Crafting Collaboricity: Harmonizing the Force Fields of Writing Program and Writing Center Work

One final lesson that identity movements have taught me: the need to recognize the false choice of assimilation and separation that so many movements and individuals who are attached/aligned with them must negotiate. -- Harry Denny, Facing the Center, p. 15

Here is the church, here is the steeple.  
Open the door, and there’s all the people.  
-- Children’s Nursery Rhyme

**Manifesto**

We want to advocate for permission not to build a grand program, or even a grand interaction of programs, as a given or premised end of Writing Center / Writing Program collaboration. Instead, we suggest that, at least in some cases, what a Writing Center director and a Writing Program director should be working on is each other—that instead of building programs, we might build people. In searching for how to make the work of the Writing Center and the Writing Program dovetail and mutually reinforce each other, we have instead discovered that in our institutional circumstance—and so we would submit that people in other institutions might inquire the same of their own places—what is more appropriate, valuable, and attainable is a particular kind of interaction among the leadership of programs that in fact need not and do not neatly or inevitably mesh.

In short, we find in our first two years of community-crafting that where we thought the point was the creation of a product, we have actually been working on an interaction, ways of being with and for each other.

And if we have been taken by surprise by the actual outcome of our efforts, we find as well that the means is unexpected and, for us, novel—enough so that we have to propose a new word for the blend of two expectations we brought to our work, collaboration and reciprocity.
Neither term, it turns out, sufficiently allows us to progress or is adequate for naming the interaction that serves as the “product” of our first year’s work at combining our efforts and finding the most productive relationship between our Writing Center and Writing Program.

**Our Story Begins (or, One Becomes Two . . .)**

In the fall of 2013, Montana State University (MSU) experienced an unprecedented moment of opportunity for crafting a vibrant community of writing extending out across the MSU campus. Historically, the Writing Program Administrator and Writing Center Director at MSU had been one and the same person, leaving little time to develop both programs fully or to develop many relationships across campus. Thanks to the efforts of our predecessor and new monies for a Writing Center space and a tenure track line for its director, now one had become two: two directors, two distinct programs. Unanticipated and unaddressed was the question of how these newly separated programs would best articulate what? A shared mission, perhaps? The relationship? with each other.

Although each of us received “new” programs, our “new” was built on a deep historical foundation. In the 1980s, the collaboration of our first-year composition instructors and Writing Center had been a short-lived but high-impact attempt to dramatically increase the efficiency of first-year composition instruction (as measured by number of students per faculty teaching hour). The effects of their failure reverberated around our campus for the next twenty-five years. Now we had revitalized our Writing Center and Writing Program toward a goal influencing writing and writing instruction campus-wide, creating two distinct entities that would need to negotiate the division and sharing of labor to that end. Left to the new administrators—the newly tenured and appointed Director of Composition (Doug) and the newly hired tenure-track Writing Center Director (Michelle)—was the design and implementation of this articulation. We had only met a
few times, and really had no idea what the relationship between our programs (never mind us!) would or should be. We had not talked about our visions for our programs; we had not talked about our past “relationships” with counterparts at other institutions. We did know, however, that our kairotic moment was and remains ripe with possibility for reimagining the relationship between our Writing Center and Writing Program.

Our opportunity was to craft that relationship by intentionally striving to make visible the fields of influence and possibility our respective programs create toward a shared project, which itself has not been easy to understand or express. What is it our two shops actually work on? The notion of “fields of influence” itself leads us to an unusual metaphor for describing the combined nature of our work: fields in the physics sense of “force fields,” like electromagnetic energy. Such a field is an energized space defined by the reach of the energizing force. The force, or energy, is everywhere within that space, lying “upon” it like a blanket. A given force field resonates or harmonizes with the objects it encounters. More than one field can occupy the same space at once, and those fields won’t necessarily interact with each other except when they act upon the same objects within both their reach. In other words, we can imagine “writing programs” and “writing centers” as projecting separate force fields over a campus. The work of each is defined by the nature of the force each exerts, with different shapes, coverages, and kinds of influence. The relationship between the two force fields depends on the points where both exert an influence on the same structures or people.

Given these past many months of discussion and work, we might say that our shared project is to foster writing and writing instruction at MSU by shaping the campus’s writing climate, by directly creating learning experiences with writing for the campus community, by increasing the campus’s awareness of the ubiquity of writing, by changing the ways people think
about writing and rhetoric (exposing cultural misconceptions and supplying more reasonable conceptions in their place), by advancing the study of writing, and by consulting with others across campus who share these goals. But when we first sat down in late summer 2013, we were far from such clarity about either ends or means.

The awareness of our opportunity was and continues to be mind-blowing, leaving us both excited and stumped. Just exactly what does this relationship mean? How do the two of us, working together and working independently, ensure that we enact our visions for our individual programs while navigating the realities of our institutional structures? And in true chicken-and-egg fashion, how are our visions for each of our individual programs shaped by the unfolding possibilities and realizations of our interaction?

This chapter reflects on our efforts to understand and to craft a relationship between the Writing Program and Writing Center that is both collaborative and reciprocal as we individually and interactively reach across campus to foster and sustain a vibrant community of writing, one that values sociocultural and rhetorical views of writing. We seek to make visible each program’s force field. We explore where our sites of interaction occur, and how we can make visible those interactions so that, by crafting reciprocal relations and harmonizing influences, all those within the force field—students, tutors, teachers, administrators—can both be shaped by and shape the community of writing at MSU.

**Physics and Attitudes**

To begin, we’ll offer a historical narrative on the articulation of our enterprises, some basic descriptions of their current structure, and a note on the intellectual commitments with which we each entered our work.
Our story of programmatic entwinement begins in the early 1980s, with John Ramage and John Bean engineering a FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education) funded collaboration in writing instruction at MSU that created first-year composition courses of sixty-six students in each section taught. Bean and Ramage (1983) described the Writing Center as the “hub” of the program, where both instructors and tutors held their office hours, and students could come to the Writing Center to meet with tutors at any point during the semester. Each instructor was assigned two undergraduate Writing Center tutors per section as teaching assistants. These tutors both led the collaborative writing groups (facilitating tasks created by the instructors), and offered “office hours” in the Writing Center for students to meet with them for one-on-one assistance. In addition, “many of the tutors [were] graders, but the roles,” Bean and Ramage (1983) argued, “were kept distinct” (p. 16-17). The Writing Center also dispatched these tutors/teaching assistants to classrooms across campus to give students in other majors brief presentations on argumentation and editing. At the time, the English Department (in which all this took place) had no graduate program.

Later in the 1980s, Ramage and Bean departed to teach elsewhere, FIPSE funding disappeared, and the program floundered intellectually even as inertia carried its skeleton into the early 1990s. A number of the undergraduate tutors / teaching assistants went on to earn MA degrees elsewhere and came back to MSU, now working as adjunct writing instructors in courses of thirty-three students per section (the university had cut their size in half with the disappearance of the FIPSE funding). Intellectual leadership in composition shifted to the Writing Center, directed by Mark Waldo, as the Center “served” course-based writing instruction that had no “program” or “director” itself. In the early 1990s, Waldo, too, departed MSU. Now with no directorship or tenure-line leadership, the Center lost its space, and its remains were
spread among three small rooms (office, tutoring space, and small computer lab) on different floors in different wings of another building. The director was not replaced; the Center was run by one of the former tutor / assistants (now an adjunct instructor) as a .22 FTE teaching load. In the mid-1990s, a new linguistics tenure-line hire was tasked with overseeing the adjunct faculty teaching composition courses, with oversight of the adjunct running the Writing Center (and its flagging peer tutor program) folded into the same job.

The mid-1990s brought one additional complication that would shape the conditions in which Michelle and Doug have undertaken their work: an MA program in English. It was important to the MA’s designers that graduate teaching assistants, as instructors of record in first-year composition courses their first semester, teach only one course per semester. To work within the English department’s budget—which also continued to fund the Writing Center—GTAs were assigned four hours per week of tutoring in the Writing Center. The funding for this aspect of GTAships would come from the bespoke peer-tutoring program that had been maintained in the Writing Center, which would now be cut. From this point, about half the Center’s tutoring would be conducted by GTAs and the other half (as had been the case for some time) by professional tutors, some of whom, again, were those original undergraduate tutors/assistants who now taught as adjunct faculty. For some of those professional tutors, the Writing Center provided additional work and therefore income in those semesters when course assignments were lower.

This stasis continued into the mid-2000s: first-year writing courses of thirty-three students per course, a tenure-track faculty WPA (at that time Kirk Branch) directing both composition and the Writing Center, day-to-day functions in the Writing Center handled by a coordinator/adjunct faculty member, with tutoring conducted by GTAs and professional tutors
in a decidedly cramped and user-unfriendly space. Given the difficulties of a single faculty member doing two full-time jobs and the challenges facing the project of writing instruction at MSU as a whole, Branch focused on a particular set of problems—advocating for smaller class sizes, developing a strong GTA preparation program, and advocating for a strong increase in Writing Center funding and an improved, useable physical space that defragmented the Center’s various components. This advocacy hit stone walls for years, until an enrollment explosion brought a sharp increase in funding and attention to student support services in 2010.

By coincidence, this first wave of funding happened while Branch was abroad for a year and Doug Downs was interim Director. Doug, while “not a Writing Center guy,” did know enough to use the funding to restart the peer tutoring program taken from the Center fifteen years earlier by the graduate program, as well as to hire an administrative assistant who rejuvenated the Center’s tutoring efforts and increased its visibility on campus. Also funded that year was a consultation by Michele Eodice, for which Branch had been advocating for years. Eodice’s report offered a tangible vision and set of priorities with which Branch, upon his return in 2011, was able to leverage significant funding, including a tenure-track faculty line for a Writing Center Director. In fall 2012, the Center moved from its dark, closet-like cubicle room into a renovated, windowed space across the hall, hired a new tutor development coordinator at .5 FTE, and began a search for a new director. Michelle’s 2013 hire as a tenure-track Writing Center Director brought the final piece of a “new Writing Center” into play.

To put it mildly, excitement about the possibilities for the Writing Center, on our part and on the part of the faculty within the department and peer tutors, has been high. As currently configured, the Writing Center is made up of a tenure-lined Writing Center Director (Michelle), tasked with developing both the internal vision for the Writing Center and partnerships across the
campus, a tutor development coordinator who is tasked with the training, hiring and supervising of peer tutors, roughly twenty undergraduate peer tutors and nine graduate teaching assistants, and a professional tutor hired by our Office of International Programs to support ESL writers. The primary model for our tutoring continues to be one-on-one meetings, but Michelle has incorporated her work in writing studios (Kovach, Miley & Ramos [2011] and Miley [2012]), expanding the Center’s work to include writing groups both attached to particular courses and open to interested students. Our tutor development coordinator has worked with Michelle to develop a program for tutors that includes workshops, mentoring, and “peer pods” (small discussion groups). With Doug’s help, Michelle has provided workshops for faculty through the Center for Faculty Excellence, and is expanding the Center’s work across campus.

And what of the Writing Program? From the same shared history, as Branch has rotated out of the WPA role in 2013 and Doug has rotated in, we can say that what we casually call “the Writing Program” is an ill-defined beast. It might accurately be called “the First-Year Writing Program” in reference to its central task, the teaching of two traditional, general-education (gen-ed) college composition courses, WRIT 101 and WRIT 201 (College Writing I and II). The university requires one Core (gen-ed) writing course of all students, WRIT 101, while individual majors may require a second course, WRIT 201. However, the Writing Program also handles WRIT 221 (Technical Writing) and any coursework stemming from WAC or WID initiatives (all in the planning stages), taking the program out of a first-year or gen-ed-only role. Historically and currently, all Writing Program faculty and courses are members of and budgeted through the Department of English, as is Doug’s administrative position as Director of Composition. While tenure-line English faculty very occasionally teach Writing Program courses, most sections are taught by non-tenure-track (adjunct) faculty and GTAs from the English MA program. The
Director of Composition is tasked with all instructor development, which includes GTA preparation as new graduate students immediately begin classroom teaching and Writing Center tutoring, and adjunct instructor development, some of whom have been teaching writing longer than Doug and Michelle. GTAs are relatively constrained in their pedagogical approaches, while adjuncts faculty are entirely unconstrained. Given the resulting breadth of pedagogies in writing courses—and the fact that one of Doug’s first moves was to ratify drafts of new WRIT 101 learning outcomes and a first-ever program mission statement—it is fair to say that the Writing Program had historically lacked curricular coherence. In fact, the Program had essentially never been built as a program.

Two other administrative structures bear on efforts toward programmatic coherence. First, Doug consults with a seven-member Composition Committee, again located in the Department of English, which includes the Director of Composition, Director of the Writing Center, two adjunct members, one GTA member, one other tenure track writing faculty member, and one librarian. And second, the Director of Composition sits on the university’s Core (general ed) steering committee and chairs the subcommittee on the Writing Core.

We now return to our discussion and use of metaphorical force fields: There is obvious overlap between our programs. At the very least, we share GTAs and WAC efforts. As we began discussing the relationships between our programs, we realized that both of us came to our new positions with a commitment to transparency and visibility. Doug had initiated a Writing About Writing curricula (Downs and Wardle [2007], Downs [2010]), one based on rendering transparent to students scholarly conversations about writing, enabling students to build more mature and effective conceptions of writing. Michelle brought a vision of writing center work as providing an environment that makes visible the institutional and instructional forces
surrounding students’ writing processes. In her work, she draws from Soja’s (1996) theorizing of “Thirdspace . . . a place of critical exchange where the . . . imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives” (p. 5). As Doug works within the classroom to make the work of writing transparent to students, Michelle works in the Writing Center to make the work of writing transparent to faculty and administrators, each acknowledging that they are working against “set” expectations of their programs. For both, transparency provides agency to all those within the activity of writing, creating an environment where teachers and learners of writing can positively shape and be shaped by those in relation. We see both our programs and our work as administrators as having what the authors of GenAdmin (Charlton, Charlton, Graban, Ryan, & Stolley, 2011) identify as “activist potential within and beyond our programs” (p. 10). The Writing Center and the Writing Program are sites for “creative, intellectual” work, work that can “catalyze personal, programmatic, and institutional change” (p. 10). And, significantly for our conceptualization of our collaborative craft, we both identify as GenAdmins: we see our roles as writing administrators “not as a position that we might hold” but rather “as a way of being – a perspective from which we see, think, decide, and act, regardless of whether we are the WPA or not” (p. 66)—a “coalescence of conviction and artistic action” (p. 10).

Coming to our work with similar values and goals, cooperation and collaboration between our programs seemed not only necessary but also obvious. We knew (know) we are in a moment that does not come very often – a moment when re-scripting is possible, and we want to use our new script to best blend our resources in order to make the most massive and positive impact on writing on the MSU campus. So we began meeting and discussing what that collaboration looks like: how do our force fields blanket the writing community on the MSU campus? What coverage does the Writing Program have? The Writing Center? And where is their
overlap? However, as we sat excitedly talking about all the possibilities of our new script, the institutional structures in place long before we got here began to rear up and shape our understandings of the realities of our partnerships.

**History Lesson: When Two is Not One Plus One...**

Four months into our new directing adventure, our programs experienced a confrontational moment that, looking back, may have been avoided had we been more attuned to the internal workings of our institution. Remember those undergraduate tutor/TAs who earned MA degrees and became professional tutors and adjunct instructors? Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the English department and WPA’s philosophy were that adjuncts were too poorly paid to justify offering them professional development. There were no adjunct faculty meetings or development opportunities offered by the WPA or department, no performance reviews, no inclusion of adjunct faculty in department deliberations about writing instruction. So, in 2012, adjunct faculty started their own professional development, creating a series of monthly reading-discussion meetings they call “First Fridays.” The adjuncts select a reading in composition theory that interests them and meet in the Writing Center to discuss it. This effort has been spearheaded by one of the longest serving adjuncts who also has been in the role of student-tutor/teaching assistant, by a second adjunct who is also the Writing Center’s tutor development coordinator, and by a third adjunct who served as a WPA at UC-Santa Barbara in the 1990s.

With excitement bubbling throughout the program about the potentials offered by the new Writing Center and its PhD-prepared Director and the new WPA, the three leaders of First Fridays invited Michelle and Doug to speak at a First Friday session about their visions for the future of writing instruction at MSU. We enthusiastically agreed, even though we felt we as yet had no such vision. Through our work during the fall semester, we were already sensing that our
way forward did not lie in the neat narratives offered by typical notions of collaboration, but we could not yet say an alternative. We entered the meeting, then, with some givens that we had not yet articulated outside of our own personal conversations.

The adjunct faculty entered the meeting with their own givens, which we discovered centered on precisely the kinds of Writing Center / Writing Program relationships and activities that we two were already by premise ruling out. At no point did we have any intention of making the Writing Center a service port to the Writing Program as in the 1980s. And the new Writing Center’s grant money predicated peer tutoring that would phase out professional tutoring. But as it turns out, the model from the 1980s that we have described as an entwinement of the Writing Center and Writing Program was precisely what our adjunct faculty who were there in the 1980s had been missing! For these adjuncts, the Writing Center had provided power and security that the new Center, with its move to “true” peer tutoring and conceptualization as an alternative learning environment for students apart from writing courses, could no longer offer. Just a few minutes into that First Friday, it became clear to everyone in the room that our shared thinking about the articulation between Writing Center and Writing Program was vastly different from the adjuncts’ desires.

We might as well have set off a bomb.

In “The Rhetorician as Agent of Social Change,” Cushman (1996) warns that for the activist, access to communities must be “charted, recharted, and respected. . . . we must chart the internal workings of the institution in order to see the ways we might, or might not, fit in” (p. 21-22). To illustrate the necessary mapping that comes with activist work, Cushman describes a moment when her assumption of access to a community ended in confrontation. She had spent an afternoon chatting and playing cards with a group of people within the community she was
working with, one member of which was Anthony, Lucy’s boyfriend. Sometime during the afternoon, Lucy, one of Cushman’s research subjects, called Cushman aside and confronted her about Cushman’s banter with Anthony. In Lucy’s mind, Cushman had been “taking up” with Anthony. Cushman, an outsider assuming insider access, had not recognized the cultural norms within Lucy’s community and had overstepped the boundaries of the community without knowing it (p. 20-21). Looking back, our First Friday confrontation was very much like Cushman’s (albeit Cushman’s sounds less explosive). Working from the assumption that our programs were “new”, we had not fully respected or charted the community that was a part of the making of our programs. We had not fully considered that “we” were not our programs, that our visions for our programs are enacted by others. Without them, we cannot fully craft our community.

In the light of our understanding of the nature of our two ventures as force fields, what we have had to work on this year is understanding how we might best deploy them in relation to each other—how to organize our activism. On what model do we configure ourselves? One road not taken was attempting an in-effect seamless merging of efforts in a “boundaryless” articulation of our two enterprises. At first, we might have understood ourselves as trying to “mesh” our individual efforts to collaborate on a unified goal and singular end. Now, we think something else.

**The Problem with a “Collaborative” Relationship**

The term “collaborative” is a key principle to describe work in both our programs. Writing Centers are founded on the idea of collaboration. One does not have to think too hard about either of our disciplines to know that the concept of collaboration is foundational. We can reach back in our history to works like Lunsford’s (1991) “Collaboration, Control, and the Idea
of a Writing Center,” or look to the present to the description of “The Resistant WPA as
Collaborator” in GenAdmin (Charlton, et al., 2011, p. 51). Our disciplines pride themselves on
our collaborations, particularly as we work with students and within WAC/WID partnerships. In
a collaboration, forces work together to create a shared product (see Figure 1.1):

Fig. 1.1 Collaboration

There is something wonderful about the idea of collaboration, of all forces working
together toward the same end. These are spaces of openness and opportunity. In fact, Eodice
(2003) calls on Writing Centers to demand collaboration, to work towards “boundarylessness”:

[P]rofessional and social networks are already formed and formidable within the
writing center community; these are powerful and productive and ferry our
goodies back and forth to each other, but to go beyond this we need to become a
“smart mob” – a homegrown initiative that utilizes our workaday knowledge to
reach others in ways that can impact policy, influence administrative and
institutional leaders, and help us grow leaders from among our writing center
fellows. We can and should demand collaboration and continue to work toward
boundarylessness, even with the knowledge that these actions will never be fully
accomplished, completed. (p. 129).

But there is also a danger in boundarylessness, a danger in focusing on the shared product
rather than the individual forces working toward a common goal. Without recognition of the
unique and individual force fields both partners bring, the collaborative possibilities can quickly
move from two working together to an unequal power relationship, like that of buyer to seller, or
academic unit to student service. Those in Writing Center work have noted the danger of becoming the “outsourced” for others teaching writing. For example, Pemberton’s (1995) questioning of the marriage between WID and Writing Centers speaks to the danger of the identity or values of one partner being ignored or absorbed into the other in a collaborative relationship. Often Writing Center partners in WAC/WID use the excuse that they “don’t have time to teach writing” and therefore partner with the Writing Center because of their own insecurity about teaching writing. And Writing Centers agree to accept the identity of being the “experts” in teaching writing because it gives them “a sense of authority and expertise” (p. 120).

The same may be said of Writing Programs. Both disciplines, with “service” as key to their identity within the university, run the risk of losing their identity in their desire to gain value through collaboration.

The somewhat conflicted history of relationships between Writing Programs and Writing Centers suggests that the dangers of boundarylessness may also exist when our programs collaborate as well. For instance, Nelson and Garner (2011) provide the examples of their Writing Center to argue for horizontal organizational structures across the university. Conceptualized as the “central support system for the expanded university writing requirements” (p. 12), the Writing Center collaborates with many across campus. They have also instigated a system whereby faculty in English are appointed as tutors to “ease” some of their teaching load. The Writing Center has thus become “two kinds of a horizontally structured center: students (and a few staff and faculty) across the disciplines [come] for assistance with their writing at all levels, and faculty across the disciplines [consult] with the director and staff on the teaching of writing” (p. 12). Eventually, their Writing Center fused with the teaching and learning center, detaching from the English Department all together.
Nelson and Garner (2011) describe the horizontal relationships that they have established with those across campus as strong, positive collaborations. But the description of their relationship with the English Department suggest that the “boundarylessness” with the rest of the university has come at the cost of relationships within their home department. They note:

The director has little or no influence on the staff assigned to the Writing Center from semester to semester, and most of the department’s literature or creative writing graduate students have little professional contact with the director and slight desire to understand writing center theory or practice. Perhaps the most negative feature of occasional cool relationships with the English department is the impact on the Writing Center staff, who sometimes struggle to validate writing center work in their promotion and review materials. These kinds of workforce issues, which result from the move away from a department’s support, are most certainly serious ones. (p. 24-25).

In our own institutional history, the unfortunate merging of Writing Program and Writing Center left our institution with no writing program and an ineffective Writing Center that many saw as simply an adjunct to first-year composition. Despite the attempts of our predecessors to develop an “efficient system” of teaching first year composition through an “experimental program” that relied on “a progressive writing center, a coordinated sequence of assignments, an elaborate network of upper division tutors, and a commitment to collaborative learning” (Bean & Ramage, 1983, p. 15), each program collapsed in its attempt to be “collaborative.” The writing program, trying to satisfy the tenure track faculty by reducing teaching loads, and upper administration by increasing class size, attempted to be “efficient.” In our minds, teaching writing is not an enterprise in efficiency. The Writing Center, placed at the “hub” of the
experimental program, attempted to be an extension of composition rather than a truly separate, alternative learning environment. Our programmatic ancestors must have recognized the danger of their model as they wrote, “Although Ken Bruffee may understandably cringe at the way we have bastardized his collaborative learning model, we may yet have a substantial impact in promoting collaborative learning across the disciplines at a large university” (Bean & Ramage, 1983, p. 26).

Our programs, while ultimately sharing the mission of writing community on campus, have separate and unique spheres of influence (force fields) that may at times be oppositional or at least not complementary forces. If we do not recognize our unique modes and spheres of influence and if we do not consciously name the political aspect of our relationship, our force fields can be absorbed into each other rather than harmonizing with one another, each allowing the other the greatest impact. We need, then, a term beyond “collaboration” to articulate our desired interaction.

**A Turn To Reciprocity**

Drawing from activist research, scholars in our discipline have turned to “reciprocity” as the term that recognizes the political in a relationship while emphasizing the “working together” of the two parties. With the mathematical relationships of opposing but complementary forces, and the political connotations that are also inherent in the term, reciprocity provides a counter to the limitations of “boundarylessness” that can occur in collaboration. Using Bourdieu, Cushman (1996) develops the concept of reciprocity as being a give-and-take relationship. Without a return of the gift, domination or oppression can result. “Reciprocity includes an open and conscious negotiation of the power structures reproduced during the give-and-take interactions of the people involved on both sides of the relationship,” she writes. “A theory of reciprocity, then
frames this activist agenda with a self-critical, conscious navigation of this intervention” (p. 16). The individual power of each force field stays distinct; reciprocity occurs in the interactions between (see Figure 1.2):

[Insert Figure 1.2]

Figure 1.2 Reciprocity

Building from Cushman, Powell and Takayoshi (2003) suggest that in a reciprocal relationship, all entities benefit from the internal growth occurring through the “contextualized process of negotiation and renegotiation” (p. 396) in their transactions. Reciprocity is always possible, but only through intentional openness to transformation do our programs mutually benefit. Powell and Takayoshi note that reciprocity is not always easy to achieve. Without the awareness of the reciprocal relationship, researchers can easily fall into “missionary activism: ‘intervention without invitation’” (p. 395), or even into a “collaborative” relationship that is not necessarily “mutually beneficial” (p. 396). We submit that our First Friday experience, during which we were advocating for reciprocity between our programs, fell into the category of “intervention without invitation” (p. 395). We had not asked adjunct faculty how they felt about our visions, about their perceptions of changes we were making and how such affected their experiences.

As a guiding principle, reciprocity provides us a recognition of the power structures in our relationship, as well as the politics involved. In addition, Powell and Takayoshi’s emphasis on the “recognition/assertion/insistence” that “building relationships among humans” (p. 399) is at the heart of reciprocity has become essential to the crafting of our interactions. But in theorizing reciprocity, scholars like Powell and Takayoshi, and Cushman, are theorizing a
relationship *between researcher and subject*. While we recognize the activist potential within our programs, and we are both researchers, neither of us is the object and/or subject of each other’s study. Our relationship is, in fact, one of equal collaboration between two writing program administrators. Although we do desire recognition of the spaces our force-fields do not intersect, we also value a shared end: the desire for a vibrant community of writing across the MSU campus. So, while the principle of reciprocity comes close to describing our interactions, we find ourselves wanting a term to more holistically capture our navigation of our spaces.

**Collaboricity – Crafting an Ethic of Care**

When we began our conversations about crafting our collaborative relationship, we thought that we would come to a list of shared projects. Instead we have come to a principle to guide our work together. By joining the terms “collaboration” with “reciprocity” to reach “collaboricity,” we acknowledge that we have a shared goal and product—the writing community at Montana State University—at the same time that our forces are not one but two. While our force fields at times overlap, they do exist independently. Through our overlapping fields, and our shared goal of a campus writing community, our interactions affect not only each other’s programs but also the people within each of the fields of influence (see Figure 1.3):

[Insert Figure 1.3]

**Figure 1.3 Collaboricity**

In combining the terms “reciprocity” and “collaboration,” we choose to recognize with Harry Denny (2010) that we do not (cannot) choose between separation and assimilation. We are acknowledging that our programs exist both independently and interdependently. The energy of our force fields affects both of our programs, and thus the people who constitute them, but do not
ultimately define the other. Like the authors of *GenAdmin*, we require an “active and creative ethic of caring—caring for others not according to how we want to care for ourselves, but according to how they need or desire to be cared for” (Charlton, et al., 2011, p. 57) as we navigate and negotiate the crafting of our spaces. Collaboricity for us best describes our principle for the dynamic movement between, within, and surrounding our programs.

Central to our understanding of collaboricity is the necessity of listening—listening to one another, to those within our programs, to our students, and to those across our institution. Our weekly meetings at the local coffee shop, scheduled initially so that we would set aside time to do the shared “work” of our programs, have become for us a time of sharing, venting, questioning, acknowledging. Our coffee shop meetings have become our “spaces to dialogue” (Charlton, et. al., 2011, p. 59). And in our space of dialogue we open space for other voices, for the voices of the adjunct instructors, of the graduate teaching assistants, the tutors, the students, the faculty across campus, the administrators—the voices of those whom our programs touch. We have found that through our dialogue, we have opened ourselves to being more empathetic.

In theorizing empathy, the authors of *GenAdmin* note that “empathy seems to require much more than an enhanced understanding to understand one another; rather empathy requires an enhanced understanding of how we position ourselves as interpreters and participants in ongoing experiences” (Charlton et al., 2011, p. 57). Through collaboricity, we have found ourselves better able to practice empathy as “interpreters and participants.”

In addition to the importance of listening and empathy, we have found acknowledgement of expertise necessary to our enterprise. Doug has never wanted to be a Writing Center scholar. Equally, Michelle has no interest in directing a Writing Program. Yet there is mutual respect and acknowledgement of one another as administrators, scholars and experts *within our shared*
discipline. Our shared expertise, our respect of one another as colleagues, allows us to advocate for one another and for one another’s programs, and to strategize with one another with respect and care for the other. Collaboricity allows us to acknowledge where our force fields intersect, and where they may be complementary but non-aligned forces. Collaboricity allows us to find spaces of independence in our interactions while “locating a position, conviction, or ideological state in which we can dwell together for a time, long enough to accomplish some objectives” (Charlton et al., 2011, p. 59). And collaboricity allows us to focus on a shared vision of the “creation of new possibilities without glossing over the situatedness (and sometimes uncomfortable conditions) from which they are born” (Charlton et. al., 2011, p. 177). Collaboricity, as our guiding principle, harmonizes our force fields as we engage in our ongoing work of community-crafting.¹

*Here is the Church, Here is the Steeple.* . .

Our first two years together have been full, productive, stressful, anxiety producing, exciting, and intensely hopeful. Brought together because of our programmatic roles, we have been reminded that the nursery rhyme we learned as children offers wisdom for our own work. Institutions and academies are not the spaces we build or the programs we create, but rather they are the people who are within those spaces and programs. And though, like in a family, we may have all been “born into” these spaces, we cannot simply coexist but must grow and develop with one another in order for our programs (and thus the people who make up our programs) to thrive.

Our first years have been ones of recognizing that our work is, in some ways, one another. We have been reflecting most recently on the nature of our writing program / writing center interactions as, fundamentally, a happy meeting of “particular” people who seem
committed as much to each other’s welfare—and therefore to the welfare of our respective enterprises—as we are to our “own” programs. There is, apparently, some way in which we find ourselves fellow travelers who want to take-care-of each other in the way of taking care of “our work.” Individuals, of course, are not replicable, and there isn’t any good way to problem-solve by saying, simply, “get better people” or “get people who care for/about/with/through you.” Rather, we find ourselves needing to think about how we can build structures that foster the good people (or the good in people) when they appear.

It’s touchy, talking about people, particularly those who, through their own temperaments and commitments, we find working against our own needs and professional directions. Understanding our interaction through collaboricity helps us to stay centered on the work we do, finding those structures that do help us foster positive community crafting, that help us to harmonize the forces of our programs so as to most effectively craft a vibrant community of writing across the MSU campus. As we continue to craft, collaboricity reminds us to focus on what it truly is all about: the people.

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Postscript from the editors

Applying the lens of complex collaboration – In this chapter, structure plays a central role, even as it does in complex collaboration theories. In Mankin, Cohen, and Fitzgerald’s (2004, p. 8) identification of specific hallmarks of successful complex collaborations, they include “organization, structure, people and relationships, and collaborative process” (p. 7). Miley and Downs recognize the importance and need to understand their particular historical structure even...
as they build their own working structure of collaboricity. In doing this, both bring a keen sense of lateral skills and have understood the need to balance “a performance focus with concern for people” (Mankin & Cohen, 2004, p. 32). Thus, they seem to have achieved a path for sustainability from which not only they, but their successors, may benefit. As they implement their shared vision of collaboricity, they are building what Eddy refers to as organizational capital, which are the “accessible resources based at the home institution,” that are essential to fostering long-term sustainment of projects and outcomes (62-73) – not the least of which are the individuals whom Miley and Downs have identified as being central to their structure.

**Practical Implications**—Miley and Downs coin a word, “collaboricity,” to represent a new way of thinking about collaborations and issues of reciprocity between writing centers and writing programs. This willingness to step outside the box, to take into account individual directors’ areas of expertise and personality traits leads to novel ways of re-envisioning program administration based on a social structure rather than traditional programmatic ones. The bedrock of this approach lies in understanding both the history and profiles of predecessors associated with existing programs. In seeking ways to “rescript” the stories of individual programs into one of “shared force fields,” Miley and Downs offer a novel model for both moving beyond silo models of administration, meeting the needs of students from across the university, AND avoiding a bland, ineffective, and “boundaryless” monolithic program that serves institutional desires and reinforces traditional turf wars.
References


Miley, M. (2012). The mediating lens of the online writing studio. *Academic Quarterly*


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1 Our imagery of force fields resonates with Ratcliffe’s (2005) theorizing of identification. In *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*, Ratcliffe invokes the image of “shared energy fields” to represent a new understanding of identification that “draws from Burke’s consubstantiality via second-nature substances as well as from Fuss’s discursive identifications and disidentifications” (p. 69).