all three explicitly discussed how neither identity outranked the other. Shakura said, "I'm a black woman. Periodt. That's who I am." And Nazia addressed how her middle eastern nationality and gender are intrinsically linked when discussing stereotypes she confronts as a person "associated with all the labels of a Muslim woman." As the Combahee River Collective argued in their 1977 statement, black women's relationships with society (teaching included), "has always been determined by our membership in two oppressed racial and sexual castes" (10). This chapter argues such Black Feminist scholarship is often applicable to all women of color battling both white supremacy and patriarchal power structures simultaneously. Gender for men in this category, on the other hand, was at times discussed third or not even mentioned at all, as was the case with Kahee, who presents as male. However, the male TA who identified his gender third did note the intrinsic ties regarding the performances of masculinity when discussing race, as addressed later in this section. A further result to emphasize in these identifier lists includes how both international TAs mentioned their relationship with English-as-a-second-language as an identifier. I highlight such responses because again the order in which TA's listed their identifiers often correlates with how specifically these TAs addressed navigating their own positionality in classrooms.

As a white female author, my analysis woven within these results is primarily geared towards a white audience, due largely in part to my own positionality. It's understood that BIPOC TAs may better benefit from reading discussions regarding navigating one's positionality written by those who share their positionality. Still, this section seeks to honestly engage with and represent the information shared during interviews and illuminate helpful approaches BIPOC TAs have taken when navigating their positionality.

In listing their race first, five out of six BIPOC interviewees, both male and female, discussed how they must work hard to establish their authority as teachers in the classroom. Drake, a black TA who identifies as male, discusses how he wears a collared shirt and tie every day in class to set a standard. "As a tall, black man with long dreads, several of my identity markers are clearly apparent when I walk into class," Drake shared. "So, I always teach in a tie and with my dreads pulled back." None of Drake's white counterparts who were interviewed discussed having to dress a certain way or wear their hair a certain way to garner respect from students. Yet here, Drake feels he must confront white supremacist stereotypes of black men through his clothing and tying back his dreads. Drake was not alone in discussing dress as a means to set expectations and garner respect in the classroom. Shakura too discussed how she "dresses up" and present herself as "strict" in order to establish herself as a college teacher.

Shakura discussed a similar sentiment as Adrienne in being young and a woman in the classroom, yet Shakura's experiences are further compounded by her race. "When I first started teaching, I was hyper aware of how young I was," Shakura said. "I started teaching at the age of 23, so I was very close in age to my students. Plus, I'm a black woman." While Adrienne discussed working hard to establish her authority on the first day of class, Shakura discussed battling to establish her authority throughout the semester. "I'm constantly dealing with

combativeness from students about everything, grades, you name it.” In fighting ageism, patriarchal notions of what constitutes a college professor, and white supremacy, Shakura often feels her struggles at the helm of the classroom are unending. This is important to consider when we expect/demand more labor from scholars of color than we do from white scholars, as discussed earlier. The labor of teaching alone as a young black woman already has taxing elements white female counterparts simply don’t experience. This is why white female teachers, like the full professor mentioned earlier, should not ask BIPOC colleagues to serve as the spokesperson of race in other classrooms, as this does not support nor respect their existing labor.

Both international TAs, Kahee and Nazia, also mentioned their need to establish their authority teaching English writing while not speaking English as their first language. “I speak English with an accent, so I really must use my first- and second-class sessions to establish my authority and my intelligence,” Nazia said. Nazia’s research focuses on linguistic prejudice and negative stereotypes often assigned to accented speakers—research that revealed Middle Eastern accents are often viewed as ugly, unintelligent, and dangerous. Compound this with the research shared earlier regarding how female college teachers have to worker harder to gain respect and be viewed as intelligent when compared to their male counterparts (Miller and Chamberlin).

During Nazia’s second semester of teaching, a student attempted to use Nazia’s accent against her. The student was failing after missing more than fifty-percent of class and not turning in a single major assignment. The student then tried to argue for a higher grade, blaming Nazia’s accent as the culprit for the “communication breakdown” regarding the student’s several zeros and absences. While such a student argument is obviously ludicrous, it demonstrates the challenges faced by our international colleagues in an English Department. Nazia, however, now



applies her positionality as an accented speaker to the design of her FYW classrooms. “From day one of class, we discuss rhetorical listening,” Nazia shared, an approach endorsed by Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner as a means to best acknowledge multilingualism in the classroom. Within the first two weeks of class, Nazia also, “play(s) recordings of accented speakers and ask(s) students where they think the speakers are from. Students are then required to do a free write on the stereotypes associated with the various accents played.” Nazia discussed how such an approach centers diversity as a primary topic in her FYW classrooms. “I teach [students] that we are not living in a homogenous society, either linguistically or culturally,” Nazia said. Implementing said lesson plans at the beginning of the semester helps encourage Nazia’s students to be more welcoming to others and herself as well.

Other BIPOC interviewees also addressed how they broach the topic of race in the writing classroom very early within the semester, often using their authority of experience. “Growing up on a [indigenous] reservation as a mixed kid, I’ve experienced the results of oppression in a manner that helps me relate to my black students and the black plight,” Tyee said. “I too have grown up with things like code-switching and code-meshing. And helping provide students with the language to communicate such experiences is exciting.” Tyee too discussed being transparent in the classroom regarding his own experiences with racism and oppression. While white interviewed TAs mentioned utilizing transparency in the classroom, their transparency also requires outlining their own efforts to not judge students through a Eurocentric lens. Tyee students, however, more easily trust that Tyee’s experiences will preclude him from such judgements. That’s not to say, though, that Tyee isn’t still subjected to battling notions of white supremacy that can often be internalized by those of color confronting such oppressions daily (Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, 8). Tyee has been bombarded by white

language supremacy just as his white colleagues. However, for Tyee, teaching code-meshing has a more liberating effect than mentioned in any white TA interviews. And that difference is important to recognize when white scholars question whether discussions of code-meshing should be at the ground floor of all writing teacher training. Tyee's comments further demonstrate why such incorporation is vital.

At the time of the interview, Tyee had been teaching for roughly sixth months. Jada, a young black woman at the helm of the classroom, had been teaching for three years. She therefore discussed in more detail the different ways she addresses race when teaching in front of a primarily black student audience versus a more mixed student audience. "When in front of primarily black classrooms, I can be more direct as a black woman," Jada shared. "I can just say, racism is real, and then we move on to investigating how it works both in writing and through literature." However, when Jada teaches in front of a mixed audience of students, she scaffolds conversations of race differently. "For those who don't experience daily racism, I often have to scaffold my courses to first establish that racism is still very much alive before we can investigate it. Rather than simply saying, racism's still real, I work a little harder to demonstrate its existence in current society, often leaning into my own positionality as a black woman," Jada shared. For Jada, her positionality as a BIPOC person alone isn't always enough to build student trust, especially when working with non-black students. However, when building said trust, race is never a singular factor for Jada when discussing systems of oppression in society. In working with both primarily black classrooms and more mixed classrooms, conversations regarding race, gender, sexuality, and class are always equally present for Jada when doing antiracist work. As both the Combahee River Collective and Kimberlé Crenshaw contend, oppressive power structures are interdependent and therefore must be addressed in an intersectional manner.

Furthermore, for Jada, such Black Feminist theory also provides space for her students to enter these conversations from different points of access. “In mixed classrooms, students can gain their footing in these conversations in various ways, whether that be through race, class, or gender,” Jada said.

Tyee, while not having as much teacher experience as Jada, shared a similar sentiment. “When discussing race in the classroom, I also discuss ways in which marginalized communities of color see masculinity and how we [both men and women] feel men must perform,” Tyee shared. “As a man of color in front of the classroom who is also a poet, I get excited discussing the poetics of writing in FYW classrooms. This is typically not seen as ‘manly’ in the community of which I was raised.” Thus, Tyee addresses gendered expectations with his students. He finds it important to equally engage with conversations of gendered performances in tandem with race.

The intersectionality addressed in both Jada’s and Tyee’s interviews provide crucial facets to the manner in which we train teachers to incorporate antiracism within their classrooms. As Inoue argues, antiracism, at its nature, is interdependent with confronting oppressive structures relating to gender, sexual orientation, religion, and class (*Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies*, 5). Therefore, addressing racism’s intersectionality with patriarchal structures, classism, and homophobia is equal crucial. Now, this can seem extremely overwhelming to TAs. Shoot, it can seem extremely overwhelming to those teaching as faculty. This chapter has already addressed just how challenging it can be to teach race *in itself*. Adding an intersectional approach can seem too much, especially for those who don’t personally experience intersectional forms of oppression. Yet, there are ways to present such an approach more intuitively. In simply fostering conversations regarding how different teachers navigate

their positionality in the classroom when dealing with diverse material and audiences, we actively engage with such intersectional work. In having the various positionalities of TAs be an open conversation within a writing program, we are forced to recognize and confront both the positives and limitations within our positionalities from intersectional lenses. Therefore, the practice of such critical reflection inherently trains us to broach the same conversations in the classroom—to delve into the nature with which antiracist practices coalesce with conversations of classism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, xenophobia and more. In other words, personal reflection on these topics helps promote transference. And Jada and Tyee’s interviews prove that such an approach, while difficult, is possible for TAs to incorporate.

In looking at nationality specifically in relationship to BIPOC teachers, both international TAs of color found it somewhat difficult to navigate their positionalities in the classroom, especially when the material featured in Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation was presented in a racially binary manner, i.e. as either Black or White. Kahee explained that, “Most of the time when we talk about antiracism in the department, we are talking about antiracism against African Americans, not really Asians...It makes me feel like an outside within this topic.” Kahee’s comments demonstrate how antiracist work must continually evolve and grow. The interventions discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 are products of attempting such growth. Chapter 2 invites students to consider code-meshing of lexis related to their cultural, generational, or regional identities, not just racial identities. And Chapter 3 offers an exercise to encourage students to investigate their own cultural rhetorics, outside of just African American or Anglo traditions. Steps such as these were crucial in creating a more inclusive, antiracist curriculum. And this chapter argues that it is important to highlight the process of such growth when training TAs to incorporate such work—to demonstrate that such results aren’t an overnight endeavor.

While the initial binary aspects of the implementation of this antiracist work was difficult to navigate, Kahee did find advantages. “Since I am neither black nor white, my students from either race find me to be objective. They believe my outsider perspective makes me a safe space when discussing race in terms of black and white.” While we strive to place such antiracism outside of a binary scope, one of Kahee’s approaches can benefit us all. Kahee spoke how he’s open with his students that he’s still in the process of learning all the ways that race functions in society, as we all are. He explained, “I’m honest and clear with my students that I’m still very much learning about these topics, so I’m here to learn with them and learn from them.” As these previous chapters have demonstrated, antiracist work is very much collaborative and therefore it’s important to approach it as such in the classroom. In continuously reinforcing just how collaborative and evolutionary antiracist pedagogical approaches truly are, we may help quell anxieties TAs may hold, breaking down barriers that discourage TAs from such work.

### **Conclusion**

In reflecting on how we train TAs to both incorporate antiracist approaches and navigate their own positionality while doing so, this chapter closes by offering a potential activity to incorporate in antiracist training for TAs. In 2020, the department invited a psychologist to speak on the effects of racism on our students. In the workshop, TAs were then encouraged to include an Antiracist Statement in their syllabi. The following year, Asoa Inoue and Vershawn Ashanti Young were invited to facilitate another antiracist workshop. During that workshop, a TA mentioned the advice to include such a statement. Both Inoue and Young contended that rather than simply featuring an Antiracist Statement in our syllabi, we reflect on whether or not your syllabi are indeed antiracist. What if writing up such a reflection was a requirement of all TAs.

During the course of gathering interviews, several participants asked me to define antiracism when asked whether or not they incorporated antiracist pedagogies. While Chapter 1 offers a definition, this study's results demonstrate just how many forms of antiracist pedagogical praxis exist. Therefore, for this activity, invite TAs to write a brief reflection on what antiracist pedagogies means to them. Give them time to really contemplate and complete this task. Then once TA have a definition that truly resonates with them, ask them to write an analysis of how their syllabi and daily pedagogical approaches compare to their outlined antiracist definitions. Such an analysis enables TAs to reflect on their training, reflect on the techniques they want to model, reflect on how they incorporate these things into their classroom, reflect on how the navigate their own positionalities when doing this work. Through this analysis, TAs can celebrate the hard work they've already accomplished towards implementing antiracist pedagogies. They can also reflect on areas they want to grow. Invite students to reflect on mistakes they've made when approaching such work as well as what they learned from said mistakes. Have them include at least one antiracist practice they'd like to incorporate moving forward. Encourage them to incorporate it.

While such an exercise can be featured as helping students write those required diversity statements mentioned in this chapter's opening, more importantly such activity requires metacognition towards applications of their training. As a result, TAs won't simply have performative diversity statements, they will have outlined diversity techniques that make writing classrooms a more inclusive and equitable space—that make writing classrooms antiracist.

## Chapter 5: The End of the Beginning

I sit here, writing this concluding chapter from my house in Sacramento, California. Exactly one year ago to this week, I walked onto the University of California, Davis (UCD) campus for the first time and signed my teaching contract for the institution's University Writing Program. Subsequently, I have written half of this dissertation from my apartment in Memphis, TN, and the other half from my house in Northern California, approximately a thirty-minute commute to UCD's campus. When I began this project, I was teaching primarily first-year-writing (FYW) courses in a majority black city. Now, I've just completed my third quarter of teaching upper-division writing-within-the-discipline (WID) courses at UC Davis, an institution with a vastly different student body than that of the University of Memphis (UofM). Within the last year, approximately 75% of my students have been either immigrants or first- or second-generation immigrants of color who have grown up in multilingual households. While I opened this dissertation discussing how my context of race shifted greatly upon entering the Ph.D. program at UofM, I close this dissertation sharing that my context of race has continued shifting and growing, due largely in part to my new surroundings.

UC Davis is currently awaiting its designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution and my classrooms are full of students who've experienced both micro and macro aggression as Hispanics, Middle Easterners, Asians, and Asian Americans in California, a state whose southern region was initially a part of Mexico. The state helped spearhead the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and subsequent anti-immigration policies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Golden State also bore Japanese Internment Camps during World War II. California, like Memphis, houses landmark sites of racial oppression and unrest but from differing contexts. In contrast to Memphis, more than 50% of my black students at UC Davis are not from America, but rather Africa. Many have

grown up in colonized countries like Algeria where French is the primary language. In this context, classroom conversations regarding code-meshing and translanguaging continue, but they happen differently as a result of a more globalized perspective. Similarly, cultural rhetorics invited into a single classroom bare influence from all over the global. I've seen how my ever-evolving growth spurts born from these realities have impacted my writing and revision process just within the confines of this dissertation. It's been more than a year since I finished collecting my data for these projects and every time I review it, it's with a developing racial and geographical lens. Therefore, I struggle to conclude this dissertation based on the realization that there is no "conclusion" to antiracist research and pedagogies, no finish line, no definitive ending. There are only more doors to walk through, more ceilings to break, more mistakes to be made, more knowledge to learn, more social consciousness to explore, and more rhetorical listening to be done.

These last three chapters investigated a FYW program to demonstrate just how multifaceted antiracist pedagogies truly are and highlight the necessity for a holistic approach for their successful praxis. From code-meshing and assessment to widening our understanding of rhetorical traditions to investigating how all this works both in teacher training and in application, I've argued for those on their own antiracist journeys to take it one bold and intentional step at a time, knowing there is no stagnate destination, but rather beautiful, heartbreaking, energizing, and liberating experiences all along the way. Within this spirit, this chapter is dedicated to (1) reflecting on the nature of this work and (2) demonstrating just how far-reaching such antiracist research and practices truly are, not just within a FYW program in which this research was set. This chapter therefore concludes with a heuristic that outlines how



specifically key takeaways from each chapter can be applied to course reading schedules, assignments, and lesson planning in all writing and communication classes moving forward.

### **A White Woman doing Antiracist Work in the Pandemic Era**

From the first inception of this research to the writing of this chapter, several life-changing events occurred, both personally and globally, and several realities remained constant. From my own positionality, antiracist work has required a commitment to tenacity and a healthy relinquishment of ego. As a white person doing this work, it became extremely clear early on that any racialized defensiveness on my behalf would serve as nothing less than poisonous fruit. Each step required perseverance, rhetorical listening, recalibration of my biases, and constant ego checks.

As a person diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and subsequently managing the control issues often associated with this diagnosis, global events and realities that occurred during this research required me to constantly test my own adaptability and reaffirm my own role. While conducting research for Chapters 2 and 3, COVID-19 hit and subsequently became its own character, rearing its head in several facets of my research. During the writing process of those methodology sections, the phrasing, “I was gonna do this, but then COVID happened,” became commonplace. Adaptability quickly became the name of the game, as did creative problem-solving, empathy, and a shift in focus to the broader community’s well-being rather than a more traditional, hyper-focused individualism espoused by the West. In staying home, limiting human contact, wearing masks, and getting vaccinated, we had to consider the greater safety of our communities rather than solely our own individual discomforts, outlining the exact steps needed to confront the chronic pandemic within the Covid pandemic: the continued racialized murdering of people of color. In episode 1 of Spike Lee’s four-part documentary

series, *NYC Epicenters: 9/11-2021½*, NBC 4 New York News Anchor David Ushery discusses how the global lockdowns created by COVID-19 forced us to confront the deadly virus of racism in America. “We were forced to stop, slow down, and really look,” Ushery contends. “We couldn’t avert our gaze from George Floyd and the knee on the neck, couldn’t avert our gaze from Ahmaud Arbery and everything that was happening; [we were] forced to confront it and forced to have the conversation.” There was no meeting up with friends at your favorite brunch spot after Travis McMichael, Gregory McMichael, and William Bryan murdered Ahmaud Arbery. No waiting for the next big sporting event to occur when Derek Chauvin slowly stole the life of George Floyd. No vacations to be had when Joshua Jaynes, Kyle Meany, Brett Hankison, and Kelly Goodlett murdered Breonna Taylor. We were all glued to our TV screens, watching news anchors, from the confines of their homes, share the recent Covid death tolls and interview medical experts who raised concerns of the continued deadly violence against black people, “a pandemic on a pandemic,” as coined by Laurencin and Walker and endorsed by the *National Institutes of Health*. As COVID-19 lockdowns forced us to confront racial injustices, antiracist research quickly garnered a growing spotlight as unprecedented support for Black Lives Matter swept the globe. The 70-years of research cited throughout this dissertation made its way onto general-public reading lists when Chauvin’s defense team, during the murder trial, argued that Floyd had said “ate too many drugs” rather than “ain’t do no drugs” (Bosman, para 1). Conversations regarding equity rose to new levels and research addressing linguistic diversity and antiracism gained elevated platforms. At times, these rising events inspired me to double-down on my own research for this project; at other times, these continued events made me want to completely abandon this research, just go hide indefinitely in the woods—a privileged perspective; I’m aware. But that’s the honest truth.

As discussed in Chapter 1, it didn't take long for the political Right to view this research's elevated platform as a threat. Bans against curriculum design that promoted antiracism were introduced around the country during the early stages of this dissertation, and to this day, presidential candidates continue to gain political points for bashing and outlawing "woke" curricular (Hays, para 1). Furthermore, as educational campuses reopened after 18-months of remote learning, students came back to face-to-face classrooms equipped with high levels of anxiety and social struggles as they'd spent the last year-and-a-half in isolation. Conversations regarding race in the classroom became met with fatigue as burnout rates rose in the wake of enormous social unrest. The scary and collective trauma that was the year 2020 left everyone utterly exhausted, myself included.

Unfortunately, going up against centuries of linguistical and rhetorical oppression requires tenacity. Three years after the 2020 BLM protests and three years after the data collection for this dissertation began, Tyre Nichols was brutally beaten to death at the hands of Memphis police officers over an unwarranted traffic stop (Hurley, para 1). A native son of Sacramento, where I now live, Tyre Nichols's murder in Memphis was broadcast nationally as I was in the middle of writing my fourth chapter, which investigates an ethnographic study of antiracism within Memphis. The intersections between the horrific murder, my own research, and all the places I've called home felt unreal, unpalpable. I did not need to watch the video to know exactly what had happened. One of my earlier childhood memories was watching the recording of Rodney King being beaten within an inch of his life just a four drive away from I where I lived in Arizona. I honestly have no idea how many dozens and dozens of videos I've seen of black people being murdered, lynched, on national television just to then watch police, politicians, and the criminal justice system gaslight America, claiming we didn't see exactly

what we just watched. Even without baring direct witness to Nichols's murder, I couldn't write a word the week the video of his brutal killing was released. All the antiracist work I'd done in my classrooms and in this dissertation felt small, useless even, in the wake of another black death. I didn't see my brother reflected in Nichols, nor my father, nor my uncle. But I saw the grief of those who did—the grief of his own mother in Memphis and the grief of his brothers in Sacramento. Despair hit me like a Mack Truck. I felt selfish for allowing it to fully consume me for a week. I'm a white person; aren't we supposed to step up in times like this rather than lay on our couch, watching the news, too emotionally distraught to move? I felt weak for stepping back from my work. Weak for letting the thought cross my mind that this work is no match for America's racism.

I would love to think that Tyre Nichols's murder will be the last public lynching of a black person, but I just don't believe that to be true. America, and people in general, are just not there yet. Which leads me back to the nature of this work. It's hard. In so many ways. And for those doing such research, sometimes it feels like we are no match for that which we go up against. We feel despair. Anger. Burnout. Heartbreak. We might not always feel like we can meet the challenge. And this is coming from someone who doesn't even have to deal with the daily aggressions my colleagues of color face. I argue, however, like many others, that it's important to acknowledge how we feel while doing this work. I had to reach out the week of Nichols's death and tell my mentor I was over everything. I had to tell her I couldn't imagine completing the research on an antiracist study when it felt like racism was never gonna budge. I had to take a beat and then rely on her strength to find my own. This work requires support. It requires love. It requires honesty. That's part of its nature. That's what it takes.

This work also requires collaboration. As Chapter 1 discussed, the research provided in this dissertation is to be read in tandem with scholars of color. And in order to produce research worthy of being supplemental texts in the antiracist movement, this dissertation required a highly collaborative approach that included a racially diverse pool of voices. This dissertation features 188 participants and is the product of collaborative efforts that include at least half a dozen scholars of color who actively contributed to the process. As Chapter 3 mentioned, I could not merely ask scholars of color to be present within this research; I had to really listen rhetorically to their input, often checking my own ego along the way. This first time I ever wrote a scholarly paper centered on race was in my inaugural African American Literature class in 2017. I engaged with the question if and how white society truly makes space for blackness through a critical analysis of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. After completing the paper, the professor told me I was going to submit a proposal for the annual College Language Association (CLA) conference and then read this work in front of a room of primarily black scholars in the field. I fought him fairly hard; but the reality remained, the work needed an array of black input. So, I went to the conference, full of nerves, and read the paper. I opened the presentation mentioning I had written the paper for a white audience and that I welcomed any feedback black scholars were willing to share. Y'all, my hands were practically shaking as I read. But what I gained was worth every single nerve. Black scholars in the room that day very graciously posed questions to facets of the novel I'd never even considered. They offered me the opportunity to see the work from a different perspective. They shared with me insight I would have never gained without their help. Chapter 4 discussed how white scholars can't require that our colleagues of color do all the work for us, but in my experience, whenever I've come to this work honestly, genuinely, and openly,

BIPOC scholars have been generous with their input and enabled the work to grow in beautiful and necessary ways.

This collaboration continued throughout the process of this dissertation. BIPOC members of both CLA and the Conference of College Composition and Communication (CCCC) continued offering valuable feedback as I workshopped research from each of these three studies at conferences. They gave me reading lists and options on how to present the information in classrooms. They shared their own experiences and perspectives with such work, providing avenues from which I could build. Having received a grant for this work from CCCC, they partnered me with David Green, the WPA for Howard University, who helped me once again reconfigure what it truly means to do antiracist assessment.

I can't pretend I was always the perfect recipient of all these necessary collaborative efforts. Did this required feedback sometimes sting a little? Yes. Did my ego sometimes rear its head in my own internal monologue while receiving said feedback? Of course it did. My white ego threw little fits sometimes. "Dude, how was I supposed to know *that*," my ego would say. "Yeah I messed it up *again*; sorry I can't be *perfect*," my internal voice would whine. But once my ego wrapped up its temper tantrum, then it was time to go back to the basics of rhetorical listening—to really sit down and hear the feedback these BIPOC scholars provided. Their feedback never expected me to know everything. Their feedback wasn't asking me to be perfect. Their feedback wasn't scolding nor ignoring my efforts. What their feedback did do was offer me a chance to grow and strengthen my critical thinking. It provided me the necessary tools and perspectives to make this work better. To really hear this, I had to let my white ego throw its littler temper tantrum and then I had put it back in check.

One of my internal monologues, however, has stayed rather constant throughout the years I've been doing this work. I still have some nerves when a new acquaintance asks, "What's your research about?" As I white woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, I still briefly pause before answering, "I do antiracist work." Do new acquaintances sometimes raise their eyebrows upon hearing my answer? Yes, and for good reason. Chapter 4 discussed legitimate skepticism from people of color towards white individuals engaging in race work. Rhetorical listening requires me to put myself in their shoes. How many times have BIPOC individuals witnessed a white woman stomp through this work with the air that they're gonna "save" all these BIPOC people. How many of my BIPOC colleagues have watched white administrators performatively espouse antiracism and then not back their statements with any real actions and change. My BIPOC peers are totally valid in their skepticism when first hearing that I do antiracist research. White people can also reasonably be skeptical. How many white people have witnessed these same things? How many white people have watched other white friends and family engage in some ludicrous competition of "who's the most woke?" Yes, I still have anxieties in proclaiming that I do antiracist work, but I have learned that these nerves can work to my benefit. Such nerves keep me cognizant of the all the nuances associated with this rhetorical situation. This legitimate skepticism keeps my research transparent. It keeps me humble. It holds me accountable. It constantly requires that I critically consider both the ethics of and my positionality within this work.

It is with that critical lens that this chapter also considers the various ways results from this dissertation can impact upper-division writing classrooms, not just FYW, where this dissertation is set. Therefore, the next section offers a heuristic that outlines keys takeaways from the three studies before discussing their broader classroom application.

## The Five E's

As mentioned previously, it's been more than a year since I've taught a FYW course. In my ten-week Business Writing and Writing for Engineer classes, I no longer have the same amount of time to discuss and analyze rhetorical theory. I no longer spend sixteen weeks of class focusing on the writing process, literacy sponsorship, and discourse communities. But the antiracist training I received while teaching FYW courses, the research I read while writing this dissertation, and the results of this dissertation's featured studies offer ways to continue engaging with this work even as the rhetorical situations of my classrooms shift. The following heuristic offers avenues to ensure these antiracist conversations remain present in all writing classes whether it's the primary focus or a nuanced addition.

When building a syllabus for any course, whether that be an upper-division, WID course or a technical editing class, I now ask myself the following four questions. I present these questions below within the form a heuristic that (1) highlights key research from this dissertation before (2) offering suggestions on how to apply this heuristic to a syllabus reading schedule, class assignment, and/or lesson planning. No one question can be separated from the others nor must these questions take place in a specific order. Each question works in tandem with the others and all five E's must be in present, within a course syllabus, in relation to intersectional diversity.

1. **Exposure:** *Have I provided space in my course reading schedule, class assignments, and/or in my lesson plans to **expose** students to racially diverse linguistics and rhetorics?*
  - a. *The Research:* Student exposure to racial diversity may vary across geographical locations, but as stated earlier, its presence must be consistent within all writing classrooms. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate how exposure to racially diverse



Englishes and rhetorics equip students with a more rounded rhetorical toolkit—thus enabling them to better navigate the variety of spaces and rhetorical situations they’ll encounter in both their professional careers and personal lives. Included student surveys and classroom observations also further solidify that several students actually *crave* this exposure. When asked the open-ended post-survey question, how can teachers better help students (Chapter 2), nearly a third of students requested that teachers assign readings that successfully incorporate code-meshing within their academic and professional prose. Students were excited to learn that English isn’t monolithic—that academic/professional writing isn’t one-dimensional, and they wanted to see that reality in action. They wanted that exposure and those examples. Chapter 3 also demonstrates the importance of said exposure. When exposed to the incorporation of diverse Englishes and rhetorics in real time by the instructor, classroom observations demonstrated that students were twice as likely to engage in class discussion. Exposure to both the required racially-diverse readings discussed during classroom observations as well as the observed teacher’s own diverse linguistic practice excited students. They wanted more of it. Exposure to such racial diversity situates each student within the linguistic and rhetorical functions of both a racially diverse country and a culturally diverse world.

- b. *Classroom Application*: There are many ways to ensure student exposure to racial diversity in the writing classroom, regardless of the class’s racial demographics. The first and most obvious is to include readings written by authors of color in the course reading schedule—readings that then must then be examined through

antiracist lenses, as Question 2 will discuss. The reference section of this dissertation offers several brilliant authors of color from which to choose; however, it's of course not the only place to find wonderfully diverse writers. Our fellow colleagues at organizations such as CCCC, CLA, Fem Rhet, and others have put together brilliant reading lists as well. Depending on time available for a course prep, I'll sometimes choose a new-to-me BIPOC author so I can learn their work alongside my students.

Of course, academic writers are not the only resource for offering linguistic and rhetorical diversity. Pulling from our daily surroundings and self-knowledge is extremely beneficial. We all live in societies where the intersections of race and writing are present. Including examples from a variety of important mediums also ensures critical exposure. The very first reading I ever assigned to discuss racially-diverse rhetorics in the writing classroom came from a local op-ed piece, not an academic journal. There'd been a shooting near the university and a local community leader wrote a response that featured diverse rhetorics commonly utilized in our city. I brought the article to class to further expose students to successful usages of black rhetorical traditions within daily functions of society, and we were able to examine these rhetorical features together as a class, which nods to the second point within this heuristic.

2. **Examine:** *Have I provided space in my course reading schedule/class assignment(s)/lesson plans to **examine** racial diversity with my students using antiracist tools and frameworks?*

- a. *The Research:* Chapter 1's discussion of post-multiculturalist theory highlights the importance of not only including diverse readings in a course schedule, but also investigating and analyzing said readings with the care and attention they deserve—care and attention that includes examining the work with antiracist tools. These tools can include featuring the historical background of different diverse lexis and rhetorics and/or utilizing diverse theoretical frameworks. The Chapter 2 study asked students to investigate the origin behind their own chosen lexis and phrasing and the study in Chapter 3 included both the historical background of the featured rhetorical tradition as well as how each featured rhetorical tool can serve as an analytical framework, separate from Greco/Roman thought. Both chapters discuss how such an examination provided further student-engagement with the content, thus further supporting transference outside the classroom.
- b. *Classroom Application:* The rhetorical situation of each classroom and the method of how exactly to present and examine diverse linguistics and rhetorics may impact which diverse readings, linguistics, and/or rhetorical traditions to include. As discussed in Chapter 3, the choice to feature African American rhetorics resulted from teaching in a primarily black city. I therefore had to learn African American rhetorical theory over a summer in order to best present African American readings to a primarily African American classroom. Some of you may choose to include more Asian-American authors, more Indigenous-American linguistic influences, more Hispanic or Middle-Eastern rhetorical traditions, or a culmination of others based on the demographic make-up of your

classrooms. Whichever you chose, ensure apt classroom examination of such work through fitting rhetorical and theoretical lenses. As Chapter 1 discusses, Anglo-rhetorical theory often falls short when comprehensively analyzing work written by authors of color.

The demographics of the classroom, however, don't necessarily have to dictate where exactly one enters conversations regarding the proper examination of diverse writing. Within the last year of teaching, I still often open discussion on racially diverse rhetorics/linguistics with readings from Black-American authors paired with Black-American theoretical frameworks, even though my classroom demographics have shifted. I do this because it's currently the greatest example of apt examination of non-white authors that I can currently lend. It's an area where I can successfully demonstrate how to approach diverse readings through diverse theories. Therefore, if you have a diverse rhetorical/theoretical framework of which you are most familiar, use that to guide your syllabus reading list. It's necessary to set a standard for how to successfully engage with racially-diverse work.

Within this classroom examination of diverse text, linguistic, and rhetorics, it's equally important not to assume student exposure based on your student demographics. As Chapter 3 highlights, while students may have exposure to diverse rhetorics, languaging, and readings, they may not have exposure to a successful academic analysis and examination of such work. This is why it's important that you exemplify what such analysis and examination look like in your classroom, as Question 4 will further address.

3. **Explore and Expand.** *Have I provided space in my course schedule/assignments/lesson plans for my students to **explore** their own cultural rhetorics, Englishes, and/or biases, therefore **expanding** on the collective knowledge of diversity? Is there space where I, as a teacher, can further use student feedback to **expand** on racially diverse readings/assignments/lesson plans taught in the past?*

- a. *The Research:* The success of Chapter 2's intervention largely relied on inviting students to explore their already existing knowledge on linguistic diversity. In having them chose a diverse word or phrase from their own cultural background (generational, geographical, racial, or other), they were able to expand on the collective knowledge regarding the evolutionary and heterogeneous functionings of language. The conclusion of Chapter 3 also offers a class assignment which tasks students to research and explore their own cultural rhetorics, again doing a deep dive into their own backgrounds and growing from their own existing knowledge. Said assignment peaked student curiosity and resulted in strong student engagement and practice with research.

While this heuristic question asks that students expand on their knowledge, it also asks that teachers utilize student feedback and engagement to expand on their already existing syllabi, assignments, and lesson plans. Chapter 4 utilizes an ethnographic study to contend that antiracist work often occurs in steps. Syllabi don't necessary become fully antiracist over night or even over the course of a single semester/quarter. Rather it helps to simply look at one assignment or unit already in existence, review student input, and then ask yourself the first three questions. How can I expand on this syllabus? Can this assignment/unit be revised

to better expose students to racial diversity? Can I revise this lesson plan to include a deeper examination of the linguistics/rhetorics of an author of color? How can I invite my students to situate themselves within these antiracist discussions and explore how their own cultures and identities impact their writing, communication, and potential linguistic prejudices?

- b. *Classroom Application*: As previously discussed, this dissertation already offers example lesson plans and assignments that invite students to explore their own cultural backgrounds, and in the closing of this chapter, I offer further classroom assignments for upper-division writing courses that demonstrate this heuristic in full practice. However, I note here that while sections of student assignments featured in Chapters 2 and 3 were initially designed to be submitted just to the teacher, I have since expanded on this idea. When asked to explore one's own cultural lexis and rhetorics, students now do so through discussion posts shared with peers or in-class presentations. This provides more student exposure to diversity than I could ever offer in a single course reading lists. In order to encourage said sharing, it's crucial that the classroom indeed be a safe-space for students to engage in cultural explorations with one another. To best foster that safe space, first antiracist assessment practices are a must within these assignments (as argued in Chapter 2). As long as a student explores their own cultural linguistics and/or rhetorics as outlined, they receive full credit, and they know it. No teacher biases (conscious or unconscious) can be present within the grading of these assignments. Secondly, time is dedicated within such assignments to discuss rhetorically listening to each other's experiences,

knowledge, and research. Since these intersectional assignments invite students to pull from their own racialized experiences, gendered occurrences, religious upbringings, physical and mental abilities, geographical locations, and more, it's crucial that students feel safe in sharing this exploration with their peers. For example, when I assign students to (1) explore one of their own cultural rhetorics, (2) write a 500-word discussion post regarding said research, and then (3) respond to two other posts, we first outline rules for both listening and responding to each other as a class. While I'm very clear that prejudice in discussion responses will not be tolerated, I also recognize that sometimes prejudices aren't evident to those who hold them. Therefore, students learn that if something they read from their peers makes them upset or uncomfortable, they need to first analyze what exactly about the post prompted such a reaction. Then they must explore from where inside themselves did this negative reaction spawn? If these negative feelings persist even after they've had time to digest and reflect on their initial reactions, students are then directed to reach out to me for discussion before responding to their peer's post. This one-on-one allows for further unpacking of any potential biases. Such approaches to student responses helps ensure that no student feels shamed or threatened for sharing their own cultural experiences in their initial posts.

4. *How will I **embody** these outlined antiracist processes with my students?*

- a. *The Research:* As Chapter 4 discusses, we sometimes must cross traditional boundaries when enacting antiracist pedagogies. In asking our students to situate themselves within conversations regarding intersectional, racial diversity, we too

must embody this practice and openly situate ourselves within these same conversations, as highlighted in teacher interviews. Chapter 4 illustrates the importance of embodying honesty and transparency regarding our own backgrounds, identities, and potential biases with our students while engaging in these conversations, examinations, and explorations. For example, embodying antiracism as a white woman means illustrating for students how to admit when we make mistakes. As demonstrated in this chapter, embodying antiracism also means rhetorically listening to your peers and checking both your own ego and assumptions while doing so. Furthermore, we must be active participants and collaborators in this gaining and sharing of antiracist knowledge—sidestepping the traditional teacher/student hierarchy in the classroom and highlighting our students' agencies within this collective knowledge-making processes. As data from Chapter 4 contends, power is to be distributed equitably in antiracist spaces—an act that teachers can implement by positioning themselves to their students as fellow pupils of learning.

- b. *Classroom Application:* Whenever students are tasked with analyzing their own intersections between race and writing, consider offering your own personal analysis as an example. If asking students to access and share potential vulnerabilities, do the same. Foster students' authority and agency within their own life experiences regarding race and writing by consistently highlighting what exactly you're learning from them. My feedback on such assignments often reflects rhetorical listening shared through a personal tone. I highlight what exactly I've learned through their submission, validate their experience(s) through



repeating key aspects of their own research, and find at least one avenue where I can personal connect with what they've submitted. Such feedback embodies how I want them to respond to each other within these assignments.

In order to demonstrate this heuristic's practical application to an array of writing courses, the next section features how the heuristic was utilized when building syllabi for some of my own upper-division writing courses.

### **Using the Heuristic**

The first quarter I taught Business Writing, I rooted the class in the theory of Lloyd Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation." I then assigned four major projects: a job application packet, UX study report, social media campaign, and grant proposal. I dedicated one week that quarter to discussing linguistic diversity. We read and examined worked by Vershawn Ashanti Young before students were asked to identify and analyze the functions of their own various languages in textual form, similar to Green's antiracist classroom activity in "The Re-education of Neisha-Anne S. Green: A Close Look at the Damaging Effects of a 'Standard Approach.'" Upon viewing my teacher evaluations that quarter, students overwhelmingly shared that the days focused on this topic were their favorite. So, the next quarter, I expanded on the assignment, creating the following cultural analysis presentation. The assignment sheet read as follows:

Throughout the semester, we will be working with several written genres adjacent to business communications, such as resumes, cover letters, memos, consultation emails, usability study reports, grant proposals, and so on. Having worked professionally with all these genres, I feel confident in acclimating you to the expectations of each genre. There is one important facet of business communication that cannot necessarily be taught, but which holds great importance: how your individual identities and cultures intersect with

both a professional setting and business writing and communications. Therefore, you will be asked to reflect and analyze how your own identity markers and cultures intersect with these realities. For this assignment, you will be asked to give a 10-minute presentation to the class [on this analysis]... While it's important that you analyze your own cultural intersections, it's equally important that you listen to how others navigate their identities and cultures in professional settings as well.

I introduced the assignment in the middle of the job application packet unit, opening space to discuss the statistics shared in Chapter 2 that address how a lack of understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity often leads to linguistic prejudices that knock qualified accented speakers out of the running for competitive jobs. After the assignment's introduction, two students opened each subsequent eighty-minute class with these ten-minute presentation on their cultural analysis, followed by a short Q&A. The structure of this assignment still provided ample time for us to successfully discuss and complete other major assignments while also adding more exposure to diverse cultural rhetorics than I could ever feature in a syllabus reading schedule.

The day students signed up for their presentation slots, I gave an example presentation of how my own cultural background and identities impact that way I communicate and navigate my professional spaces, embodying the work I requested. I discussed how my mother's native tongue (German) is linguistically more direct, as is the culture of Germanic-speaking countries. I placed this in comparison to how direct-speaking women are viewed in American society and paired it with research regarding how women in general are seen as teachers, not professors, and therefore judged for their positionality within my profession. I also recognized how this dynamic is further exasperated for my female colleagues of colors. Furthermore, I touched on how my age has intersected with how I communicate and navigate professional spaces and how regional

dialects, such as the word “y’all,” have cropped up in my own professional emails and academic scholarship. After offering my own exploration and examination, I reminded students that all cultural influences and identity markers were welcomed, and that they would receive full credit as long as they thoughtfully engaged with the topic. That day, students were also tasked to outline rules of conduct, voted in by all, for how to engage with each other’s presentations, thus fostering a safe environment for such exploration. Students were not pressured to present solely on race, gender, abilities, age, economic status, etc., but rather feature any of their vast identities to which they felt drawn.

The results of this assignment blew my mind—more so than can be fully unpacked within the confines of this chapter. However, in order to demonstrate the impact of the heuristic, some results are shared. First, a handful of my white cis male students panicked in the beginning. They falsely believed they had no culture or that their race played no part in their writing. Thus, space was provided to challenge these notions. Students worked to first explore and examine how they each have cultural influences that greatly impact their daily communication. Other white students visited my office hours or sent emails asking how to acknowledge their whiteness in their presentations, ensuring race doesn’t remain “the absent presence in composition studies,” as Pendergast addresses in her 1998 article (36), cited in Chapter 1. International students and first-generation immigrants shared how they’ve been held to varying standards of racialized performances of their own cultural identities in their speech practices, and LGBTQ+ students mentioned how they’ve been forced to code-switch to hide their sexual orientations. Students investigated the rhetorical traditions of countries plagued by war and explored the gestural and visual rhetorics associated with their choice to either wear or not wear a hijab. Both male and female identifying students looked at the impact of patriarchal structures on the content of their

speech and communication styles and how they feel they must present themselves in professional contexts. Students addressed how hegemonic beauty standards impact the way they communicate and navigate professional spaces, and how their varying economic statuses served as literacy sponsors throughout their education. Things I would have never been able to bring up within the confines of one ten-week Business Writing course students themselves brought to the classroom. The traditional teacher/student hierarchy was deconstructed as I learned from them every day and they learned from themselves and from each other.

The heuristic's impact on the assignment—to expose, examine, explore, expand, and embody—left an impact on students, who shared their thoughts via concluding course evaluations:

From this course, I gained skills in writing within the workspace, awareness about cultural diversity in professional settings, and confidence to speak my own opinions. This class pushed my comfort levels more than I expected. The cultural analysis presentation caught me off guard but in a good way. I thought it was a great way to talk about everyday problems and insecurities, especially how it affects our writing and our upcoming careers. In addition, it made me feel less alone because I realized others were also going through the same emotions as me.

Months after the conclusion of the assignment, another student reached out via email to discuss how much these cultural analysis presentations influence the way they currently approach their internship working for a US Congresswoman. Again, I provide some of these initial results not to toot my own horn, but rather to show how the provided heuristic can be applied outside of a FYW program to benefit students in their educational growth and their understanding of writing and rhetoric.

With practice and creativity, every writing course can benefit from the inclusion of this antiracist heuristic. I used the heuristic to further modify the cultural analysis presentation into a required discussion posts in my Writing for Engineer courses, and the heuristic helped build assignments for my Technical Editing class. In said class, students are tasked with editing a phonetically code-meshed piece. I personally use Young's "Should Writers Use They Own English." I copy and paste portions of the article into a Microsoft Word document—not disclosing that the article was already published—before asking students to apply their editing prowess. This assignment not only (1) exposes students to racially diverse lexis and rhetorics, it requires that they (2) examine specifically how such diversity enhances writing and (3) explore how their own cultural biases impact their initial editing inclinations. At the conclusion of the assignment, some students chose not to edit out any featured usages of African American rhetorics and lexis. They made this decision not knowing the piece was already published as is. Having graduate teaching assistants also provide feedback to one of the many phonetically code-meshed pieces cited in this dissertation, without disclosing that the piece was published, can also be good practice. It can provide teachers with opportunities to strengthen their skills in offering feedback to students who choose to feature diverse linguistics and rhetorics within their writing.

### **Looking towards the Future**

Configuring antiracist research, both cited and produced within this dissertation, to any writing and communications class is an exercise that never gets dull, but rather provides fun and exciting avenues for teachers to stretch their creative muscles. But as discussed, this must be a collaborative process. Antiracism cannot be a siloed endeavor. Therefore, just as I've built on the work of others, this dissertation is too meant to be a springboard, a jumping off point. This dissertation features ways in which to challenge FYW students to investigate and grow their own

code-meshing skills, but future research regarding how to best respond to code-meshed writing is needed. Students ask that our feedback encourage and hone their code-meshing. How specifically do we do so? What are tangible methods or approaches we can take? This dissertation opens space for welcoming African American rhetorical traditions into the first-year writing class, but how can we make other equally-important, racially-diverse rhetorical traditions accessible to undergraduates—specifically those not majoring in rhetoric and writing? What racially-diverse theoretical frameworks should we become familiar with; what readings should we assign; what specific racialized concepts might best benefit our students and therefore deserve further exploration? This dissertation investigates antiracist teacher training. What tools and approaches not highlighted in this dissertation would further ensure success in DEI practices? What antiracist practices are you using that's proven sound results?

Within all four previous chapters, the phrasing, “literature in this area is limited,” appeared several times. As we continue to conceptualize new and exciting ways to implement antiracist pedagogies, we need to share it. To publish it. To learn from each other as we continue to learn from ourselves. Let's make research on the areas of antiracist praxis vast. To my fellow white scholars, let's contribute as allies. Let's continue to offer supplemental texts that complement the dozens of rich and diverse voices out there. Let's never stop rhetorically listening to our BIPOC colleagues. Let's be active in the fight to challenge white-washed pedagogies with antiracism. Let's support each other and continue honest and transparent discussions regarding the full nuances of this work. Let's not “end” here. But rather know that this conclusion of this dissertation is just the beginning of one antiracist pedagogical journey.

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## Appendix A: Rhetoric Y'all Pre-Survey

1. Your personal writing style is very different than your academic writing style?
  - a. Strong agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Somewhat agree
  - d. Neither agree nor disagree
  - e. Disagree
  - f. Strongly disagree
2. If you do believe them to be very different, why do you think they are so dissimilar?  
(open-ended question)
3. If you believe that your personal and academic writings are stylistically very different, do you ever wish they were more similar?
  - a. Definitely yes
  - b. Probably yes
  - c. Might or might not
  - d. Probably no
  - e. Definitely no
4. How are your personal and academic writing styles similar and/or different?  
(open-ended question)

## Appendix B: Rhetoric Y'all Post-Survey

1. Do you think you could incorporate code-meshing into your academic writing?
  - a. Definitely yes
  - b. Probably yes
  - c. Might or might not
  - d. Probably not
  - e. Definitely not
  
2. Did the workshop help you begin to think of ways to incorporate your personal writing style into your academic writing style?
  - a. Definitely yes
  - b. Probably yes
  - c. Might or might not
  - d. Probably not
  - e. Definitely not
  
3. Pretend you are a writing instructor. Consider the following categories and prioritize them based on what YOU think is important when it comes to assessing academic writing.
  - a. Overall Argument
  - b. Organization
  - c. Writer's identity is present
  - d. Spelling
  - e. Grammar
  - f. Word choice/vocabulary
  - g. Accuracy of factual information
  - h. Ideas are developed
  - i. Ideas are organized
  - j. Style is unique to the writer
  
4. How could an instructor or writing tutor assist you with code-meshing in your academic writing?  
(open ended question)

## Appendix C: African American Rhetorics Handout

### FEATURES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RHETORICAL TRADITION

#### Call and Response

A statement quickly followed by an answering statement. Ex. Can I get an amen?  
Amen!

Differs from Greek rhetorical tradition by viewing the audience as a participant verse audience as a vessel to be filled by the knowledge of the rhetor.

#### Signifying

“Use of indirection to make points. May employ oppositional logic, overstatement, understatement, and/or reliance on reader’s knowledge of implicit assumption that is taken to be common knowledge.” – Gilyard/Richardson

To make meaning within a Black rhetorical world that exists alongside and in relation to a white one. – Henry Louis Gates, Jr., i.e. Revising a text from the point of view of the oppressed.

Signifying can be indirect yet directed at a person present in the situational context. Components include metaphorical-imagist; signifying can be humorous/ironic, teachy but not preachy, punning/play on words, and be unexpected. – Geneva Smitherman

#### Narrative sequencing/testifying

“The story-telling tradition is strong in Black American culture...Black English speakers will render their general, abstract observations about life, love, people in the form of a concrete narrative. The relating of events (real or hypothetical) becomes a black rhetorical strategy to explain a point, to persuade holders of opposing view to one’s own point of view... Every black neighborhood in every city in the United States comes equipped with its own story-tellers.” – Geneva Smitherman, i.e. Narrativizing includes the retelling of a story implicitly linked to arguments to make a point.

“To testify is to tell the truth through ‘story.’ In the sacred context, the subject of testifying includes such matters as visions, prophetic, experiences, the experiences of being saved, the testimony to the power and goodness of God. In the secular context, the subject matter includes such matters as blues changes caused by yo man and yo women, and conversely, the Dr. FEEL GOOD power of yo man and yo women; experiences attesting to the racist power of the white oppressor; testimonials to the power of the gifted musician or singer. The retelling of those occurrences in lifelike fashion recreates the spiritual reality for others who at that moment vicariously experience what the testifier has gone through. The content of testifying, then is not plain and simple commentary but a dramatic narration and a communal reenactment of



one's feeling and experiences. Thus, one's humanity is reaffirmed by the group and his or her sense of isolation diminished." – Geneva Smitherman.

### **Rhythm and Cadence**

The rhythm of the blues became America's first original poetics. Prior to slave gospels and the blues, all America simply conformed to the musical genres of Europe. With African American music establishing America's first real beat, the rhythm of African American speech quickly became its own rhetorical tradition.

Example: Jesse Jackson: "Africa would if Africa could. America could if America would. But Africa cain't and America ain't."

## **Appendix D: Interview Questions for Teachers of African American Rhetorics**

1. What is your race?
2. What is your nationality?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your area of research?
5. How did teaching African American rhetorical practices impact the way you approached the classroom?
6. What challenges did teaching non-western rhetorics present?
7. What benefits, if any, did teaching the additional rhetorical strategies present?
8. Were there drawbacks to teaching African American rhetoric? If so, what?

## Appendix E: Student Survey Questions for African American Rhetorics Study

1. What is your age?
  - a. 17 or below, if yes, please stop participating in this survey now.
  - b. 18-24
  - c. 25-34
  - d. 35-44
  - e. 45-54
  - f. Older than 54
  
2. How many years have you been in college?
  - a. First year
  - b. Second year
  - c. Third year
  - d. Fourth year
  - e. Five + years
  
3. What is your gender?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Transitioning
  - d. Non-binary
  - e. Other
    - i. Please identify
  
4. What is your race?
  - a. American Indian
  - b. Alaska Native
  - c. Asian
  - d. Black or African American
  - e. Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - f. Hispanic
  - g. White
  - h. Other
  - i. Two or more races
    - i. Please identify
  
5. What is your home language, the language spoken in your household as you grew up?
  - a. Academic English
  - b. Blue-collar English
  - c. African American Vernacular English
  - d. Spanish
  - e. Other
    - i. Please specify

6. If using your home language, how would you express to a server at a restaurant that you didn't need anything else.
  - a. We are doing fine.
  - b. We're just fine.
  - c. Naw we straight.
  - d. Esta Bien.
  - e. Other
    - i. Please specify
7. Was space in the ENGL 1020 classroom given to recognize/celebrate your home language (the language spoken in your household as you grew up) and/or your cultures rhetorical traditions? If yes, please briefly explain?
8. Was space provided in the classroom to investigate your own culture/race?
9. Has your home language and/or rhetorical traditions ever been represented in a classroom before? If yes, please briefly explain.
10. Have you ever been taught rhetoric before?
11. If you'd been introduced to rhetoric prior to this class, select all that you had studied in a classroom and understood before this semester.
  - a. Ethos
  - b. Pathos
  - c. Logos
  - d. Kairos
  - e. Testifying
  - f. Signifying
  - g. Call and Response
  - h. Rhythm and Cadence
  - i. None of the above
  - j. Other – please specify
12. What rhetorical tools and elements of rhetoric did you learn about in your ENGL 1020 place?
  - a. Ethos
  - b. Pathos
  - c. Logos
  - d. Kairos
  - e. Testifying
  - f. Signifying
  - g. Call and Response
  - h. Rhythm and Cadence
  - i. Writing to a specific audience
  - j. None of the above
  - k. Other – please specify

13. Which of the below strategies did you discuss in your rhetorical analysis paper?
  - a. Ethos
  - b. Pathos
  - c. Logos
  - d. Kairos
  - e. Testifying
  - f. Signifying
  - g. Call and Response
  - h. Rhythm and Cadence
  
14. What was the topic of your researched argument paper?
  
15. What rhetorical strategies did you use in your researched argument paper?
  - a. Ethos
  - b. Pathos
  - c. Logos
  - d. Kairos
  - e. Testifying
  - f. Signifying
  - g. Call and Response
  - h. Rhythm and Cadence
  
16. Have your thoughts regarding academic writing changed during this semester due to the rhetorical tools you learned? If so, how have they changed? Please briefly explain.
  
17. Which of the rhetorical tools that you studied in ENGL 1020 did you find most helpful when writing your own researched argument?
  
18. Do you feel more or less comfortable experimenting with style and voice in your writing now that you've been in ENGL 1020 for the last 13 weeks?
  
19. Do you believe what you learned this semester in ENGL 1020 will help you throughout college and our chosen career? Please briefly explain your answer.

## **Appendix F: Antiracist Teacher Training Survey Questions**

1. What is your age?
2. What is your nationality?
3. What is your race?
4. What is your gender?
5. How long have you been a teaching assistant for the UofM?
6. What is your area of concentration in the English Department?
7. What are your research interests within your concentration?
8. How does your concentration and/or research interests impact the material you teach in your first-year writing classrooms?
9. What year were you enrolled in 8003?
10. What antiracist approaches do you remember learning in 8003?
11. Have you discussed antiracist pedagogical approaches in any other classes you've taken at UofM?
12. If yes, which classes? What specifically did you learn?
13. Are there any areas of antiracism that you learned outside the English Department?
14. If so, what were they? Where did you learn them?
15. Which CAP meetings have you found to be most helpful during your time as a teaching assistant?
16. Do you feel that labor is equally distributed amongst grad students? Please explain.
17. Do you feel that your voice is heard by administration and faculty? Please explain.
18. Do you feel that as a teacher you are supported by administration and faculty? Please explain?
19. Do you believe that UofM's English Department is committed to diversity and inclusion?
20. If yes, please list specifics as to why you believe UofM's English Department is committed to diversity and inclusion?

21. On average, how many students in your class on Second Language Learners?
22. Do you perform antiracist pedagogical technics in the classroom?
23. If yes, please detail what approaches you take and how you implement them?
24. Have you ever felt anxious or worried about presenting certain material in the classroom?
25. If yes, please explain

## **Appendix G: Antiracist Teacher Training Interview Questions**

1. How long have you been a teaching assistant for the UofM?
2. What is your area of concentration in the English Department?
3. What are your research interests within your concentration?
4. Can you briefly discuss your experiences with antiracist training in the English Department?
5. Did you attend any of these specific CAP meetings? (List will include meetings that discuss antiracist approaches or teaching within your subject position) If so, which ones did you attend?
6. Can you recall your thoughts about these meetings?
7. Do you believe that UofM's English Department is committed to diversity and inclusion?
8. If yes, please list specifics as to why you believe UofM's English Department is committed to diversity and inclusion?
9. What are some identity markers that you believe to possess?
10. Do you feel that these identity markers impact your interactions with students? Please explain.
11. Do your identity markers impact how you present certain material in the classroom. Please explain?
12. Have you ever felt anxious or worried about presenting certain material in the classroom? Please explain?
13. Do you promote code-meshing in your classroom?
14. If so, how do you approach the topic?
15. Are you equally comfortable presenting Western rhetorical traditions and African American Rhetorical Traditions in first-year writing classrooms? Please explain?
16. Do you perform antiracist pedagogical techniques in the classroom?
17. If yes, please detail what approaches you take and how you implement them?



18. Do you have any particular incidents where you felt your identity particularly impacted a specific interaction?
19. Do I have permission to discuss in my dissertation/publications and/or conferences this previous story you've shared with me? (stories gathered from observational notes).
20. If yes, can we review the story to ensure I portray the incident as truthfully as possible.

## Appendix H: Cultural Analysis Assignment Sheet

### UWP 104A – Business Writing University of California, Davis Cultural Analysis Presentation

#### **Purpose:**

Throughout the semester, we will be working with several written genres adjacent to business communications, such as resumes, cover letters, memos, consultation emails, usability study reports, grant proposals, and so on. Having worked professionally with all these genres, I feel confident in acclimating you to the expectations of each style of communication. There is one important facet of business communication that cannot necessarily be taught, but which holds great importance: how your individual identities and cultures intersect with both a professional setting and business writing and communications. Therefore, you will be asked to reflect and analyze how your own identity markers and cultures intersect with these realities.

#### **Developing your presentation:**

For this assignment, you will be asked to give a 10-minute presentation to the class in which you analyze how your own identity markers and cultures intersect with a professional setting and the communication associated within that setting. There are no strict rules or guidelines regarding how to stylize your presentation. You can stand up and talk for the full 10-minutes; you can build a visual or digital component to aid in your presentation; you can play short related video clips; you can record your presentation in advance and play it for the class: I'm open to it all. The main point is that you reach the objective of engaging with the proposed prompt. As long as your presentation is approximately 10 minutes (give or take a minute) and analyzes your positionality, identity, and cultures within daily professional settings and communications, you will receive full credit. While it's important that you analyze your own cultural intersections, it's equally important that you listen to how others navigate their identities and cultures in professional settings as well.

While there are no hard and fast rules for how you approach this assignment, I offer a few suggestions:

1. Recognize and outline your identity markers and your cultural background. Native Californians definitely have a culture different than people from Tennessee, Oklahoma, or Arizona. And in just six months of living in California, it's also already clear that there are cultural differences between So Cal, Nor Cal, the Bay and more. How have these cultures based on regional settings and regional histories impacted the ways you communicate? What about immigrant cultural? Those from bilingual households? Those bilingual themselves? Those whose native language is not English? What about your gender? How was gender performed in your household growing up? How have you seen gendered performed around you? What about a million other things? Ever play instruments? Does musicality affect your communication standards? How does communication work for those who identify as either extroverts/introverts? Ever perform in theatre? Where you raised in the digital era? Are you a tech junkie that communicates best through digital interfaces, codes, math?

2. Reflect on how your identity(s) and the culture(s) impact your daily communication and interactions in both a personal and professional stand point. Does the culture in which you were raised value directness and/or prioritize niceties (both real or performative) within communication? Where you raised to believe your gender impacts the amount of space you're afforded in professional communications? Where you raised in a religious setting that reflects certain cadence within communication standards (My southern Baptist grandmother would say yes)? Does your communication approach in a personal setting differ from your approach in a professional setting? If so, how specifically and why?

**Deadline:**

During the second week of class, you will sign up for a presentation slot via a google drive document linked to canvas. Two presenters will kick off our class period every day from the middle of week 3 up until Thanksgiving.

**IRB Initial Approval: CWC Student's Right to Their Own Language**



Institutional Review Board  
Division of Research and Innovation  
Office of Research Compliance  
University of Memphis  
315 Admin Bldg  
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

February 5, 2020

PI Name: Angela Morris  
Co-Investigators:  
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Scott Sundvall, Brennah Hutchison  
Submission Type: Initial  
Title: CWC Student's Right to Their Own Language  
IRB ID : #PRO-FY2020-8  
Exempt Approval: February 4, 2020

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at [citiprogram.org](http://citiprogram.org).

For any additional questions or concerns please contact us at [irb@memphis.edu](mailto:irb@memphis.edu) or 901.678.2705

Thank you,  
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chair  
The University of Memphis.

**IRB Modification Approval: CWC Student's Right to Their Own Language**



Institutional Review Board  
Division of Research and Innovation  
Office of Research Compliance  
University of Memphis  
315 Admin Bldg  
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

April 7, 2020

PI Name: Angela Morris  
Co-Investigators:  
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Scott Sundvall, Brennah Hutchison  
Submission Type: Modification  
Title: CWC Student's Right to Their Own Language  
IRB ID : #PRO-FY2020-8  
Level of Review: Exempt

Approval: April 6, 2020  
Expiration: --\*

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

The modification is approved.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. This IRB approval for modification has an expiration date, an approved renewal must be in effect to continue the project prior to that date. If approval is not obtained, the human subjects consent form(s) and recruiting material(s) are no longer valid and any research activities involving human subjects must stop.
2. When the project is finished a completion form must be submitted.

3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without prior board approval.
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at [citiprogram.org](http://citiprogram.org).

*\*Modifications do not extend the expiration of the original approval*

Thank you,  
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chair  
The University of Memphis.

**IRB Initial Approval: Teaching Afrocentric and African American Rhetorical Strategies**



Institutional Review Board  
Division of Research and Innovation  
Office of Research Compliance  
University of Memphis  
315 Admin Bldg  
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

January 28, 2020

PI Name: Angela Morris  
Co-Investigators:  
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Katherine Fredlund  
Submission Type: Initial  
Title: Teaching Afrocentric and African American Rhetorical Strategies  
IRB ID : #PRO-FY2019-594

Expedited Approval: January 28, 2020

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at [citiprogram.org](http://citiprogram.org).

For additional questions or concerns please contact us at [irb@memphis.edu](mailto:irb@memphis.edu) or 901.6783.2705



**IRB Modification Approval: Teaching Afrocentric and African American Rhetorical Strategies**



Institutional Review Board  
Division of Research and Innovation  
Office of Research Compliance  
University of Memphis  
315 Admin Bldg  
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

April 14, 2021

PI Name: Angela Morris  
Co-Investigators:  
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Katherine Fredlund  
Submission Type: Modification  
Title: Teaching Afrocentric and African American Rhetorical Strategies  
IRB ID: #PRO-FY2019-594  
Level of Review: Expedited

Approval: April 14, 2021  
Expiration: --\*

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

The modification is approved.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. This IRB approval for modification has an expiration date, an approved renewal must be in effect to continue the project prior to that date. If approval is not obtained, the human subjects consent form(s) and recruiting material(s) are no longer valid and any research activities involving human subjects must stop.
2. When the project is finished a completion form must be submitted.
3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without prior board approval.

4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at [citiprogram.org](http://citiprogram.org).

*\*Modifications do not extend the expiration of the original approval*

Thank you,  
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chair  
The University of Memphis.

**IRB Exemption for English Department Graduate Student Ethnography**



Institutional Review Board  
Division of Research and Innovation  
Office of Research Compliance  
University of Memphis  
315 Admin Bldg  
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

August 16, 2021

PI Name: Angela Morris  
Co-Investigators:  
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Katherine Fredlund  
Submission Type: Admin Withdrawal  
Title: English Department Graduate Student Ethnography  
IRB ID: PRO-FY2022-32

From the information provided on your determination review request for “English Department Graduate Student Ethnography”, the IRB has determined that your activity does not meet the Office of Human Subjects Research Protections definition of human subjects research and 45 CFR part 46 does not apply.

This study does not require IRB approval nor review. Your determination will be administratively withdrawn from Cayuse IRB and you will receive an email similar to this correspondence from [irb@memphis.edu](mailto:irb@memphis.edu). This submission will be archived in Cayuse IRB.

Thanks,

IRB Administrator