Making Composing Policy Audible: A Genealogy of the WPA Outcomes Statement 3.0

This article offers a genealogy of the deliberative policymaking of the WPA Outcomes Statement 3.0 Revision Task Force. Interviews with Task Force members reveal that the revised statement presents composing, technology, and genre as “boundary objects,” in order to preserve the document’s kairos for as long as possible.

In the fall of 2014, a diverse group of rhetoric and composition faculty and writing program administrators introduced the third revision of the Council of Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, colloquially known as “OS 3.0,” in the WPA article “Revising FYC Outcomes for a Multimodal, Digitally Composed World” (Dryer et al.). Representing the CWPA Outcomes Statement Revision Task Force, Dylan Dryer, Darsie Bowden, Beth Brunk-Chavez, Susanmarie Harrington, Bump Halbritter, and Kathleen Blake Yancey reported upon the origins and history of the 2014 revision. They explained that “[in] the fall of 2011, motivated by the sense that the field had a broader view of composing than it did a decade ago,” CWPA President Duane Roen “recruited ten faculty members . . . from various institutions to explore whether the Statement needed a
more systematic overhaul” of the previous two revisions (Dryer et al. 130). For the next few years, the task force collected feedback on possible revisions at workshops and conferences and conducted a formal survey of administrators, faculty, and graduate students. In gathering this input, task force members particularly focused on how to address digital and multimodal composing practices. Frequently, feedback from survey, workshop, and conference participants involved “questioning terms and assumptions (about outcomes, writing, composition, digital, multimodal)” and debating “the implications of word choice in a document that incorporates digital literacy” (133–34). In July 2014, the new OS draft was approved by the CWPA Executive Board; OS 3.0 was presented on the CWPA website shortly thereafter.

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In what follows, to complement the task force’s 2014 history, I offer a genealogy of their ongoing deliberative rhetoric. Reporting on my interviews with several of the task force authors of “Revising FYC Outcomes,” I argue that the task force’s deliberations informed OS 3.0’s presentation of composing, technology, and genre in their collective effort to preserve the
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Acknowledging their own (and the field’s) conflicting interpretations of the above terms, the task force chose to treat these terms as boundary objects, or “objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (Star and Griesemer 176). The task force thereby sought to ensure that digital and multimodal composing outcomes could be broadly and flexibly adapted across writing programs. This genealogical account, then, seeks to illuminate the task force’s efforts to construct the OS 3.0 as a policy boundary object, which has the “potential to . . . remove tensions and challenges for policy implementation” (Emad and Roth 19).

1. Genealogy

Genealogy, described by Michel Foucault as the effort to “record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality” and search for these events “in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history,” works to excavate the ambiguities inherent in the construction of historical narratives (76). In place of the “monotonous finality” of historical documentation, genealogy exposes the “multiple voices and silences” of myriad actors—the inclusion or exclusion of “many possible kinds of interpretations of categories, texts and artifacts” that mark a document’s development (Bowker and Star 41).

Several rhetoric and composition scholars have acknowledged policymaking’s multivocality. Chris Gallagher has noted that both popular and scholarly accounts often define policy narrowly, in terms of a finished textual product: “Conventionally, a policy is understood as an official statement, adopted by organizational leadership, that guides organizational practices. To this way of thinking, policy is (or is reified in) a governing document” (348). Because they exclude the collaborations, conflicts, and silences that shape policy, these accounts unintentionally suggest a deliberative process characterized by uniformity or uninterrupted consensus and, by corollary, a policy document that speaks with a single voice. Of course, the reality of policy deliberations is far messier and richer. Robert Asen describes such deliberations as “polysemous texts, since interlocutors may understand their objects and interactions differently” (8). In other words, policymaking can generate strikingly different interpretations of what a policy means, even (or especially) among the policymakers themselves. A genealogical
account, then, can help surface the diverse acts of “meaning making” that compose policy and that are left obscured by conventional document-centric accounts (Asen 8).

Indeed, this kind of policy genealogy often marks scholarship on the original Outcomes Statement (OS 1.0). For example, participants in the 1997–2000 Outcomes Collective have described the debates and concerns that marked their deliberations in the 2005 collection *The Outcomes Book: Debate and Consensus after the Outcomes Statement* (Harrington et al.) and its 2013 sequel, *The WPA Outcomes Statement: A Decade Later* (Behm et al.). Likewise, Patricia Ericsson’s 2003 dissertation presents a “nuanced analysis of the . . . WPA Outcomes Statement projects that accounts for processes”—the processes that led to and influenced the making of these documents as well as their eventual use” (Ericsson 111, emphasis added). While she certainly “does not ignore the products” that emerged from these processes, her emphasis is upon the *polikairos* (“the close attention to problems, policies, and politics . . . used for both assessing the opportune time of a political move and guiding the force of that move”) that has informed such products (Ericsson 25, 111).

I do not claim any particular novelty, then, in undertaking a genealogical approach to the construction of composing, digital technology, and genre in OS 3.0. Rather, I see this approach as a necessary extension of the previous scholarship’s valuable accounts. Surfacing the task force participants’ interpretations of composing, digital technology, and genre can better tell us what it meant for them to address the OS 3.0 to “a multimodal, digitally composed world,” as well as the affordances and challenges posed by their deliberative meaning making.

### 2. WPA OS 3.0 Task Force Case Study

Interview participants were chosen because of their role as members of the WPA Outcomes Statement Revision Task Force. All ten members of the Revision Task Force were invited to participate via email. Of these ten members, five agreed to participate: Professors Dylan Dryer, Susanmarie Harrington, Bump Halbritter, Beth Brunk-Chavez, and Kathleen Blake.
Yancey. All members gave permission to use their real names when publishing interview findings.

Task force interviews were designed with the intention of highlighting certain key terms and concepts explicit in OS 3.0 or its accompanying texts and tracing the “multiple voices” concealed in their inclusions and interpretations, as well as the “conspicuous absences” (Halbritter) of other terms or concepts. Methodologically, these interviews were inspired by Lee Odell, Dixie Goswami, and Anne Herrington’s discourse-based interview approach to exploring writers’ tacit knowledge. I adapted the discourse-based interview approach, originally developed to “identify the kinds of world knowledge and expectations that informants bring to writing tasks” (228), to surface the participants’ tacit knowledges, interpretations, and ideologies surrounding the terms composing, technology, and genre. In this way, the interviews could afford a genealogy of the deliberative meaning making in which task force participants were engaged.

2.1 Composing and Digital Technology

When discussing the key revisions to OS 3.0, the task force’s 2014 WPA article highlighted the document’s “explicit working definition of composing” as “what may be the largest revision apparent in the WPA OS” (Dryer et al. 138):

In this Statement, composing refers broadly to complex writing processes that are increasingly reliant on the use of digital technologies. Writers also attend to elements of design, incorporating images and graphical elements into texts intended for screens as well as printed pages. Writers’ composing activities have always been shaped by the technologies available to them, and digital technologies are changing writers’ relationships to their texts and audiences in evolving ways. (“WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition [3.0]”)

For Dryer et al., this definition of composing marked the document’s long-overdue adjustment to a “multimodal, digitally composed world.” The authors underscored, in particular, the contrast to earlier documents’ emphasis on “writing” as the privileged term: “where the former versions approached writing as a more stable act—even among emerging technologies—the new version embraces emerging forms of composing in a world of fluid forms of communication” (138). Moreover, though not explicitly stated in the article, one of the most significant features of OS 3.0’s explicit definition was the acknowledgment that composing and technology are inseparable.
To explore the implications of this new language for enabling various programmatic practices, respondents were asked the question, “Do you think this explicit definition of composing changes the way the WPA OS can be used? If so, how? If not, why not?” (see Appendix). As a follow-up question, they were frequently asked, as well, about the relationship between composing and the document’s language on technology, specifically the terminological choices made to describe digital composing.

Several respondents echoed the WPA article in pointing out that OS 3.0’s use of the term **composing** was very different from OS 1.0’s use of the term **writing**. Dryer, for instance, posited that

> if you think about it as a textual silence—the assumption that what writing was, was self-evident—the effect of that [silence], it seems to me, was that [OS 1.0] allowed the term to be defined passively in a fairly limited way. We didn’t stake out a definition of what writing meant, and that meant, for a lot of folks outside of composition or outside first-year writing programs, and even within it, [defining] writing as a fairly traditional, paper-based, school writing. . . . [The lack of definition] had the effect of allowing other people’s assumptions about what writing was to rush in through that silence.

Dryer’s idea of a “textual silence” in OS 1.0 suggests a clear kairotic moment missed by the document and, further, the policymaking power of the OS to afford composing practices. OS 1.0’s silence in the face of a “multimodal, digitally composed world” encouraged stakeholders in and out of the field to endorse a conception of writing as alphanumeric, print-oriented, and composed of the bellettristic school genres familiar since the current-traditional era. While Dryer later indicated that he understood the Outcomes Collective’s decision not to address technologies—since “they didn’t want to seem to be endorsing specific technologies which they rightly predicted would be obsolete by the time they came to press”—he also regretted that OS 1.0’s textual silence “effectively precluded [other] definitions of writing that might only have underscored what a wider range of people might want to do in a first-year writing program.” We can read this silence as pointing to a policy’s power to construct what Star and Bowker call “residual categories,” or “that which is left over after...
a classification is built—‘none of the above’ and ‘not otherwise specified’ are typical locutions” (274). Without any inclusion in OS 1.0, the possibility of digital and multimodal composing is made into a residual category, an “other” lacking any formal legitimacy and earning, at best, only tacit, tangential support.

In OS 3.0, by contrast, the new language on composing actively accounted for the “complexity” of writing. Halbritter, for example, indicated that “the big difference I see in the 2014 version versus the 2008 version is a complexity of the notion of what we think of as writing.” For Dryer, this complexity meant moving beyond a notion of writing as “fairly traditional, paper-based, school writing.” Composing accomplishes this goal since it “is a word that applies as well to the visual or to the aural as it does to the traditional scriptive” (Dryer). In other words, composing opens the door to the other “definitions of writing” that OS 1.0 had left out.

Accordingly, task force members often pointed to the explicit definition of composing as affording multimodal and digital composing practices within writing programs. Yancey spelled out this use of the OS straightforwardly: “if you want the OS to influence your program, it would be more difficult to have a program that was exclusively oriented to print.” Referring to her own experience with digital projects at El Paso, Brunk-Chavez agreed that “I think that any program that’s leaning toward doing something different has that idea in their head: are we composing or are we writing?” and that, in order to support programmatic innovation, OS 3.0 “embeds composing [that] much more deeply and integrates it in ways the previous statement didn’t.” Harrington marveled that while the first Outcomes Statement chose to avoid referencing technology due to concerns over students’ digital access, “one of the things that has clearly changed between now and the first one is much more ubiquity of people having access to different sorts of composing technologies” and that, at present, “the concern [of access] wouldn’t keep you from trying to broaden out composing just because, I mean, now people can compose on their phones for writing.”

Interestingly, several of the respondents also acknowledged that this...
new attention to the digital required a delicate balancing act. One concern was that inclusion of particular digital composing technologies and practices would diminish the timeliness or *kairos* of the OS. According to Harrington, “We were really aiming to broaden out without tying ourselves to any particular technology to avoid that problem of the new thing that will come about in three years that the OS failed to name.” Brunk-Chavez, too, conceded that OS 3.0 does not mention specific digital composing practices by name for fear of going out of date: “You’re right, we didn’t [talk] about wikis and blogs, because in two years, who knows?” Yancey indicated that she had not tried to include any mention of electronic portfolios (a central piece of her research) into the OS outcomes, since “this wasn’t something that the field has really been engaged in.” A few respondents also addressed the persistence of digital access challenges for students and (in some cases) writing programs alike. Harrington, for example, contrasted Halbritter at Michigan State, “experimenting with funky sound cloud podcasting projects,” with “somebody at an institution where . . . maybe you’ve got commuting students with very uneven levels of access to different sorts of technology and maybe you’re just doing things that get printed on a piece of paper and that get handed in.” The implication, of course, was that the OS had to be able to speak to the needs of both teachers’ students.

In response to these various issues, the Revision Task Force consciously chose to use language that could accommodate both digital and “analog” technologies. Dryer expressed this choice aptly, underscoring the digital divide as a key motivating factor: “the goal, ultimately, as we began to sort through the words to use [for composing outcomes], was: could you use this language . . . in a writing program where the writing technologies were still fairly analog? So, could you use this OS plausibly in a program that wrote on typewriters?” Like Harrington, Dryer argued that the point of the composing outcomes was not to privilege any particular technology (“This doesn’t have to be about InDesign or Adobe Pro”), but to cultivate an awareness of all technologies’ potentialities as technologies (“there’s no reason you couldn’t read that [OS 3.0’s composing outcomes] and apply that interestingly to fairly conventional composing technologies”).
In order to cultivate this awareness, respondents suggested, the language on composing was both inclusive and ambiguous; the words *complexity* and *capacious*, and references to *diverse* or *various* composing practices, were repeated consistently throughout the interviews. In terms of inclusivity, Brunk-Chavez stressed that she felt like language connecting composing and technology “is everywhere” in the document, referring to terms like *design, medium, and writing technologies* and phrases like “capacities of different environments (print and electronic)” that were dispersed throughout OS 3.0’s “Rhetorical Knowledge” section and elsewhere. She also discussed how including the notion of “intellectual property (fair use and copyright),” as opposed to the more general concept of plagiarism, in the “Knowledge of Conventions” section opened the door to considering how composing “is different from writing, it’s something bigger than writing.” On the other hand, Halbritter conceded that while “we do say that students should learn these key rhetorical concepts through analyzing and composing a variety of texts . . . we don’t really specify what that variety is.” Referring back to her earlier example of instructors at writing programs with differing levels of access, Harrington argued that OS 3.0’s ambiguity “lets both instructors on both of those extremes define what the variety [of texts being analyzed and composed] is going to be, given whatever constraints or affordances might be possible with the technologies that are available to students.” In other words, the language on composing affirms the work that various programs are doing, no matter what kinds of technologies are available to them, so long as this work acknowledges the complexity of composing.

Similarly, Halbritter described the efforts of the task force to use inclusivity and ambiguity to negotiate the document’s tension between composing and writing:

I wouldn’t say that we [on the task force] all share the same position on composing and on writing. That said, we felt that potentially the differences actually represent the differences in the field, as well. That there is no one way of approaching either writing or composing. . . . So I think that was one of the tensions that was always living in this kind of an OS, and that is: how do I keep this [document] robust enough to be able to say that we don’t want to only use a word, “writing,” which may make some people funnel everything toward an idea of writing as a [static] noun, and diversify it, without actually estranging the fact that, well, we teach writing, we’re a bunch of writers.
For Halbritter, then, the explicit definition of composing suggests the multiplicity of practices and projects in which writers are engaged; it “diversifies” the idea of writing. This affordance of multiplicity makes it acceptable to a task force, and a field, that exhibits marked disagreements in their “position[s] on composing and on writing.” At the same time, it also allows for cooperation around a common goal, namely, that “we teach writing, we’re a bunch of writers.” It’s this combination of multiplicity and cooperation, Halbritter implies, that makes the document “robust.” In presenting the document this way, he echoes Dryer and Yancey’s acknowledgment elsewhere that the OS Revision Task Force intended the OS 3.0 to work as a “boundary object.” Indeed, Halbritter’s language echoes Star and Griesemer’s own definition of boundary objects: “objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (176, emphasis added).

Tellingly, respondents signaled that their textual embrace of inclusivity and ambiguity was not limited to the definition of composing alone. They also indicated that it encompassed changes to the document’s language on genre.

2.2 Genre

In discussing “genre” in OS 3.0, the 2014 WPA article indicates that changes have been made to the statement regarding genre, but it does not necessarily specify what those changes are: “Statement 3.0 revises its construct of genre by consolidating it with the purposes and foci we now understand to be shaped by genre” (Dryer et al. 138). This begs the question, of course, what such “purposes and foci” are. Thus, in order to clarify their interpretations of the document’s revisions, respondents were asked to address whether Statement 3.0’s understanding of genre had changed from the previous two statements and, if so, how (see Appendix). Respondents’ answers to these questions varied strikingly; as Brunk-Chavez suggested in her response, “I think that every person on the committee whom you talk to would have a slightly different interpretation of what that [the understanding of genre] means.” In spite of these differences, the task force members were largely in agreement that the previous statements’ understanding of genre was inadequate and that OS 3.0 worked to remedy this. Thus, much as in their discussion of composing, respondents pointed to their efforts to ground
Respondents pointed to their efforts to ground different approaches to genre in a shared purpose—rejecting the idea of genre as static form (an idea that, as some respondents pointed out, often becomes associated exclusively with print-oriented texts) and stressing the role of composers in the construction of genres.

Dryer emphasized that the understanding of genre had indeed changed in OS 3.0 from the earlier versions of the Statement. Discussing the “Rhetorical Knowledge” and “Conventions” sections of OS 1.0, Dryer highlighted outcomes such as “Understand how genres shape reading and writing” and “Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics.” For Dryer, this language indicated that “genres are basically described as containers.” He contrasted the above outcomes with the “very substantial reframing of genre in ‘Rhetorical Knowledge’” in OS 3.0, pointing, for instance, to the outcome, “Gain experience reading and composing in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers’ and writers’ practices and purposes.” The last phrase of this outcome—“and are shaped by readers’ and writers’ practices and purposes”—was particularly important for Dryer because it demonstrated how, throughout the new document, “students and readers and writers generally are constructed as much more agentive. And so knowing and understanding that genres change and that readers and writers participate in that change is, I think, a significant change in the construct of genre described here.”

Halbritter shared Dryer’s notion that OS 3.0 afforded a more agentive participation in genre, although he approached the question from an explicitly Deweyan perspective. Halbritter made a distinction between the original document’s emphasis on “understanding of” or “knowledge about” genre and the revised OS’s emphasis on the “relationship to” genre. In responding to the question, “Has the understanding of genre changed from the previous two statements?”, he replied, “No. However, the relationship to genre has changed.” Reflecting on genre-related outcomes in the “Knowledge of Conventions” section in OS 1.0, such as “Learn common formats for different kinds of texts” and “Develop knowledge of genre con-
ventions,” Halbritter listed off the key terms emphasized— “Formats, genres, documentation, prescriptive grammar”— and concluded that the message communicated by these outcomes ”seems to be, ‘Develop knowledge of’ these things that are external to the writer.” In other words, the writer’s relationship to genre was subordinate or irrelevant to the goal of developing the writer’s knowledge about stable conventions and “common formats.” In the 2014 OS 3.0, on the other hand, “the key terms here are generally why, experience, explore, practice. So here, genre conventions now come up [as] ‘Understand why conventions vary.’ ‘Gaining experience negotiating variations in genre conventions.’” For Halbritter, the key change to the understanding of genre, in terms of language and conceptual apparatus, was the inclusion of experience; he argued that “the language of experiential learning is [now] built into the language of the OS [3.0], so that it is not as foreign to experiential learning situations as potentially the other OS [1.0] was” (Halbritter). Again, though Halbritter uses somewhat different language from Dryer’s (with, possibly, somewhat different philosophical and practical implications) to describe the changes made to genre, this language moves in tandem with their effort to acknowledge readers’ and writers’ participation.

Harrington, too, acknowledged the need to move beyond the static formalism of former notions of genre and to embrace genre as experiential. However, even as she was in fundamental agreement with Dryer and Halbritter, she also expressed these agreements using different vocabulary, framed largely around “habits of mind.” Harrington indicated several times that the outcomes should focus on genre as practicing various habits of mind, rather than as satisfactorily producing (or reproducing) the formats of specific documents. Pointing to one new outcome in the “Rhetorical Knowledge” section, “Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure,” Harrington commented:

the point there is not so much that you write in different genres as though it’s a cookie cutter—that you’ve written a letter that has [one set of] features, and then you’re writing an essay that has [another set of] features, and then you’re going to write an opinion piece that has [yet another set of] features. The shift was . . . in students discerning the elements of the rhetorical context and letting the features of the text emerge because of that analysis.
In “discerning the elements of the rhetorical context” when performing genre, Harrington suggested, students were cultivating the habit of mind that is rhetorical knowledge, “the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes and contexts in creating and comprehending texts.” Harrington then gave other examples of this kind of generic activity corresponding to particular habits of mind: “There’s a habit of mind about taking responsibility for making choices and understanding their consequences, and the habit of mind regarding creativity.” Only Harrington described this agentive, experiential responsibility as a “habit of mind,” drawing from her previous collaborative policy experience with the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Education. However, the focus on “responsibility for making choices” corresponds to Dryer’s notion of genre as an “agentive process” and Halbritter’s notion of genre as experienced and negotiated.

Of all the respondents, Beth Brunk-Chavez drew the most direct links between this expansive notion of genre and the document’s affordances of digital composing. Referring to the 2008 OS 2.0, which included a “technology plank” added to the main text, she asserted that “in the previous document, genre was more text-based, obviously, right? . . . Because that last plank was separate from everything else, the technologies or whatever media we use to compose and deliver [writing] projects were separate from what they [the projects] were doing, if that makes sense.” In this interpretation, OS 2.0 still positioned technology as a supplementary tool clearly distinct from the composing processes and rhetorical actions embedded in students’ projects. In the OS 3.0, on the other hand, the understanding of genre as agentive or experiential means that it is inseparable from the medium of composition chosen:

I think this one [the revised OS] considers genre as much wider; obviously, it’s not just print-based, it’s not just text-based. It can be not text at all, it can be a hybrid version of text and images, or text and video. And the genre is really influenced by what we compose with, and that affects how that message gets delivered as well.

As in the case of the explicit definition of composing, OS 3.0’s construct of genre now also encompasses multiple ways of doing things (as opposed to “common formats”). Brunk-Chavez noted, as well, that this multiplicity extended to “genres and conventions across disciplines.” Though previous
versions of the OS may have implicitly prioritized traditional first-year composition genres, such as the privileged position of the print-based research paper identified by Dryer, the 2014 Task Force debated “the value of just teaching those English composition genres vs. an understanding of what’s happening in students’ writing lives, or what are they writing outside our courses . . . And when we [as composition instructors] call something a lit review, that’s not the same as a lit review [that] they’re writing in Psychology.” Pointing to language in the “Knowledge of Conventions” section that explicitly stated that conventions “vary by genre . . . by discipline . . . and by occasion,” Brunk-Chavez argued that this afforded a much more fluid, context-driven understanding of generic practice.

However, Brunk-Chavez recognized that the expansion of genre across media and disciplines in OS 3.0 also required a degree of prudence. As mentioned earlier, she admitted that OS 3.0 does not mention specific digital genres or specific digital composing practices by name. Brunk-Chavez linked this decision to the *kairos* of the document and the concern that it could quickly go out of date: “You’re right, we didn’t [talk] about wikis and blogs, because in two years, who knows? . . . I was writing a little document about Google Docs. And then [Docs] changed to Google Drive, right . . . So that’s a good example. If we were to put, ‘Collaborate on Google Docs’ [as an outcome], it’s already past.” Given the rapid rate of technological change, Brunk-Chavez echoed the concerns of other task force members in worrying that several digital composing practices in the present, whether they be blogs, wikis, or Google Docs, may quickly become defunct. In that case, enshrining them in OS 3.0 would only serve to make the document less flexible and more immediately in need of further revision. Some generality, in this view, would better prolong the document’s timeliness.

On this question of timeliness, Harrington and Yancey offered welcome perspectives, having served on the first Outcome Collective and vividly recalling earlier debates about genre. For Harrington,

Perhaps one of the reasons that the genre stuff struck me so much is that I remember when we were editing the first version of the OS, getting it ready to go out for executive committee approval and whatnot, we were still arguing about whether genre itself was a term that should be used in the statement or not, because was it a term that was too much of an insider term? And, obviously, it’s here now.
As in Brunk-Chavez’s discussion of digital genres, Harrington revealed an early anxiety that the term *genre* might be too specific, “too much of an insider term,” to aid the document’s public or cross-institutional utility. This corresponds with other contemporaneous accounts indicating that “not everyone who might choose (or be called upon) to interpret and implement the OS will necessarily read the term *genre* in a way that is informed by recent genre theory,” since “genre isn’t a term with much currency for a lot of people in English studies” (Liu 72–73). In the end, however, the OS included the term—“obviously, it’s here now”—and the expanded notion of genre in OS 3.0, Harrington suggested, signaled genre’s present timeliness.

Yancey built substantially on this notion of genre as a term whose time has come. Echoing Harrington’s concern about genre being an “insider term,” she questioned whether the sophisticated notion of genre described in the various iterations of the OS was shared by the public, or by writing teachers *en masse*, even up to the present:

> In the first one [OS 1.0], we had a lot of discussion about whether we should even include the word ‘genre’. . . . There were two questions. The chief one was really an audience question, so, who is this for? Will people reading the document understand genre? The second involved—there was a question about, even in terms of teachers of writing, whether that [i.e., the concept of genre] would make sense to them. I talked to someone just in the last month, who was quite certain, you know, she was still enamored of modes [i.e., narration, description, exposition, argument]. She didn’t understand genre, she understood modes. She basically saw genre, if she saw it at all, as a form or format.

At first glance, Yancey’s discussion here might seem to argue against the inclusion of genre in OS 3.0. For members of the public, even for composition instructors, genres are still understood largely as forms. In this, not much would seem to have changed between OS 1.0 and 3.0; as early as 1999, Irvin Peckham confessed that “one of the problems with genres is that people who haven’t read very much about them think they refer to the modes” (qtd. in Liu 73). How could the term *genre* be timely, given such reception?

However, Yancey’s next words indicated her belief that the understanding of genre had, in fact, changed in OS 3.0, and that this change has significant implications when making sense of the document’s timeliness and audience. As Yancey argued, though the writing public may perpetuate an outdated notion of genre, there has been a substantial *scholarly* or *discipline-wide* shift in rhetoric and composition’s consideration of genre, one that is reflected in OS 3.0:
I think, in the last fifteen years, the field has become much, much savvier about genre. I’d simply point to the wealth of research on the topic, the interest in genre as a portal for students . . . I think that genre is central to the field in theory, in research, and in practice in a way that it was not fifteen years ago.

The document’s understanding of genre had changed, in other words, because the field’s understanding of genre had changed—that is, “the field has become much, much savvier about genre.” Once again, we see this concern with “timeliness” in relation to the field. This concern, in Yancey’s case, meshed with her sense of the WPA OS, in each of its iterations, as a “consensus document.” In this view, OS 3.0 should reflect the consensus of the field. To do otherwise as policy, according to Yancey, would be counter-productive: “we didn’t move as far as I might want to see us move. I don’t think the field’s ready for that. I don’t think that represents consensus practices.” In other words, Yancey saw the document as trying not to move too far ahead of where the discipline is.

To be sure, Yancey nuanced this focus on rhetoric and composition's relationship to genre with an awareness that genre had also become increasingly relevant across the curriculum, in spite of persistent misunderstandings of the term. Discussing the Outcomes Statement’s potential as a “bridging document,” Yancey used Mary Soliday’s *Everyday Genres* as a touchstone for the bridges to be built: “The fact that she could title a book *Everyday Genres* tells you . . . that genre really has taken hold in the field in any number of contexts . . . And I think that, to some extent, is reflected in some way in the document. I can imagine some people who are scholars of genre wanting to have seen more in it. But then I’ll go back to the idea that it’s a consensus document.” As in the case of composing, Yancey pointed to the delicate balancing act between inclusivity and ambiguity in which the task force had engaged. On the one hand, OS 3.0 introduced language that could afford a more complex version of genre, one that could prove useful in a variety of contexts: digital composing, high school composing, WAC, professional writing, and so on. On the other hand, the task force had to weigh how field-specific it made its language in order to gain “consensus,”

Indeed, as the interviews generally indicate, a strategic ambiguity ran throughout the task force’s language choices. When it came to constructing outcomes for composing, technology, and genre, the task force opted to construe these terms as openly and flexibly as possible.
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both inside and outside the field. They determined that a certain degree of “strategic ambiguity” was necessary to achieve this goal (Weick 120).

Indeed, as the interviews generally indicate, a strategic ambiguity ran throughout the task force’s language choices. When it came to constructing outcomes for composing, technology, and genre, the task force opted to construe these terms as openly and flexibly as possible. Excavating the genealogy of this decision reveals something the 2014 WPA article’s history did not, for the most part, elaborate in detail—the deliberative rhetoric underlying the OS 3.0 policy document—and suggests particular lessons we can draw from OS 3.0’s ongoing policy successes and challenges.

3. Discussion

A genealogy of the WPA OS 3.0 reveals the multiple voices of the OS Revision Task Force, both in concert and in conflict. Each task force member, as indicated above, had somewhat different understandings of the document’s kairotic efficacy, its construction of digital and multimodal composing, and its construction of genre. Yet in spite of (and perhaps even because of) these differences, the task force succeeded in crafting what Yancey called a “consensus document”—or, in keeping with the OS’s status as a boundary object, a document reflecting “cooperation without consensus” (Star). In order to sustain the policy’s kairos, the task force members chose to support digital genres and digital composing implicitly, but not explicitly, for fear of the document alternately “moving too fast” or “going out of date.” While this decision promised the flexibility and adaptability the task force was aiming for, they may not have been able to avoid the “gap between policymaking and policy implementation” described by Emad and Roth. While a policy boundary object, according to Emad and Roth, has the “potential to . . . remove tensions and challenges for policy implementation,” boundary objects do not succeed in garnering support in a vacuum; rather, they must be recognized and legitimated as boundary objects by the different communities of practice involved. Perceptions of the OS 3.0 as prescriptive or conservative, as noted by task force members themselves, persist. Therefore, this article’s genealogy also provides insight into the most advantageous conditions for OS 3.0’s policy success and into its likely ongoing challenges.
into the most advantageous conditions for OS 3.0’s policy success and into its likely ongoing challenges. Some of these conditions and challenges are outlined below.

1. **OS 3.0 acknowledges composing and genre as boundary objects.**

As discussed previously, boundary objects are objects that afford cooperation without consensus; they are strictly defined within a particular community of practice, but loosely defined across different communities of practice. Similarly, OS 3.0 allows certain terms and concepts—among them, composing, writing, technology, genre, and conventions—to encompass many different things. For example, the inclusivity of the document’s explicit working definition of composing affords radically different composing practices across writing programs. As Jody Shipka has pointed out, a broad understanding of composing can include not only “digital texts, such as digital audio, video, and websites,” but also “writing on shirts, purses and shoes, repurposing games, staging live performances, producing complex multipart rhetorical events, or asking students to account for the choices they make while designing linear, thesis-driven, print-based texts” (9). Different communities of practice (e.g., writing programs or departments)—some emphasizing print-based practices, others digital, others visual or aural—can all find their practices supported by the notion of “composing” as boundary object found within OS 3.0. Understanding “genre” as a boundary object, along these same lines, ensures that this concept is not tied to the specificity of static forms but instead supports various recurring practices across occasions, disciplines, communities, technologies, media, and so on. While the document may be identified with some practices more readily than others within any particular community, OS 3.0 also provides loose definitions that allow for ongoing organizational cooperation—even in the face of dissensus. However, there is no guarantee that this organizational cooperation in the face of dissensus will fully develop; this lack of guarantee highlights the primary challenge of OS 3.0, discussed below.

2. **OS 3.0 must avoid the impression, or temptation, of hegemony.**

In his interview for this article, Dryer noted a frustrating paradox about the task force’s revision work. Discussing the legitimate criticisms that rhetoric and composition scholars made about OS 1.0 and 2.0, he lamented that the OS 3.0—rather than being seen as a democratic invitation to address these criticisms—is perceived as yet another imposition from above:
So we overhaul it, and then of course people say what they said fifteen years ago: “We’re supposed to do all this?” Because there is something—and again, I’m still trying to sort this through in my own mind—but there’s something about seeing the document published in this way that makes it exceptionally difficult not to look at it as a pronouncement, a mandate, something handed down from the executive committee, even though we say we’re looking for outcomes and not standards. But that’s been an exceptionally, perhaps surprisingly to me, subtle point for us. There’s kind of a reluctance, I think, to wade into the statement for yourself and start messing around with it. But that’s exactly what you’re supposed to do with it!

Dryer’s apprehensive observation suggests that OS 3.0 is readily perceived—and, perhaps, may be readily employed—as an expression of hegemony, defined here as the “condition of attaining and holding the power of imposing a definition of how things are discussed and understood” (Huvila 2530). The perception—or reality—of OS 3.0 as a hegemonic policy document would prove to be an unfortunate irony, since hegemony discourages the very same productive disagreement and alternate imaginings that several task force members hoped the document would generate. As Huvila cautions, a boundary object cannot insure against hegemonic intervention, since it may itself constitute hegemonic intervention, persuading or pressuring “bordering communities to perceive the hegemonic point of view as nondetrimental and even advantageous” (2537).

Jeff Rice, for example, has criticized previous iterations of the OS as just such a hegemonic intervention. Whereas the task force has framed the OS 3.0’s ambiguities as kairotic and flexible, Rice argues that they represent a politically suspect generality that preserves the programmatic and disciplinary status quo:

Faced with an ideology of generality, a reader of . . . the Outcomes Statement itself can easily be interpellated as someone who should do general work. That reliance on general work, that dependence on the familiar, is the core of all conservatism. Generality is the basis of the rejection of the ‘unusual,’ and the legitimacy of the ‘one best way’ for standardized production. The minute we introduce specificity, we place the efficiency prompted by generality under question. (12)

In other words, Rice claims that the OS, far from affording programs the freedom to experiment with the document and implement it in any way
they see fit, instead establishes a standardized, generalist, and conservative approach as the “one best way.” In this sense, Rice’s argument closely resembles Dryer’s concern that OS 3.0 will be perceived as a hegemonic boundary object, one that imposes its robust common identity upon various practitioners and communities of practice without room for question or dissent.

I would suggest that Rice’s argument is well taken, particularly when considering the rather formidable influence the OS can have within writing programs. Noting that “68 percent of writing program administrators conducted formal review of student writing in light of outcomes or objectives” in 2014 and that new composition textbooks now frequently cite the Outcomes Statement “to address such assessment needs,” White et al. conclude that “[t]he combination of portfolio-based writing assessment and outcomes-based curriculum derived from a national consensus document represent something new in the world of composition programs: a consensus model of the writing construct” (16–17). While there are decided advantages to producing a “consensus model of the writing construct,” with the full weight of writing program administrators, writing assessments, and textbook publishers supporting it, the likelihood that such a model will effectively be challenged or “messed around with” by graduate teaching assistants, contingent instructors, newly minted professors seeking tenure, and other (relatively) subordinate communities of practice is somewhat uncertain.

However, I would also suggest that OS 3.0 creates the conditions of possibility necessary to resist hegemonic appropriation of its policy rhetoric. Given the task force members’ commitment to continued revision of the OS and widespread participation in said revision, extending the task force’s own deliberative rhetoric to wider communities of practice within the field can encourage this healthy resistance. I discuss this possibility in more detail below.

3. OS 3.0 can build on its successes by keeping policy deliberations audible. Keeping policy deliberations audible means dismantling the perception of OS 3.0 as a finished, single-voiced document. Instead, the document and the discourses surrounding it must explicitly acknowledge that the deliberative policy rhetoric that created OS 3.0 is ongoing, inclusive, and receptive to dissent, experimentation, and change.
the perception of OS 3.0 as a finished, single-voiced document. Instead, the document and the discourses surrounding it must explicitly acknowledge that the deliberative policy rhetoric that created OS 3.0 is ongoing, inclusive, and receptive to dissent, experimentation, and change. There are a number of opportunities for accomplishing this goal; several of them, in fact, are included in the task force’s 2014 WPA article. One opportunity is to document and celebrate local adaptations and workarounds. As Dryer et al. recommend, such documentation might entail “provid[ing] a website where WPAs can upload local versions of OS 3.0—both to help others see how local institutions have adopted and adapted it and to provide a record of the kinds of uses we have collectively made of the WPA OS” (135). In making this recommendation, the task force takes a significant step in addressing Rice’s critique of the document’s generality: variation needs to be described and accounted for, and tactical introductions of specificity into the discourses surrounding the Outcomes Statement can help to “push the envelope” in fruitful ways, showing what programmatic innovations (in terms of multimodal composing or otherwise) are possible. When a policy is even partially audible in this way, its “silences” and “conspicuous absences” can be more readily identified and challenged.

Another opportunity for expanding the Outcomes Statement’s inclusivity is to embed greater capacities for adaptation and revision into the Outcomes Statement itself and its accompanying communities of practice. Without a policy’s responsiveness to community members, perceptions of its status as a “pronouncement [or] mandate” only increase, and the policy will eventually face overwhelming resistance and breakdown if it takes minimal or no account of community members’ real practices. The OS’s emergence from, and persistent engagement with, WPA-L discussions is one example of making the policy responsive to member input and critique. Its dependence on disciplinary forums to effect revision is another. There are various mechanisms the CWPA could employ to extend the document’s responsiveness, as well. First, although the first Outcomes Collective developed organically, the last two Outcomes Statement Task Forces were appointed. In an effort to return to a more organic development, the Outcomes Collective could become a standing institutional body with rotating membership, along the lines of a Special Interest Group or Standing Group at the Conference for College Composition and Communication. This would be a start to ensuring that regular and varied disciplinary input
To adapt Kenneth Burke, a way of hearing is also a way of not hearing. A policy is never all-encompassing; it will never hear all available voices on first listen. However, if we in the field choose to keep the local adaptations and revisions of OS 3.0 audible, we can fulfill the policy boundary object’s quintessential purpose: to make space for policy deliberations’ polysemy, ensure “cooperation without consensus,” and thereby aid policy implementation.

4. Conclusion
This study has sought to fill a gap between WPA OS policymaking and OS policy implementation. OS 3.0 has successfully created a policy boundary object that has the potential to bridge multiple communities of practice; however, to realize this potential, it must address the concern that it retains earlier Outcomes Statements’ perceived shortcomings, such as biases toward generality, conservatism, and a prescriptive relationship with its audience. Addressing these concerns requires that OS 3.0 explicitly publicize and extend the multivocality of its deliberative policy rhetoric. It is my hope that by providing a genealogy of the OS 3.0 Revision Task Force’s deliberative meaning making surrounding the concepts of composing, technology, and genre, the current article has aided in precisely this kind of public extension. In the end, as the members of the Revision Task Force have argued, OS 3.0 belongs to all of us, and it is our right and our privilege, as composition practitioners, to effect future revisions.
Appendix: Sample Interview Questions for OS 3.0 Task Force Case Study

Interview Questions:

History

1. Can you tell me a little about how the Outcomes Statement Revision Task Force drew from past policy statements or emerged alongside current policy statements? I’m thinking particularly of the footnote on the first page: “This Statement is aligned with the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing.”

Digital Technologies and Composing

2. The WPA Journal article discusses OS 3.0’s "explicit definition of composing” as one of its key changes to the document. How do you think this explicit definition of composing changes the way the WPA OS can be used?

3. The article also discusses multiple sources of disciplinary input the Task Force received before and during the drafting process. One kind of input described is discussion of different terminology and practices associated with digital composing (such as digital literacy, new media, visual rhetoric, and multimodality). Can you say more about how these discussions informed the terms and practices incorporated into the final draft OS?

Genre

4. Statement 3.0 also includes particular attention to genre, particularly in the “Rhetorical Knowledge” and “Conventions” sections of the OS. In your view, has the understanding of genre changed from the previous two statements?
   • (If so) How?
   • (If not) Why was the language changed?

Disciplinarity

5. According to the WPA article, “the language of the revision itself signals a different stance to our stakeholders, most explicitly by its increased assertiveness about the need to base programmatic decisions on disciplinary knowledge” (139).
   • Is this your understanding as well?
   • (If so) Do you think this different stance changes the way the OS is used? How?
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