Open Admissions, Resilience, and Basic Writing Ecologies: A New Cultural Narrative

Joyce Olewski Inman

ABSTRACT: *This article considers the complex ecosystems of Basic Writing programs through the lens of resilience science, particularly William E. Rees' work in the field. The author uses critical discourse analysis to analyze articles published in* The Journal of Basic Writing *from 1995 to the present and identifies institutional narratives that illustrate patterns of development and disassembly in Basic Writing programming that align with Rees' adaptive cycle: narratives of growth, conservation, release, and reorganization. The author then shares her own institutional narrative and grapples with the conflicted legacy of Basic Writing and what it means to move forward and attempt to create resilient programming in our current climate of political and cultural division.*

KEYWORDS: *Basic Writing; conservation phase; growth phase; institutional narratives; Open Admissions; program narratives; release phase; reorganization phase; resilience science*

> *The provost explains that the university is about higher educa-*
> *tion, not remediation, especially given the times (one of many*
> *budget crises in my career; they come often; financial crises are*
> *a normal part of capitalism; according to Marx and Keynes,*
> *though each providing different ways of dealing with crisis). The*
> *university cannot afford the luxury of remediation...*

> *About ten years after that first meeting with a provost, the other*
> *state university in the same state: Same conversation, same*
> *threat, same result, given the promise of assimilation, a kind*
> *of enculturation.*

> —Victor Villanueva

Joyce Olewski Inman is Associate Professor of English at The University of Southern Mississippi, where she previously served as Director of Composition. Her research interests include Basic Writing pedagogies, literacy politics, writing assessment, and the ways space and locale can influence writers, their identities, and their texts.

Joyce Olewski Inman

The Journal of Basic Writing (*JBW*) is, in many ways, a historical record of how Basic Writing practitioners responded to the changing needs of basic writers and teachers of writing during and after the era of Open Admissions. The journal allows us to map the ways Basic Writing programs across the country are both created and dissolved in response to external pressures—to contemplate the ways Basic Writing may or may not be resilient and to consider the various elements of the ecological systems within which these programs exist. George Otte and Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk provide a history of the discipline and of the journal in *Basic Writing*, and their account includes an interesting reflection on the late 1990s and the ways *JBW* articles often provided "accounts of the dismantling of Basic Writing programs" (34). The authors note that while scholars in the field have always had differing opinions on the ethics of Basic Writing programming, the majority of the programs that were dismantled were shuttered due to lack of resources and the vulnerability of the students and programs themselves, not due to pedagogical considerations (34). Victor Villanueva's cautionary tale of his experiences with building and dismantling of Basic Writing programs at different institutions and his sobering articulation, "same conversation, same threat, same result," establishes the consistency of this problematic narrative throughout scholarship on Basic Writing programming—a narrative that resonates with any Basic Writing practitioner or administrator, as the history of Basic Writing programming clearly illustrates the cycles of crisis and response that began with Open Admissions initiatives.

A careful review of *JBW's* contents suggest that Otte and Mlynarczyk are correct, and the narratives published in *JBW* (including Villanueva's) illustrate the internal and external pressures that threatened the resilience of Basic Writing programming across the nation. In their overview, Otte and Mlynarczyk claim that the 1990s ushered in the field's recognition of the ways Basic Writing might indeed be a "project of acculturation" and that narratives of Basic Writing programs illustrate how external forces were "once again threatening to eradicate support structures and to limit access for weaker students" (26-27). Similarly, in her 2018 article "Disciplinary Writing in Basic Writing Education," Lynn Reid provides a combination of distant and close reading of programmatic narratives from 1995 to 2015 in *JBW* in an attempt "to focus on feature-length articles that included narrative accounts of the politics of remediation playing out in a specific local context" (15). Like Otte and Mlynarczyk, Reid recognizes the ways these programmatic narratives are bound by external pressures, implicitly acknowledging the complicated ecosystems these programs inhabit.

Of course, the concept of writing and writing classrooms as ecologies is not new. Sustainability theories have been applied to writing practices (Cooper; Dobrin and Weisser; Patrick), writing classrooms (Owens; Shepley; Inoue), and writing programs (Gilliam; Devet; Kahn; Ratliff), as teacher-researchers note the relationships between environments, the individuals and materials inhabiting them, and the actions and reactions present in those environments. These studies all focus on ecologies as localized and on the concept of sustainability, "the degree to which a process or enterprise is able to be maintained or continued" (OED 2b). We are, however, beginning to see a shift from sustainability to resilience, an implicit acknowledgement that sustainability is an ideal while resilience acknowledges the need for adaptability and recovery from problematic influences and actions. This move towards resilience is one that resonates given the explicit environmental and political pressures on Basic Writing programming. Practitioners and researchers need to acknowledge the vulnerabilities of Basic Writing programs and focus on programmatic missions that acknowledge the need for resilience and on how to create programs and classrooms that can recover quickly and serve their students effectively even in the face of difficulties.

In this article, I consider the complex ecosystems of Basic Writing programs, the cycles these systems have experienced since Open Admissions movements of the 1970s, and the ways scholarly narratives portray these cycles. I begin with discussions of resilience and Basic Writing programs in an effort to consider what might be described as a volatile history and how we might use resilience science, particularly William E. Rees' work in the field, in an effort to make more lasting institutional change when it comes to serving students many deem underprepared. Then, to illustrate the patterns of design and failure that emerge in narratives of Basic Writing programs, I examine the *JBW* archives and the local histories of programs developed and disassembled in response to political, economic, and ethical pressures that are part of the conflicted legacy of Basic Writing. I then share my own institutional narrative, adding to the *JBW* archive of narratives about Basic Writing. The final section of the article grapples with the tensions inherent in Basic Writing programming and makes recommendations for moving forward in our current climate of political and cultural division that early scholars of Open Admissions and Basic Writing would, unfortunately, immediately recognize.

Joyce Olewski Inman

Resilience Science and the Ecologies of Basic Writing

Best known as the originator of the "ecological footprint" concept, William Rees' work in sustainability, ecology, and ecological economics engages diverse aspects of our relationship to our local and global economies, from the housing crisis (2018), to the climate crisis (2019), to Covid-19 (2020). Experts in resilience science define resilience thinking as "understanding and engaging with a changing world. By understanding how and why the system as a whole is changing, we are better placed to build a capacity to work with change, as opposed to being a victim of it" (Walker and Salt 14). And according to Rees, "understanding and coping with change is at the heart of resilience thinking" (Rees, "Thinking" 33). This concept of adapting to change should be familiar to scholars of Basic Writing, as the majority of our work and the scholarly accounting of that work responds to external and internal pressures related to who our students are (Horner and Lu; Gray-Rosendale, "Back to the Future"; Ritter), access for students others might deem underprepared (Rose; Fox; Stanley), and programmatic measures that might best address institutional, communal, and student needs (Bartholomae; Shor; Soliday; Lamos).

In "The Adaptive Cycle: Resilience in the History of First-Year Composition," Clancy Ratliff employs Rees' explanations of resilience science to document the ecological life cycle of first-year composition and to discuss ways the field of composition and rhetoric might "reorganize" first-year writing classes at local levels to improve resiliency. Ratliff explores the ways first-year composition—as an ecological system—may be viewed through Rees' systematic lens; however, Ratliff only gestures toward Open Admissions and the Basic Writing programming that the movement generated. Open Admissions, the GI Bill, and Basic Writing classes, in the ecology she puts forward, are merely contributing factors to the growth of first-year writing sequences as a whole (286). For the purposes of this article, we must consider Open Admissions and the localized implementations of the initiative as more than elements leading to the institutionalization of composition coursework, and Ratliff's reliance on Rees' theories of community planning, economics, and ecologies is a helpful starting point in zeroing in on Open Admissions and Basic Writing using resilience science.

Rees' work in resilience science suggests the adaptive cycle includes four phases: the exploitation and rapid growth phase, the conservation phase, the release phase (Rees also refers to this as the "collapse" phase and in later works as "plague"), and the reorganization phase. In her article,

Ratliff encourages the field of composition and rhetoric to acknowledge the ways first-year writing sequences have adhered to this model with booms in undergraduate enrollment and cries of literacy crises contributing to the growth phase; continued public rhetoric related to literacy and a reliance on contingent labor during the conservation phase; moves toward expediency in graduate rates that led to students receiving credit for composition classes during the release phase; and the suggestion that composition may now be in the reorganization phase. Ratliff concludes her analogous exploration with a call for compositionists to consider how they might effectively preserve and encourage the role of writing in institutions of higher education. And while this is certainly an overly-simplified summary of Rees' work and Ratliff's efforts to employ the resilience science model in composition, it provides an interesting lens through which we can observe the cyclical growth and demise of Basic Writing programming via the narratives offered by Basic Writing professionals.

Finding Narratives of Resilience

I began this study with the intent of exploring how Basic Writing scholarship framed the dismantling of Basic Writing programs. As I will discuss later in this article, I was dealing with the failure of the Basic Writing program at my institution, and full of frustration at these circumstances, I felt the need to return to others' stories, thinking this might lead to answers of how the program at my institution might be reinvigorated and reassembled. In doing so, I couldn't help but consider Linda Adler-Kassner and Susanmarie Harrington's exploration of competing narratives in Basic Writing and their suggestion that "Basic Writing, however defined and however situated, is always a political act, and the stories that shape it have significant implications for students, the institutions they attend, and the culture(s) in which those students participate" (14). Like Adler-Kassner and Harrington, I was interested in the tensions and "break points" of Basic Writing, but I also wanted to delve into institutional accounts of how programs were created or dissolved. I suppose I hoped this might help me create some sort of master plan related to resilience in Basic Writing at my institution. In Otte and Mlynarczyk's overview of Basic Writing, they suggest that the late 1990s is when scholarship in the field began to publish accounts of Basic Writing programs being dismantled (26), so I began combing through issues of *JBW* beginning with the 1995 issues. I read *JBW* articles with the goal of finding patterns of assembling and disassembling programs that might have been

missed in previous studies of the journal's content (Gray-Rosendale; Center; Otte and Mlynarczyk; Reid).

I did not begin this process intending to focus on institutional narratives, however; but then I read Reid's "Disciplinary Reading in Basic Writing Graduate Education: The Politics of Remediation in JBW, 1995-2015." Her suggestion that these types of narratives provide a somewhat problematic depiction of our field, that "the reproduction of such stories, true or not, reinforces an image of Basic Writing professionals as increasingly without agency beyond our classrooms," struck me as significant (29). Of course, Reid's overarching argument focuses on ways we train graduate instructors and their interpretations of scholarly literature and, thus, the discipline, but her interpretation of the programmatic narratives offered in *JBW* (and the lack of agency they suggest) seemed like a strong starting point for a discussion of resilience.

In order to provide an example of how we might encourage nuanced readings of disciplinary literature, Reid examines local narratives that describe and confront the politics of literacy and address the roles of multiple stakeholders within an individual institution. I, too, am interested in these programmatic narratives, but my approach differs slightly in that I am hoping to better understand how to develop more resilient programming—particularly given the volatility of the ecological life of Basic Writing over the past five decades and what looks to be an even more insecure future moving forward. In addition, while cognizant of the fact that *JBW* is a product of the CUNY system, I think it is important to consider how scholars in programs outside of the CUNY system have discussed the measures that led to their adoption of new programming and the measures that may have led to their demise.

Thus, I chose to code *JBW* articles from 1995 to the present, and this meant reading and coding 242 articles. My coding process is informed by Thomas Huckin's critical discourse analysis methodology with his emphasis on identifying patterns of interest, questioning and verifying these patterns, and using "functional-rhetorical analysis" to interpret the results (90-93). My first reading of the articles involved summarizing the focus of each piece in order to determine patterns. Ultimately, four primary patterns of scholarship emerged: 1) curriculum-based, 2) placement, 3) theory-based, and 4) programmatic. My second reading allowed me to further refine these categories and to verify my initial coding, and in both the first and the second readings, articles could be coded using more than one of these codes. My parameters for coding narratives used these specific codes:

- *Curriculum-Based Scholarship*: Articles authored by teacher-scholars reflecting on specific elements of their own classroom curricula were coded as curriculum-based. These pieces covered a wide variety of curricular discussions related to Basic Writing courses—teaching specific genres, implementing service-learning, harnessing reflective writing, teaching grammar, and the role of reading in the Basic Writing classroom are just a few examples.
- *Placement Scholarship*: Articles coded as placement tended to center on high-stakes testing, institutional placement measures, and assessment practices specific to student placement.
- *Theory-Based Scholarship*: Articles coded as theoretical were typically overarching discussions of the politics of Basic Writing, how we define basic writers, and scholarship forwarding specific theories of language use. These articles were often representative of the tensions and stakes of Basic Writing in higher education.
- *Programmatic Scholarship*: The final category involved articles focused on programmatic initiatives—either the development or failure of a program implemented across multiple course sections to meet the needs of Basic Writing students at a specific institution.

A Focus on the Programmatic

In my initial coding pass, any article that discussed the creation or dissolution of Basic Writing programs with state systems or specific institutions was coded as programmatic. In the second reading, I chose to distinguish between articles making arguments about the justness (or not) and the necessity (or not) of Basic Writing programming and those that were local programmatic narratives, leaving twenty-nine articles coded specifically as programmatic narratives. In some ways, each of these twenty-nine narratives is about both success and failure, as even articles focused on designing a new program are often predicated on the failure of a previous program. Narratives focused on the design of new Basic Writing initiatives fall into what many readers will see as expected categories in terms of the types of programs described (e.g., stretch programs, supplemental programs, mainstreaming programs). Each narrative outlines the practitioners' attempts to create a Basic Writing program more suited to a specific institution and the needs of their students, and most contemplate the growth of the program

and nascent results of the program on student success and retention. Narratives that chronicle failures of initiatives tend to focus on the external forces that led to failure. Authors describe failed initiatives not just as failures, but instead use words such as "death" (Severino) "unraveling" (Stygall), "resistance" (Tassoni, "(Re)Membering"), and "inability" (Melzer).

These narratives provide significant insight into "the politics of remediation"[1] and the external pressures that often influence programmatic decisions, but they also allow us to begin to sketch the ecologies of Basic Writing programs. In a typical institutional setting, the Basic Writing ecology involves a state board of trustees, the local community and feeder schools, the local institution and its mission, the academic unit responsible for providing instruction to students deemed basic writers, the faculty who teach these classes, and the students who take them. These, however, are simply the major stakeholders; other elements of the ecology include the neoliberal economy of state budgets, legislative actions, institutional budgets and priorities, the economics of high stakes testing, and rising tuition costs. In her thoughtful look at first-year composition ecologies, Ratliff outlines the adaptive cycle of first-year composition as one that began in the 1970s and is, perhaps, just now entering the reorganization phase. However, reading and coding local narratives of Basic Writing in *JBW* suggests that Basic Writing programming may provide a more obvious means of applying resilience thinking to academe. Each of these institutional narratives, regional ecosystems if you will, illustrates a local institution at a different phase of the adaptive cycle, while they also suggest that resilience in Basic Writing programming may depend on an institution's (and the field of composition's) willingness to embrace diversity and social equity instead of specialization and efficiency.

In addition, close readings of these narratives illustrate that scholars understand the systematic and ecological nature of Basic Writing programming—tracing the growth, conservation, and disruption of these programs, as well as attempts to rebuild them to better meet the needs of "inhabitants" of the programs. In her reflections on the twenty-five year history of the University of Illinois-Chicago's Educational Assistance Program, Carol Severino notes that "growing xenophobia and 'metrophobia' climate threaten the survival not only of support programs but of urban institutions themselves" (40). Phrases such as "threaten," "climate" and "survival" acknowledge the ecological nature of the local Basic Writing program Severino historicizes, but, more significantly, there is a tacit admission that the program functions within an entire system that goes beyond just the institution itself. Similarly,

in her often-cited article, "Unraveling at Both Ends: Anti-Undergraduate Education, Anti-Affirmative Action, and Basic Writing at Research Schools," Gail Stygall points out that there is a "dismantling of diversity in U.S. public universities [that is] contributing to a system that permanently locates Basic Writing students and students of color in lower tiers of the hierarchy" (4-5). Providing examples from the University of Washington, Stygall calls on writing scholars to consider the public discourse surrounding Basic Writing and to pay attention to the internal documents at their institutions and the need to investigate "the sociopolitical linguistic milieus in which our programs exist" (19). Stygall's work is a veritable snapshot of a plagued ecology—a program in which efficiency is prized over diversity and resilience.

These ecological narratives are not outliers. 100% of the twenty-nine examined narratives described Basic Writing programs as existing within an institutional, political, and economical environment, and each used language and phrasing suggestive of ecological frameworks. Four primary patterns of ecological language emerged in my readings of these narratives. Authors carefully described the histories and ecologies of their programs, and the literal and metaphorical language they used to talk about the programs focused on one or more of these themes: 1) the interconnectedness of various elements of the Basic Writing ecology; 2) power relationships; 3) prioritizing efficiency or diversity; or 4) crisis. Scholar practitioners' tendency to incorporate these types of language suggests a recognition of the ecological nature of our programs, as well as a desire for resilience, "the capacity of a system to withstand disturbance while still retaining its fundamental structure, function, and internal feedbacks" (Walker and Salt, qtd. in Rees, "Thinking" 27). These language patterns align with Rees' theories of the adaptive cycle in important ways, as each of the *JBW* programmatic narratives I studied includes a detailed description of the system within which the Basic Writing program operates, while authors also use language that characterizes the interconnectedness of various elements of the program and the adaptive cycles taking place.

Articulating Narratives of Growth

Not surprisingly, many of the coded narratives include language and descriptions suggestive of Rees' growth phase. Scholars often reference Open Admissions as either a moment in time that led to the growth of Basic Writing programming or as a descriptor of the institution. This common feature of the narratives provides insight into the accepted belief that Open Admissions

initiatives led to the primary growth phase of Basic Writing programming and Basic Writing scholarship. Consider Rees' definition of the "exploitation and growth phase":

> The early phase in a new adaptive cycle is characterized by the establishment and rapid growth of the stronger opportunistic species (or new businesses) that have flooded in to take advantage of open ecological niches (or unexploited markets) and temporarily plentiful resources. . . Initially, diversity and resilience are high but internal connectivity is low. As it develops, the system gradually creates a stable regime. (34-35)

This description of the growth phase may remind readers of the longstanding discussion in Basic Writing scholarship of whether or not the system has created "basic writers" and the programs serving these students to serve its own needs—taking advantage of "open ecological niches" within the system of higher education when a need presented itself. But my goal here is not to rehash such arguments. Rather, it is important to recognize that Open Admissions initiatives and other measures meant to provide access to a larger and more diverse student population are part of a cycle that led to what we know as Basic Writing programming today.

Narratives of Basic Writing illustrate an understanding of the adaptive cycle of Basic Writing programming both in their historical references to Open Admissions and in their language patterns. In describing their programs, scholars acknowledge the "complex ways that remediation interacts with vested institutional, economic and political interests" (Goen and Gillotte-Tropp 110). Jessica Yood describes her program as a "reflexive system of constant change" (19). John Paul Tassoni and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson detail their attempts to implement a Studio approach to Basic Writing as a "struggle within a 'configurative complex' of cultural, social, and institutional places" (69). These authors recognize the competing forces within the systems and the problematic and productive interactions between various elements of the ecological system. Basic Writing narratives also tend to recognize the complicated lives of many of their students and the competing forces and demands on their time—adding another layer to our understandings of how inhabitants (in this case, students) of the system operate. For example, Mlynarczyk and Marcia Babbit argue that Basic Writing and the "structural features of the university" must adapt as "more and more college students have to juggle work and family responsibilities as well as school work" (74).

In other words, each individual student functions within their own system, only parts of which overlap with the system of the university and the Basic Writing program. And some narratives recognize the cyclical nature of Basic Writing programming outright. Mary Kay Crouch and Gerri McNenny note that in the complex history of the California State University system's attempts to serve basic writers, "the solutions proposed during each cycle of concern rarely varied" (64). These narratives make clear that the growth phases of Basic Writing also lead to what seems like a certain amount of stability—a recognition of Basic Writing's place in the university ecosystem.

Articulating Narratives of Conservation

Growth and the recognition of systematic roles lead to Rees' conservation phase, described as a period of relative consistency and stability, but also one of consolidation and accumulation. It is during this period that the "competitive advantage. . . shifts to efficient specialists" and "diversity and resilience gradually decline" ("Thinking" 35). A history of Basic Writing programming and Basic Writing scholarship might identify this period as the decade following Open Admissions to the new millennium, but such an overarching characterization ignores the nuances of individual programs and the ways "dominant species compete for ever-scarcer resources" ("Thinking" 35). In other words, if specific initiatives lead to growth and resources for Basic Writing programming within an institution, this period of growth is typically followed by a period of competition—the longest phase of the adaptive cycle, one in which the system is most vulnerable to attempts at homogenization.

In nature, these power disputes take the form of competition for resources and less aggressive competitors can find themselves "repressed or eliminated" ("Thinking" 35). In economic ecosystems, established aspects of the ecosystem can become complacent and unresponsive. Narratives of Basic Writing programming provide insight into both of these concepts, as competition for financial resources, political power moves, and resistance to diversity take place during this phase of the adaptive cycle. Lori Ostergaard and Elizabeth Allen acknowledge that the two primary pressures on their Basic Writing program involved "legislative efforts to influence university curricula through new and increased accountability measures and from university administrations hoping to improve retention and completion rates in the face of shrinking enrollments and dwindling state budgets" (53). In their accounting of the Basic Writing program at the University

of Alabama-Birmingham (one of the few narratives of a southern school documented in *JBW*), Tracey Baker and Peggy Jolly note their institution's desire "to assess the value of individual programs (such as Basic Writing) in order to determine whether to retain or abolish them" (28). Tassoni and Lewiecki-Wilson's language provides even more clear insight into the ways the university and the Basic Writing program are part of an ecosystem in which individuals and programs are competing for power and resources. They explain that "since institutional spaces are never transparent, unclaimed, or uncontested, remaking the landscape of the university involves problems of power and colonization" (69). Greg Glau even discusses his naive hope that his program's status as an award-winning program might provide "political protection" in an age of austerity (45).

In the adaptive cycle, this competition for dwindling resources after a period of growth and abundance also often means a renewed emphasis on efficiency. This move toward conservation is part of what depletes an ecosystem, and we see these parallels in Basic Writing narratives and their emphasis on the system's privileging of efficiency and the gain of resources or prestige over diversity and commitments to students. Matthew McCurrie recounts the ways Columbia College Chicago's administrative efforts "to make the program more accountable for the students it serves and the resources it consumes may also have sacrificed the college's commitment to open access for all" (34). Rachel Rigolino and Penny Freel point out that when Basic Writing courses are discontinued due to resource allocation it can "diminish the diversity of [the] student body by excluding students from a wide range of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds" (56). Similarly, Crouch and McNenny note that while CSU "applauds diversity," it also "wants to homogenize the population the CSU serves" (55). Stygall's descriptions of the Basic Writing programming at the University of Washington are even more aligned with Rees' suggestions that all systems can be tied back to nature (and are perhaps even more damning) when she describes she and her colleagues as "educational canaries. . . whose lost voices may preface the dismantling of diversity in U.S. public universities" (4) due to institutional priorities "when pressed financially" (6). Stygall laments the ways all "lower division writing is remedial, superfluous, unnecessary in an 'efficient' system" (emphasis original, 9). But it is her repeated reference to canaries, birds that can be overpowered at any moment but who are still responsible for alerting us to injustice, that I find fascinating when reading these narratives through a lens of resilience science. There is an implicit suggestion that the role of writing program administrators is to sound the

alarm when the signs of threat merge—but also that these cries may ultimately be unheeded.

Articulating Narratives of Release

The release phase of the adaptive cycle, or what Rees in later works begins to refer to as the "plague phase," is when resilience is at a minimum and any number of disruptions might cause collapse. Partly in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Rees explains that our tendency to value "interdependence, efficiency and growth" over "community self-reliance, resilience and stability" can lead to this collapse ("The Earth"). These types of disruptions that prioritize economic growth over diverse learning experiences are familiar to most Basic Writing practitioners. Budget cuts. Loss of faculty. Shifts in administrative priorities. Legislative decisions. Changes in grading or admissions policies. These almost always lead to cultural loss. Severino describes the demise of the University of Chicago-Illinois program as having "witnessed a drama of political conflict, social change, and ultimate loss" (40). In his narrative of Basic Writing programming in Connecticut, Patrick Sullivan notes, "there are powerful forces actively at work in America seeking to erode or turn back advances we have made in civil rights, access, and social justice" (74). Scott Stevens' analysis of the CSU system considers the way public rhetoric can plague the system and produce "the very crisis conditions it purports to reflect" (6). The release phase—the phase in which the system is most vulnerable to crisis—is where we see the disassembling of the university ecology take place. If, however, the adaptive cycle means that this disassembling is inevitable, simply part of the cycle of existence, how do we begin to create resilient Basic Writing programs?

Imagining Narratives of Reorganization

According to Rees, our responses to the chaos created in the release phase is what determines resilience. The reorganization phase, according to Rees, "creates numerous opportunities for novelty and experimentation." It is during this phase that we have the opportunity to rebuild in ways that may be more lasting, that determine the priorities of the "subsequent growth phase." However, Rees also warns that "conditions in this phase tend to produce a faithful repetition of the previous cycle" ("Thinking" 35). He points out that in order to achieve resilience during this phase of the adaptive cycle, "development strategies must abandon efficiency and maximization as primary goals in favor of social equity and ecological stability" ("Think-

ing" 37). What might such strategies look like in the neoliberal educational institution? If we consider each of the program designs forwarded in the programmatic narratives of *JBW*, will we recognize the initiatives as built for sustainability and resilience? More importantly, if we look at our own local ecologies, can we begin to forward more resilient programming that values cooperation and diversity in the face of the dwindling resources and cultural struggles we continue to face?

Another Institutional Narrative: Growth, Adaptation, Release, and Reorganization

As I contemplate these questions, I can't help but reflect on the Basic Writing program at my institution. In 2008, I received a call from the then chair of English asking me if I was interested in returning to academe and serving as the Basic Writing coordinator for their program. This position was available because the University's Quality Enhancement Plan was focused on writing and speaking, and one of the programmatic commitments to the plan was a Basic Writing coordinator position. The University was seeing increased enrollment of students who might be deemed underprepared for college-level writing based on standardized test scores, as well as decreased retention and graduation rates. This position, I realized rather quickly, was a check-the-box position. It was temporary, and it was meant to communicate support for the then institutional priority of supporting struggling writers. There was little value added to the program as far as most of my soon-to-be colleagues were concerned. I was there to work with students they preferred not to teach, someone to deal with underprepared students so they did not have to do so.

That first year, I sat down with the faculty member who was leaving this position to teach at another institution, and I explained some of the ideas I had for rethinking our Basic Writing program. She explained her work with Basic Writing at the institution and politely informed me that none of the plans I wanted to consider were feasible due to state mandates that stemmed from *Ayers v. Fordice*, a prominent desegregation case in higher education that changed the landscape of access and remediation in Mississippi. I dedicated myself to understanding *Ayers* and its influence on higher education in Mississippi, and it quickly became obvious that the *Ayers* case functioned similarly to CUNY's Open Admissions movement but with greater resistance from the community (the case was resolved in 2001 after twenty-six years in the court systems) and an even more explicit focus on race and the racial

makeup of Mississippi's institutions of higher education. The *Ayers* settlement led to changes in admissions requirements, summer developmental programs for students, and incentives for diversity that were false promises of repair and restitution to historically black colleges and universities. This background and history of what I now realize constituted the growth phase of Basic Writing programming at my institution encouraged me to begin creating what I hoped would be effective and resilient Basic Writing programming within and in response to these state mandates.

We piloted and fully implemented a stretch program based on Arizona State University's award-winning program. We prioritized writing and access through community, integrity, and instructor and student relationships. We also integrated a studio model of composition in order to abide by state requirements for students who score a 16 or below on the English index of the ACT. We were granted five hires based on our pilot data to ensure the success of the program moving forward. In 2012, we had six faculty lines devoted to the program; we lost half of those hires within three years to other programs. We were granted visiting positions in interim years—sometimes one, sometimes two. Currently, we have three permanent positions dedicated to the Basic Writing program. We dissolved the studio program in 2017 after the institution revised grading requirements for classes that were not listed as 100-level courses or above. We dissolved our stretch program in 2018 when we could no longer staff or schedule it effectively due to loss of faculty lines. We worked to retain the core values of the program, implementing common reads, extra-curricular activities, and writing celebrations for our students. None of this changed the fact that we were back where we started—a preparatory class most often taught by graduate instructors who were not adequately prepared to meet the needs of students. The class now included institutional credit, but despite ten years of successful movements forward, that was one of the only tangible institutional changes the program maintained.

In Fall 2019, we started again. We planned for intersessions. We designed and planned to pilot a version of supplemental coursework that would increase students' first-year writing course to four credit hours in hopes of designing a curriculum that would meet students' needs and provide them more time with their instructors but also be less dependent on institutional resources that could be removed at any time. As we were preparing for these new programmatic measures—and like every institution across the nation—we found ourselves attempting to do this work during a pandemic. Covid-19 brought additional layers of bureaucracy, safety concerns, and necessary

curricular changes that we could never have anticipated. Roadblocks and crises, everywhere we turned.

I share this narrative both because I am confident it will be familiar to readers and because, in retrospect, I recognize how each of the major shifts at our institution align with Rees' adaptive cycle. I have the advantage of looking back at the past twenty years of this program and providing a condensed narrative that fits the confines of a journal article, while most *JBW* narratives are focused on one specific phase of the adaptive cycle by necessity. At this point, however, I do not know if my ability to survey what seems to be an entire cycle of growth, adaptation, release, and reorganization is a blessing or a curse.

Conclusions; or Planning for Reorganization

In "The Human Nature of Unsustainability," Rees argues that human nature itself is what leads to our inability to sustain our global ecosystem. He posits that our tendency to "exploit all available resources" and our belief in perpetual growth "centered on unlimited economic expansion" means that as a species we are living unsustainably (198). The same can be said of institutions of higher education in America, including mine. Most regional educational ecosystems and their Basic Writing programs have seen complete adaptive cycles (and for many institutions more than one such cycle) that originated with diverse growth phases spurred by Open Admissions initiatives and witnessed varied release phases due to institutional and legislative priorities that privilege efficiency and monetary growth. We are at yet another intersection where financial exigency, crisis management, and attention to intersectional factors—particularly in terms of race—exist. Covid-19 has made that intersection more obvious, and it will require those invested in the success of at-risk students to contemplate the resilience of our programmatic structures. The pandemic may be a disruptive force that Basic Writing practitioners cannot ignore as we begin to think about our opportunities to reimagine and rebuild. Rees argues that we are at a "crucial juncture in human evolutionary history" and that survival and sustainability will require a shift from competition to cooperation—a new cultural narrative that directly contradicts the current modes of thinking about our educational system ("The Human" 202).

Indeed, there is a danger that in our efforts to think about our individual courses in the years to come—our efforts to provide engaging educational experiences through difficult combinations of online learn-

ing and face-to-face courses—that we will forfeit the opportunity to think creatively about how we might face this challenge and to design resilient Basic Writing programming that values the diverse student voices we have always claimed to embrace. In a recent article for *The Atlantic*, Michael D. Smith argues that the seeming stability of academic institutions over the past decades "has again bred overconfidence, overpricing, and an overreliance on business models tailored to a physical world" and he suggests that this long period of stability means we have "conflated our *model* with our *mission*" (emphasis original). Is it possible that many of us in Basic Writing studies have conflated our model—the way we deliver writing instruction to at-risk students—with our mission?

Resilience thinking tells us that the model is never stable. For example, agricultural pesticides eliminated crop-damaging insects, and then those insects developed immunity; fire control methods that were seen as the savior of national parks have led to even more wildfires; fisheries science methods that promised to create even more fish for consumption have caused collapse (Rees 26). These model technologies were successful in their early efforts, but the systems around them evolved leading to their failures. Perhaps the lack of resilience we see in our efforts to reach underserved student populations is due to our focus and allegiance to models—stretch models, ALP models, studio models—rather than to our missions.

I would venture to guess that most Basic Writing practitioners align in our missions. We hope to provide access to the college experience and the successes that can stem from our culture's privileging of higher education to as many students as possible, and we hope to do so in ethical ways that value students and their language practices. We hope to advocate for these students and for their places within our systems of education. We hope to become a "presence that creates visibility for our work and for the work of our students" (Bernstein 8). In order to meet these goals and help our students thrive in a pandemic-informed educational environment, we are going to have to rethink our allegiance to models, particularly when those models are more often than not devoted to efficiency of time and resources and not to diversity. Rather than focusing on models, we need to focus on our missions and on creating spaces for education that align with those missions.

We need to recognize that Open Admissions initiatives embraced recruiting diverse students and that at many institutions, Basic Writing programs still serve large percentages of minority students. And while I acknowledge the danger in assuming that our Basic Writing students are "of one-person type" (Ritter 13), I am also aware that over two-thirds of the

writers who place into the Basic Writing program at my institution identify as Black. And while this in and of itself is problematic and we have been grappling with the complex issues of race and socioeconomic status since we started our program, the Covid-19 crisis makes this data particularly damning. Many of the students we are trying to reach and to retain are students who are more likely to be affected by Covid-19 because of failed systems. And Basic Writing programs based in our pre-Covid models may become yet another system to fail these students. As Amy M. Patrick notes in "Sustaining Writing Theory," "maintaining diversity is key to sustaining healthy communities, and recognizing diversity is key to moving toward sustainable solutions." Patrick claims that "helping our students to understand the ways we and they perceive relationships to individuals, communities, the ecological, social, economic, and technological world around them—consciously or unconsciously—is thus crucial to our engagement with them as writers." And as Asao Inoue argues in *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies*, we must help students problematize their educational environments and *"[change] or [(re)create] the ecology so that it is fairer, more livable, and sustainable for everyone"* (emphasis original, 82). Our programs, then, must embrace diversity and create programming that more fully acknowledges the systemic racism underlying Basic Writing initiatives as a whole.

Rees suggests that planning for resilience and sustainability requires us to develop completely new ways of thinking and learning about our individual and global systems and doing so in ways that see change as inevitable. He notes that this is necessary for our survival. Our programmatic narratives illustrate the university's willingness to use crisis situations as an excuse to prioritize efficiency over diversity. Those of us who are dedicated to serving marginalized students will need to be strategic about the programs we build from this chaos. Survival and programmatic resilience in this new phase of higher education will require attention to our missions and an understanding that our students' lives are at stake. It will require that we acknowledge "how linguistic hierarchies and racial hierarchies are interconnected" (Baker-Bell 2). And although an examination of anti-racist pedagogies and programming is beyond the scope of this project, this is where, I would argue, we must begin our efforts to rethink our programs.

Redesigning our writing programs in this age of cultural divisiveness and pandemic-induced resource scarcity demands that we acknowledge how our programs may have contributed to the homogenization valued by our institutions. Rewriting that narrative means asking difficult questions. Who administers and teaches Basic Writing courses in our programs? Who are

our students and what does this tell us about biases of our programs? What roles do students have in determining their placement and their curriculum? What are our missions and what does our programmatic and institutional data tell us in terms of meeting the goals outlined by these missions? The current cultural and systemic crisis provides an opportunity for a new cultural narrative in writing instruction. It is time to disassemble and to build resilient programs that value the lives of our students.

Notes

1. See Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* and Mary Soliday's *The Politics of Remediation: Institutional and Student Needs in Higher Education* for the origins of this phrase.

Works Cited

Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Susanmarie Harrington. "Creation Myths and Flashpoints: Understanding Basic Writing through Conflicted Stories." *Exploring Composition Studies: Sites, Issues, Perspectives*, edited by Kelly Ritter and Paul Kei Matsuda. Utah State UP, 2012, pp. 13-35.

Baker-Bell, April. *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*. NCTE, 2020.

Baker, Tracey, and Peggy Jolly. "The Hard Evidence: Documenting the Effectiveness of a Basic Writing Program." *Journal of Basic Writing,* vol. 18, no. 1, 1999, pp. 27-39. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.1999.18.1.04.

Bartholomae, David. "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1993, pp. 4-21. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.1993.12.1.02.

Bernstein, Susan Naomi. "An Unconventional Education: A Letter to Basic Writing Practicum Students." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2018, pp. 6-34. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2018.37.1.02.

Center, Carole. "Representing Race in Basic Writing Scholarship." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2007, pp. 20-42. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2007.26.1.03.

Cooper, Marilyn M. "The Ecology of Writing." *College English,* vol. 48, no. 4, 1986, 364-75. doi.org/10.2307/377264.

Crouch, Mary Kay, and Gerri McNenny. "Looking Back, Looking Forward: California Grapples with Remediation." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2000, pp. 44-71. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2000.19.2.04.

Devet, Bonnie D. "Redefining the Writing Center with Ecocomposition." *Composition Forum,* vol. 23, 2011, compositionforum.com/issue/23/ redefine-wc-ecocomp.php.

Dobrin, Sidney I., and Christian R. Weisser. *Natural Discourse: Toward Eco-composition*. State U of New York P, 2002.

Fox, Tom. *Defending Access: A Critique of Standards in Higher Education*. Boynton/Cook, 1999.

Gillam, Alice M. "Writing Center Ecology: A Bakhtinian Perspective." *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1991, pp. 3-13. doi.org/10.7771/2832-9414.1223.

Glau, Greg. "Stretch at 10: A Progress Report on ASU's Stretch Program." *Journal of Basic Writing,* vol. 26, no. 2, 2007, pp. 4-50. doi.org/10.37514/ JBW-J.2007.26.2.03.

Goen, Sugie, and Helen Gillotte-Tropp. "Integrated Reading and Writing: A Response to the Basic Writing Crisis." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2003, pp. 90-113.

Gray-Rosendale, Laura. "Investigating Our Discursive History: *JBW* and the Construction of the Basic Writer's Identity." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1999, pp. 108-35. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.1999.18.2.07.

---. "Back to the Future: Contextuality and Construction of the Basic Writer's Identity in *JBW* 1999-2005." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2006, pp. 5-26. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2006.25.2.02.

Harrington, Susanmarie, and Linda Adler-Kassner. "'That Dilemma Still Counts': Basic Writing at a Political Crossroads." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1998, pp. 3-24. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.1998.17.2.02.

Horner, Bruce, and Min-Zhan Lu. *Representing the "Other": Basic Writers and the Teaching of Basic Writing*, NCTE, 1999.

Huckin, Thomas. "Context-Sensitive Text Analysis." *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*, edited by Gesa Kirsch and Patricia Sullivan. Southern Illinois UP, 1992, pp. 84-104.

Inoue, Asao B. *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future*. Parlor Press, 2015.

Kahn, Seth. "Towards an Ecology of Sustainable Labor in Writing Programs (and Other Places)" [Friday Plenary Address, July 17, 2015, Boise, ID CWPA]. *WPA: Writing Program Administration,* vol. 39, no. 1, 2015, pp. 109-21.

Lamos, Steve. *Interests and Opportunities: Race, Racism, and University Writing Instruction in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2011.

McCurrie, Matthew Killian. "Measuring Success in Summer Bridge Programs: Retention Efforts and Basic Writing." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2009, pp. 28-49. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2009.28.2.03.

Melzer, Dan. "Remedial, Basic, Advanced: Evolving Frameworks for First-Year Composition at the California State University." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2015, pp. 81-106. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2015.34.1.05.

Mlynarczyk, Rebecca, and Marcia Babbit. "The Power of Academic Learning Communities." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2002, pp. 71-89. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2002.21.1.06.

Ostergaard, Lori, and Elizabeth Allen. "From Falling Through the Cracks to Pulling Through: Moving from a Traditional Remediation Model toward a Multi-Layered Support Model for Basic Writing." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2016, pp. 23-62. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2016.35.1.03.

Otte, George, and Rebecca Mlynarczyk. *Basic Writing*. Parlor Press, 2010.

Owens, Derek. *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation*. NCTE, 2001.

Patrick, Amy. "Sustaining Writing Theory." *Composition Forum*, vol. 21, 2010. compositionforum.com/issue/21/sustaining-writing-theory.php.

Ratliff, Clancy. "The Adaptive Cycle: Resilience in the History of First-Year Composition." *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2019, pp. 283-300. doi.org/10.1215/15314200-7295951.

Rees, William, E. "Thinking 'Resilience.'" *The Postcarbon Reader: Managing the 21st Century's Sustainability Crisis*, edited by Richard Heinberg and Daniel Lerch, Watershed Media, 2010, pp. 25-40.

---. "The Human Nature of Unsustainability." *The Postcarbon Reader: Managing the 21st Century's Sustainability Crisis*, edited by Richard Heinberg and Daniel Lerch, Watershed Media, 2010, pp. 194-207.

---. "Why the Housing Crisis is Really about Globalization." *The Tyee*, 18 Jan. 2018. thetyee.ca/Opinion/2018/01/18/Housing-Crisis-Really-About-Globalization.

---. "The Earth is Telling Us We Must Rethink Our Growth Society." *Resilience*, 7 Apr. 2020.

---. "Coping with Covid-19, Acknowledging the Real Plague." *Solutions*, vol. 11, no. 2, May 2020.

Reid, Lynn. "Disciplinary Reading in Basic Writing Graduate Education: The Politics of Remediation in *JBW*, 1995-2015." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2018, pp. 6-34. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2018.37.2.02.

Rigolino, Rachel, and Penny Freel. "Re-Modeling Basic Writing." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2007, pp. 51-74. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2007.26.2.04.

Ritter, Kelly. *Before Shaughnessy: Basic Writing at Yale and Harvard, 1920-1960*, NCTE, 2009.

Rose, Mike. "The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University." *College English*, vol. 47, no. 4, 1986, 341-59. doi.org/10.2307/376957.

---. *Lives on the Boundary*. Penguin, 2005.

Severino, Carol. "An Urban University and Its Academic Support Program: Teaching Basic Writing in the Context of an Urban Mission." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1996, pp. 39-56. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.1996.15.1.04.

Shepley, Nathan. Environmental Flux and Locally Focused College Writing. *Composition Forum,* vol. 29, 2014.

Shor, Ira. "Our Apartheid: Writing Instruction and Inequality." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol.16, no. 1, 1997, pp. 91-104. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.1997.16.1.08.

Smith, Michael D. "Are the Universities Going the Way of CDs and Cable TV?" *The Atlantic*. 22 June 2020. theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/university-like-cd-streaming-age/613291.

Soliday, Mary. *The Politics of Remediation: Institutional and Student Needs in Higher Education*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2002.

Stanley, Jane. *The Rhetoric of Remediation: Negotiating Entitlements and Access to Higher Education*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2010.

Stevens, Scott. "Nowhere to Go: Basic Writing and the Scapegoating of Civil Failure*." Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2002, pp. 3-15. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2002.21.1.02.

Stygall, Gail. "Unraveling at Both Ends: Anti-Undergraduate Education, Anti-Affirmative Action, and Basic Writing at Research Schools." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1999, pp. 4-22. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.1999.18.2.02.

Sullivan, Patrick. "'Ideas about Human Possibilities': Connecticut's PA 12-40 and Basic Writing in the Era of Neoliberalism." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2015, pp. 44-80. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2015.34.1.04.

"Sustainability." *Oxford English Dictionary,* 3rd edition, 2012 (entry updated June 2018).

Tassoni, John Paul. "(Re)Membering Basic Writing at a Public Ivy: History for Institutional Redesign." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2006, pp. 96-124. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2006.25.1.06.

Tassoni, John Paul, and Cynthia Liewiecki-Wilson. "Not Just Anywhere, Anywhen: Mapping Change Through Studio Work." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2005, pp. 68-92. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2005.24.1.05.

Villanueva, Victor. "Subversive Complicity and Basic Writing Across the Curriculum." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2013, pp. 94-107. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2013.32.1.05.

Walker, Brian, and David Salt. *Resilience Thinking*, Island Press, 2006.

White, Edward. "The Importance of Placement and Basic Studies: Helping Students Succeed Under the New Elitism." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1995, pp. 74-85. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.1995.14.2.08.

Yood, Jessica. "Present-Process: The Composition of Change." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2005, pp. 4-25. doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2005.24.2.02.