

## Articles and Poems

# My Queer (Writing) Heart

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**Abstract:** “My Queer (Writing) Heart” is a poetic autoethnographic expression that maps the journeys of a queer South Asian educator navigating US academia, especially in the writing programs, where queerness in teaching and administrative staff is both a possibility but also seen as a burden by its various stakeholders. Using a bus as a metaphor for higher education, this piece depicts bare the emotional labor, rhetorical erasure, and pedagogical resilience that transnational queer English composition teachers and writing center tutors often endure as queer rhetorics within US Education remain under siege.

**Tags:** [writing center](#), [writing program](#), [transnational feminism](#), [queerness](#), [LGBTIQ+](#), [anglophone queer poem](#), [creative writing](#)

**Doi:** [doi.org/10.37514/PEI-J.2025.27.3.02](https://doi.org/10.37514/PEI-J.2025.27.3.02)

Some crossed,  
some crossed by to catch others.  
Many stood on the curb, too close,  
In, out. In, out. –  
  
Most rode until their destinations.  
A few couldn't be careless enough.  
In Out, in Out. –

Each time, an overheated pain engulfs.

A sense of breakdown – Tss! Tss!

Repair status: more Ins, less Outs.

Yet, on constant crash protector duty,  
dodging danger zones of others, for others, until kaput,  
not wondering how to secure own loose belts and not get hurt,  
especially when unloading is unorderedly. Out, out, out. Tss! Tss! Tss –

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They did them. Mine will do him.  
Smile, protecting them selflessly,  
ready to bet itself without a pledge  
or dime. Like a free ride, no promises.

Adopting their past cycles and blades as my own.  
Survive the known pain of being left every single time. Would there  
be a day it will not get robbed? Not mishandled, misused, and missed to be yearned?

## Prologue

While growing up in India as a South Asian queer person, I used to follow American politics and academia from a distance. Watching the public electing queer teachers such as Mark Allan Takano to the US Senate, the declaration of June as pride month, or appointing Randy Berry as the US first LGBT representative for the Human Rights of LGBTI+ Persons at United Nations, I used to think: *I want to go to America and live my life as me*. It appeared relatively easier to be a queer person in America as the US society seemed sensitive, and education appeared liberal. However, my bubble burst soon after I moved to the US as an academic. I say burst bubble because the possibility of being a Queer<sup>1</sup> and the trajectories of Queer imagination in my work and field of Rhetoric and Composition Studies, and others, were not always just there, nor they did not mushroom sporadically; it took years and decades of blood, sweat, and queerism. It took me a while to understand educational politics and how queer writing teachers like me understand and navigate US academia, and make sense of what Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes mean by how to “juxtapose and improvise to enact and embody both the possibility of speaking queerly to composition and the impossibility of composing queerness.” (177). My poem is the autoethnographic roving of my queer experiences as an early-career rhetorician, writing teacher, and assistant writing center director. My poem invites readers to peek into my so-far queer teacher/tutor journey and interactions in the US academia at the micro, meso, and macro levels. I use the metaphor of the bus as a container for the US higher education system, where a Queer and/or Queer teacher/tutors travel alone or with passengers (colleagues and students) like them.

**Microsystem:** The first two stanzas provide readers recollections of interactions in my micro circle: teaching first-year composition and tutoring/administrating at the Writing Center. In my writing classrooms and writing center tutoring sessions, my student-writers/tutees, often lacked a certain level of attention and labor to analyze what is going on in a rhetorical situation queerly due to heterosexist influences through educational policies and laws. Hence, they inadvertently become complicit in the problem and rhetoric of the disordered and normative educational US contexts. The interaction above was one of the first few indications of my bubble-bursting experiences that I mentioned at the beginning of this prologue. Such interactions began managing my expectations of the academic circles I have been operating within. The current hypervigilance of queer lives and perspectives in broader education (Kosciw et al.) and significantly higher education (Denny et al.; Greenfield) are some of recent examples. In my poem, I have attempted to show such attention by quantifying things that are done to the queer selves of our students and us as teachers, such as being “crossed” or being totally “careless enough,” AKA being callus of queer needs in education. Unfortunately, ongoing anti-homosexual/trans-imagination-oriented educational practices have **contributed** to the hostile educational practices that are slowly becoming expectations and future parameters, which should not be so.

**Mesosystem:** The third and fourth stanzas lead to implicit and explicit impacts on my Queer teaching and tutoring identities, based on my interactions with my field’s various stakeholders, the field itself, and the

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1 I use Queer as an inclusive terms that acknowledge also those don’t identify as L, G, B, T, Q, I, or A, such as two spirit, pansexual, or others including LGBTIQ+.

questions and problems I often grapple with when I see queer rhetoric in danger across situations. A day-to-day example would be the constant pitching in of my queer teacher labor for my students' intellectual development, in my precarious and contingent student-teacher position which James Daniel defines as "overwork and burnout" (9). I have attempted to indicate the labor and stress of employing such labor by using phrases in my poem to reflect the feelings of being robbed, holding everything for everyone, or being used up. Such labor is a product of the pedagogical situations I have encountered during my teaching/tutoring, where some of my student writers feel clueless when I employ queer texts or artifacts. Their cluelessness terrifies me, but they should not be blamed. The real cause is US education's hegemonical and historical discourses that constantly review access to queer knowledge or literacies. Shutting down the University of Houston's LGBT resource center (Welsch) is one example of silencing spaces where pedagogical and rhetorical agency thrives, hence one's marginalized perspective within education experiences

*Macrosystem:* The last two stanzas are about my discontentment with my field which, according to research, is still largely anti-trans/queer, White supremacist, and racist (Banks et al.; Wallace; Webster). However, I still hope for an intellectual or broader rhetoric of queer inclusion intersecting with diversity and multiculturalism through activism. For example, "Smile, protecting them selflessly" is one of my recollections of when my queer teachers took care of my needs at the cost of theirs. I see this as activism, especially for untenured faculty members who supported my queer needs and literacies. In this despotic world where homophobia, queerphobia, transphobia, and racism exist, my queer teachers made it less dystopian for me, especially in academia and beyond, through their more involved mentorship and commitment to my success. I operate in my teaching/tutoring identities with such a background and the conscious need for more of such ongoing investments. The words/phrases in my poem such as "mishandled," "misused," and "missed to be yearned" signify my urge/hope that access to LGBT resources should not necessarily always be embedded in institutional structures, such that they are always at the whim of the institution. Such resources need to be decentralized to continue serving queer individuals in the community, rather than being centralized within institutions, to avoid the dangers of defunding or underfunding their existence. Some of these instances are currently being faced in the US educational rhetoric as one example.

I hope my experiences and thoughts will connect with readers, and give them the specifics of my teacher/tutor-being through my foregrounded experiences and experiences of others maneuvering my imaginations.

## **Acknowledgment**

Saurabh Anand would like to thank Erik Brown, a Creative Writing PhD student at the University of Georgia, for looking at the initial drafts of this poem.

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