LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD:
A STUDY OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN
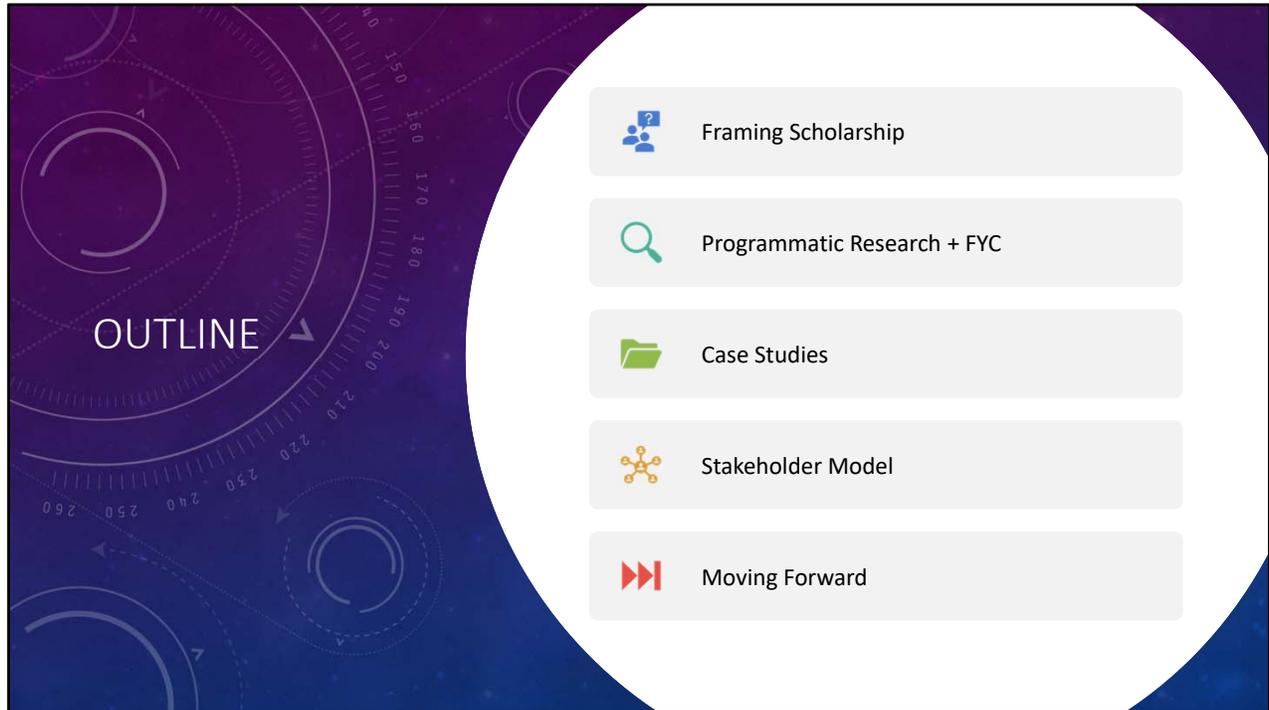FYC CURRICULUM AND WRITING
PROGRAM DESIGN

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Good afternoon and thank you all for coming to our panel. My name is Rebecca Petitti, and I'm a PhD candidate at UMass Amherst. My talk today, "Looking Back and Moving Forward: A Study of Digital Technology in FYC Curriculum and Writing Program Design" comes from my dissertation so I'm going to do my best to cover a lot of ground today. I have some reading copies that I left a the ends of rows/on tables (room set up) and you can also follow along by going to [website] and clicking on the top link. Let's jump in!

FROM PROPOSAL TO PRESENTATION: SOME CHANGES

Started the project with an inquiry about where scholarship enters practical application to better understand FYC curriculum design

Research is a recursive process (of course!) and I found, instead, that where this scholarship *does* enter is connected to three levels of stakeholders
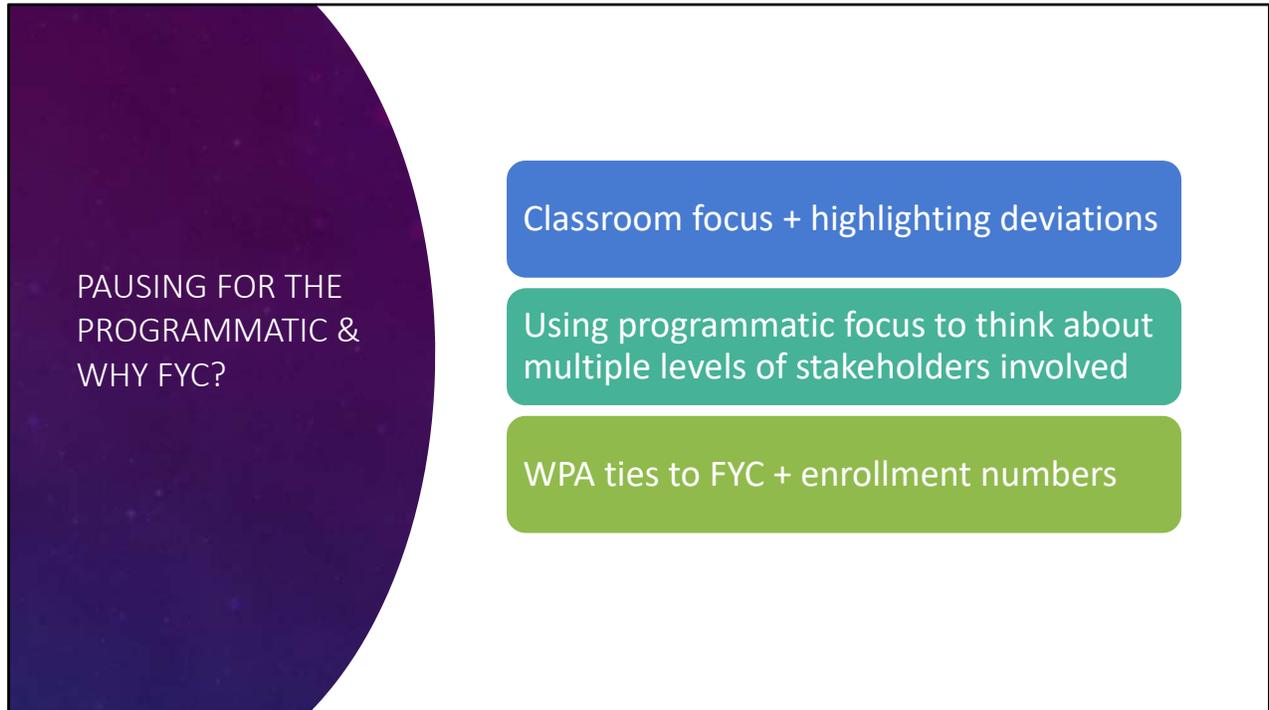
So before getting into it all, I of course need to do the conference disclaimer of, I submitted my proposal and some things have changed. When I proposed this presentation (and at the start of my dissertation) this project was an inquiry about where scholarship enters practical application as a way to understand FYC curriculum design. As we all know, research is a recursive process and so, as I went along, I found that it was less about *where/how* and really became more about the conditions that enabled certain kinds of engagement with scholarship and those conditions were linked to three "levels" of stakeholders. That's what I'm going to talk a little bit about today.

OUTLINE

- Framing Scholarship
- Programmatic Research + FYC
- Case Studies
- Stakeholder Model
- Moving Forward

I just wanted to offer a quick overview of what I'll be talking about today. I want to begin with a very brief kind of glossing of "what we know": what scholarship and research is framing this presentation and my larger project, and the formal outcomes statements/frameworks that this responds to. I then want to offer a quick bit about why I choose to focus on programs and do programmatic research, as well as explain my focus on FYC. I'll then move into introducing my 5 case studies, with a quick note about how I landed with the 5 I did, before moving into talking about my stakeholder model and what I found within each level. I'll focus primarily on my first level of administration stakeholders, with a particular focus on my methods of analysis. I'll close with some thoughts about moving forward with this research, other projects, and the methods employed.

FRAMING LITERATURE:
IN THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENS

- *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition* (Versions 1-3)
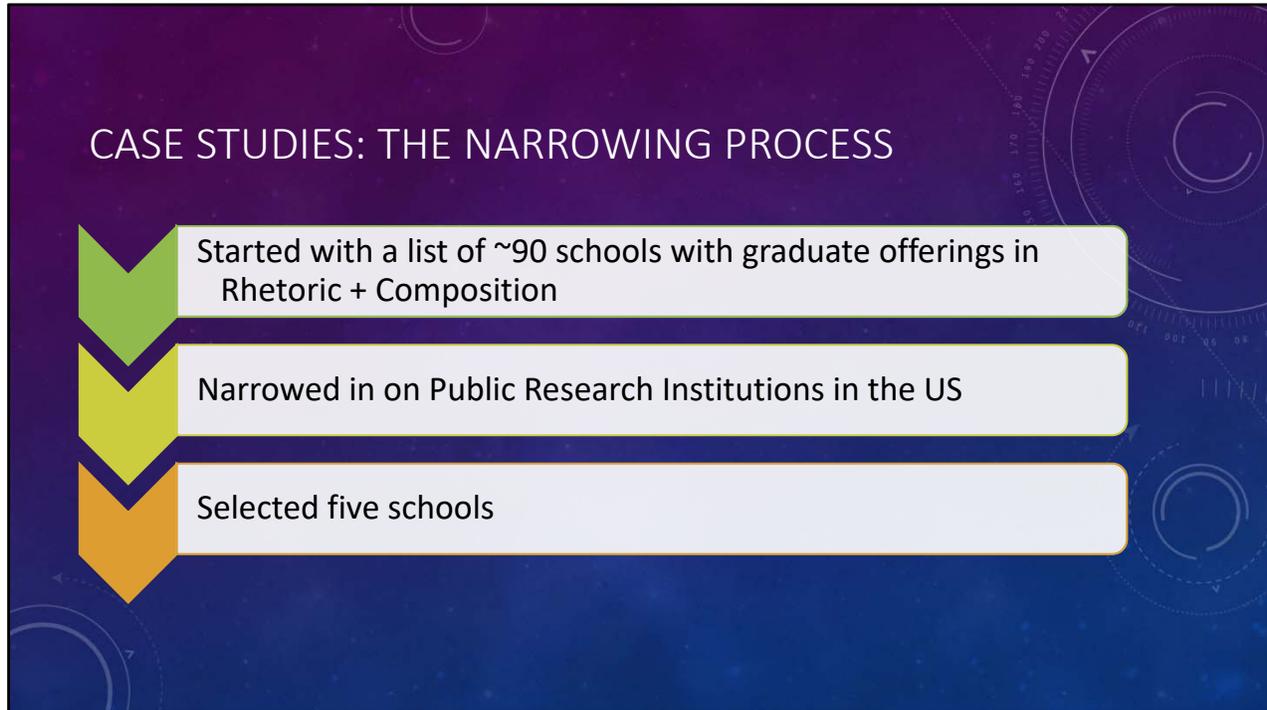- *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*

I'm sort of in the room where it happens, if you will. Being at this conference, so much of the work coming from the Computers and Writing community influences this work. I'll point to two particular documents that I think illustrate some of these commitments: the WPA *OS* and the *Framework*. Particularly with the WPA *OS*, which across its three versions we see the reshaping and evolution of our thinking about technology. (V1 – not present; V2 – tacked on/afterthought; V3 – Integrated throughout composition outcomes (inseparable from the teaching of composition). I also name these 2 documents as they speak to further research that either influenced their conception or sparked further response. I'll also point to three scholars, like Cynthia Selfe, Jody Shipka, and Kathleen Yancey whose work is crucial to our understanding of multimodal composing in the FYC classroom. Their work remains one of my larger frameworks, as well as my impetus for undertaking this research.

PAUSING FOR THE PROGRAMMATIC & WHY FYC?

- Classroom focus + highlighting deviations
- Using programmatic focus to think about multiple levels of stakeholders involved
- WPA ties to FYC + enrollment numbers

What happens in a single classroom is not always reflective of a writing program's shared curriculum, mission, or focus. Much of the research found in Rhetoric and Composition centers on specific classroom practices, and much has been learned from these studies. Nonetheless, a classroom focus risks highlighting deviations from the norm, where an individual instructor or set of instructors might demonstrate innovative pedagogies but does not necessarily connect to or reflect the larger values that are communicated beyond the audience of classroom, or across the institution. Looking at classrooms or individual instructors offers a small perspective of what people are doing on their own, while programmatic studies focus on the broader picture of how ideals and commitments from the field's scholarship are enacted in curricula. This focus also creates the opportunity for larger discussions about institutional practices, structures, and resources that may inhibit or challenge certain levels of enactment and mobilization.

Why FYC?
While the work of a writing program varies by institutional context, one near-constant is their responsibility for FYC. As Susan McLeod has noted, "writing program administration has from the beginning been tied to freshman (or first-year) composition, a peculiarly American institution" (23). Not only are writing programs most commonly tied to FYC on their given campuses, but this is also the course that enrolls the most students across US campuses, as David Fleming notes "for more than a century now, the most required, most taught, and thus most taken course in U.S. higher education has been freshman composition" (1). It is for these reasons that I have chosen to focus my programmatic research study on the FYC element of writing programs.

CASE STUDIES: THE NARROWING PROCESS

Started with a list of ~90 schools with graduate offerings in Rhetoric + Composition

Narrowed in on Public Research Institutions in the US

Selected five schools

I wanted to quickly run through my "selection process," as I've had questions in the past about the schools/programs I chose. Using rhetmap.org I started with the list of around 90ish US schools with graduate offerings in RhetComp. I started here for two reasons:

- Perhaps most importantly, this is a dissertation and I need to have parameters and boundaries set somewhere.
- It's not because I think schools w/o grad offerings are not doing this work, but I do think **there are some assumptions** to be made about schools with graduate programs and the time that may (and sometimes may not of course) be granted to Faculty for their research agendas and the expectation of their engagement w/ field scholarship.

From there, I narrowed again to US Public Research Institutions. Again, this had to do with parameters. But also, there is at least on PRU in every state, and personally, I attended PRUs for 2/3 of my degrees.
And I got it to 5. There was a range of curricular designs within these programs, and I was able to connect with a current or former WPA from each program.
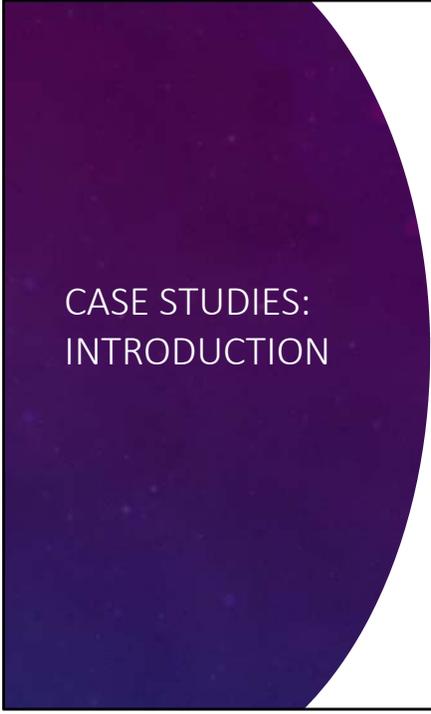
CASE STUDIES: INTRODUCTION

University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass)

University of Connecticut (UConn)

Miami University of Ohio (Miami)

Florida State University (FSU)

Ohio State University (Ohio State)

These are my 5 (read). I conducted interviews w/ former or current WPAs from each program, as well as created a textual corpus including syllabi, assignments, teacher handbooks, programmatic mission statements, institutional mission statements + strategic plans, etc.
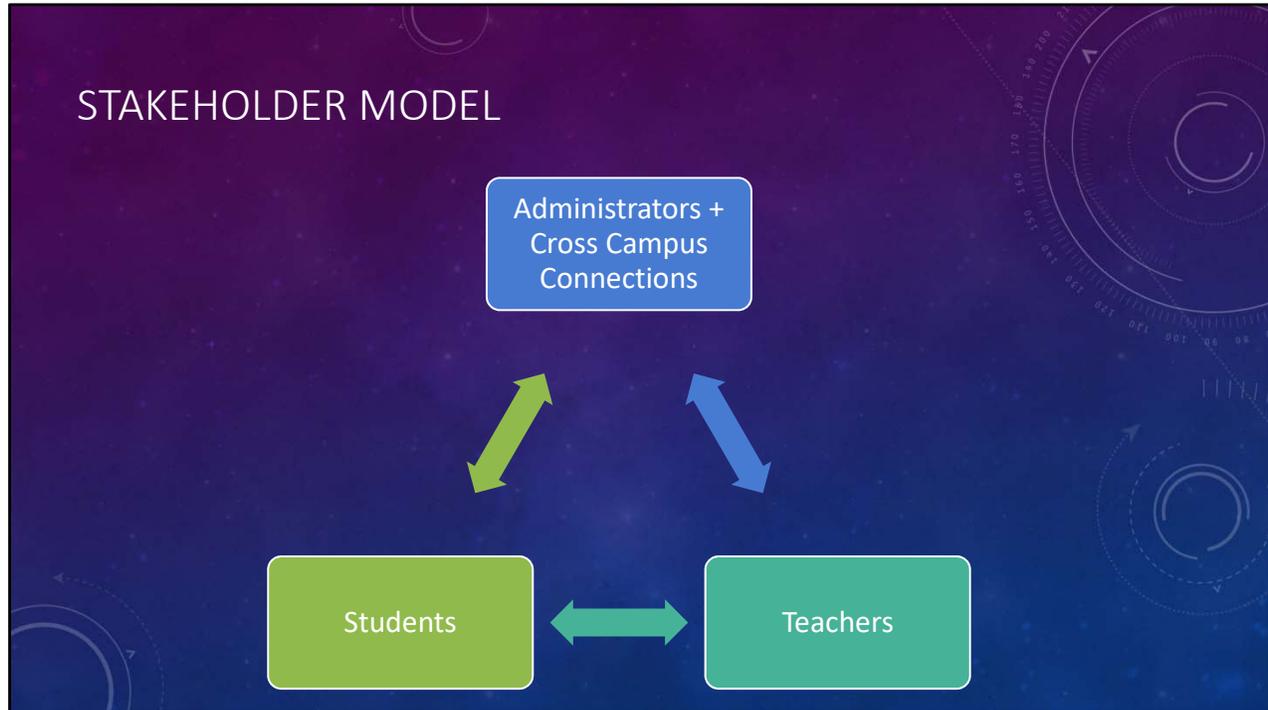
What became most apparent across my research was the role of certain conditions (and people/connections) for enacting multimodal pedagogies drawn from scholarly best practices. These conditions were shared across programs (including when these pedagogies/curricula were not present). I have here a stakeholder model that helps illustrate these findings. So, you're a WPA and these are your audiences or stakeholders to engage with. At the "top," you have administrators, as well as the larger campus community and colleagues across disciplines. Then you have your teachers within the writing program. And lastly, there's the students. Know I present it like this because, as much as there is the hierarchical realities (admin, teachers, students) I also think these things are reciprocal. Decisions made by administrators are (sometimes, not always) determined by the students and teachers they serve, just as teachers draw from their students. And so, what I found in my project is that there are very tangible and specific ways that WPAs can engage with each of these stakeholders to find better support and framing for their programs and curricula. I'm going to start with talking about the levels of teachers and students together, as these are my most "work in progress" areas. (I've done some initial data analysis, but I'm working on these two levels now.) Then I'll move into looking at administration, with a focus on the methods I used for this analysis.
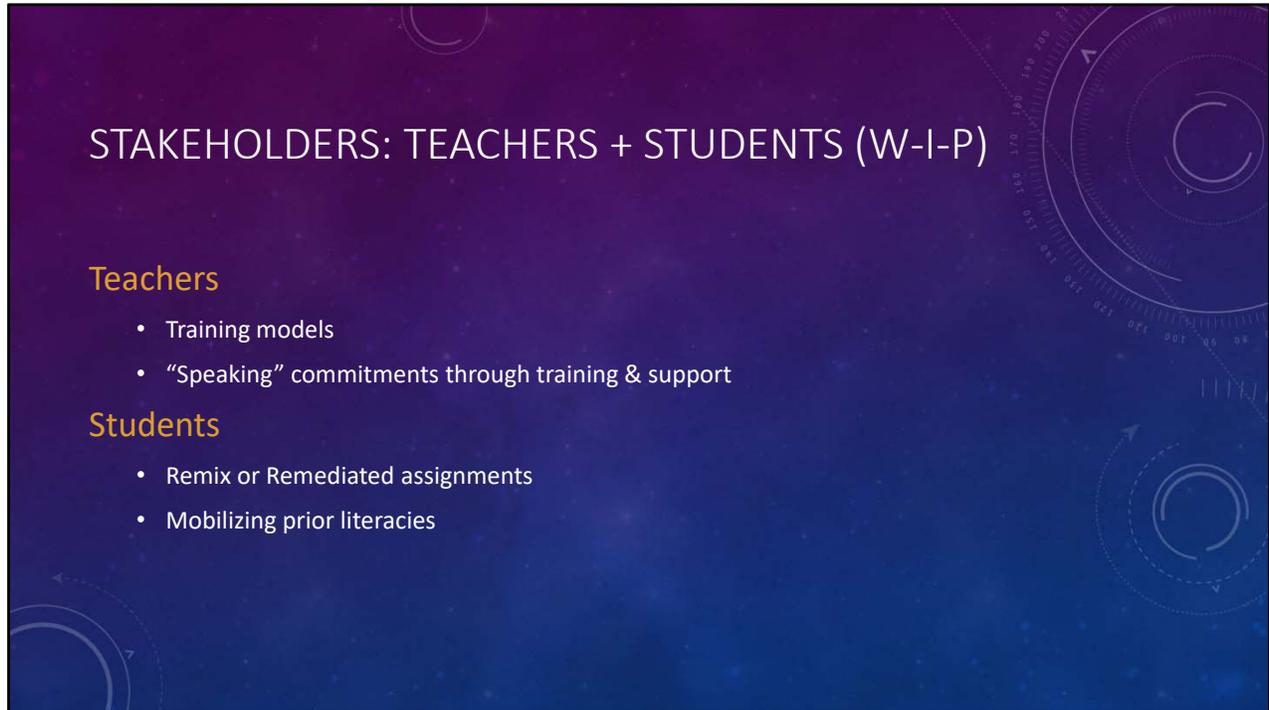
STAKEHOLDERS: TEACHERS + STUDENTS (W-I-P)

Teachers
- Training models
- "Speaking" commitments through training & support

Students
- Remix or Remediated assignments
- Mobilizing prior literacies

As I said, this is still the work-in-progress piece of my findings, but I did want to mention the initial findings here.

Teachers: Here the emphasis is really on training models. Those programs that had training models reflective of the multimodal commitments they wanted from their teachers were those programs where multimodality "happened." The way to engage instructors is by modeling commitments and values, while also providing training and support. And while yes, this may *seem* obvious, it's not. Some programs do this without realizing that the training model is what "empowers" instructors, while others have outdated training models and wonder why it's not happening.

Students: I found that, most often, students are engaged with remix or remediation assignments. These assignments took different shapes, but they called upon students to rethink previous assignments (and research) for new media forms and audiences. While it's too early for me to concretely argue anything, I do see this connected to engaging students' prior literacies, as well as a way to visually/concretely demonstrate to students the move form "writing" (text-based) to thinking about composition and design.

STAKEHOLDERS: ADMINISTRATION

Using institutional mission statements + strategic plans to align with larger campus initiatives for resources and support

- Demonstrating alignment with current models
- (Re)Designing curricular models using mission statements or larger strategic visions

I turn now to looking administrators and cross-campus connections as a stakeholder to find support and resources. Across my five case studies institutional mission or strategic plans were not a highly attributed factor, if even acknowledged at all. Most WPAs I spoke with said very little about the larger campus mission, despite their own programs aligning with the larger mission of the university. Having read the institutional mission statements and strategic plans prior to my WPA interviews, what became apparent to me was the close relationship between a writing program's curriculum and objectives, and the strategic plan of the institution. At those universities with strategic plans that made explicit their goals and support for innovative pedagogies and teaching, or their hopes to strengthen "21st century" literacies in their students, the writing programs were much more likely to enact multimodal curricula supported at the programmatic level. They were also much more likely to identify institutional resources made available to support their curricular goals. Again, this relationship was not made explicit in my interviews, but I found that the program's FYC curricula and the WPA's own understanding of their program's place within the institution was often aligned with the larger strategic plan and mission. I argue that WPAs can and should use institutional mission statements and strategic plans to find support from their broader campus communities. With these campus materials as frameworks for their own curricula, WPAs are positioned to make stronger arguments for resources. At the same time, they can situate their program and individual courses within the larger campus narrative, benefitting from these inter-campus relationships.

METHODS

- RStudio
- Institutional Strategic Plans as more than "empty words" – Words matter.

```
#read data
uconn_strat <- read.csv('uconn_csv.csv', header = FALSE, sep = ',')

#merging columns into one
uconn_strat <- data.frame(Words = c(as.matrix(uconn_strat)))

#create corpus
uconn_strat_corpus <- Corpus(VectorSource(uconn_strat$Words))

#lowecase conversion
uconn_strat_corpus <- tm_map(uconn_strat_corpus, content_transformer(tolower))

## Warning in tm_map.SimpleCorpus(uconn_strat_corpus,
## content_transformer(tolower)): transformation drops documents

#cleaning up list
uconn_strat_corpus  <- tm_map(uconn_strat_corpus, removeWords, exclude)

## Warning in tm_map.SimpleCorpus(uconn_strat_corpus, removeWords, exclude):
## transformation drops documents

uconn_strat_corpus  <- tm_map(uconn_strat_corpus, removePunctuation)

## Warning in tm_map.SimpleCorpus(uconn_strat_corpus, removePunctuation):
## transformation drops documents

#matrix
tdmuc <- TermDocumentMatrix(uconn_strat_corpus)

tdmatrixuc <- as.matrix(tdmuc)

wordfreq_uconn <- sort(rowSums(tdmatrixuc),decreasing = TRUE)

#plot
wordcloud(uconn_strat_corpus, min.freq = 5, max.words = 40, random.order = TRUE, colors = brewer.pal(4,"Dark
, scale=c(3,.25))
```
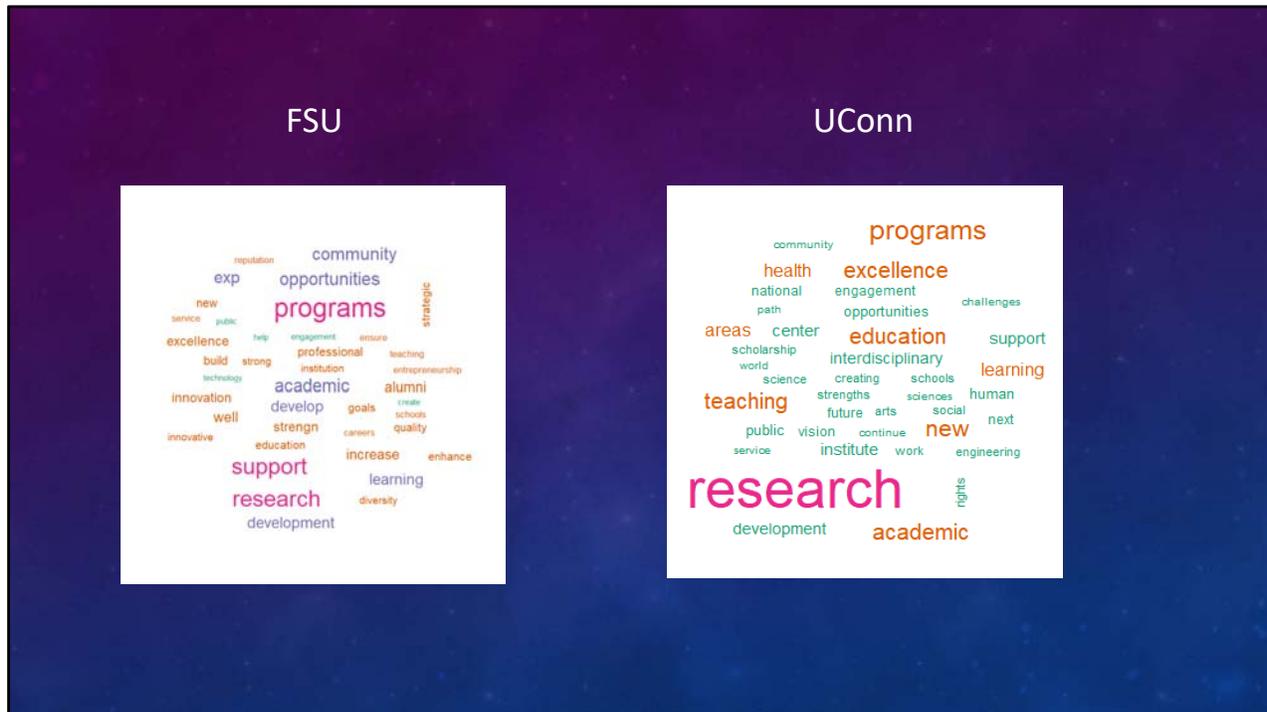
As I was doing these interviews, I started seeing the connections between the institution's own strategic plan and what was happening in these programs. While sometimes strategic plans are criticized as "empty words," I wanted to focus on the words and see what emerged. Using RStudio, an open-source programming platform, I generated word frequency data. I used the word frequency data to create word clouds for each institutional strategic plan, as well as a commonality cloud that depicts the top 40 most frequently shared words across the five strategic plans. The individual strategic plan word clouds show the top 40 words appearing in the document 5 or more times. Having the words illustrated helps me visualize just how *not* empty they really are. I'm still situating these within a larger contextual history, but what this kind of work does for now.

Here, I present the Commonality Cloud, highlighting the top 40 most frequently shared words across the five institutional strategic plans. So, the size and color of the words distinguishes their frequency [**point to the words as I talk through**]. Larger words in pink are most frequent, followed by the purple, then the orange, and lastly the green.
Looking at what is shared across these strategic plans helps illuminate what it is that these different colleges have in common. While some share geographic conditions, and while most share similar student demographics, they also carry their own visions and ideals. This highlights, albeit at the surface level, what actions or ideals these universities share. There is much, however, that sets them apart. And it is these differences, originating from their localized contexts, that WPAs can mobilize to help enact multimodal curricula in their own programs.

I want to highlight two specific schools here: FSU and UConn. They both had strong multimodal curricula, supported at the programmatic and institutional level. For the sake of time, I'm going to point to some notable attributes of these words clouds, but also want to recognize that, as this is an overview presentation of my dissertation, there is much I've left out.

FSU

Moving away from the most frequent words, I turn now to the third and fourth levels of frequency, the words shown in orange and green, respectively. Among these words are "innovation" and "technology." FSU stands out as the only institution whose strategic plan has a notable mention of technology, with the word present in the top 40 words across the 20-page plan; again, this is the only institution where this occurred. While innovation can be found in most other word clouds and often serves as a "catch-all" for universities, technology only appears in FSU. This commitment to and emphasis on technology at the level of higher administration was further reflected by my interview and other materials collected.

UConn

For UConn, these first two levels of frequency are fairly typical: "education," "teaching," "learning," "programs," and "academic." Like FSU, it is this third level of frequency, shown in green, that sets UConn apart; here we see "sciences," "social," "human," "engineering," and "arts." This is the only instance across any of the institutional strategic plans where colleges and disciplines make an appearance. This highlights UConn's commitment to recognizing and supporting all of its academic departments and programs. Of course, the strategic plan is not a guarantee that support and resources, both material and monetary, are distributed equally across departments and programs. Nonetheless, it demonstrates the intent to support all programs and shows that the school recognizes its wider campus community.

In addition to discipline-specific descriptors, "interdisciplinary" appears in this level of frequency. Again, this is the first and only occurrence of this particular word appearing in the top 40 frequencies. This further highlights UConn's commitment to its broader campus community, while also suggesting a potential desire

for cross-campus initiatives. The inclusion of "interdisciplinary" further supports the new "Writing Across Technology" (WAT) curriculum that the UConn Writing Program has designed and is working to implement. Like FSU, the importance of cross-campus networking was further highlighted in my interviews and materials collected.

MOVING FORWARD

Beyond Public Research Universities:
W*hat does this look like at other colleges?*

Tapping into these levels:
How do we reach administrators, instructors, and students?

Methodology + Focus:
What is gained when we move our research to the levels above the classroom: The programmatic? The institutional?

With any project, we need to think about moving forward + future research. As I'm still working through my data, while also keep up some parameters as I'll be finishing this dissertation in March, I can already see opportunities for continuing this work, how it can be used etc.

- Firstly, I centered my research on public research universities. These stakeholders, and the potential found within each, will look very different at different kinds of universities. For example, private institutions that rely on endowments for funding will look different.
- It's important to consider local contexts -- what stakeholders a WPA focuses on might vary across contexts. And again, I saw remix/remediation assignments as engaging students but once we change the university context, this might no longer be the case.
- Perhaps most interesting for this audience is methodology and focus: What can we gain from moving our research outside the classroom --- programmatic focuses + importance of that. When we think about engaging the institutional levels (something about we all work within + find ourselves housed in a university, so why not use that/engage with it)

THANK YOU!

Thank you all for being here, and a thank you to my interview participants. While I did not cite them in today's presentation, they were of course essential to the development of this project and to the dissertation that I am writing.