



The Extracurriculum of Creative Writing

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It's a Wednesday night in Atlantic City, which means that between 30 and 50 writers are perched on folding chairs in the Noyes Arts Garage, an arts gallery that's also home to studio space for local and regional artists. The writers have gathered for the World Above monthly poetry series, which includes a featured reader, a writing prompt, and an open mic. The writers at World Above are an incredibly diverse group, in terms not only of race but also age, socioeconomic status, educational background, and life experience. Regular attendees include retired community college professors, high school teachers, computer programmers, professional gamblers, community gardeners, social workers, baristas, stay-at-home parents, and students. Lights from Atlantic City's casinos and outlets blink just outside the glass-walled gallery, and inside the writers take turns standing to read a poem. Literary and visual arts are hardly what comes to mind for most people when they think of Atlantic City, but the energetic, engaged crowd of writers who gather regularly at World Above prove that creative writing is happening in all kinds of ordinary and perhaps even unlikely spaces – and that many of the most exciting sites of creative writing are beyond our classroom walls.

Though World Above is, in many ways, special, it's far from being an outlier. It's just one example of how creative writing communities are found in an extraordinarily wide range of private, community, and digital spaces around the country. Literary nonprofits including the Arts and Literature Laboratory (ALL) in Madison, WI, Inprint in Houston, and the New Orleans Writers Workshop offer low-cost, independent courses in creative writing. These nonprofit groups tend to emphasize access, and they work to keep their programming inexpensive and welcoming to writers from a wide range of backgrounds. University-affiliated programs, such as the Madwomen in the Attic at Carlow University in Pittsburgh, the Writers Room at Drexel University, and the Cooper Street Writing Workshops at Rutgers-Camden, also host community writing workshops. These programs often aim to bridge the “town and gown” divide by welcoming community members

into campus spaces. The recent resurgence of independent bookstores has created new opportunities for commercial and community partnerships, with many bookstores becoming home to writing groups, workshops, and reading series. The several branches of Politics and Prose in and around Washington, D. C. host a robust series of writing courses, and People's Books & Culture (formerly the Penn Book Center) in Philadelphia partners with literary nonprofit Blue Stoop to host writing workshops in the store. And, of course, there are countless digital spaces where writers gather, ranging from fan fiction sites and Facebook groups where writers can get feedback on their drafts to more formal courses of instruction like the online classes offered by literary magazine *Catapult* and more. All this activity demonstrates that, though enrollment in creative writing workshops at colleges and universities is booming, there's also a huge number of writers learning, practicing, and sharing their writing outside the college classroom.

These are writers in what literacy studies scholar Anne Ruggles Gere has called the extracurriculum, whose practice is driven not by the demands of a class or a boss at work, but by a passionate avocation. I'm using extracurriculum as a deliberately capacious term to encapsulate the many ways of learning, practicing, and sharing writing outside the formal structure of the for-credit creative writing workshop. In this definition, the extracurriculum of creative writing includes a wide range of practices and approaches to writing and being a writer: individual writers typing away in coffee shops or at kitchen tables, whether or not they ever share their writing with anyone; writers' groups that meet in private houses or meeting spaces at libraries; free or tuition-based writing workshops hosted at libraries, university spaces, and community spaces; reading series in independent bookstores and bars; the rich and wildly varied writing communities and diffuse ways that writers support each other online, including online workshops and writing groups, newsletters that offer encouragement and support for writers and aspiring writers, fan fiction sites, and the ad hoc communities that gather around hash tags that provide accountability and support to writers, like novelist Jami Attenberg's #1000wordsofsummer. The extracurriculum of creative writing is defined largely by desire: these writers are motivated not by fulfilling graduation requirements or earning credits or a grade, but by their need to make space for writing in their lives. The writers in these spaces are more diverse than those found in most college creative writing classrooms, and many of them are working just as hard as our most earnest and talented students. Their extracurricular writing practices have a great deal to teach those of us who are writing, teaching, and researching from within college campuses. And yet their voices and their practices have been largely absent from the research of Creative Writing Studies.

These extracurricular writers and writing groups and their focused, committed work raises vital questions for those of us who care about writing practice and pedagogy: Where does writing happen? How do people take up and maintain a writing practice, particularly outside the structure

of a class? How do writers persist in the face of disinterest and perhaps even discouragement? And – and this is essential for questions of diversity and inclusion – which people and what spaces get counted when we talk about creative writing? Although scholars in literacy studies and writing studies have long examined the extracurriculum as a site of literacy learning and practice, these questions should be of vital interest as well to scholars in Creative Writing Studies, whose research, pedagogies, and writing practices make them especially well-suited to the task. Who better, after all, to take up the question of why writers work assiduously on a poem or short story or essay when there’s no classroom deadline or grade forthcoming than others who are similarly obsessed?

This essay aims to illustrate how empirical human subjects and archival research examining the writers and writing groups of the extracurriculum can contribute to the emerging field of Creative Writing Studies. The central and significant accomplishment of Creative Writing Studies so far has been to establish a rigorous and theoretically grounded pedagogy capable of providing a strong rejoinder to the longstanding question of whether, as Kelly Ritter and Stephanie Vanderslice put it in the title of their book, creative writing “can really be taught.” Tim Mayers’s articulation of Creative Writing Studies as a “field of scholarly inquiry and research” distinct from literary studies or other fields of English and centrally grounded in pedagogy has allowed the field to begin to carve out a disciplinary identity for itself. Creative Writing Studies has done important work in critically examining creative writing pedagogies, pushing beyond the workshop model that was the dominant mode for so long, and developing a theoretically-grounded approach to classroom creative writing instruction. New books like *Creative Writing Innovations*, which bring together teachers and scholars from a wide range of institutions and writing backgrounds, point to the exciting ways this pedagogy has continued to develop. But if Creative Writing Studies confines its research to the writers who make their way to the college classroom, the field will miss a great deal of the richness and diversity of writing, both today and in our shared history.

Taking the extracurriculum seriously as a site of creative writing learning and practice is vital for Creative Writing Studies in two ways. First, including the extracurriculum as part of the discipline allows Creative Writing Studies to craft a history that is longer, more complex, more inclusive, and less elite than the conventional histories of the discipline would have it. And second, because the extracurriculum necessarily includes writers who are more diverse in basically every way – age, class, race, socioeconomic status, educational and language background, life experience – than those in college classrooms, studies of the extracurriculum are essential for creating a more inclusive creative writing pedagogy. If Creative Writing Studies wants to understand more fully how and where and why people write and what this writing means to them, we have to look beyond our classrooms and into the vibrant worlds of writing already underway in the extracurriculum.

In what follows I demonstrate how research in creative writing’s extracurriculum can enrich our

understanding of writing practices and help define a broader terrain for Creative Writing Studies as a discipline. I'll first describe the important research from Composition and Rhetoric that's relevant for our purposes in Creative Writing Studies. I'll then draw on my own research in the archives of a rural writers' group in mid-century Wisconsin to show how research in the extracurriculum can enrich our understanding of who counts as a writer, where writing is practiced and learned, and what that writing can mean for individuals and communities. I'll then illustrate, through contrasting the conventional disciplinary histories of Creative Writing with the histories of writing in the extracurriculum, how research in creative writing's extracurriculum allows us to claim a history for creative writing that is longer, more complex, and more diverse. Because rigorous attention to pedagogy is a central facet of Creative Writing Studies, I'll also show how research in the extracurriculum can support the development of inclusive pedagogy. Throughout, I provide suggestions for how other scholars can take up this important work.

THE EXTRACURRICULUM AND THE EVERYWHERENESS OF WRITING

Although creative writing has typically been defined as an academic practice, with researchers focusing on the histories and pedagogies of classroom creative writing workshops, research in the extracurriculum shows that a wide range of people are engaged in a wide range of writing practices beyond the university. Studies of the extracurriculum carried out by scholars in composition and rhetoric have identified the many and varied sites where people learn and practice writing; significantly, many of these sites are distinguished by their accessibility to people who might not feel themselves welcome in the elite spaces of college classrooms. When Anne Ruggles Gere first articulated the concept of the extracurriculum in her 1993 CCCC Chair's Address, later published as "Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition" in *College Composition and Communication*, she did so by pointing to the examples of a women's writing group in the Tenderloin in San Francisco and rural writers' group in Iowa. She explained that these two groups, gathering in sites we'd hardly think of as "literary," "represent a tiny portion of the enormous number of individuals who meet in living rooms, nursing homes, community centers, churches, shelters for the homeless, around kitchen tables, and in rented rooms to write down their worlds" (76). These writers, she argued, "bear testimony to the fact that writing development happens outside formal education" (76). In the years since, scholars in Composition and Rhetoric have taken up this concept of the extracurriculum to study literacy learning and practice across a wide range of sites, including coffee shops in Philadelphia and Lincoln, Nebraska (Spigelman, Beckstead et al), weekly Al-Anon meetings (Daniell), community centers in rural Nova Scotia (Horsman), and the Boston bookstore where the collaborative authors of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* gathered to draft that landmark book (Wells). This research shows what anyone who's been involved in a community writing group or who's attended a poetry reading or open mic can attest to as well: public spaces all around the country are abuzz with writing.

This research has increasingly attended as well to text and digital spaces, which Alexandria Peary calls “the textrooms of the extracurriculum.” These studies have revealed the literacy learning that happens via text, ranging from women’s magazines like *Godey’s Lady’s Book* (Peary) to the late 19th-century agricultural periodicals that included encouragement and instruction in discipline-specific writing practices alongside descriptions of new scientific farming practices (Brazeau). Letters have also been an important “textroom of the extracurriculum”; Jill Lamberton has documented how the letters exchanged between the first women admitted to Cambridge helped them make sense of the educational and cultural demands placed on them, and Pamela VanHaitsma has shown how letters have functioned as queer extracurriculum, providing a powerful site for learning and racial uplift, particularly pre-Stonewall. Studies of the digital extracurriculum have considered blogs (Peary), fan fiction sites (Schultz), and “digital participation sites” like Reddit (Tarsa) as powerful sites of literacy learning. The extracurriculum has provided vital space for those whose identities and experiences are not fully affirmed by the college classroom to learn writing skills, and, perhaps even more significantly, through sharing their writing, to see themselves as writers.

Together, this research shows the vitality of reading and writing beyond our classroom walls. In fact, as Kim Donehower argues in “Why Not at School?”, these extracurricular practices can be far more powerful in building a lifelong reading and writing habit than anything that happens in a classroom. In Donehower’s study of what she calls “hyperliterate,” “people who read and/or write extensively as adults, when those activities are not required by a job or pursuit of a formal educational degree,” she finds that these individuals rarely give school any credit for shaping what has proven to be a “lifelong avocational literacy” (35). While classrooms are certainly important sites of instruction, then, if we want to learn how people continue writing beyond the structures of a course and what writing means to people when it’s not a requirement for school or work, we have to look beyond our campus gates.

THE WISCONSIN RURAL WRITERS AS A CASE STUDY IN CREATIVE WRITING AS A SITE OF INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

My own research in the extracurriculum has provided many examples of the significance of creative writing as a form of meaning-making in the lives of ordinary people, as well as the vitality of creative writing in extracurricular spaces. The archives of the Wisconsin Rural Writers’ Association (WRWA) show the richness of writing practices in rural communities. The WRWA was founded in 1948 at the University of Wisconsin in Madison to support rural people around the state in using creative writing to record, preserve, and celebrate the history and folklore of rural Wisconsin. The WRWA was founded after participants in a three-day play-writing workshop held in Madison suggested that a university-affiliated organization might be able to get people writing if it supported the formation of local writing groups. They hoped to find, at most, 50 or 60 people

around the state who would be interested in learning about writing and sharing their writing with others. That initial estimate of interest in writing was rapidly exceeded. In just the first year, the organization's membership topped 1,000, with writers' groups springing up in eight counties from Marathon County in the far north to the town of Janesville in south central Wisconsin (Newhouse; Kamarck). These extraordinarily high membership numbers suggest that rural people in Wisconsin did not need to be prodded to get started writing; they were already writing, and many had just been waiting for someone to ask them about it, or encourage them to share. Though the organization had hoped to encourage rural people to begin creative writing, they quickly found that there was already, as a report in the Spring 1952 newsletter argues, "a vast amount of writing going on in the farm kitchens and parlors of Wisconsin" ("Contest Winners").

The WRWA, which consisted of ordinary rural people around the state, is an excellent example of how a university affiliation can support extracurricular writing. Two faculty members from the University's Extension Division assisted with the initial creation of the organization, but the WRWA was a truly grass-roots effort, created in response to community interest in writing and shaped by the needs and requests of its rural membership. The WRWA newsletter and occasional workshops provided genre-specific writing instruction and information about how to pursue publication, but it was members' expertise as rural people, rather than classroom instruction or the official recognition of an instructor or a university, that supported their writing practice. In other words, the university-affiliated leadership of the WRWA provided practical support for rural people to begin or continue writing - but the interest in writing and the desire to use writing to depict and examine the world around them existed long before any outside person intervened.

In addition to revealing the widespread interest in writing among ordinary people - an interest that long predates any encouragement from university faculty or staff - the archives of the WRWA also have significant lessons for us about what writing can mean to people in the extracurriculum. The organization published a regular newsletter, and in addition to publishing member poems, essays, and short stories, the newsletter often included essays by members about what writing meant to them, or how their involvement in their local writing group had shaped their sense of themselves as writers. In a particularly moving essay titled "What the Wisconsin Rural Writers Association Can Mean To A Farm Woman," Wilhelmina Guerink, a self-proclaimed "farm woman" in northern Wisconsin, explains that "thinking and letter writing have been my favorite hobbies for over thirty years" but before belonging to the WRWA, her interest in writing had marked her as an "oddity" in her rural town (14). However, when she joined the WRWA, she reports that she "discovered that the state was full of folk like me," and through her involvement in the organization, she was able to find support for her writing and begin sharing it (14). Time and time again, the writers in the archives remark on the significance of finding sympathetic readers and fellow writers. One writer,

a farmwife named Helen Stieve, wrote that her membership in the rural writers' group has "given me an emotional outlet to supplement the monotonous routine of housework and has thus made me a more interesting and certainly more contented person" ("Report of Mrs. Helen R. Stieve"). An early newsletter summed up the value of these personal connections around writing by asserting that "meeting as a group is a most wonderful counteragent to the stultifying loneliness which writing requires" (Kamarek 2).

That having a space to be seen as a writer and to share writing with others was important for the rural writers of the WRWA is further supported by the long distances many members traveled over difficult roads in order to attend meetings of their local clubs. The Hamburg Writers, meeting in rural northern Marathon County, reported of an early meeting that "it was cold and 'blizzardly' last night when this group of Rural Writers met at Naugart School, but it was heart-warming to know that there were those who would defy the raging elements to come to the meeting" ("Report on the Tour of the Writers' Groups" 2). The Lakeshore Writers, one of the earliest and most long-standing local clubs, met at the Court House in Manitowoc, a town in eastern Wisconsin on Lake Michigan, and its 12 founding members traveled to Manitowoc from seven different towns in two counties, with several members coming from as far as 50 miles away ("During Ten Years"). These rural writers' willingness to travel long distances, and their frequent discussion of how happy they are to have found like-minded folks at their local writing group, illustrate the significance of writing as a tool for connection and meaning-making in the lives of ordinary people.

The archives of the WRWA also have much to say about how writing helps people connect to their community and the history and the culture of the place in which they live. The writers of the WRWA were ordinary rural people - farmers, housewives, school teachers, pastors - and their identities as writers were very much rooted in knowledge of rural culture and traditions. The WRWA encouraged them to write about, as one member put it, "the rural life I know best," and this rural knowledge was a key part of their identity as writers. Several of the local clubs were formed with the writing of local history as a key goal. The "It Happened in Ephraim" club formed in the town of Ephraim in Door County required members to bring "at least one local anecdote, story, or bit of historical lore" to each monthly meeting, with the goal of incorporating this local history into a publication to be shared with the community ("Report on the Tour of the Writers' Groups" 1). Many members wrote about the landscape, culture, and history of their local community, and many reported that the encouragement to write about their own lives and communities both supported their writing and helped them feel more closely connected to the rural life in their area. Several writing clubs became sponsors of writing for others, with groups hosting writing contests in schools and giving readings at nursing homes and delivering talks at meetings of women's clubs and homemakers' groups. Although rural people and rural places have long been depicted as educationally and culturally backward, the

prolific writing and eager circulation of that writing among the members of the WRWA shows that writing is likely happening in all kinds of places we might not expect.

It's my hope that the accounts of extracurricular creative writing in the archives of the WRWA highlights the value of research in the extracurriculum for scholars in Creative Writing Studies. Such work can help us both understand our history more fully and continue to develop innovative pedagogies. While the WRWA is in some ways exceptional - the organization was able to draw on community structures like the Grange, 4-H, and University Extension that were already regular presences in the lives of rural Wisconsinites - I suspect that the archives of groups like it exist, unexamined, in other places, and it's certainly true that many similar writing groups are working right now. I lucked into my research project after a serendipitous conversation with a community member at the Lorine Niedecker Wisconsin Poetry Festival, who mentioned an organization that had encouraged rural people to take up creative writing, and the early stages of my research were supported by the university archivist's exhaustive knowledge of the university holdings. Writer-scholars in Creative Writing Studies who are active in writing communities in their own areas will doubtless find other projects that are worthy of research. University Extension and Continuing Studies programs, community writing organizations, and state and local historical societies are all good places to start looking for projects. This research will help to deepen and complicate the history of creative writing, enrich our own pedagogy, and point the way toward further university-community collaborations around creative writing.

THE HISTORY OF THE EXTRACURRICULUM OF CREATIVE WRITING

In the dominant histories of the field, creative writing is a necessarily academic and institutional practice. D. G. Myers, whose 1995 book *The Elephants Teach* remains the most comprehensive historical study of creative writing as a discipline, defines creative writing as a classroom subject and a means of employment for writers (xi). Myers's history focuses on the teaching of writing in elite universities, and he argues that creative writing first emerged at Harvard in the late nineteenth century when Wendell Barrett, an aspiring writer, was hired to teach Advanced Composition (46). Mark McGurl's *The Program Era*, which analyzes postwar fiction in terms of the graduate writing programs that supported its development, similarly insists that creative writing is synonymous with the university. Even scholars from within Creative Writing Studies have characterized creative writing as solely an academic subject. In the essay in which he argued for the development of Creative Writing Studies as a field, Tim Mayers defined Creative Writing as the "academic enterprise of hiring successful writers . . . to teach college-level writing classes" ("One Simple Word" 218).

This is a version of our history that does not serve us.

Disciplinary histories that start in Iowa or Harvard paint a picture of creative writing as an

elite, institutionalized practice, one that requires the imprimatur of a university and a university-approved instructor. Research in the extracurriculum shows that our history begins instead with the much longer story of literary societies, writing groups, mutual aid societies, and women's clubs, in which writing was always integral. Anne Ruggles Gere's history of writing groups shows that long before the first workshops in Iowa, people all around the country were involved in writing groups, mutual improvement societies, women's clubs, and the Lyceum and Chautauqua movements. In the mutual improvement groups dating back to the colonial era, both men's and women's groups were marked by an interest in writing; members were required to share their work and receive feedback (Gere, *Writing Groups* 32). And the history of this writing is much older than that as well; poetry writing was a core component of classical rhetorical education, and Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory* insisted that students learn poetry writing before they could move on to the study of rhetoric (Walker). Scholars in Creative Writing Studies have not typically recognized this history as our history. And yet the practices – gathering to share drafts and provide feedback – and the genres produced – members of the women's clubs and mutual improvement societies Gere studies, for example, wrote poems, stories, and essays alongside speeches and reports – are very much our own.

In contrast, studies of the extracurriculum – which go back to Revolutionary War-era student groups meeting off-hours in basements at Harvard and nineteenth-century women's clubs made up not only of wealthy and middle-class women but also immigrants, working-class women, and African-American women – show that people have always been writing and sharing their writing, and that much of the work of writing has taken place in community and civic spaces, rather than college classrooms.

In addition to ignoring the long tradition of people writing – often without pay or recognition – outside the university, these institutional histories of the field, which insist that creative writing started at Harvard and in Iowa and belongs to academia, necessarily map the long history of racism and exclusion in America's educational institutions onto the field of creative writing. That the university broadly, and creative writing specifically, has long been hostile to writers of color has been well-documented; David Mura's "White Writing Teachers" and Tonya Hegamin's interview with Marilyn Nelson from the first issue of this journal demonstrate compellingly how the whiteness of academic creative writing harms writers of color. Matthew Salesses has argued persuasively that conventional approaches to workshop implicitly support a narrow understanding of craft and privilege writers working in a white, western tradition; his book *Craft in the Real World* maps out approaches to teaching creative writing that can better serve a wide range of writers. (It's perhaps worth noting that Salesses's own writing experience includes both university workshops and community workshops like Grub Street and Tin House, and it seems likely that that extracurricular teaching experience has broadened his sense of what's possible in a university classroom.) Felicia

Rose Chavez's new book, *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom*, functions as a guide for instructors and programs working toward anti-racist writing pedagogy. Janelle Adsit's work, such as *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing*, attempts also to resist the oppressive and frequently racist structures of university creative writing workshops.

Moreover, the specific history of creative writing as emerging at Iowa and flourishing with the postwar college enrollment boom further intertwines creative writing with racist federal policy and university admissions practices. Many histories of creative writing link the growth of undergraduate and graduate creative writing workshops to the overall post-war enrollment boom that was supported by the G.I. Bill (McGurl), with some of these studies even linking the tough-love approach of these early workshops with the presence of veterans, who were presumably too hardened by battle to be hurt by an instructor's unkind comment on a poem (Swander 168). The "massive boom" in higher education in the late 1940s benefited creative writing programs, who enrolled large numbers of veterans whose educations were subsidized by the G.I. Bill (Bennett 7). As Eric Bennett puts it, "veterans wanted to write, and taxpayers were willing to pay for it" (7).

What these histories neglect to discuss, however, is the extent to which the G.I. Bill was itself, both in design and in its impact, a tool of racial exclusion and injustice. Though black veterans were entitled, on paper, to the same educational benefits as whites, racial segregation, racial quotas, and a lack of space and funding in the black colleges that would accept them meant that black veterans had a very difficult time actually using those benefits. The GI Bill infused white universities with public and private funds, supporting the growth of creative writing programs among many others – at the expense of black returning servicemen (Katznelson). As a result, the G.I. Bill actually widened educational and economic differences between whites and blacks, particularly in the South (Turner and Bound). Although the G.I. Bill was a mechanism for postwar prosperity and the growth of the white middle class, it did real material and intellectual harm to generations of black families. In linking our own history so closely to the university broadly and the postwar growth in college creative writing workshops, we also align ourselves with the racism and exclusion that has always marked American higher education and that was a particular feature of the very mechanisms – the G.I. Bill and the growth in American colleges and universities it underwrote – that contributed to the rise of creative writing as an academic subject. It makes little sense for a field that values diversity and inclusion to yoke itself to a racist history.

Further, seeing creative writing as solely academic prevents us from seeing the full political potential inherent in the work of writing and the circulation of that writing. The conventional histories of creative writing portray the field as necessarily apolitical and concerned solely with self-expression. Scholars have tended to trace the development of creative writing through Progressive Era education reforms and Expressivist rhetorics and pedagogies. Myers, for example,

aligns the rise of creative writing in secondary schools with progressive education, a history that reinforces a view of creative writing as primarily concerned with self-expression. Mark McGurl is in accord with this history, asserting that “creative writing is surely one of the purest expressions of that movement’s abiding concern for student enrichment through autonomous self-creation” (3). Though this critique of expressivism as subjective and concerned solely with personal expression is common, I would also argue that it’s inaccurate. Joseph Harris, for one, characterizes expressivists such as Kenneth Macrorie and Peter Elbow as “aggressively and self-consciously political,” particularly in their work in the early 70s (36). Moreover, assuming that self-expression is apolitical and merely personal is necessarily wrong-headed because it excludes the long tradition of people for whom writing has been a vital political act. Claiming the right to tell one’s own story through writing has always been political, particularly for writers from marginalized backgrounds or whose stories deviate from normative narratives.

The extracurriculum, in contrast with the university classroom, has always been a space in which marginalized people have sought access to forms of knowledge and education to which they’ve been barred access – and this knowledge has often been used for explicitly political and liberatory purposes. Historical studies of the extracurriculum and particularly alternative sites of rhetorical education provide especially compelling examples of how extracurricular education can reach people whose needs have not been met by educational institutions. Several studies show the ingenuity demonstrated by women, rural people, and minorities in accessing training in reading, writing, and public speaking. Shirley Wilson Logan’s *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in 19th Century Black America* and Jacqueline Jones Royster’s *Traces of a Stream* reveal the ways that African Americans have used literacy and rhetorical education to effect social change. Logan’s research, for example, shows that the black church, the black press, literary societies, and even Civil War military camps were essential sites of education in rhetoric and literacy for African Americans.

Rural people, who are typically geographically removed from prestigious educational institutions and who’ve often been thought of as necessarily backwards or less interested in reading and writing, have also made use of extracurricular literacy and rhetorical education. Rural community organizations, including 4-H and the Grange, have provided essential skills in oratory and writing; the Grange’s training of women in public speaking is especially notable because women were traditionally barred from these kinds of public roles (McCracken, Ostrander). In Appalachia, the Moonlight Schools offered after-hours education to rural families (Greer) In the rural south, the South Carolina Citizenship Schools were a vital site of literacy education in the service of resistance and civil rights struggle (Lathan).

This history suggests numerous research projects that would be invaluable in shaping Creative Writing Studies’s disciplinary identity. Many universities have archival records of literary societies

and student organizations similar to those documented by Gere, and researchers could examine how those groups integrated, and perhaps rejected, curricular creative writing instruction in their extracurricular practices. Cave Canem, CantoMundo, Kundiman, VONA, and other communities of writers seem to me clearly in a lineage with Logan's scholarship showing that marginalized people have always made their own spaces and pursued essential skills in rhetoric and literacy. rhetorical and literate skills. Studies of the founding of organizations like these, including their evolution and their impact on the writing lives and careers of the writers they've supported would go a long way toward enriching Creative Writing Studies. Histories of the digital extracurriculum of creative writing, including early discussion boards, fan fiction sites, and the phenomenon of NaNoWriMo, would also be illuminating not only for historians but also for those working on digital pedagogies. A history of Creative Writing Studies that takes these extracurricular writers as seriously as the writers in our classrooms is essential if we're to craft an identity for our field that reflects the true vitality and diversity of writing as a practice.

THE PEDAGOGIES OF THE EXTRACURRICULUM

Much as the classrooms of Harvard and Iowa are an inaccurate and exclusive place to begin the history of creative writing, locating the origins of our pedagogies in those spaces is counterproductive. Given how little actual teaching seems to have happened in these early creative writing workshops, in which the expectation was largely that the genius at the front of the seminar table would transmit his – always *his* – genius to whoever else in the room was sufficiently talented to absorb it, they make a poor model for the interest of current Creative Writing Studies scholars in innovative, culturally responsive pedagogical practices. The early stories about Iowa often focus much more on the legendary drinking and carousing of legendary writers like Carver and Berryman than they do on anyone's pedagogical efforts and innovations. The core pedagogical practices of creative writing – a belief in process, in seeking out feedback on drafts, on writing as a thing to be shared – have always been an integral part of the extracurriculum, and so it makes sense for us to look at the history and present of creative writing's extracurriculum as we continue to develop our pedagogy.

Specifically, the extracurriculum can provide insight into questions scholars in Creative Writing Studies have already been asking about classroom writing practice: how does workshop help students to improve? what other methods might there be? how do students take up feedback? Studies of the extracurriculum could also attend to group dynamics and the processes of drafting and revising that go on long after a traditional semester would have concluded.

Such studies could also examine how writing happens in the midst of daily life: when and how do writers write? how do they make time and space for it? I suspect that these questions in particular would be valuable for creative writing pedagogy because they could help creative writing

instructors develop a more flexible and more empirically-grounded approach to teaching writing process. While many of us urge our students to write every day, or, as the Mary Oliver book used in my own first college creative writing class urged, to “set a date with the muse” and keep it, studies of writers in the extracurriculum would likely reveal that the work of writing is more diffuse and fragmented than our pedagogies have typically suggested. Naturalistic, empirical studies of creative writing would be able to explore what Robert Yagelski has called “writing as a way of being.” Further, because the extracurriculum is more diverse in terms of race, age, and educational and socioeconomic background than any college classroom, studies of writers and writing groups in the extracurriculum would also allow scholars to ask deeper, more interesting questions about the intersections and meanings of those identities for writers and writing. Studies of how creative writing happens outside the elite and often exclusive spaces of the university would help us to see a more diverse range of writers at work.

The limited number of studies of extracurricular creative writing from Composition and Rhetoric point toward the pedagogical value of this research. Candace Spigelman’s *Across Property Lines: Textual Ownership in Writing Groups* followed the practices of an extracurricular writing group and a composition course writing group to understand the role of time and authority in group feedback. The edited collection *Writing Groups Inside and Outside the Classroom* incorporated studies of curricular and extracurricular writing groups to consider what makes these groups most effective for writers at different stages and working in different disciplines, genres, and contexts. Both books suggest that following the writing practices of writers in the extracurriculum can provide insights for classroom instruction. However, these studies’ disciplinary location within Composition and Rhetoric limits their applicability to Creative Writing Studies, and our field would do well to develop our own studies in extracurricular creative writing groups.

Composition and rhetoric can also provide a useful set of methods for researching writing in the extracurriculum. Many of composition and rhetoric’s early human subjects research methods were borrowed or adapted from anthropology. Ethnographic studies of communities, like Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with Words*, could be especially revealing for seeing how groups work together and tracing how groups respond to each other’s work. In books like *Literacy in American Lives* and *The Rise of Writing*, Deborah Brandt has made excellent use of the life-history interview method to follow how literacy has mattered across people’s lifetimes. These methods are more focused on how people interact around a text, or what they say about themselves, and are less about the text itself. Researchers working on writing process studies have developed methods that would be especially useful for scholars in Creative Writing Studies. Paul Prior and Jody Shipka’s use of cultural-historical activity theory, Stacey Pigg’s research in how space shapes student writing practices, and Hannah J. Rule’s work on time, freewriting, and process could help researchers attend to the

materiality of writing process and practice. The research methods developed by scholars in writing studies, when adapted by scholars in Creative Writing Studies, could do a great deal to help us understand how writers learn and practice creative writing in a wide range of contexts.

CONCLUSION

Beyond learning about specific writing practices or workshop dynamics or pedagogical tricks, the extracurriculum can help us to understand more deeply why people want to write in the first place, and how they persist through the difficult work of writing. Those of us who write from within academia typically have both years of classroom instruction to guide and assure us when we sit down with our notebooks or our keyboards, and we often have the strong institutional incentives of job seeking, promotion, and tenure to stick with our writing and publish it. (And we all know how hard writing still is!) Studying writers in the extracurriculum shows what it's like to write in the face of disinterest or even discouragement or disdain - and to keep at it anyway.

The work of the World Above writers, and the many, many other writers working in these community spaces around the country and on the internet, illustrates a vital principle that those of us who care about writing would do well to remember: the university does not own writing. Though many of us spend our days teaching writing and thinking about writing curriculum and responding to the writing that students have written in our classes, writing is alive and well beyond our walls. It's tempting to think that we can carry writing out from the university and into the community, and many well-intentioned service-learning programs begin with this kind of missionary zeal. But what this work reminds me is that writing is already happening beyond the university.

Throughout my exploration of the extracurriculum as a researcher, a teacher, and a community member, what I find moving, time and time again, is the revelation of just how ordinary writing is. Writers aren't special people toiling away in some remote tower lit by candlelight. We're everywhere. So our sites of teaching and research should be, too.

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