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Confronting the Ideologies of Assimilation and Neutrality in Writing Program Assessment through Antiracist Dynamic Criteria Mapping

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Abstract: This article contributes to conversations about antiracist writing program assessment, with particular attention to the evaluation of first-year writing samples. In an effort to confront the racist ideologies of assimilation and neutrality, I employed a modified version of dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) that involved surveying students, conducting instructor focus groups, and analyzing writing prompts. The triangulated results informed the development of an assessment tool that was used to examine 89 writing samples. The goal of this assessment was not to produce a set of standards that mirror community values but rather to describe what was happening in the writing program and then use that information to facilitate critical reflection on the ways in which classroom practices align with or depart from the programmatic goal of delivering socially just writing instruction. By sharing my own experiences, I hope to help other writing program administrators (WPAs) develop processes for enacting antiracist writing assessment in their own contexts. I also reflect on the ways my procedure did—and did not—achieve its antiracist goals.

Keywords: first-year writing, antiracist writing assessment, community-based assessment, ideology of assimilation, ideology of neutrality

In March 2019, I sat in the Pittsburgh auditorium and listened to Asao Inoue's (2019a) CCCC Chair's Address. The experience challenged me, like so many others, to critically examine and confront the raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) that pervade my assumptions about writing instruction, in general, and about writing assessment, in particular. At the time, I served as the Assessment Coordinator for the English Department at a four-year public university in the mid-Atlantic, and I was actively on the job market in search of a Writing Program Administrator (WPA) position. In March 2020, I accepted my current role as the General Education Writing Coordinator at a four-year public university on the west coast. This article shares my experience with applying theories of antiracism to the practice of writing program assessment during my first year as a WPA. Those experiences led me to propose what I'm calling "antiracist dynamic criteria mapping," an empirical and inductive assessment procedure that aims to confront the ideologies of assimilation and neutrality.

I write this article as a white person who speaks a variety of English that is perceived as "standard." I also write this as a scholar who was educated in a doctorate program that did not emphasize BIPOC scholarship or composition scholars' long history of antiracist activism (Carter-Tod & Sano-Franchini, 2021; CCCC, 1974; Smitherman, 1999). I did not begin exploring the literature on standard language ideology and systemic racism in writing programs until Fall 2016, when I was assigned to teach a graduate seminar on Language and Social Context to a cohort of racially and linguistically diverse doctorate students. I owe much to those students and to my colleagues who shared their wisdom and expertise in teaching circles and guided me towards the scholarship that informs my practice today.

The Theory of Antiracist Writing Program Assessment

Composition scholars who specialize in social justice and antiracism have detailed the discriminatory history of writing and literacy education (Harms, 2020; Hammond, 2020; Molloy, 2020; Ribero, 2021), shared Black perspectives on writing program administration (Carter-Tod & Sano-Franchini, 2021; Perryman-Clark & Craig, 2019), and advocated for centering racial justice in composition studies (Baker-Bell et al., 2020; Brown, 2020; Carter-Tod, 2019; Gere et al., 2021; Young, 2021). Scholars also theorize, study, and offer pedagogical recommendations for first-year composition (Burns et al., 2020; Inoue, 2019b; Inoue et al., 2020; Weisser et al., 2020) and K-12 language instruction (Baker-Bell, 2020). This work informs conversations about enacting antiracist initiatives in writing programs (Branson & Sanchez, 2021; Green & Robinson, 2021; Jones et al., 2021), including initiatives that are specific to program assessment (Poe et al., 2020; Poe & Inoue, 2016).

Within the literature on socially just and antiracist writing program assessment, scholars have attended to professional development (Sassi, 2020), directed self-placement (Toth, 2020), dual enrollment (Moreland, 2020), program-wide grading contracts (Stuckey et al., 2020) and the assessment of student writing samples (Adler-Kassner & Estrem, 2009; Poe & Zhang-Wu, 2020). This article aims to contribute to the last conversation on that list—assessing student writing samples. First, I review the theory of antiracist writing program assessment alongside two ideologies that contribute to systemic racism and racial formation in the U.S.: assimilation and neutrality. Then, I propose a modified version of dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) in light of those theories. Finally, I describe my early attempts at developing an antiracist DCM procedure at my institution. This article does not conclude with a tidy list of suggestions or a fully formed

theory of antiracist DCM. Instead, I hope to, first, create a transparent, reflective, and practical account of what it means to begin this work, and, second, invite WPAs to consider the potential efficacy of antiracist DCM in their own contexts.

Antiracist Writing Assessment and The Myth of Standard Language

My understanding of the theory of antiracist writing program assessment begins with the myth of standard language (Lippi-Green, 2012). Because language necessarily evolves as individual speakers or writers use language in unique ways, the notion of "standard" language is a social phenomenon, not a linguistic reality. Inoue (2015) applies this concept to writing instruction in his argument that judging "quality" in student writing perpetuates the myth of standard language. If we understand assessment as judging, then we create a situation where the teacher is comparing student writing to what Lil Brannon and C.H. Knoblauch (1982) describe as an "ideal text" (p. 159). A more effective approach to assessment would be collaborating with the student to understand their intentions and then providing feedback that helps students create their ideal version of a given text.

Inoue further illustrates how the ideal text of Standard Academic English is inseparable from the white racial habitus that the supposed standard embodies. In other words, saying students should write in "standard" English really means that they should use language that looks and feels like the dominant social group, which, in the U.S., means the white middle- to upper-class. This not only unfairly disadvantages students of color in our first-year writing courses, but it also dismisses their language as not "standard" and therefore not valuable. The issue is exacerbated by the linguistically incorrect assumption that all white middle- to upper-class people use language in the same way. Much like race is a social construct, so is standard language. Consequently, to combat the myth of standard language in our writing classrooms, we have to first acknowledge that the standard is a myth, and then acknowledge that holding on to the socially constructed idea of the standard is racist. [1]

Standard English, Systemic Racism, and the Ideologies of Assimilation and Neutrality

In other words, we need to recognize that the presence of Standard English in our program policies and assessment protocols is a result of and contributes to systemic racism. Joe Feagin and Sean Elias (2013) define "systemic racism" as a theory that "elucidates the foundational, enveloping and persisting structures, mechanisms and operations of racial oppression that have fundamentally shaped the USA past and present" (p. 932). An important goal of this theory is to illustrate that racism "involves much more than individual racial prejudices and discrimination" (p. 937). People who do not personally hold racist beliefs and attitudes still participate in racism because it is embedded in so many of the social systems that define our lives, such as housing, health care, and law enforcement. Systemic racism also perpetuates and is perpetuated by the theories and models that emerge from academic disciplines, including composition studies. Consequently, simply not being overtly racist is not sufficient; we have to also actively and intentionally work against the racist structures that surround us, and that includes identifying and confronting the ideologies that those systems encourage us to embrace. In this article, I will focus on two particular ideologies

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1 The socially constructed idea of Standard English also contributes to sexism, homophobia, ableism, and classism. I focus on racism in this article, but I acknowledge the realities of intersectionality and I acknowledge that white privilege is a spectrum (Ribero, 2021).

that Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2015)[2] discuss in the third edition of Racial Formation in the United States: (1) assimilation and (2) neutrality.[3]

Assimilation. Omi and Winant (2015) offer a robust examination of the historical evolution of theories of racial formation in the social sciences, as well as the impact of those theories on US politics and ideologies. They explain that "it was only when European explorers reached the Western Hemisphere, when the oceanic seal separating the 'old' and the 'new' worlds was breached, that the distinctions and categorizations fundamental to a racialized social structure, and to a discourse of race, began to appear" (p. 113). These explorers "discovered" people, which challenged understandings of where humans come from and prompted questions about what "counts" as human. The result was a conception of race as biological, and that conception was used to justify enslavement and genocide.

In the early 20th century, social scientists like W.E.B. Du Bois countered biological racism with theories of race as socially constructed. Instead of a biological reality, race is a category that governments and institutions and social structures use to organize human bodies into ocular categories that advantage some over others. So, race is not "real" and also race is a very real "social category with definite social consequences" (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 110). While understanding race as a social construct helped activists advocate for civil rights (especially after World War II), it also created the foundation for assimilation arguments. The ideology of assimilation reduces race "to something like a preference, something variable and chosen, in the way one's religions or language is chosen" (p. 22).[4] Omi and Winant explain that this understanding of assimilation is influenced by theories of ethnicity and immigration; the argument goes something like this: "just as immigrant ethnic groups learned a new language and new customs, eating and speaking (and perhaps worshipping) differently, so too could [B]lacks, Asians, and Latin American immigrants" (p. 40). The problem with assimilationist logic is that it erases the fact that the people who are placed into those racial categories are Americans who inform the culture of this nation by their participation in it. Failure to acknowledge those contributions to the definition of "American" creates the framework for another aspect of racial formation theory in the U.S., which positions the "white nation" as the historically dominant construct of "the American people."

In composition studies, the logic of assimilation advances arguments for code-switching between "home" versus "school" languages and informs the assumption that students can and should acquire Standard English (Young, 2009). The logic of the white nation functions similarly, undergirding arguments for teaching students to write for a "professional" or "academic" audience, wherein "they" is implicitly a white man (Young, 2021). Often, these logics are perpetuated in

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2 Feagin and Elias (2013) critique the second edition of Omi and Winant (1994), advocating for "systemic racism theory" as an alternative to "racial formation theory" (p. 932). In the third edition of Omi and Winant (2015), many of these critiques are addressed and the racial formation theory they advance accounts for what they call "structural forms of racial inequity" (p. 1). In the literature on writing assessment, I have seen both "systemic racism" and "structural racism." I use systemic racism in this article as an acknowledgement of Feagin and Elias' influence on my understanding of these ideas.

3 Omi and Winant (2015) use the term "colorblindness" to describe this ideology. I use "neutrality" because of Bethany Davila's (2017) explanation that "colorblindness is a product and producer of whiteness, the race-based ideology of neutrality and standardness" (p. 154). It is the ideology of neutrality that creates the conditions for colorblindness, just as colorblind behaviors and assumptions perpetuate that ideology. I also favor "neutrality" because "colorblind" can be interpreted as an ableist term.

4 Composition theory extends Omi and Winant's (2015) work by illustrating that, while a person may choose to learn new languages and language varieties, our languaging marks our identities in ways that are deeply connected to racial formation (Flores and Rosa, 2015). Omi and Winant stress that race is an ocular phenomenon—it's something we see; linguists and compositionists would add that it's also something we hear in both verbal and written language.

writing classrooms because of what April Baker-Bell (2020) refers to as "respectability language pedagogies"—we say we value and respect our students' linguistic resources, but then we teach them Standard English to "save" them from "the negative stereotypes that are associated with their linguistic and racial backgrounds" (p. 29). In his presentation at the Conference on Antiracist Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, Vershawn Ashanti Young (2021) similarly emphasized that arguments against linguistic diversity in the writing classroom are rarely grounded in concerns about rhetorical effectiveness; instead, those arguments center on concerns that the speaker will be perceived as "unintelligent" in the "real world." Instead of perpetuating the racist status quo by asking our students to change their language(s), we need to combat the ideology of assimilation by changing our attitudes about those languages. And an attitude shift is just the first step; the next step is to counter the construct of the white nation, and the related ideology of neutrality, by centering raciolinguistic diversity in our classrooms and in our programmatic assessment strategies.

Neutrality. In the political "racial reaction" against the 1960s civil rights movement, the assimilation and white nation arguments evolved into an ideology of neutrality that promoted "colorblindness" (i.e., "I don't see color"; "all lives matter"). As Bethany Davila (2017) defines it, "colorblindness is a product and producer of whiteness, the race-based ideology of neutrality and standardness" (p. 154). Omi and Winant (2015) argue that this ideology emerged when politicians rearticulated the central ideals of the civil rights movement in a way that reestablished racial hegemony. Politicians stopped talking about race directly and instead used coded language as they advocated for "a return to 'traditional morality'" and a re-capturing of the American Dream (p. 191). The result was a sociopolitical environment with increasing racial inequities but no formal recognition that race was at the root of that inequity. Colorblindness thus removed the body from conversations about race and in so doing "neglect[ed] stigma, exclusion, privilege, and violence, all characteristics inherent in the 'mark of race'" (p. 40). The ideology of neutrality also deemphasized the long history of racism in the US: "racism was now recast as something that could affect anyone; a century of white predication—whites as the subjects of racism, [B]lacks and people of color as the objects—was thus peremptorily dismissed" (p. 219).

That erasure of the body and denial of the history that constructed the racist systems we now live in is prevalent in writing program assessment procedures that involve "norming" raters to judge the objective or inherent quality of de-identified writing samples (Alexander, 2016). In those norming sessions, coded terms like "appropriate" and "proper" and "correct" implicitly advantage white students who are familiar with the Standard. They also position Standard English as a neutral object that is equally accessible to all students. To counter this ideology, we need to ask: What (student and instructor) bodies are being normed, and why? Who is being normed to what standards, and who created those standards in the first place?

Davila (2017) offers empirical evidence of the ideology of neutrality in her interview study with twelve composition instructors. She provided each instructor with three writing samples written by white, Black, and Hispanic students, and then "asked them to mark places where the essays strayed from their expectations for college writing" (p. 158). She found ample evidence of coded language: instructors used "standards," "correct," and "clarity" for Standard English. The coded language of clarity is particularly problematic because it allows instructors (and raters) to avoid the "position of asserting that only one dialect—and one associated with already privileged people—can communicate ideas effectively" (p. 165).

Davila (2017) additionally found evidence of this ideology's erasure of the body. One instructor in her study argued that "the conventions of the academic student essay discourage representations of identity so that this genre can function as a fair measure of ability" (p. 163). Far from creating a "fair measure of ability," this erasure separates students' written ideas "from their racial, classed, and/or gendered identities" and thus supports the "race-based ideology of neutrality" that enables the belief that "standardness is an individual accomplishment based on effort" (p. 162). The majority of instructors in Davila's study expressed such an ideology by positioning Standard English as equally accessible to all students, and thus the most fair measurement of clarity.

Race, Writing Program Assessment, and Dynamic Criteria Mapping

In composition studies, scholars are rejecting assimilationist and neutral ideologies by, for example, calling for the centering of Black Language in the writing classroom (Baker-Bell et al., 2020), advancing theories of transnational Black Language (Milu, 2021), and implementing classroom assessment strategies like grading contracts (Inoue et al., 2020). In addition to encouraging our writing instructors to adopt these antiracist pedagogies, WPAs need to maintain program policies and assessment strategies that explicitly counter the ideologies of assimilation and neutrality.

Being explicit and intentional in this work is key; de Müeller and Ruiz's (2017) survey research demonstrates that few WPAs "consider race when developing and administering their writing programs" (p. 20), which contributes to writing instructors and WPAs of color "feeling silenced by writing programs if and when they try to advocate for race-based initiatives" (p. 23). WPAs engaging in this work must also recognize that it requires a large-scale evaluation of the systems that support and maintain writing instruction. As Jones et al. (2021) explain, we need to "think beyond 'how we've always done things' or how things have always been to 'how can we do better' and how can we reimagine our organizations" (p. 30). This type of reimagining cannot be done in "a few short days or weeks or even months" (p. 31); it requires long-term, strategic planning and collaboration across the institution.

I began this work at my institution by developing a year-long assessment procedure that attempted to apply the theory of antiracist writing program assessment to a modified version of dynamic criteria mapping.

Dynamic Criteria Mapping (DCM)

Dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) (Broad, 2003; Broad et al., 2009) is a method of community-based assessment. Instead of the WPA training raters to use a decontextualized rubric, evaluation criteria emerge from extensive conversation and negotiation among a program's writing instructors. Bob Broad's (2003) initial iteration of DCM occurred in a writing program that was employing collaborative assessment through a program portfolio. Writing instructors met frequently throughout the academic year to examine and discuss drafts of student writing, which facilitated the in-depth and ongoing conversations that DCM requires. At institutions that do not have the infrastructure for meetings throughout the academic year, DCM often occurs as a multi-day retreat. In either case, the WPA acts as a grounded theory researcher, listening to instructors as they discuss what they do and do not value in student writing samples.

The goal of DCM is to help individual instructors interrogate what they "*really* value as opposed to what the instructor *thinks* she values" (Broad, 2003, p. 136, emphasis in original).

These individual reflections contribute to a collective negotiation about what the program values. Eventually, the WPA constructs a complex visual map to represent the community values, which create the basis for assessment tools that guide the scoring of student-authored texts. A key goal of DCM is to ensure that the program assessment "judge[s] students according to the same skills and values by which they have been taught" (Broad, 2003, p. 11). DCM thus aims to promote thoroughly contextualized (and thus valid) assessment at the classroom and program level.

However, because DCM does not directly address race or the myth of standard language, it is likely to "reproduce unfair, racialized dynamics" and thus become "another structural way that writing assessment reproduce[s] White language supremacy" (Inoue, 2019b, p. 58). The problem is that the process of DCM still ultimately aims to produce a "standard" that is used to judge quality. Instead of a decontextualized rubric, the standard is a far more complicated and locally derived value system, but it's a value system to which students are then expected to norm or assimilate. If we use such a system to *judge* the inherent quality of student writing, then we risk the racist ideology of assimilation; if we fail to account for the historically inequitable structures that permeate the writing program, including the training and norming of the writing instructors in that program, we risk the race-based ideology of neutrality.

In the book that introduced DCM, Broad (2003) actually shares examples of this happening. In one instance, Broad describes instructors responding to a sample text called "Anguish." In their discussions, the instructors noted that the text was written in

> a discourse or dialect other than what [one instructor] called 'public discourse … or academic discourse.' … Instructors agreed that 'Anguish' had merit of different kinds but debated whether it was passing work for English 1 because of its alien discourse, most evident to instructors in the essay's frequent shifts between present and past tenses. (p. 109-110)

If we can adapt the process of DCM in light of the theories of racial formation, systemic racism, and antiracist writing assessment, then we might create an environment where those instructors could have recognized and discussed the raciolinguistic ideologies that were informing their response to the text. An antiracist version of DCM would also necessitate more context about the student-author's intentions and goals for the writing project.

Antiracist Dynamic Criteria Mapping

Broad (2003) argues that a WPA cannot "provide an adequate account of the values of her writing program by thinking about them or even by talking about them in general terms with her writing instructors" (p. 3). Instead, Broad claims, WPAs need "to enter into discussion and debate of actual performances in an effort to discover what they (and others) value" (p. 135). In other words, we need a systematic process for collaborative, empirical inquiry. For this reason, Broad developed DCM as a version of constructivist grounded theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2002), which is a qualitative research method designed to help scholars generate theories that are deeply rooted in and informed by the experiences of people whom the theories are about. The research process involves simultaneous data collection and analysis and the employment of the constant comparison method to identify relationships within the data.

In the antiracist version of DCM that I am proposing, WPAs would consciously and intentionally bring the theory of antiracist writing assessment to the process of co-constructing knowledge about the writing program with instructors, students, and other campus partners. This

involves first describing what is happening in the writing program and then using that information to reflect on what the program practices imply about the program's values. The goal is to not only reach consensus about the program's goals and values, but to also identify racist structures and work with community members to co-construct a writing program that combats the ideologies of assimilation and neutrality in its curriculum, pedagogies, and assessment procedures.

In what remains of this article, I describe my early attempts at initiating a program assessment that enacted antiracist DCM. My project is guided by two research questions: How do WPAs design and implement program assessments that acknowledge systemic racism and combat the ideologies of assimilation and neutrality? How can DCM methods of empirical and inductive inquiry support antiracist writing program assessment?

Applying Theory to Practice

In my context, a variety of factors (mostly related to lack of funding) prevented a version of DCM that involved frequent meetings throughout the semester or a multi-day retreat. Instead, I followed the grounded theory spirit of DCM by collaboratively and iteratively gathering and triangulating multiple sources of data, including existing institutional data, programmatic SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, student survey results, instructor focus groups, and an analysis of writing prompts. This data informed the design of the assessment tool, which was used to examine 89 writing samples. Prior to beginning data collection, I gained IRB approval (#1680127-1) to share the results from the student survey and instructor focus groups and to report on the process of developing the assessment tool. When this article was accepted for publication, I shared the manuscript with the instructors who consented to the study as a participant check.

Data Source #1: Existing Institutional Data

Mya Poe and Quianquian Zhang-Wu (2020) argue that "questions about inequality [need to be] considered at the *beginning*" of a program assessment, "not after data have been collected" (n.p., emphasis in original). Consequently, I began my work by examining existing institutional data and, in the spirit of disparate impact analysis (Poe et al., 2014),[5] looking for evidence of inequity in that data. By applying the antiracist practice of disparate impact analysis at the beginning of the study, I hoped to frame my modified DCM in an explicit interrogation of bias in existing structures and in the values those structures encourage. I collected three types of institutional data: student demographics, placement and course completion rates, and program materials.

Student Population. This four-year, public, Hispanic-serving institution enrolls approximately 16,000 students. The institution's website reports the following ethnicities for the student population: 47% Latino/a, 27% Caucasian, 9% Asian & Pacific Islander, 5% Multiple Ethnicities, 3% African American, <1% Native American, and 4% Other ("Fast Facts," 2020). The institution also reports that "53% of graduates were the first in their families to earn an BA degree" ("About CSUSM," n.d.).

Equity Gaps in Placement and Course Completion Rates. When I arrived in summer 2020, I was provided with a system-wide report that indicated that "Black/African American and

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5 Disparate impact analysis investigates unintended discrimination by statistically examining the outcomes of an assessment for different groups. Typically, this approach is employed to evaluate existing assessment protocols such as placement procedures (e.g., Gomes, 2020). In my case, institutional reports with evidence of inequity already existed, and I was able to use those reports as a foundation for the programmatic assessment protocol.

Hispanic/Latino students comprised 55 percent of the cohort overall, but comprised 71 percentage of the population of the students placed" into a category that required them to take a "preparatory" writing course (101A) before they could complete the course that fulfilled the general education requirement in written communication (101B) (Bracco et al., 2020, p. 8-9).

Additionally, institution-specific data revealed that underrepresented groups were dropping, failing, or withdrawing from both 101A and 101B at a higher percentage than non-underrepresented groups (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Average Equity Gaps in 101A & 101B Completion (2018-2012)
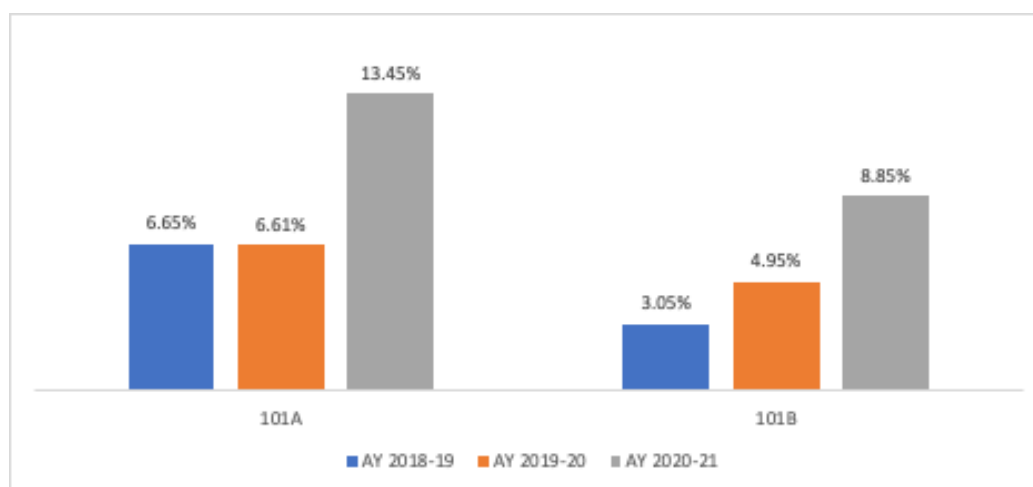
Equity gaps in 101A were already high in 2018-2020 (6.6%) and became extremely high in 2020-2021 (13.5%). The equity gaps for 101B had been steadily increasing for three years, from 3% to 8%. While COVID-19 certainly had an impact on these equity gaps, the data suggests that the pandemic exacerbated an existing trend.

Program Materials. I collected qualitative data from the writing program's website and internal files and specifically looked for evidence of programmatic engagement with theories of antiracist writing program assessment. I did not find references to antiracism, but I did see a programmatic commitment to social justice. Housed in a literature department that prioritizes cultural studies, the writing program had worked over the years to position itself as teaching writing through a similar lens. The program's mission statement noted the importance of asking students to "analyze various genres and cultural perspectives," the course learning goals indicated that students would be able to demonstrate "an appropriate response to a rhetorical situation/context," and the course description stated that students would "interrogate the ways in which texts (re)produce particular social constructions and power relations."

The program materials also recommended that instructors use a criterion-based rubric that included "academic tone and language" and "mechanics, grammar, and usage" criteria. While the rubric did not contain coded terms like "proper" or "correct" grammar, it did describe "error" and referenced "well-polished" or "mature" use of language, which have the potential to foster an ideology of neutrality. In terms of program assessment, I learned that this same rubric had been

used in past assessment initiatives, typically with a small sample of student writing; I was unable to locate a protocol for more extensive programmatic assessment.

Data Source #2: Instructor SWOT Analysis

In Fall 2020, 28 instructors taught 69 sections of first-year writing. Nearly all of those instructors were non-tenure track (NTT), and many were part-time Lecturers who also work at one or more local community colleges. My first task as WPA was to lead a program retreat for these instructors in the week before classes began. At that retreat, I asked the faculty to engage in a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis of the program. I did not mention my own interests in advancing an antiracist agenda; instead, I asked the instructors to describe their experiences with and opinions about the program. The results indicated that instructors wanted a more coherent vision of the goals of the program and how those goals are articulated in the curriculum. The results also revealed concerns about the balance of programmatic consistency and academic freedom, especially as it related to required textbooks and assignment sequences. Finally, the analysis indicated that instructors were interested in opportunities for professional development and eager to collaborate with me to revise the current curriculum and program policies.

While antiracism and social justice were not explicitly discussed, the results of the SWOT analysis suggested that the faculty were open to and interested in conversations about such pedagogies and theories. Consequently, I worked with a team of faculty to organize monthly professional development workshops, which included the following topics: Antiracist Writing Pedagogy (September 2020), Cultivating Communities of Inquiry in Online Writing Courses (October 2020), Semester Debrief (December 2020), Teaching Students to be Critically and Socially Conscious Rhetors (February 2021), Effective & Efficient Response to Student Writing (March 2021), and Multimodal Composition (April 2021). By focusing the first workshop in the series on antiracist pedagogy (we read a chapter from Inoue (2015) and analyzed the assessment ecologies presented in our syllabi), I aimed to enact de Müeller and Ruiz's (2017) recommendations of making the programmatic commitment to antiracism overtly visible.

Data Source #3: Student Survey

To collect student voices, I collaborated with a few writing instructors to design and distribute a student survey in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. Two-hundred and ninety students completed the survey in fall (18% response rate) and 177 completed the survey in spring (20% response rate). The surveys respondents' self-reported racial identities were: 44% Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Chicanx, and/or Mexican, 22% white or Caucasian, 10% Asian and/or Pacific Islander, 9% Multiracial, 3% Black and/or African American, 2% Middle Eastern, and 1% Native American. Eight percent of students did not report their racial identity, and 1% of students reported "other" or "none." The respondents' gender identities were: 73% female, 22% male, and 1% percent non-binary or prefer not to say. Three percent of students did not report their gender identities. I also asked about sexual identity, linguistic identity, and first-generation status: 17% identified as LGBTQ, 46% identified as multilingual, and 34% of respondents were the first in their family to attend college.

I examined students' responses to three survey items that were designed to measure the extent to which students were learning and talking about linguistic diversity in their courses (see a complete copy of the survey in Appendix A). I asked students to respond to a list of 13 skills or

behaviors, using a 4-point Likert scale to indicate what they learned in the first-year writing class. Three of those items were: (1) FYC increased my appreciation of diverse language practices, (2) FYC increased my appreciation for the ways "good" writing looks different in different situations, and (3) FYC created an inclusive learning environment that celebrates diverse perspectives. Students responded positively to "FYC celebrates diverse perspectives;" with an average score of 3.26/4, it was the third-highest response. However, the other two questions were in the bottom five of the thirteen items. Most students only "somewhat agreed" that "good" writing is situation-dependent (3.16/4) and even fewer agreed that the writing course taught them an appreciation of diverse language practices (3.03/4). Independent t-tests were conducted to compare students' responses based on the demographics reported in the previous paragraph; there were no statistically significant differences in how any of the groups of students responded to these survey items.

This data suggests that, despite the stated program commitment to social justice in the course description and mission statement, students did not perceive learning about linguistic diversity to be a key component of the course. I presented the results of the Fall 2020 survey at the program retreat the week before the spring semester began and asked instructors to sign up for focus groups to continue the conversation. In that presentation, I focused on teaching rhetorical knowledge as a way to draw students' attention to the context-dependent realities of good writing and to the benefits of linguistic diversity.

In retrospect, I missed an opportunity to more overtly discuss antiracist writing pedagogy and assessment at the Spring 2021 retreat. At the time, I was understanding antiracist writing instruction as a progression: first, we teach writing rhetorically, which helps us understand the myth of standard language, which then creates opportunities to examine the relationship between race and language. I now see the value of beginning these conversations with a discussion of raciolinguistics, but I was only able to see that as a result of the subsequent data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Data Source #4: Instructor Focus Groups

In February 2021, I conducted five focus groups, in which 95% (n=21) of instructors teaching that semester participated. When delivering the consent form for this study, I asked participants to self-report demographic information. Of the 19 instructors who consented, 15 identify as female, 3 as male, and 1 as non-binary; 13 identify as white or as a person with European heritage, 2 identify as Asian, 2 identify as Chicanx, and 2 chose not to report. In terms of role, 16 are NTT faculty and 3 are graduate student teaching associates (TAs).

I started each focus group by reading the course description out loud and asking participants to indicate what sentences or phrases did or did not resonate with them. We then read the course learning goals and discussed what goals they did or did not emphasize in their courses. Finally, we reviewed the required assignments and textbook policies and discussed instructors' strategies for leveraging the course materials to facilitate outcome achievement. The protocol for these focus groups (see Appendix B) was intentionally descriptive; while I was keenly interested in learning about how (and if) instructors were integrating antiracist pedagogies, I did not frame the focus groups around this theory. Instead, in the spirit of DCM, I wanted to see what values and priorities emerged from the community, and then identify connections between that emergence and antiracist theory. My hope was that this approach would generate sufficient community buy-in to facilitate structural change.

Table 1

Transforming Focus Group Themes into Core Values and Connecting those Core Values with Antiracist Theory

Themes that Emerged from Focus Groups	Excerpted Core Values in Revised Mission Statement	Connecting the Core Value to Antiracist Theory
Theme #1: Social Context. Because of the department's grounding in cultural studies and literature, instructors often talked about social context in terms of course theme. They also explained that the program had been evolving away from literary analysis and towards writing as a rhetorical act.	**Core Value #1: Writing is Social.** Writing (re) produces particular social constructions and power relations. … In other words, writing is never ideologically neutral because the meaning conveyed is always informed by the social context of the writer(s) and the reader(s).	At the Fall 2021 retreat and throughout the 2021-2022 professional development workshops, we began to discuss these overlaps and consider antiracist writing theory as a way to connect the program's commitment to social context with current composition studies conversations.
Theme #2: Rhetorical Decision Making. Most instructors ask students to engage in some kind of rhetorical analysis. Some instructors expressed interest in revising their approaches to more explicitly account for audience, purpose, and genre in the writing process.	**Core Value #2: Writing is Rhetorical.** Because writing is social, "good" writing does not follow a decontextualized formula. … The details of a successful composition— language use, language variety, organization and presentation of ideas, mode of delivery—are informed by the project's audience, purpose, and genre.	Positioning rhetoric as a consequence of social context created opportunities to discuss the influence of standard language ideology in conceptions of "good" writing.
Theme #3: Writing Process. The instructors frequently described engaging students in a multi-draft process that involved instructor and peer feedback as well as writing center visits.	**Core Value #3: Writing is a Process.** Because writing is social and rhetorical, it must be taught as a process. FYC students analyze rhetorical situations and investigate genre norms as they engage in multi-draft writing projects.	This core value facilitated conversations about how teaching writing as a process enacts antiracist theory. Our conversations soon gravitated towards grading contracts and other grading-for-equity strategies.
Theme #4: Academic, Research Writing. Instructors introduce students to the university library and emphasize critical reading, information literacy, and ethical source integration as foundational skills for academic, research-based writing. The existing course policies required instructors to teach MLA formatting, but they expressed interest in relaxing this requirement.	**Core Value #4: Academic Writing.** FYC guides students to become confident academic writers. We encourage students to draw on their experiences as successful communicators in diverse contexts and apply those skills to specific academic genres. We also emphasize that "academic writing" is an umbrella term that encompasses many different genres with unique norms and conventions.	I recommended that instructors give students a choice of APA or MLA formatting, which created opportunities for conversations about the immense variety in what "counts" as "good" academic writing. Those conversations created spaces to discuss the racist structures that create genre norms/ conventions and that dictate what genres "count" as "academic."

I subsequently analyzed the focus groups recordings via the grounded theory method of constant comparison for qualitative coding. This process resulted in the identification of four themes that consistently emerged across the focus groups: social context, rhetorical decision making, writing process, and academic writing (Column 1 of Table 1). I then collaborated with faculty to use these themes to draft a new mission statement for the program that articulated four core values: writing is social, writing is rhetorical, writing is a process, and academic writing (Column 2 of Table 1). The goal was to use the language and ideas generated in the focus groups to create core values that align with and create room for antiracist writing pedagogy; throughout the subsequent academic year, we began using those core values as starting points for conversations about antiracist writing theory (Column 3 of Table 1).

This process facilitated productive reflections on the goals of the program, which led to creating both program policies and professional development opportunities that promote antiracist writing pedagogy.

My next step, informed by Broad's (2003) argument that thinking and talking are insufficient to truly understand the values of a writing program, was to seek evidence of how these core values were or were not being enacted. I thus turned my attention to the major assignment p rompts instructors wrote and the compositions students produced in response to those prompts.

Data Source #5: Final Project Prompts

On March 1, 2021, I met with five FYC lecturers and the writing center director, all of whom had volunteered to participate in programmatic assessment.[6] I introduced them to the themes that emerged from the focus group analysis and explained that I wanted us to collaboratively design an antiracist protocol for examining student writing. Because it is difficult to assess for writing process when examining a final written product, we decided to focus our assessment on social context, academic research writing, and rhetorical decision making.

The group also decided that, before looking at writing samples, we would collaboratively analyze the writing prompts that guided students to produce those samples. Our goal was to learn how instructors were asking their students to engage with social context, academic research writing, and rhetorical decision making. We also decided to characterize the ways the writing prompts described the project's audience, genre, and purpose, in hopes of this information helping us examine rhetorical decision making in the writing samples. Table 2 provides the template we used.

Table 2

Collaborative Prompt Analysis Template

Prompt ID:	Audience:	Social Context:
	Genre:	Rhetorical Decisions:
	Purpose:	Research Writing:

Over the next month, the raters and I read through the prompts and populated the table, either paraphrasing or directly quoting the prompts to indicate (a) the audience, purpose, and genre that the student was being asked to write in/for, and (b) language in the prompt that directed

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6 The prompt analysis and scoring of student samples were modestly funded by the university. Participants received a stipend for their work (equivalent to $20/hour). Consequently, this stage of the process was framed as the "official" program assessment.

students to address or engage in behaviors related to social context, research writing, and rhetorical decision making.

The results indicated that most faculty were addressing social context through the paper topic, but were not inviting critical investigations of linguistic diversity or the relationship between race and language. Similarly, very few prompts explicitly addressed rhetorical decision making. In contrast, nearly all of the prompts included detailed instructions and parameters for research writing. The results of the prompt analysis were used to create the "descriptive criteria" on the Assessment Tool (see Appendix C).

Data Source #6: Writing Sample Scores

The final step (I thought at the time) was to score writing samples (see Appendix D for the data collection methods). I was persuaded by the DCM argument about the value of examining and talking about student writing, but I had neither the time nor the funding to facilitate a full-scale DCM retreat. As an alternative, I studied the models of DCM presented in Broad et al.'s (2009) edited collection. The chapters consistently result in some kind of rubric, ranging from fairly traditional criterion-based rubrics (Alford, 2009) to a star-shaped chart that lists features to be scored (Detweiler & McBride, 2009) to an "unrubric" (Harrington & Weeden, 2009). Consequently, I decided to borrow the structure of a rubric that had resulted from true DCM and adapt it in collaboration with the assessment raters.

I opted for Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem's (2009) assessment tool, which asked raters to evaluate (on a Likert scale) the extent to which the student writing met the community's criteria for "good writing," and then asked them to use checkboxes to indicate what particular qualities of good writing existed in the writing sample. In my version (Appendix C), the Likert-scale evaluations included an overall holistic score as well as overall evaluative scores for social context, research writing, and rhetorical decision making. For the "particular qualities" associated with each core value, I used the results of the prompt analysis to create an initial list (for example, the "research writing" qualities included "thesis statement" and "source integration"); that list was revised in collaboration with the raters as we attempted to use the tool to describe specific writing samples. In this way, the tool primarily assessed whether students were engaging in behaviors that their assignment prompts required or recommended. Our goal was to describe what students were doing, not evaluate whether students were producing our image of an ideal text.

I hoped that this emphasis on *description* instead of *evaluation* and on *behaviors* instead of *textual features* would create an antiracist version of scoring student samples. Instead of asking, what's the quality of this sample? We tried to ask, what do we see in this sample? What is the writer doing? But because the tool included evaluative criteria, we were still *judging* the quality of decontextualized and deidentified writing samples, thus inviting an ideology of neutrality. Furthermore, I was asking raters to norm their judgements (we used adjacent scoring and raters negotiated all disagreements; see Appendix D for more information), which squarely aligns with assimilationist ideologies. This process resulted in interesting data, but it did not achieve its antiracist aims. Especially in the evaluation of the research writing and holistic criteria, we quickly and perhaps even relievedly applied the unstated standards that gave us the "gut feeling" about the sample's quality. We celebrated when the need to negotiate our scores was rare. I only later realized that assimilationist and neutral ideologies were shaping our conversations.

Future Ideas for Antiracist Program Assessment

With that being said, there were two elements of the sample scoring process that hold potential for future development in the arena of antiracist program assessment: we can combat assimilationist ideology by replacing norming with antiracist articulation and we can combat the ideology of neutrality by evaluating rhetorical decision making. I conclude this article with a discussion of those two elements and then a more general reflection on next steps for myself and other WPAs pursuing this work.

Combating Assimilation with Antiracist Articulation

Broad (2003) argues for "articulation" instead of "norming" during dynamic criteria mapping. He notes that the traditional terms for the "large-group discussion that precede live grading," such as "standardization," "calibration," and "norming," all focus on "how evaluators agree. These names neglect an equally important part of those discussions that has heretofore remained hidden and forbidden: exploring how and why evaluators disagree" (Broad, 2003, p. 129, emphasis in original). By not only allowing but celebrating disagreement, articulation prompts each participant to "listen[] to and understand[] the full range of values at work in the program" and then "actively reflect on how the values discussed might inform her future teaching and assessment of writing" (p. 129-130, emphasis in original). In traditional DCM, the goal of articulation is to discuss "the specific criteria by which [raters] were guided in reaching their pass/ fail decisions about each text" (p. 129). Not everyone needs to agree "on how a particular text should be judged," but they still engage in evaluation via their pass/fail decision; additionally, because articulation "precedes live grading" (p. 129), at some point the "focus shifts … from the descriptive to the normative" (p. 134). An antiracist version of articulation would remove the pass/ fail decision and resist the shift towards norming. Instead of preparing participants to norm and score, the end goal of antiracist articulation is listening and understanding and informing future writing instruction.

Critics may argue that this sounds like professional development, not writing assessment. I agree. Professional development has always been a component of writing program assessment, and that professional development typically occurs informally (and implicitly) during the discussion of writing samples. I am recommending we make that informal activity an explicit and central component of writing assessment. From the onset, instructors (not raters) participating in assessment should know that a key goal of examining (not scoring) writing samples is for them to reflect upon and improve their practice. We are assessing the program, not just the students, and that requires an examination of the instructors' (and the WPA's) values and practices.

While antiracist articulation was not fully achieved in my study, the descriptive criteria on our assessment tool provided a glimpse into how this might work. Unlike the evaluative scores, where raters judged social context, academic writing, and rhetorical decision making on a 1-6 Likert scale, the descriptive criteria were checkboxes—an instructor either did or did not observe source integration or counterarguments or sociocultural analysis in the writing sample (for a complete list of descriptive criteria, see Appendix C; these criteria were created based on the results of the prompt analysis). As the instructors worked in pairs to examine a collection of samples (each pair had an hour to review and complete the rubric for 5-7 samples; see Appendix D for more details), I tracked their agreement. For the evaluative scores, I treated this as typical norming, listing disagreements that the pairs would later negotiate. For the descriptive criteria, I tracked whether none, one, or both raters indicated they observed a behavior. Then, I looked

for criteria on which they were frequently disagreeing: if, for example, they had examined five samples during a session and, for three of those samples, only one instructor (instead of both or none) observed a particular descriptive criterion, then I would list it as an opportunity for discussion. In the negotiation session, I asked the instructors to talk broadly about how they were conceptualizing and observing the descriptive criteria. They took notes on this discussion in their debrief document, and afterward the full group talked about it before moving on to the next round.

The goal of this discussion was not consensus; instructors did not change their rubric responses or determine which observation was correct. Instead, the goal was to broaden our collective understanding of what "thesis statements" or "source integration" or "sociocultural analysis" might look like in different writing samples. This created opportunities for conversations about the subjectivity of responding to student writing as well as for conversations about why our writing prompts regularly require fixed elements instead of acknowledging the diversity of ways in which students might effectively accomplish a writing task. The descriptive discussions also provided insights into writing instructors' assumptions about what counts as good writing, and provided specific data that I could share at retreats and in professional development workshops to facilitate similar conversations with the larger population of writing instructors.

While some of this discussion occurred in my study, it was limited by the presence of the evaluative criteria on our rubric—we kept gravitating back to the tidy decision about what samples were or were not "good" instead of celebrating the complexity that the descriptive criteria brought us. In the future, I would remove the evaluative criteria and just focus on the descriptive.

To report on this data, and thus fulfill the more formal expectations for writing program assessment (beyond professional development), I recommend triangulating the data with other sources. In my case, I was able to compare the descriptive data with the prompt analysis. This approach allowed me to report findings; for example, while few writing prompts described research writing as contributing to a conversation, the instructors saw ample evidence of students attempting to contribute to conversations in their research writing. Therefore, I recommend more explicitly talking with students about the ways that research writing involves contributing to a conversation. Instead of reporting on whether or not students were succeeding in our courses, these types of findings in my assessment report offered a descriptive examination of what kinds of writing our prompts were asking students to produce and what kinds of writing the instructor-raters perceived those students to actually be producing.

The descriptive data also created an opportunity for me to view the writing instructors who participated in assessment as a sample of the instructors across the program. Future research might explore this further, asking, what would it look like if, instead of collecting a representative sample of student writing, we created a representative sample of writing instructors? Such an approach should facilitate assessment protocols that analyze instructors' interpretations and actions while scoring, which would reveal information about their assumptions about writing. In this way, writing program assessment resists the ideology of assimilation by assessing the program's assumptions about writing instead of labeling our students as good or bad writers. Put another way, the goal of such an assessment is to understand and improve our practice as writing instructors, not to judge the quality of the writing samples in front of us.

Combating Neutrality by Assessing Rhetorical Decision Making

A focus on the program instead of the students does not mean that we abandon attempts to measure what students are learning in our courses. But we do need to create a more valid measurement of what we're actually trying to teach. We *are* not teaching students to perform Standard American English; consequently, our assessment procedures should not evaluate the extent to which writing samples enact that standard. We are teaching students to think and write rhetorically, so I propose we create protocols that assess rhetorical decision making. Doing so requires context; adding context to our assessment procedure will combat the ideology of neutrality.

My proposal comes from my assessment team's experience with attempting to examine rhetorical decision making in our writing samples. After Day 1 was complete, I calculated the percentages of agreement for every criterion. The group achieved 88-94% agreement on all four evaluative criteria (social context, research writing, rhetorical decisions, holistic). The instructors also achieved 75-88% agreement on the descriptive criteria related to social context and 69-80% agreement on the descriptive criteria related to research writing. In contrast, they only reached 47-59% agreement on the descriptive criteria related to rhetorical decision making. Consequently, I opened Day 2 by presenting the agreement calculations from Day 1, and the group engaged in a discussion of the descriptive criteria for rhetorical decision making. This led to a few changes to the assessment tool. We removed one criterion and made a few clarifications to better define three criteria (indicated in all caps on the assessment instrument in Appendix C). However, these changes did little to improve agreement; by the end of Day 2 agreement for the rhetorical decision making descriptive criteria was 40-61%.

Calculating agreement can be problematic because it emphasizes norming in ways that promote assimilation; I report it here because it facilitated a productive conversation among the assessment team. We recognized that assessing writing for students' rhetorical decision making instead of for their correct use of language combats the myth of standard language and creates practical strategies for prioritizing social context in the writing classroom, but we were at a loss for how to use the assessment tool we'd created to do that work. We consequently concluded that we needed to have additional conversations across the program about how to teach writing as a rhetorical act and about the difficulty of observing rhetorical decision making in a written product.

For future programmatic assessments, I propose re-contextualizing the writing samples. Similar to the cover letters common in portfolio assessment, we could ask students to introduce themselves and describe the writing sample's purpose and intended audience as well as their proximity to that audience. We could even take this a step further and ask students to describe the process of rhetorical decision making that led to the product we're reviewing and to point us to moments in the written product that demonstrate their learning. Then, the instructor's task would be to look for specific instances in the draft that show the writer achieving their stated goals or making moves to address their audience. An even more explicitly antiracist assessment procedure might ask students to reflect on how the writing process and resultant product involved critical languaging and antiracist rhetorical knowledge, both of which are defined as antiracist FYC goals in Beavers et al.'s (2021) revision of the WPA Outcomes Statement.

This approach could also follow the DCM recommendations for selecting sample texts. Broad (2003) argues that sample texts "should be selected because they feature as many kinds of rhetorical successes and failures as possible" (p. 129). Instead of looking for variety in successes and failures, an antiracist DCM would seek a variety of rhetorical situations. This would allow instructors to discuss how students engage in and demonstrate rhetorical decision making across

diverse contexts, thus combating the ideology of neutrality. Instead of asking, "is this clear/good/appropriate?" we would be asking, "what are the many different ways students use language to achieve their goals across a variety of rhetorical situations?"

Continuing the Loop

Unlike traditional DCM, this assessment plan does not aim to define what the community values and use that definition to produce a set of standards for evaluating student writing. Instead, an antiracist DCM describes what is happening in the program and uses that information to help the instructors and WPAs reflect critically on why we value what we do. Those reflections inform revisions to curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices, such that the community is collaboratively and intentionally working to combat the ideologies of assimilation and neutrality. This process is complicated and ongoing; we are "continuing" the loop more so than "closing" it by iteratively collecting multiple data sources, sharing triangulated results, and inviting continual conversations about our classroom practices and program policies. In my case, I plan to replicate the student survey every semester and conduct instructor focus groups every spring. I also plan to repeat the SWOT analysis and prompt analysis every two or three years. In terms of writing sample analysis, I am in the beginning stages of designing an assessment protocol that uses antiracist articulation to generate descriptive data with two guiding questions: What assumptions are informing the ways instructors respond to student writing? To what extent are instructors able to observe evidence of rhetorical decision making in student writing?

In addition to inviting discussion about the potential for antiracist DCM as a programmatic assessment strategy, I hope this article prompts WPAs to reflect on the goals of programmatic assessment. When I began work as an Assessment Coordinator, I thought the goal was to reliably score writing samples and then draw generalizable conclusions about student writing quality. Now I believe the goal is to use the process of examining student writing samples to better understand how instructors' and WPAs' assumptions about writing influence our perceptions of student texts.

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