Facing the Center

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This book would not have been possible without the generous funding from St. John’s University’s summer research grant program that I received for Summer 2008 and 2009 and the regular ongoing assistance that institution provides. The summer funding made possible time to focus and produce and reflects the investment in faculty research that Provost Julie Upton, St. John’s College of Arts & Sciences Dean Jeffrey Fagan, and Associate Dean for Staten Island Kelly Rocca, each have historically made. My English department Chair, Steve Sicari, and the Director of St. John’s Institute for Writing Studies, Derek Owens, have not only been strong and encouraging leaders and advocates of this project; they have also acted as two of the best mentors a junior faculty member can wish for.

In the writing centers, the associate directors, Tom Philipose and Chris Leary, have provided sound leadership and unwavering support, especially when I’ve needed to close my door or disappear to write for blocks of time. Without all that they do, the quality and speed with which I produced this manuscript wouldn’t have happened. Besides these fine men, my support staff is both generous and protective. Connie DeSimone at Staten Island and Virginia Buccino at Queens acted as the best buffers and protectors I could ask for, and just as important, they were both touchstones who grounded me and empathized always at just the right moments. Connie, in particular, made driving over the Verrazano Bridge week in, week out, worth every toll because of the pure positive energy and drive with which she infuses everything. More so than most, she kept me moving and enthusiastic. Dorothy Bukay, the staff assistant for the larger Institute in Queens, has always been a rock and a trusted resource, and I thank her for her support as well.

This book grew out of a conference presentation at the 2007 Conference on College Composition and Communication in New York City. The panel, “(Un)Covering Identities: Theorizing the Construction, Resistance, and Interplay of Minority Identities in a Majority Academy and World,” included Courtney Frederick, Rochell Issac, Anna Rita
Napoleone, and Elizabeth Weaver. We all still plan an edited collection that explores the dynamics of “covering” in a variety of teaching contexts.

Thomas Ferrell and Moira Ozias were valued peers who helped me workshop and hone early chapter drafts when I spent a month at the University of Kansas doing an intensive writing retreat. Anna Rita Napoleone, Anne Ellen Geller, Pat Belanoff, Michele Eodice, Kami Day and Frankie Condon spurred along drafting and revising, whether they posted comments, talked me through revisions and texts to complicate my thinking, or became voices in my head which whom I could dialogue. Lauren Kopec, a doctoral student in English, worked with me to develop the index and voiced needed encouragement throughout the waning days of this book’s production.

As the manuscript entered the final stages, Michael Spooner and the anonymous reviewers couldn’t have offered better, more challenging, affirming guidance for improving what this text ultimately became. Quite often during the process, I doubted whether this book was possible or that it would even matter. Along with all the people above, I can’t imagine someone more suited to mentor and guide a writer like me who doubts as much as he believes than Michael.

This book has been a labor, a journey with peaks and valleys, moments when it didn’t seem like it’d ever come to closure, times when it created deep elation and frustration. Nobody else experienced and tolerated all that was involved, and nobody else has more fingerprints on this project and lingering influence than Courtney Frederick. While this book imagines many interlocutors, he is among the most important. My talks with him, his sacrificed time, and his patience to read and reassure kept me going these last couple of years. I hope everyone, just once in life, has the luck to have a soul mate and intellectual companion sharing the same home; with Courtney, it made all the work vibrant and meaningful because he understands and cares as much as I do about the power and potential for spaces like writing centers where people come to collaborate and grow with one another.