



## **Two-Year College English Association**

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# **TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College**

*Prepared by a Task Force of the Two-Year College English Association  
of the National Council of Teachers of English*

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## Executive Summary

This report, produced by the Two-Year College Association (TYCA), provides guidelines for preparing future two-year college English faculty. The document, which aligns with the [CCCC Position Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing](#) and TYCA's [Characteristics of a Highly Effective Two-Year College English Instructor](#), presents recommendations for those who train future two-year college English professionals: directors and faculty of English studies graduate programs. These guidelines also provide graduate students who are interested in two-year college teaching careers with recommendations for a combination of relevant coursework and research, professionalization activities, and hands-on experiences that will prepare them to be engaged two-year college teacher-scholars.

Given the growth of community colleges, both in terms of enrollment and prominence in national education policy, now is the time to call on graduate programs to take seriously the work of educating future faculty for the full range of institutional contexts in which they might teach. The millions of students whose first experiences with postsecondary writing are in two-year college English classrooms deserve to learn with engaged professionals who employ context-appropriate best practices in our field.

These guidelines recommend that graduate programs adopt four broad goals for meeting the needs of future two-year college and open admissions faculty, who constitute the teaching majority:

- Make two-year colleges visible to graduate students;
- Collaborate with two-year college colleagues;
- Develop curricula relevant to two-year college teaching;
- Prepare future two-year college faculty to be engaged professionals.

Some of the key recommendations include the following:

- Integrate readings and discussions of two-year colleges and two-year college issues across English studies graduate curricula;
- Collaborate with area two-year colleges to establish mentorship and research networks for graduate students;
- Partner with area two-year colleges to create teaching and writing center practica that will give graduate students hands-on experience in two-year college settings;
- Invite interested doctorate-holding two-year college faculty to teach graduate courses and/or serve on relevant thesis and dissertation committees;
- Expand graduate course offerings to include topics valuable to faculty teaching in open admissions and teaching-intensive colleges and universities, including two-year colleges;
- Support thesis and dissertation projects relevant to two-year colleges;
- Familiarize graduate students with TYCA and its flagship journal, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*;
- Encourage graduate students to participate in state, regional, and national professional organizations with a significant two-year college presence, particularly (although not exclusively) TYCA, CCCC, NCTE, CWPA, IWCA, NCPTW, MLA, CRLA, and NADE.

## TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College

### Community College Contexts

#### Mission

For over a century, community colleges have played a unique role in higher education, one rooted in democratic educational opportunity for all. Most community colleges have open admission policies and endeavor to serve the values and needs of the communities in which they are situated. In addition to preparing students for transfer to a four-year college or university, two-year college missions generally include basic skill development (ESL, GED, etc.), workforce training, and continuing education (AACC, “About”). Today there are more than 1100 community colleges in the United States, and these institutions enroll 46% of all U.S. undergraduates (AACC, *2015 Community College*).

#### Student Population

Two-year colleges serve an extraordinarily diverse student population. Community colleges enroll the majority of African-American, Latino, and Native American college students in addition to returning adult students, dual-enrolled high school students, multilingual and “Generation 1.5” students, veterans, and students with disabilities. Because most two-year colleges are open-admissions, students also enter with a wide range of prior academic experiences; a majority are placed into at least one developmental reading, writing, or math course (MDRC). According to the American Association of Community Colleges, more than one-third of community college attendees are first-generation college students. Most work part- or full-time while attending school, and many have children or other significant family responsibilities. Although two-year colleges are more affordable than their four-year college counterparts, the majority of community college attendees rely on some sort of financial aid (AACC, *2015 Community College*). In many cases, two-year college students face a range of material challenges that impact their class attendance, persistence, and ability to complete coursework. While the diversity of community college students can present unique challenges in the English classroom, the range of experiences and perspectives these students bring is one of the great joys of teaching in these settings.

#### Faculty and Working Conditions

Teaching in a community college is a distinct academic profession with its own opportunities, challenges, and character (Reynolds and Holladay-Hicks). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are currently more than 30,000 two-year college English faculty in the United States, which is 40% of the nation’s postsecondary English teaching force. The Center for Community College Student Engagement found that 70% of these faculty were contingent or adjunct hires, and this part-time work force taught 58% of classes (3). Typically, the full time two-year college instructor has a teaching-intensive assignment, which might include five classes per semester (or three or more per quarter). Increasingly, the instructors who secure full-time faculty positions at two-year colleges are those who have prepared themselves in ways that align with the unique demands, expectations, and values at these institutions.

Tenure and promotion vary significantly at two-year colleges, as does support for professional development and scholarship. Notions of professionalism are distinct at community colleges, with teaching, service, and scholarship valued in different configurations than at most four-year institutions. When research is encouraged or rewarded, scholarship that directly enhances the institution’s ability to serve its students tends to be most valued. Furthermore, two-year college faculty may not always have the kind of institutional authority over issues of curriculum and assessment that their four-year colleagues take for granted, and advocating for practices grounded in disciplinary knowledge can be challenging rhetorical work that requires familiarity with administrative structures and discourses.

### Disciplinary Considerations

Two-year college English faculty are often expected to be English studies generalists; they may teach courses in literature, creative writing, film, general humanities, and other relevant areas. However, composition courses dominate the English department offerings at most two-year colleges and the teaching load of most two-year college faculty. In many institutions, English faculty also teach developmental/basic writing, integrated reading and writing courses, accelerated learning courses, and/or work with students in the writing center. While two-year colleges are responsible for about half of the first-year composition courses and the majority of developmental writing courses, relatively few community colleges have designated writing program administrators or developed WAC/WID programs (Klausman; Ostman). First-year composition courses serve a wide range of purposes, including prerequisites for program admissions or preparation for writing in workforce programs, and may be offered in a variety of settings, including high schools. At times, two-year colleges credential first-year composition credits earned through testing or prior learning assessments.

Despite their important role in the postsecondary writing landscape, two-year colleges are persistently underrepresented in composition research. As a long line of leading two-year college English faculty have pointed out, the bulk of writing studies scholarship is produced in and about four-year institutions, which has created a significant blind spot in disciplinary knowledge-making about composition (Tinberg; Lovas; Hassel and Giordano). This dearth of research both contributes to and is perpetuated by the near-total absence of two-year college issues and scholarship in graduate curricula. Since many two-year colleges do not allocate resources toward or reward publication, two-year college faculty may lack the support or incentive to participate in national disciplinary dialogues; simultaneously, institutions that reward and support research may fail to include two-year college students and their learning spaces in their research projects on teaching and learning.

### Higher Education Policy and the Two-Year College

Increasingly, two-year college faculty's work conditions are being shaped by public policy. Community colleges have done a great deal to broaden access to education and training for millions of people, and the important role of these institutions in educating diverse student populations is likely to expand as state and federal policymakers and higher education reformers continue to place community colleges at the center of efforts to increase the percentage of Americans with postsecondary degrees and make college more affordable ("Fact Sheet").

Even as they are experiencing greater attention—and increased expectations—from policymakers, community colleges face ongoing challenges and opportunities that are both endemic to education in the United States and specific to two-year colleges. These enduring challenges include the complexities and social justice issues surrounding course placement, the fraught position and purposes of developmental education, ongoing funding crises, and the growth of dual-credit and concurrent enrollment programs. Moreover, student success is an omnipresent discussion at two-year colleges. Current data show that only one-third of students who start post-secondary education at a community college earn a degree within six years (CCRC). Although this statistic may be misleading, given there are many reasons beyond credentialing that students come to community colleges (Cowen, Brawer, and Kisker 70), these seemingly bleak numbers can drive "state-level postsecondary reform initiatives across the country" (Hassel et al. 229).

Because state and federal policies and reform efforts among philanthropists and funding agencies disproportionately impact community colleges, professional leaders like Jeffrey Andelora and Patrick Sullivan have called for two-year college faculty to become "teacher-scholar-activists." This role means

asserting professional authority beyond the classroom to advocate for two-year colleges, their faculty, and their students with policymakers and the public.

### **Academic and Professional Preparation of Two-Year College English Faculty**

For those interested in teaching in the community college, a subject-area master's degree is generally the minimum credential required, with preparation and experience specifically related to composition pedagogy often a preferred qualification. While traditional graduate education encourages and even requires specialization, prospective two-year English faculty become more valuable and marketable to hiring institutions when they have varied experience and training, including composition, communications, basic writing, technical writing, writing centers, literary studies, and reading. Even more importantly, those interested in teaching in the two-year college must be prepared for the unique community college context, which includes working with the diverse student population served at community colleges and doing so in a range of instructional modes (*Guidelines*).

Effectively preparing faculty who will teach in two-year colleges is an essential responsibility of university graduate programs, yet two-year college English instruction presents a number of distinctive considerations that are typically neglected in traditional graduate programs. Currently, most graduate programs either explicitly or implicitly professionalize students for careers at four-year institutions, with little or no attention to community colleges, the contexts where many graduate students are likely to make their careers. The reasons for this misalignment are both historical and structural, and are certainly not restricted to English or writing studies. The current paradigm of U.S. graduate education privileges content knowledge and research training over preparation for teaching (North; Stenberg). However, TYCA believes it is time for the field, *particularly its representatives in universities that house graduate programs*, to reckon with that history and change those structures. This accounting is a matter of research quality, of professional equity, and, ultimately, of social justice for the growing numbers of undergraduates that begin their college careers at two-year institutions. As the major national professional organization representing two-year college English faculty, TYCA is in the best position to offer graduate programs guidance in this area.

We draw some of our inspiration for this document from the 2014 *Report of the MLA Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature*, which calls for transformative changes to graduate education in English departments. This task force suggests that “the profession would do well to endorse a shift from a narrative of replication, in which students imitate their mentors, to one of transformation, since graduate programs should be centered on students’ diverse learning and career development needs” (1-2). The MLA Task Force makes several recommendations that resonate with TYCA’s views about how graduate programs might better prepare future two-year college English faculty: validate diverse career outcomes; redesign programs to align with students’ learning needs and career goals; strengthen teacher preparation for diverse institution types; and expand professional opportunities for future employment (2). In line with these recommendations—and in response to an ever-tightening job market in English studies—TYCA offers this revised *Guidelines for the Academic Preparation of Two-Year College English Faculty* to help our field redesign graduate education “for the needs of the teaching majority” (Hassel and Giordano 117).

### **Transforming English Graduate Programs**

Paralleling the recommendations of the *Report of the MLA Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature*, TYCA advocates that all English graduate programs “review their programs to align them with the learning needs and career goals of current and future students” (13). Such a review should include determining a) how many recent graduates of both master’s and doctoral programs go on to take faculty positions at two-year colleges, b) how many current and incoming graduate students are interested in pursuing such careers, and c) the local, regional, and national job market for postsecondary

English teaching. Graduate programs whose students are regularly going on to two-year college faculty positions—or who indicate an interest in doing so—should offer meaningful professionalization for these careers. This professionalization should include:

- Familiarity with the distinctive history, missions, and institutional conditions at two-year colleges;
- Understanding of the unique professional roles, identities, and scholarly contributions of two-year college English faculty;
- Preparation to engage with the growing body of scholarship on community colleges in other disciplines, particularly research in higher education;
- Preparation for teaching the culturally, linguistically, socioeconomically, and academically diverse students who attend two-year colleges;
- Preparation for teaching the range of courses that two-year college English faculty typically cover, including both “developmental” and college-level, with a significant emphasis on composition.

In addition to professionalizing future two-year college English faculty, graduate programs have an ethical and professional obligation to prepare *all* students—even those who will go on to careers at four-year institutions—to be knowledgeable about two-year colleges, their students, and their faculty. Such knowledge is essential for understanding the landscape of postsecondary literacy instruction in the United States. Thus, greater awareness of two-year colleges will enable future university faculty to be better researchers, better teachers and mentors to their own graduate students, better colleagues to two-year college faculty within our shared professional organizations, and better advocates for diverse learners in policy settings.

Our research reveals that examples of the kinds of graduate preparation we recommend exist across the nation, but we are advocating for a more systematic approach to designing and presenting these opportunities across graduate programs in English studies. TYCA recognizes that graduate programs vary in terms of resources, disciplinary composition, and curricula: there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Based on our review of the literature, as well as our own experiences as students, teachers, and professionals, we recommend that graduate programs adopt four broad goals for meeting the needs of the teaching majority: 1) make two-year colleges visible to graduate students; 2) collaborate with two-year college colleagues; 3) develop curricula relevant to two-year college teaching; and 4) prepare future two-year college faculty to be engaged professionals. Here, we offer a number of concrete strategies that graduate programs can implement to further each of these goals.

#### *Make Two-Year Colleges Visible*

- Acknowledge and support the possibility that graduate students will pursue two-year college English careers in recruitment materials, orientation activities, and advising and mentoring.
- Integrate readings and discussions of two-year colleges, their students, and their faculty’s scholarly contributions across all courses in the graduate curriculum, particularly those focusing on composition history, theory, pedagogy, and assessment.
- Include readings about and discussions of two-year college issues in teaching assistant or graduate student instructor preparation activities and programs.

#### *Collaborate with Two-Year College Colleagues*

- Cultivate a disciplinary professional community with English faculty at area two-year colleges. Such communities, built around common areas of interest and concern, such as teaching first-year composition, placement and transfer, writing assessment, returning veterans and adult learners, dual credit programs, etc., are beneficial for faculty and students (graduate and undergraduate) at both institutions.
- Collaborate with area two-year colleges to establish mentorship and research networks for graduate students. This will enable graduate students to learn from experienced two-year college

faculty and develop mutually beneficial research projects.

- Design graduate courses and programs that are accessible for current two-year college English faculty seeking professional development. Not only can this be a useful resource for area two-year colleges, but these veteran colleagues bring a wealth of experience and insight from which their classmates can learn.
- For graduate programs whose students regularly seek employment in two-year colleges, partner with area two-year colleges to create teaching and writing center practicum opportunities that will give graduate students hands-on experience in two-year college settings. If relevant, invite interested doctorate-holding two-year college faculty to teach select graduate courses and/or serve on those students' thesis and dissertation committees.

#### *Develop Relevant Curriculum*

- Offer specialized graduate courses in teaching and researching English in the two-year college. Making such courses available to students across English studies provides an opportunity to connect those studying literature or creative writing with composition theory and research.
- Expand graduate course offerings to include topics valuable to faculty teaching in open admissions and teaching-intensive colleges and universities, including two-year colleges. Such topics include basic writing, literacy education for culturally and linguistically diverse student populations, writing assessment, writing program administration, writing center theory, online pedagogy, and multimodal composition.
- Support graduate students seeking to learn about scholarly conversations relevant to two-year colleges that are not covered in the regular curriculum through independent or collaborative study and/or extra-departmental coursework (such as secondary or higher education, multicultural pedagogy, sociolinguistics, or ethnic studies).
- Support thesis and dissertation projects relevant to two-year colleges, particularly (although not exclusively) for students who seek to teach in these settings. Committees should be receptive to innovative culminating projects that might be more useful for aspiring two-year college teacher-scholars than the traditional thesis or dissertation.
- As needed, consider developing specialized graduate program tracks, interdisciplinary programs/certificates, or other credentials that signal students' expertise in two-year college English instruction.

#### *Prepare Two-Year College Professionals*

- Foster special interest groups among graduate students interested in teaching or researching two-year college English.
- Bring well-known two-year college teacher-scholars to campus as guest speakers and workshop facilitators.
- Encourage graduate students to participate in state, regional, and national professional organizations with a significant two-year college presence, particularly (although not exclusively) TYCA, CCCC, NCTE, CWPA, IWCA, NCPTW, MLA, CRLA, and NADE.
- Familiarize students with TYCA's key position statements and publication venues, in particular (although not exclusively) its flagship journal, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*.
- Provide early, ongoing, and explicit preparation for the two-year college job search. Such preparation should include informing students about the intense competition for full-time faculty positions at two-year colleges, equipping them with an understanding of what two-year college hiring committees look for in prospective colleagues, providing assistance in developing audience-appropriate application materials, and practicing interviews and teaching demonstrations.

In order to develop and sustain such initiatives, English graduate programs should consider hiring at least

one tenure-track faculty member with scholarly expertise in teaching English in the two-year college.

## Conclusion

Two-year college English instruction is an essential part of national and disciplinary discussions about student literacy. Because such teaching plays an increasingly prominent role in American postsecondary education and requires its own discrete professional competencies, two-year college English faculty deserve recognition and professionalization that begins during their graduate education. Graduate programs have an obligation to recognize the importance of the work that happens in two-year colleges and their responsibility to prepare graduate students to do this work well, especially given tightening job markets and budgetary uncertainty at both four- and two-year institutions. Graduate programs in English studies, which share responsibility for knowledge-making and teacher preparation with two-year colleges, are central to such reform, and TYCA welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with university colleagues in their efforts to transform graduate education. The growing majority of American students who first experience college writing in two-year college English classrooms deserve to learn with engaged and well-prepared professionals.

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