

**Students as Co-Producers of Queer Pedagogy**

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**Abstract.** Responding to concerns about a textbook reading that students perceived as heteronormative, cisnormative, and antifeminist, we formed a partnership between students and faculty to reflect on the situation and to workshop ways to move forward. Our discussions were informed by our situation: a public HBCU in North Carolina, a state that had been in the headlines for anti-LGBT legislation. Many students reported that prior to our work they had not felt they had power to challenge the authoritative nature of texts in a classroom, even when they found those texts to be incorrect or inappropriate. This project empowered students to work with faculty and the publisher to change the textbook itself as well as the way certain rhetorical content was taught in our institution.

**Keywords:** queering; agency; student-faculty partnership; partnership pedagogy; course texts

We want our students to feel empowered in our classrooms. We want them to create new knowledge, to challenge accepted ideas, and to develop as leaders and change makers. Sometimes, however, the structures of authority embedded in the classroom can create blind spots for instructors. In the case described here, we discovered mid-semester that a handbook our department had adopted contained a writing sample that many students found offensive, claiming it perpetuated gender and sexuality stereotypes.

That handbook, which was in use by our first-year writing program, became the topic of discussion in an upper-level English course on LGBTQ literature. Students in that course frequently reflected on concepts of heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and gender stereotypes as part of the course content. During one class period, students raised their first-year experience of reading a piece of student writing in *The Little Seagull Handbook 2e* (Bullock, Brody, & Weinberg, 2014). Our instructional focus on the formatting of the piece, which was included to demonstrate APA style, had blinded us to the content students found offensive. For the purposes of class discussion, the handbook excerpt became a useful example of the pervasiveness of stereotyping, but it also created a moment in which the instructors could invite further reflection and student agency. Throughout, students expressed multiple ideas for how to change not only the handbook but also the teaching related to it. The intensity of their investment in the process culminated in discussions that included the handbook's authors and editor, and all involved at the publisher were highly responsive to our concerns. What unfolded became a complex case of student-faculty partnership in rhetorical intervention that had tangible results in and beyond this classroom.

In the following essay, we review literature on student-faculty partnerships for institutional change and examine the local social and political contexts that gave exigence to the actions we and our students initiated. We discuss our thought processes behind the initial class discussions and subsequent activities. Our perspectives reflect that we approached this situation from different roles in the university. We further consider how some of what we did might be adapted productively in other contexts. Our hope is that our work might help others consider how students working as partners with faculty members can effect change on multiple levels: in the classroom, in a writing program, at the university as a whole, and at a national publisher of college texts.

### **Student-faculty partnerships**

In reviewing international scholarship about student engagement and student-faculty partnerships, Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014) discern four major domains in which such partnership approaches are used:

- learning, teaching, and assessment;
- subject-based research and inquiry;
- scholarship of teaching and learning;
- curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy. (p.36)

The case involving Kathryn's literature course demonstrates further value from collaborations between students and faculty. Classroom discussion turned into a co-constructed activist project with tangible external results. While this occasion evidenced several of the above domains in that students assessed a commonly assigned text, discussed the issues with it in subject-based terms, and provided pedagogical recommendations, this partnership also had an activist quality that resulted in actions with significance beyond one classroom and institution.

A strong strand in the scholarship of teaching and learning positions students as potential change agents rather than mere consumers in higher education. Kay, Dunne, and Hutchinson (2010) argue that student-researchers can use their agency and knowledge to contribute meaningfully as institutional problem solvers. Stocks (2012) and Ambos (2012) see undergraduate research conducted with faculty partners or sponsors as a key source for student-initiated institutional change. Important in these approaches are the degrees to which students initiate projects and maintain agency throughout. Fielding's (2001) criticism of the ubiquitous and potentially manipulative use of student voices as merely data for institutional accountability highlights important ethical considerations for those interested in involvement with students. He discusses a spectrum of student roles in school improvement projects, from serving as informants and recipients to being the initiators, collaborators, and change-makers who share power equitably with faculty partners in "radical collegiality" (p. 129). McCulloch (2009) similarly proposes a way of framing students as "co-producers" of higher education. McCulloch forwards this term from public administration to counter consumerist metaphors for students.

Other scholars of teaching and learning who recognize students as producers in student-faculty collaborations document students' contributions to published knowledge-making (Taylor & Wilding, 2009; Werder & Otis, 2010; Wymer, Fulford, Baskerville, & Washington, 2012), their roles as producers of course materials (Williams et al., 2011), and their influence on curricular design (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011; Mihans, Long, & Felten 2008).

The egalitarian intent behind such collaborations between students and faculty can also be understood through feminist scholarship of listening rhetoric, especially as posited by Royster (1996) and Ratcliffe (2005). Royster raises listening as a crucial means for discourse across racial and status boundaries:

How can we teach, engage in research, write about, and talk across boundaries *with* others instead of for, about, and around them? ... [W]hen do we listen? How do we listen? How do we demonstrate that we honor and respect the person talking and what that person is saying, or what the person might say if we valued someone other than ourselves having a turn to speak? (p.38)

Ratcliffe, building on Royster's work, defines rhetorical listening as a "code of cross-cultural conduct" (p. 19) with moves that can help "approximate equal positioning" (p.128) in situations of power difference.

Royster and Ratcliffe challenge us to acknowledge the different subject positions we occupy. In any given class, our HBCU has a racially diverse group of students, but the majority identify as African American; we are white faculty members. Many of our students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, but many are from wealthy families. We have had in our classes young people who have served time in prison, and students from more privileged backgrounds, including the child of a senator and the child of a MacArthur "genius grant" recipient. In the LGBTQ Literature course, many of the students identified openly, as Collie does, as part of the queer community; whereas, others identified, as Kathryn does, as allies to the queer community. We recognize what is powerful and diverse within our HBCU setting. Listening closely to our students inspires us to perform Fielding's "radical collegiality" with them toward activist ends within this context of intersecting identities.

### **Methods**

The authors' methods include naturalistic participant-observations of the case, participant member-checks, and collaborative rhetorical analysis of textual artifacts through a queer theory lens. Because our initial goals for questioning and reflecting together (including with our students) were to better understand this case's implications for our own teaching, this might be characterized initially as a stumbled-upon action research project. However, it seemed evident that the case could be instructive beyond our own classrooms.

To gather data and insights, we engaged in periodic reflective conversation and notetaking with each other during the teaching situation and in the months following. We involved a student from the class to co-analyze and present with us in order to member check the findings and distribute the power to make meaning from the situation. This reflects our principles about student agency and students as partners in institutional inquiry. These actions were triangulated by analyzing relevant textual artifacts including state news, educational policy, and the handbook in question. Our textual analysis began with students' insights informed through the course's queer theory lens.

### **Social and political contexts for student action**

In March 2016, a few months before the course began, North Carolina passed House Bill 2 (HB2), labelled by legal observers and journalists as one of the most anti-LGBTQ laws in the United States (Yang, 2016). Though its legal name was the "Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act," it became known nationwide, especially in right-wing media, as North Carolina's "bathroom bill" (Williams, 2016). The bill's provisions did more than simply target the rights of transgender people to use public restrooms. Because it restricted the rights of LGBTQ persons in a variety of ways, the ramifications were felt on North Carolina's campuses on multiple levels: concern among the LGBTQ community about how the law would be implemented, immediate lawsuits against the UNC system challenging the law's provisions, and withdrawal of collegiate sporting tournaments by the NCAA and CIAA (Tracy & Blinder, 2016; Peralta & Portillo, 2016). UNC System President Margaret Spellings received notice from the U.S. Department of Justice that HB2 put the university system in violation of Title IX, the U.S. federal civil rights law barring educational programs from discriminating on the basis of sex, to which Spellings (2016) replied that the University of North Carolina was "in a difficult position" (p. 1) because it was subject to the laws of the state. As one of the 17 UNC system campuses, our university was impacted in real and meaningful ways by HB2.

This event rocked any complacency progressive North Carolina educators might have had about the status of trans and queer students in our state. The suddenly and very public struggle prompted by the law's passage made many of us want to ensure that our classrooms were hospitable spaces for all students. Interacting with our students underscored for us how important an instructor's role is in creating such space for productive conversation. Engaging in honest conversation requires actively listening to students, and that act of listening reminded us that students who are sensitive to these issues can be powerful collaborators in our efforts to make education a site of not simply fairness, but also queer agency.

Our historical and institutional context is important. Not only did this scenario unfold at a public institution in North Carolina months after a highly controversial bill aimed at the LGBTQ community had been passed, but we also teach at one of the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). For our students who identify as Queer and Trans People of Color (QTPOC), the stakes can be high. As Garvey et al. (2018) point out, "QTPOC students are often faced with a tenuous choice regarding how they express their minoritized sexual, gender, and racial

identities within society and the extent to which they disclose their identities within collegiate environments" (p. 2). Mobley and Johnson (2015) have also called attention to the fact that HBCUs have lagged behind their higher education counterparts in providing welcoming spaces for LGBTQ individuals, noting in 2015, that only 21 out of the nation's 102 HBCUs had LGBT/Ally Organizations, though that number has increased somewhat in recent years. In terms of campus climate, Mobley and Johnson (2015) further point out that "rather than encouraging students to walk in their own truth and embrace their authentic selves, many HBCUs compel students who identify as gay or lesbian to suppress these identities while on campus" (p. 79). Though we believe, for many reasons, that our institution is pioneering new levels of support for LGBTQ students (Williams, 2018), we acknowledge that the culture of our campus as an HBCU may affect students' perceptions of safety and support.

Even the class in which we began this project is something that students clearly had been wanting for a long time. When we offered the course "ENG 3040: Special Topics: LGBT Literature" in Fall 2016, it was the first ever undergraduate course at our HBCU that focused exclusively on LGBTQ literature, and it was long overdue. The deep interest students showed and the vibrant discussions that followed were clear indicators of their desire for more opportunities to talk about LGBTQ issues in an academic setting. Like all historically black colleges and universities, our classrooms are diverse spaces. The makeup of the class under discussion included students of different races, ages, and a variety of other factors that impacted their experiences. As a result, they brought to our discussion their own approaches to, and understanding of, discrimination informed by the intersections of race, class, gender identity, and sexual orientation. This diversity of experience yielded a rich discussion in the classroom, and it positively impacted our ability to collectively respond to the situation.

### **Student concerns about the handbook**

Our primary textbook for the ENG 3040 course, *Finding out: An introduction to LGBT studies*, took as its approach "a recognition of how many queer cultures bring substantive, potentially transformative insights to bear on mainstream and dominant modes of being," and the authors expressed the value of "how our queer visions help us see the world in intellectually, politically, and personally capacious ways" (Gibson, Alexander, & Meem, 2014, p. xv). That approach challenges patterns of communication that tend to exclude from recognition people who do not identify as heterosexual or cisgender. In the early part of the semester, therefore, participants in the course began discussing heteronormative and cisnormative discourse and its queer erasure. It quickly came up in discussion that students wanted to examine the writing handbook our department had adopted as an example of such a text.

As the students were all familiar with *The Little Seagull Handbook*, having used it in their composition courses, they were eager to discuss it. Handbooks are considered authoritative sources on pronoun use; students wanted to evaluate how the second edition of *Little Seagull* handled such language. Students also chose to engage with

a sample paper provided in the handbook as a model of student writing. The title of the piece is "It's in Our Genes: The Biological Basis of Human Mating Behavior." Here is the opening abstract of the item in question:

While cultural values and messages certainly play a part in the process of mate selection, the genetic and psychological predispositions developed by our ancestors play the biggest role in determining to whom we are attracted. Women are attracted to strong, capable men with access to resources to help rear children. Men find women attractive based on visual signs of youth, health, and, by implication, fertility. While perceptions of attractiveness are influenced by cultural norms and reinforced by advertisements and popular media, the persistence of mating behaviors that have no relationship to societal realities suggests that they are part of our biological heritage. (Stonehill, 2014, p. 167)

What follows this abstract is an introduction in which we are asked to imagine a young woman named Jenny who is attracted to a "tall, muscular, and stylishly dressed" young man who owns a BMW (p. 168). This depiction is provided as a representative example of preferences in sexual attraction.

While discussing the text, students pushed for an aggressive critique of the handbook and its editorial decisions. There was erasure of experience here. If the essay was claiming that biology was the basis for heterosexual attraction, it didn't allow for the validity of any kind of same-sex attraction. They also felt it was important that the authors and editors of the textbook chose to share as an exemplar an essay that was heteronormative in its exclusion of the possibility of same-sex attraction. Additionally, the gender stereotypes present in the essay's assessment of attraction run counter to feminism's advocacy on behalf of individual respect and equality, suggesting, by implication, that women would not be attracted to men without money and that men are only attracted to able-bodied youthful women. By reinforcing gender stereotypes, the essay also promoted the concept of binary gender roles, a cisnormative concept. As the conversation continued, our students also wanted to look at the guidance the handbook offered on pronoun usage. Though there were admonitions in the text to avoid sexist language, guidance on pronouns did not embrace they/them for singular usage. Alternate pronouns (ze, for example) were not even mentioned. Students were aware of much debate in popular media about that kind of pronoun guidance, so they were quick to point out that a composition handbook really needed to address the issue in a helpful way.

After we started this project of critically engaging the handbook, there was one interaction Kathryn particularly remembers. She was talking with a transgender student who came to visit her office hours. He was not enrolled in the literature class, but he had been a student in her composition class two years before. Kathryn briefly mentioned that there was an offensive essay in the composition handbook that some of her students had wanted to address in class discussion. Without further elaboration from Kathryn, the student immediately said, "I know exactly which essay you're talking about." He remembered with clarity the essay that had

taken Kathryn several semesters to notice as a potential problem. LGBTQ students weren't seeing form over content the way Kathryn had been. They saw an essay in a university-sanctioned textbook that erased and invalidated their existence, and there hadn't been an opportunity for them to make their concerns heard.

### **Workshopping the problem**

During the second week of the semester, Kathryn mentioned to Collie that she and her students in ENG 3040 had voiced criticism for the handbook used in our first-year writing courses, noting the glaringly heteronormative sample text and narrow guidance about pronoun usage as their main objections. Collie directs NCCU's first year writing program. A committee she led had selected that handbook, and she felt a responsibility to speak with the students. Collie therefore volunteered to lead a workshop during one of the ENG 3040 sessions to fully air students' concerns and start discussing what actions we might take. To prepare, she read the sections in dispute and researched how other authoritative texts were working with pronouns. She discovered that the *Writing Center Journal* referenced the *Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language* crafted by the National Council of Teachers of English (2002) and had an editorial policy of singular "they." She brought an excerpt from the *Writing Center Journal's* current Submission Guide and Style Sheet (n.d.) as a reference point for our discussion.

As students worked through their responses to the text and how its guidance compared with current standard practice, Collie explained her role in the original decision to adopt the handbook. She explained that she took responsibility, and that now Kathryn and their class had raised the issue, she was equally concerned. Collie wanted to hear students' perspectives and to work with them to weigh our options for taking action. During our workshop, students expressed strong feelings, sharp insights, and a desire to move forward with some kind of formal response to the publisher. Kathryn followed up by gathering students' brief written perspectives. Collie identified the proper channels at the publisher through which we could express our concerns. We decided to draft a letter [Appendix A] including our collective analysis of the problems and our recommendations for specific changes to this handbook that would redress the problems we found.

### **Interactions with the textbook publisher**

Representatives at Norton were immediately responsive to our concerns, facilitating a face-to-face meeting with Collie and also creating an opportunity for conversation with one of the handbook's authors. Fortunately, our discussion coincided with the publication of an updated version of the handbook, which meant that they were immediately able to implement our request to change the student writing sample.

One author, Michal Brody, was especially responsive and wrote an email we were very pleased to be able to share with students:

First, I want to personally thank you for getting students to truly and literally interact with the text. As an author, I've never received such detailed,

thoughtful, and heartfelt feedback, and I really appreciate the engagement. As part of the Norton team, I also want to assure you that we are taking your recommendations very seriously, and we are making changes for the 3rd edition. In fact, a good bit of what your letter mentions has already been addressed in our revision process, including pronouns and singular they, so we're particularly eager for you to see the results when the book comes out. As for the sample APA paper, let me mention that it was chosen quite a long time ago by one of the co-authors; since its purpose is to show formatting, its content hadn't been reviewed for a while, and we didn't realize how out of date and inappropriate it is. We appreciate very much your bringing the problem to our attention, and we are replacing the sample essay for the new edition. (M. Brody, personal communication, Sept. 23, 2016)

Students expressed how empowering it felt for them to be able to raise issues with people they felt to be authorities: instructors, program directors, authors, and textbook publishers. That their concerns were heard and resulted in change was something that several of them had not imagined was possible.

### **Sharing the results of our work**

Clearly our work had impact in the specific course we taught, and the way we interrogated our textbook initiated an important conversation for our university's writing program. We shared regular updates on our students' efforts to make changes to the composition handbook at departmental meetings. Our colleagues were appreciative of that work. However, we felt that the spirit of our project required an additional level of intervention among instructors. The students on this project communicated an urgent desire that our work could positively impact the way other instructors teach their courses. Students expressed concern that just advocating for altering the textbook might not be enough to help the wider community of composition instructors teach in ways that made positive space for queer identity. Of special concern was the concept of potential erasure of identity or exclusion in the classroom. After all, that had been at the heart of students' concerns with the textbook itself. The version with the problem essay and the lack of inclusive pronoun guidance at the minimum gave tacit approval to heteronormativity and cisnormativity. At worst it had the potential to enable teachers or other students to label certain practice, such as nonbinary pronoun usage, as "incorrect" and liable to be graded as such.

Collie took on the first iteration of this work in her presentation at the Carolinas Writing Program Administrators Fall 2016 Conference (Fulford, 2016). At that point, we were in the midst of the case, and that conversation helped guide some of our subsequent discussion with the textbook publishers. It seemed important to follow up again after the spring semester, once the course had ended, the new textbook edition had appeared, and we had time to process some of the lessons learned. We were fortunate that one of our students, Zachary Brewer-Kirby, was willing to continue to work with us in order to create a presentation at a 2017 Summer Institute held on our campus (Wymer, Fulford, & Brewer-Kirby, 2017). *Strategies for Resistance, Resilience, and Hope: Supporting QTPOC on College Campuses* was



presented by the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals and the National Black Justice Coalition. It was exciting for our campus to host this symposium, and we were enthusiastic about sharing our work with a wider community of faculty, students, and staff who could consider how they might be able to employ similar interventions on their home campuses.

### **Takeaways**

This project has involved several components:

- Acknowledging the harm expressed by students who feel textually erased and offended.
- Recognizing that students are not always prepared, willing, or able to critique their learning materials unless space is made for them to offer a response.
- Identifying students' criticism of a text as an exigence for rhetorical action.
- Gathering and channeling students' insights into a rhetorical response to the situation.
- Collaborating with students, other faculty, and authors and staff at the publishing company in an attempt to queer the handbook.
- Imagining additional ways to queer our teaching practices so that students of various sexualities and gender identities can experience inclusion rather than erasure from our pedagogies.
- Reflecting on what kinds of pedagogical and curricular situations appear to "co-sign" viewpoints that do damage to our students, especially when those situations occur outside the scope of the material's directly intended purpose (e.g., teaching APA style)
- Reflecting on what kinds of pedagogical and curricular contexts we can intentionally create in order to foster student agency.

As instructors we were inspired by our students' willingness to engage and push for changes in the way we taught our courses. "[P]artnership pedagogy is about being (radically) open to and creating possibilities for discovering and learning something that cannot be known in advance" (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014, p. 58). We suspect that our prior commitment to the principles of student-faculty partnership for research primed us to be open to impromptu partnership pedagogies when critical discussion arose during Kathryn's LGBTQ literature class. Given the intensity of students' concerns as well as her own, Kathryn reconfigured her planned course schedule to make space for further discussion and action. She also invited Collie, a stakeholder to the issue, to join the group. This openness allowed students to expand upon their frustrations with a text and – with faculty sponsors – to consider ways of responding to it that might have significance beyond the classroom. Kathryn did not know in advance how this decision would unfold or what the students would learn from engaging with the problem collaboratively, but she determined that it was important to try.

Taking a significant pause in a literature class to hold space for students to work things out is a case of partnership pedagogy fused with rhetorical listening. Ratcliffe

(2005) points out that teachers may avoid tense issues such as those that highlight differences of race, gender, sexuality, and other subjectivities. When such a discussion's ends are unknown, teachers may fear losing control of the class (p. 140). Being open to listening pedagogically, however, offers a way to "ask the class why things are going awry. Ask what can be done better. Ask if [failure] is an isolated incident or if it represents a larger cultural pattern" (Ratcliffe, 2005, p. 141). Although the lesson in rhetorical agency was unplanned and unscripted, analyzing the larger cultural patterns of queer oppression aligned with the course's theoretical underpinnings. Beyond analysis, however, Royster (1996) asks us to consider, "How do we translate listening into language and action, into the creation of an appropriate response?" (p. 38). It strikes us that the risks we took were necessary for producing a collective rhetorical response to one cultural pattern that needed to be resisted.

McCulloch's (2009) concept of students as co-producers of higher education and Fielding's (2001) exhortations to mind the power dynamics both apply to this case as well because students and faculty worked together as agents to change instructional materials and teaching practices that affect many people. Our power differences within the institution were not flattened, but instead acknowledged and utilized strategically. The authority of QTPOC students (and their allied peers) to describe their lived experiences with the text worked in conjunction with our institutional authority to navigate the structures of publishers and programs. The students in ENG 3040 thereby effected change with us, co-producing new practices and texts. We hope that sharing our case encourages other instructors to make that space to collaborate with students and other stakeholders to improve the work we do.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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**Appendix A: Our letter to the publisher**

September 14, 2016

Marilyn Moller, Composition Editor & Mary Ann Parrott, College Sales Representative  
W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.  
500 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10110

Dear Marilyn Moller and Mary Ann Parrott:

North Carolina Central University's writing program has long had a good relationship with Norton because of your history of responsive service and respectful, knowledgeable marketing of books at relatively affordable price points. We have therefore adopted *The Little Seagull Handbook with Exercises*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (ISBN 978-0-393-93581-3) for several years now. Students are required to purchase *Seagull* for our two required introductory composition classes. We enrolled over 1100 new students this fall, almost all of whom take these courses.

We understand that the new 2016 MLA guidelines necessitate changes to *Seagull*. How timely. Although there are many useful features of the book, a number of students have called our attention to troubling content that should also be changed. We hope that the following analysis and recommendations thus arrive in good time for the authors to consider as they work on 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

Students in NCCU's ENG 3040: Special Topics in LGBT Literature course have recently taken up a study of the book's content, and they offered several critiques of the book. They especially find the APA sample paper and the guidance on pronouns to be wholly unacceptable for a required textbook.

With respect to the APA Sample student essay that appears as section APA-e, on pages 187-191 and in fuller format in the online companion, one student wrote, "It is an extremely biased and potentially highly offensive essay." The title of the essay alone highlights the students' concerns: "It's in Our Genes: The Biological Basis of Human Mating Behavior." The essay goes on to explain heterosexual attraction between humans while erasing the possibility for homosexual attraction. By stating that there is a biological and evolutionary basis for this attraction, the only possible conclusion the essay can offer for homosexuality is that it is somehow outside the norm. This essay has very much upset students who, during class discussion, questioned whether it was the motive of the editors at Norton to exclude LGBTQ-identifying people. In response to this idea, one student advised the following: "In

future, the editors should be mindful that the essay examples should be carefully chosen because by their inclusion it leads to the assumption that the editors agree/endorse with the essay's content. Further, we are questioning your (the editor's) motives!"

If we were to retain our adoption of the text, NCCU's writing program would in essence also be continuing to endorse this reading. That is not something we feel we could continue to do.

In addition to the problems with the essay's heteronormative, cisnormative approach to human sexuality, this essay also contains multiple aspects that any feminist would find troubling. For instance, the essay implies that women are attracted to men with wealth and that men are attracted to women who look fertile. This essay must be replaced if NCCU is to continue endorsing *The Little Seagull Handbook*.

Pronoun guidance in the handbook is also inadequate. Many students today reject the gender binary, and singular "they" is widely accepted as a way to address this situation. One student particularly advocated the model provided by the *Writing Center Journal* as a strong inclusive example of how to consider pronoun usage: "WCJ adopts the singular "they" as a gender-neutral term. We do not find a pronoun-antecedent agreement error in a sentence such as "Each tutor identified their own strategies"; rather, we recognize the phrase "his or her own strategies" reflects a problematic, exclusive binary."

Pronoun usage must be more inclusive and must indicate a positive acceptance of singular "they" if NCCU is to continue to adopt *The Little Seagull Handbook*. Introduction of other, alternate pronouns would be welcome, also. We understand that this section's author, Michal Brody, is at work addressing these issues and we are hopeful that our suggestions are in alignment with the planned revisions.

Overall our students advocate that throughout the text there be "inclusion of neutral definitions, summaries, and examples that do not single out a specific community."

We look forward to your reply and a resolution to these problems. The Writing Program will be meeting soon to revisit handbook selection, so communication about changes being made to the third edition would be important to our decision-making process.

Sincerely,

The students of ENG 3040: Special Topics in LGBT Literature, Fall 2016, North  
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