



Introduction

Chris W. Gallagher, Deborah Minter, and Shari J. Stenberg

This special issue assembles a diverse array of scholars to think through the timely question of what resilience means to our profession. What would it look like, and what would it take, to forge a resilient discipline, major or program or curriculum, writing center, pedagogy? How do local contexts shape the possibilities and limitations of resilient practices? Who reaps the rewards of resilience, and who shoulders its burdens? Is resilience even a viable and appropriate goal? If not, what are some alternative formulations?

These questions take on a particular poignancy in what feels to many of us like an age of political, social, and natural disaster. Even as the foundations of democracy are under assault in Washington and in state houses, our universities are being reshaped by management practices rooted in corporate efficiency: strategic planning, cost cutting, outcomes assessment, and labor casualization. The humanities are under particularly acute pressure, as they face declining enrollments, institutional and cultural scrutiny (and often skepticism) about their market value, and a dire job market. Those of us who teach and study literature, language, writing, and culture are—as usual and unhappily—at the vanguard of these developments.

We see the articles collected here as an extension of important work inaugurated by Nancy Welch and Tony Scott's landmark collection *Composition in the Age of Austerity* (2016), which clearly demonstrates that our pedagogy and our research are being reshaped in fundamental ways by austerity measures under neoliberal economics. Following Welch and Scott, we take *austerity* to mean policies, practices, and ideological strategies through which

the public sector is required to shoulder the burden of difficult economic times (through budget cuts, program elimination, labor casualization), even as economic, cultural, and political resources are transferred into and concentrated in private hands.

Austerity measures are a key component of today's neoliberal economic regime, which pairs market fundamentalism—what Welch and Scott (2016: 4) call a “leave-it-to-the-market” principle—with the privatization of public services and spaces. The authors in this issue of *Pedagogy* share these understandings with the editors of and contributors to that book, even as they have their own unique takes on how these concepts shape and take shape in local contexts. And of course, our authors are also writing under a new national political regime—one that does not break entirely from the three-plus decades of neoliberalism but inflects it in freshly disastrous ways.

While the articles collected here advance critical understandings of our dark era, they also provide cause for hope. This hope stems from their examples and models of “resilient” practices that hold out promise not just for survival or riding out the status quo but for resistance, critique, and transformation.

English studies is perhaps not an obvious site for theorizing resilience. When we think of resilience, we might conjure infrastructural responses to natural disaster, climate change, coastal erosion, water management, cyber threats, and the like—challenges we associate with STEM disciplines (though we would argue that that they also have human dimensions). Or we might think of the now ubiquitous popular psychology concept of “grit” (Duckworth 2016), which frames resilience in personal, individual terms. Some of our authors draw on STEM work; most are sharply critical of notions of resilience as a personal attribute or panacea; all theorize resilience—albeit from different perspectives—as a social and cultural phenomenon. Collectively, the articles make a persuasive case that those of us who teach and study literature, language, writing, and culture have important things to say about resilience.

While their approaches to resilience vary, the contributors here collectively follow Elizabeth A. Flynn, Patricia Sotirin, and Ann Brady (2012: 7) in conceptualizing resilience as rhetorical, relational, and situational. Several of the articles explicitly advance partnerships and collaborations as important vehicles for enacting resilience. In her harrowing account of the twelve-day faculty lockout at Long Island University, Deborah Mutnick argues for the political necessity of unionizing, galvanizing colleagues, and

forming alliances with students. Brett Griffiths and Darin Jensen propose collective practices to support departmental and disciplinary resilience in English departments located in two-year colleges. Margaret K. Willard-Traub draws our attention to what faculty and administrators can learn from multilingual students about listening to and working with diverse others. Across the issue, writers call for enacting resilience with others in ways that are particular to local contexts but at the same time adaptable across a range of institutional sites.

While the authors in this issue share a disavowal of resilience as personal grit, they assume a range of theoretical stances to offer nuanced conceptions of resilience that better serve their students, their colleagues, and their communities. In so doing, they draw on theories from across fields and disciplines, including ecology, community planning, feminist rhetoric, and African American art. Drawing on Flynn, Sotirin, and Brady's feminist rhetorical resilience as well as Sara Ahmed's work on diversity, Allison D. Carr and Laura R. Micciche theorize "feminist microresilience." For them, resilience involves adaptability, responsiveness to vulnerability and risk, and transformation, which they explore in relation to the development of two student-focused projects at their institutions. Clancy Ratliff also frames resilience as an adaptive process, analyzing the "erosion" of first-year writing through ecologist William Rees's four-stage adaptive cycle. In an economy where dual enrollment, competency-based learning, and prior learning assessment diminish the demand for first-year writing, Ratliff suggests that first-year writing may have entered the "release phase," or system collapse. For Ratliff, resilience means attending to inevitable, ever-present change; she leaves us with ideas for how compositionists can move from collapse to reorganization, where growth and creativity are possible.

Several of the authors challenge or qualify the concept of resilience. In "Resilience and Resistance in Writing Center Theory and Practice," Neal Lerner warns that if resilience is considered a return to a normal state, we need be aware of how "normal" can function to oppress. Building on the resistant stance that writing centers take in relation to the institutions that house them, Lerner calls for an interplay between resistance and more complex notions of resilience. Similarly, Mutnick, while not dismissing resilience outright, points to the "contradictions of resilience," reminding us that resilience can be used to normalize labor exploitation. For Mutnick, any notion of resilience must be accompanied by possibilities for resistance and social transformation. Collie Fulford attends to the limitations of "neoliberal"

resilience, which requires accommodation of austerity mandates, and she argues that social actors can employ both accommodationist and subversive resilience at once.

A crucial, related insight that emerges from this issue is that the burdens of austerity—and therefore the responsibility for resilience (and resistance)—are unevenly distributed. In “Inequitable Austerity: Pedagogies of Resilience and Resistance in Composition,” Katie Kalish, Holly Hassel, Cassandra Phillips, Jennifer Heinert, and Joanne Baird Giordano demonstrate this dynamic on a broad scale, tracing the inequitable distribution of austerity measures across their statewide university system and examining these measures’ effects on underrepresented students and contingent faculty. Fulford turns our attention to historically black colleges and universities, showing how they have suffered disproportionately during the post-2008 economic crisis and critiquing public mandates for students and faculty alike to “do more with less” by relying on “grit.” Kalish et al., Fulford, and Mutnick issue clear warnings about the damaging effects of treating resilience as an austerity “fix,” which places disproportionate burdens on particular individuals and groups while obscuring the material and social conditions at play.

No single journal issue can cover all aspects of, or capture all perspectives on, a topic as complex as resilience. That said, we are pleased to feature a set of articles that are diverse not only in theoretical perspectives but also in methodologies—you will find in these pages qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies. Our authors also bring us into diverse sites, including two-year colleges; a liberal arts college; a range of public and private universities, including a historically black university; and state higher education systems. They locate their thinking in first-year writing classrooms and curricula, graduate curricula and cocurricula, faculty development settings, campus organizing spaces, and writing centers. Our best hope for this special issue is that it will prompt further investigations, in yet more spaces and in reference to even more populations, into what the concept of resilience has to teach us about our pedagogy and research—and what our pedagogy and research have to teach us about the concept of resilience.

Works Cited

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