

TRIBUTE TO EMILY COPE

What is legacy and can legacy be measured? *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary* defines the word *legacy* as “something (such as personal property or money) that is willed to someone by a person who has died, something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past, or a candidate for membership in an organization (such as a school or fraternal order) who is given special status because of a familial relationship to a member” (Merriam-Webster). This definition falls short of describing the legacy Dr. Emily Murphy Cope has left behind.

Emily, who served as co-editor of this journal for five years, passed away on Monday, March 31, 2025 (Hartenstein Care). We—the new *YSW* editorial team—had the privilege, although briefly, of collaborating with her. Along with her fellow co-editors, Emily helped us through the transition, sharing all she could about the journal and about the importance of supporting both Faculty Advisory Editors and undergraduate students. We quickly came to see how much Emily cared about this journal—and, without realizing it, about the legacy she was passing on to us. We dedicate this first issue to her, in loving memory.

Emily did not will property or money to her students or co-editors, but as the following testimonials demonstrate, she helped students discover the will to persevere amid life's chaos and to remain curious. What she passionately sought to transmit was what she herself had received and cultivated, which is a passion for studying and teaching rhetorical practices (Weebly). With this context, we present below reflections from several individuals whose lives were touched by Emily.



Emily Cope

TESTIMONIALS

Emily's passing has been such a profound loss to our department, our students, and the field that a brief testimonial cannot do her justice.

Emily was instrumental in making *YSW* the publication it is today. She was the driving force behind taking what Doug Downs had handed off to us, capitalizing on his amazing work, and then pushing us to consider new ways to integrate student work into the journal's mission. Her role with the journal was to work with and support our Faculty Advisory Editors (FAEs). For those who are unfamiliar with *YSW*, the FAEs are colleagues in Writing Studies who volunteer to work with writers after their manuscripts have been selected. Supporting the FAEs and helping students prepare for a productive experience is crucial for their success during the summer phase of developing their manuscripts for publication. Emily approached this work with her usual high level of organization, thoughtfulness, and mentorship for the students and FAEs alike. Whatever we worked on, Emily did everything with focus and care; working with her was inspiring, and the journal would not be what it is today without her efforts and vision.

The included student testimonials give some insight into how seriously Emily took our students' work, and hint at the rigor she expected to see in *YSW* submissions. She cared deeply about publishing high-quality undergraduate research and providing a space for students at all levels to gain valuable experience from working with the journal. The student interns at York College of Pennsylvania, the embedded class-based projects that helped to edit and

rethink the design of the journal, which you can see in the lengthy lists of student editorial assistants in the volumes we managed, are the direct result of her vision for what an undergraduate research journal could do beyond sharing excellent work from the writers.

It is fair to say that Emily's impact on the journal and our field will be felt for years to come from the students we published, the interns and assistants who gained experience, and the FAEs who mentored writers. Personally, I have gained more from working with her at *YSW* and at York College than I can express, and I will miss her deeply.

—*Dr. Gabriel Cutrufello, Professor of Composition and Rhetoric, York College of Pennsylvania & Co-Editor, Young Scholars in Writing (2020-2025)*

I first met Emily as a freshman with little sense of direction. As my advisor, Emily made sure to meet with me right off the bat. I knew that she genuinely cared about her advisees because amidst the chaos of adjusting to college life, she offered a warmth and openness that grounded me and made me feel better about my indecisiveness with my future—I changed my major about seven times. Each time I came to her office, she knew the right questions to ask me and did not make me feel ashamed, not even once. I thought maybe she'd get tired of seeing me, because usually any time I was in the Humanities offices it was for a change of major, but that warmth she had never faded. Three out of four of my years as an undergraduate were pretty rough, and it was only my

last year where I buckled down and really took things seriously. I worked as a writing fellow for Emily, briefly interned with *Young Scholars in Writing*, and took one of her classes, so she got to know me pretty well by the time I graduated. Emily not only ensured I graduated on time despite cutting it very close, but she also played a huge role in me even believing in myself enough to see it through. Emily is a truly unforgettable person, which is why I know her memory will live on through all of us who had the privilege of getting to know her.

—Desiree Jones, *Professional Writing, York College of Pennsylvania*

“A word after a word after a word is power”
—Margaret Atwood

I came to York College after finishing up a three-year trial at a large university. I arrived with a shattered ego and an eagerness to learn how to hone my love for writing. Dr. Emily Cope led the class of Rhetorical History my first year at YCP. We spent hours reading speeches and learning to analyze double speak. All the while, Dr. Cope encouraged us to dig deeper, to look further in, to uncover something new.

The following year, in my senior seminar class, I remember that each of us (a small class of, maybe, six) decided on some heavy topics to undertake. My project focused on the analysis of African American Vernacular English. I read through transcripts of interviews with freed slaves. Dr. Cope guided us through practices of reading the words beneath the written texts—a practice I didn’t know was even

possible. Dr. Cope’s passing leaves behind a legacy of remaining curious, of wielding the power of words—both written and spoken, and to plunge headlong into the secret messages written throughout history.

—Rachel Palepale, *BA in Creative Writing & Minor in Literary and Textual Studies, Chavis Law Firm and York College of Pennsylvania*

Resilience was a word I’d heard my entire life. People told me I was resilient because I had endured and kept moving forward. What no one could have prepared me for were the effects that adverse childhood experiences would have on my fight to graduation. In college, I was constantly walking a fine line: just successful enough for the institution not to intervene, yet struggling so much that each day felt like a battle to keep up. My academic record was fragile; my confidence, even more so.

Dr. Cope became the difference between sinking and crossing the finish line. She didn’t just “fill the buckets”; she problem-solved, negotiated, and advocated to ensure I could meet my graduation requirements. She allowed me to channel my experiences into data-driven answers that helped me better understand that I wasn’t alone in my struggles.

Her flexibility was a recognition of humanity. She understood that perseverance sometimes looked like taking unconventional routes, and she trusted me enough to see things through. Even when she expressed disappointment, it was never the kind that said, “college isn’t for everyone”. Instead, her words pushed

me forward with a steady, quiet insistence that I could do better for myself.

Without Dr. Cope, I wouldn't have graduated. She saw potential where I saw inadequacy, and she pulled me toward the finish line. Her impact on my life extends far beyond academics. She taught me that perseverance isn't always graceful; it's often messy and exhausting, but it's worth every step.

—Kylie McCaffrey, *Professional Writing, York College of Pennsylvania*

I met Dr. Cope when I switched into the professional writing program during my first semester sophomore year. I was coming from marketing so it was a big change. She was assigned as my advisor. I was her advisee for about a year before she went on leave.

She was also my professor for two classes: History of Women's Rhetorics and Rhetorical Theory, which were challenging in the best way. She always made sure I was comfortable in terms of accommodations and doing specific assignments that could prove to be hard because of my physical communication disability.

Emailing her stressed me out at times, but that was because she knew I could do more and that I should push myself out of my comfort zone just a bit, not only in her classes I was in, but in life. I knew she wanted me to succeed and by doing so she wanted me to push myself and find what I wanted to do in and beyond college.

Last fall, she offered me a spot on YSW, the last year it was going to be at YCP. I was so excited about this opportunity because social media is something I thoroughly enjoy doing. Though I worked more with Dr. Cutruffello and Dr. Peck—both amazing leaders and whom I am very grateful I got the opportunity to work with—I was always grateful to Dr. Cope for giving me the opportunity.

Though I didn't know her very long, I will always remember her kindness and her willingness to help everyone around her.

—Shelby Welch, *Professional Writing, York College Of Pennsylvania*

As illustrated by these testimonials, Dr. Emily Murphy Cope was a dedicated colleague and teacher who genuinely saw the humanity and potential in others and helped them see it in themselves. May her life inspire us—as editors, as writers, as mentors, and as educators—to do the same.

WORK CITED

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