Writing Program Administration

Volume 47 • Number 1 • Fall 2023

Special Issue: Writing Program Administration in the Time of COVID–19

Reflections

We've Been Burned Out and Exhausted: GenAdmin WPA Labor Issues Exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic

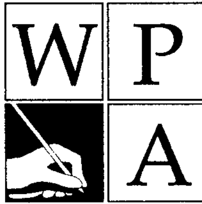
Practicing Equitable and Sustainable Trauma-Informed Writing Program Administration through Disability Justice

The Quiet Revolution: How New WPAs Are Shifting the Profession

Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics

Snapping from the Center: Institutional Absurdity and Equitable Writing Center Administration

Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators



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Land Acknowledgment: We acknowledge that much of the work of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* is done on the traditional lands of the Tuscarora People, the Steh-Chass band of the Squaxin Island Tribe and Nisqually Indian Tribe, the Dakota Nation, the Cherokee People, and other Indigenous Peoples. While the work of a journal is multivocal, collaborative, and now often virtual, we believe it is important to recognize that each participant labors within space that was often unceded by its ancestral peoples. We do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility to mindful and equitable scholarship. We also invite you to review the list of resources used to craft this statement on the WPA website.

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WPA: Writing Program Administration publishes empirical and theoretical research on issues in writing program administration. We publish a wide range of research in various formats, research that not only helps both titled and untitled administrators of writing programs do their jobs, but also helps our discipline advance academically, institutionally, and nationally.

Possible topics of interest include:

- writing faculty professional development
- writing program creation and design
- uses for national learning outcomes and statements that impact writing programs
- classroom research studies
- labor conditions: material, practical, fiscal
- WAC/WID/WC/CAC (or other sites of communication/writing in academic settings)
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- teaching writing with electronic texts (multimodality) and teaching in digital spaces
- theory, practice, and philosophy of writing program administration
- outreach and advocacy
- curriculum development
- writing program assessment
- WPA history and historical work
- national and regional trends in education and their impact on WPA work
- issues of professional advancement and writing program administration
- diversity and WPA work
- writing programs in a variety of educational locations (SLACs, HBCUs, two-year colleges, Hispanic schools, non-traditional schools, dual credit or concurrent enrollment programs, prison writing programs)
- interdisciplinary work that informs WPA practices

This list is meant to be suggestive, not exhaustive. Contributions must be appropriate to the interests and concerns of the journal and its readership. The editors welcome empirical research (quantitative as well as qualitative), historical research, and theoretical, essayistic, and practical pieces.

Submission Guidelines

Please check the *WPA* website for complete submissions guidelines and to download the required coversheet. In general, submissions should:

- article submissions should be a maximum of 7,500 words. Submissions for the "Everything Is Praxis" section should be a maximum of 5,000 words. Please see the WPA website for full details on submitting to the "Everything Is Praxis" section.

- be styled according to either the *MLA Handbook* (9th edition) or the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition), as appropriate to the nature of your research;
- include an abstract (maximum 200 words);
- contain no identifying information;
- be submitted as a .doc or .docx format file; and
- use tables, notes, figures, and appendices sparingly and judiciously.

Submissions that do not follow these guidelines or that are missing the cover page will be returned to authors before review.

Reviews

WPA:Writing Program Administration publishes both review essays of multiple books and reviews of individual books related to writing programs and their administration. If you are interested in reviewing texts or recommending books for possible review, please contact the book review editor at wpabookreviews@gmail.com.

Announcements and Calls

Relevant announcements and calls for papers may be published as space permits. Announcements should not exceed 500 words, and calls for proposals or participation should not exceed 1,000 words. Submission deadlines in calls should be no sooner than January 1 for the fall issue and June 1 for the spring issue. Please email your calls and announcements to wpaeditors@gmail.com and include the text in both the body of the message and as a .doc or .docx attachment.

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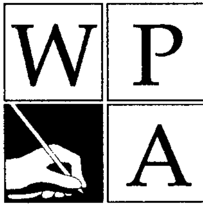

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What's Next? Writing Program Administration During and After the Pandemic

Jacob Babb and Jessie Blackburn

In February 2023, we participated in a panel discussion at CCCC on WPA responses to COVID-19, presenting some of our ongoing interview-based research on how WPAs have shifted their administrative approaches over the past three years. During the question and answer portion of the session, an audience member noted that the findings presented that day were depressing, that our research had exposed much of the hardship faced by WPAs and writing faculty since the beginning of the quarantine in March 2020.

The comment reminded us of what several research participants said once we had completed our interviews with them: The interviews served as almost a form of therapy, a cathartic moment to remember and talk through some of the huge challenges we all faced as our programs' course offerings shifted first to online scenarios for the remainder of that spring 2020 semester, often with faculty members who were ill-equipped to teach online, and then to a wide range of modalities as colleges and universities struggled to find a balance between public health and keeping the proverbial doors open.

As more time gathers between us and the beginning of the quarantine in spring 2020, it sometimes feels tempting to describe ourselves as being in the aftermath of the pandemic. Certainly, it's an understandable temptation. The days when we all locked ourselves in our homes, wiping down packages with Clorox wipes and figuring out the safest ways to buy food and toilet paper or make our own hand sanitizer as public supplies dwindled, were genuinely terrifying. They were also surreal, with the boundaries between home and work fully breaking down, exposing the lack of boundaries many WPAs had already been conditioned to accept as "normal." The quarantine was simultaneously dull and frightening, mind-numbing and anxiety-inducing. 2020 was also a year filled with social and political upheaval, as the state-sponsored murder of BIPOC became a focal point for protest and as the presidential election cycle continued reaching new levels of disruption and dysfunction, culminating in an attempted coup in Washington, D.C. on January 6, 2021, just days into the new year. There was no sign of normal anywhere. Not in the news. Not at work. Not at home.

During all this time, those of us working in higher education struggled to teach our students, to support our programs, to provide professional

development opportunities. WPAs all over the world faced truly monumental challenges as they worked with faculty members who had little-to-no experience teaching online and who were now expected to do so. WPAs had to advocate for faculty and staff as institutions began looking at ways to cut spending and as those same institutions determined through unknown algorithms whose lives were worth risking in in-person environments. WPAs engaged in the intense emotional labor of comforting instructors who were worried about their jobs, who felt they weren't teaching well in the midst of the pandemic, or who were suffering under the pressures of the pandemic.

Wanting to be in the aftermath of the pandemic makes perfect sense. In April 2023, President Joe Biden signed a bipartisan resolution ending the national emergency. The following month, the World Health Organization's Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared that COVID-19 was no longer a global health emergency. Yet as we write the introduction to this special issue in August 2023, the number of COVID cases in the United States has climbed to the highest rate since November 2021. We may want to be done with COVID, but COVID is not done with us. It may not be a global emergency any longer, but we must still contend with it. And so must our programs.

All of which leads us to wonder: what now? Or to borrow from *The West Wing*'s Jed Bartlet, the greatest fictional president the United States has ever had, what's next? What will writing program administration look like from this point forward? What lessons have we learned from a time of significant crises and disruptions? How can WPAs reshape and redefine our work to be more humane and sustainable for ourselves, our instructors, and our students? These are the kinds of questions that we hope this issue begins to address.

When we were developing the call for proposals for this special issue, we wanted to provide scholar-administrators with the opportunity to reflect on what they learned during the pandemic and how their programs changed and continue to change as we move forward. We wanted to present a forum for authors to comment on the complex landscape that has developed over the past three years and to consider what the work of a WPA looks like now. As we noted in the call, "WPAs have always worked within complicated contexts, but our new normal requires an even greater material and interpersonal dexterity to successfully navigate the needs of our programs alongside the (sometimes competing) priorities of our institutions."

We also wanted to emphasize the need to attend to the very real conditions of burnout, exhaustion, and low morale that impact our work. Most of us have engaged in extensive carework over the past three years in our

personal and professional lives. When do we reach the point where we can no longer engage in WPA work because we have exhausted our reserves? Or the fumes of the reserves that we exhausted a couple of years back? Put more optimistically, how can we begin restoring our energy and our enthusiasm for the complex but always hopeful work of writing program administration?

To that audience member who stated that our research findings were depressing: We hear you. As we all reflect on the effects of the pandemic on our work as WPAs, there's plenty to find discouraging and demoralizing. The maxim that our institutions will never love us back never felt more accurate than it did during the pandemic. But we also believe there is plenty of room for hope and optimism as we explore what we have learned about writing program administration during the pandemic and what's next for WPAs as we build on that knowledge. We hope that all of you reading the excellent work published in this issue will find validation for what you have been through as well as hope and optimism for what's next.

In This Issue

The authors whose work is featured in this issue offer many crucial perspectives on what we learned about writing program administration in the time of COVID. The articles in this issue fall into one of two categories: reflections and research articles. The reflections are short pieces that explore the experiences of WPAs or groups of WPAs that describe how WPAs have addressed specific changes to policies, practices, and philosophies in response to the pandemic. The research articles examine and analyze trends in how WPA work has shifted in response to the pandemic. Additionally, we have included one book review that we think resonates with the overall theme of the issue.

We have chosen to arrange the articles alphabetically within the reflection and research article categories, primarily because we want to invite readers to find common threads among these articles and read in the order that resonates the most. Certainly, there are numerous such threads, such as setting boundaries, prioritizing accessibility, building and maintaining communities, protecting NTT faculty and program labor policies, and providing care for others and ourselves.

The contents of this special issue remind us that much of the work of processing what we all have been going through during the pandemic, on both an individual and collective level, remains to be done. As we have read the reflections and research articles produced by the twenty-eight authors who have contributed to this issue, we see WPAs who are trying to

understand their own experiences and who are aiming to determine what writing program administration looks like after a series of incredible disruptions. We see the kind of reflection and care found in this issue as a vital step in seeing how we have administered writing programs in the time of COVID and even in the years before, which prepared us to be crisis administrators but also led many of us to head into that crisis on a low battery—and perhaps in seeing how writing program administration can change for the better in its aftermath.

Reflections

The thirteen reflections published here cover a broad range of topics. Courtney Adams Wooten reflects on how a familial health crisis led her to rethink her professional boundaries. In their reflection on building new "hubs" of support, Scot Barnett and Miranda Yaggi Rodak assert the need to protect WPAs from mission creep. Sara N. Beam and Mark S. Rideout present community pacing as praxis as a means of making space for those who participate in the work of writing programs to hold space for themselves. Elisabeth Buck calls on us to consider what accessibility means, not just for students but for program administrators as well. Paige Ellisor-Catoe draws on her experience as a caregiver for her spouse to offer caregiving as a metaphor for writing program administration.

Drawing on a study of postdoctoral fellows in his program, Andy Frazee offers strategies for building communities of care in writing programs. Teresa Grettano provides a timeline-based reflection on her efforts as a WPA to advocate for and support adjunct instructors. Stephanie Hedge's reflection examines the relentless connectivity that means we are "always on," always available as WPAs, ultimately arguing that sometimes we need to turn off and make space to watch the pandas play. Kim Hensley Owens reflects on her time as a WPA and argues that the work inevitably leads to burnout, making routine rotation of that role important for the well-being of programs and those who lead them.

Christina M. LaVecchia considers how the pandemic taught her that WPA work is embodied labor, particularly as she worked as a pregnant WPA. In her reflection on her time as a new writing center director, Mary Lutze argues that providing connection, care, and support for others can also serve as a form of self-care. Bradley Smith considers how writing groups, both with colleagues and with his daughter, helped to sustain him as his enthusiasm for WPA work waned during the pandemic. In the last reflection, Sara Webb-Sunderhaus offers a model for disabling WPA labor

to make her WPA role sustainable and to involve others in meaningful mentorship work.

Research Articles

Like the reflections, the five research articles published here demonstrate a lot of thematic overlap, even as the authors present different methods, findings, and arguments in their work. Several of the authors argue for new approaches to WPA work based in theories that push against the status quo, such as feminist theories of coalitioning or antiracist and disability approaches. Careful considerations of the role of emotional labor and carework likewise run through these articles. Amy Cicchino, Sarah Elizabeth Snyder, and Natalie Szymanski argue that WPAs should take advantage of how COVID-19 has disrupted the way we do things rather than reverting to the status quo. Drawing on interviews with GenAdmin WPAs, they suggest that coalitional community structures to WPA work can make it more sustainable. Kaitlin M. Clinnin writes about trauma-informed writing program administration, presenting a framework to combine trauma-informed principles with disability justice activism. Her aim is to offer an approach to WPA work that makes writing programs more equitable and inclusive.

In an article that can function as a companion to Cicchino, Snyder, and Szymanski's piece, Kristi Murray Costello presents her findings from an interview-based project that distinguishes between long-term WPAs and new WPAs, the latter group being those who started in their positions immediately prior to or during the pandemic. Costello speculates that interviews with new WPAs gesture toward long-term changes in the field, with individuals aiming to establish boundaries and practice self-care in more intentional ways. Denae Dibrell, Andrew Hollinger, and Maggie Shelledy introduce the concept of fugitive administrative rhetorics, a "practice of administering a shadow program within the official one." They argue that fugitivity provides a perspective on and approach to resisting the racial capitalist underpinnings of universities.

In the fifth and final research article, writing center administrators Amanda Fields, Elizabeth Leahy, Celeste Del Russo, and Erica Cirillo-McCarthy draw on Sara Ahmed's principle of the snap, a break or disruption in the status quo that can be generative. Building on their individual experiences in writing centers during the pandemic, the authors present strategies for program administrators to snap: roadblocking, changing the narrative, and coalitioning.

Book Review

The issue concludes with a review of Lydia Wilkes, Lilian W. Mina, and Patti Poblete's edited collection, *Toward More Sustainable Metaphors of Writing Program Administration*, published by Utah State University Press this year. We find the book review to be particularly timely and appropriate for this issue, and we are grateful to Megan Boeshart Burelle and Kristi Murray Costello for their thoughtful review.

Acknowledgments

As the guest editors of this issue, we want to take this opportunity to thank all the authors for their tremendous dedication to creating this issue. We asked our authors to write and revise their work on quite an expedited timeline. We also asked all of the authors to participate in peer reviewing one another's manuscripts. In short, we asked a lot of these fine scholars, and they have produced stunning, often quite vulnerable work. Authors, we are very grateful to all of you.

We also want to thank Madeline Scott and Aaren Grant, who helped us copy edit all of the manuscripts in this issue. They made a frantic summer push to get these manuscripts ready for publication a great deal less frantic than it otherwise would have been. We are also grateful to Appalachian State University's Department of English and the College of Arts and Sciences for providing the financial support necessary to compensate our copyeditors.

Finally, we want to thank the editors of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* and the Council of Writing Program Administrators for entrusting this issue to us. We are honored to have had the chance to give shape to this conversation.

Reflections

As My Dad Lay Dying

Courtney Adams Wooten

Like many WPAs, I have always tried to be empathetic and caring toward colleagues in the programs I have directed when they have had difficult personal situations arise that impacted their ability to work, whether that was a mental health emergency, medical issues, caring for others in their family and friend circles, or going through someone's death. This emotional labor has become even more central to WPA work since the COVID pandemic began in the spring of 2020, a time during which many have experienced their own and close family's and friends' illnesses, emergencies, mental health issues, and deaths. Throughout these past few years in particular, the support I have offered has involved trying to understand the situations those in the program were experiencing, arranging for substitute faculty to take over their classes as needed, directing them toward other resources on campus, such as HR, and checking in with them. In these instances, even across the widespread problems many faculty have faced through COVID, it didn't seem as if there was much else I could do (or needed to do).

However, I was starkly hit with the limits of empathy in these situations when my dad became very ill over winter break in 2022. Earlier in the fall, he had developed some health issues, and since I live seven hours away, I didn't see him until Thanksgiving break in November. At that point, he was stuck in bed but still sitting up, talking, and eating. When my mom called worried about him just as I was wrapping up the fall semester, though, I knew I needed to go home. So, I packed up my car with two dogs and Christmas presents and drove to North Carolina. When I arrived, my dad was noticeably worse; he was stuck in bed almost all the time, and his appetite had taken a steep decline. He did talk with me and my siblings that night, so I went to bed and, the next day, left to have lunch and take a walk with one of my brothers, assuming that my dad would be okay since he had been left alone before.

When I returned home, though, I panicked because he wouldn't respond to me, even when I shook him, and I could barely feel his pulse. My mom, one of my sisters, and I took him to the hospital, and over the next four days, I barely slept as my mom and I stayed with my dad while a litany of tests were run so that we could keep track of everything that was happening. I woke up on the fourth day at my dad's side in the hospital

feeling as if I was either having a heart attack or a panic attack, and I went to an urgent care where, thankfully, it seemed I had simply stressed my body too far. By this point, my dad could keep track of what was going on, so my mom, siblings, and husband all started rotating shifts at the hospital. But we found out that my dad has multiple myeloma, a type of blood cancer. While treatable but not curable, in those first few days and weeks, we weren't wholly certain how bad his case was, what treatment was an option, and how long we would have with him.

As I went through this traumatic series of events, one thing that struck me then, and that I haven't been able to shake since, is the voice in my head that kept thinking about work—a voice I know faculty in the program I direct have heard over the past few years as well. The structural problem I primarily faced was one of timing: the academic calendar is unrelenting, and while the spring semester didn't start until January 23, 2023 (which gave me more time than many of my colleagues at other institutions would have had to figure things out), that date was like a blaring siren that seemed louder with every minute. I knew that if I couldn't return to work at the start of the semester, the more time I could give others to figure things out, the better. Although I work with very supportive colleagues, there would still be many challenges if I had to take leave, and I wasn't even sure if that would be financially possible for my husband and me. I texted my department chair and my colleagues on my administrative team from the hospital, letting them know what was going on, and they were all very empathetic and supportive of whatever I decided I needed to do.

But I realized, sitting on the other side of the text messages and emails that I usually sent, that while they made me feel supported and valued, they couldn't change the clock ticking ever closer toward January 23 as I tried to figure out what I could do or needed to do. The academic calendar did not care what was happening to me; it would not change, and the work coming with it had to continue somehow. Meanwhile, I couldn't help but be resentful that my husband's workplace—without the constraint of semesters starting or others having their own workloads precipitously rise when he left—had sent him to support my family and me without any kind of deadline about when he needed to be "done" with this crisis.

None of this is a reflection on myself, my colleagues, or anyone else. That is, in fact, the point. The very systems in which we operate that make individual faculty responsible not only for themselves but for their classes, students, committees, and so on do not create a context in which work can be easily shifted or covered by others for more than a couple of days or a week. These problems with academic labor have become glaringly obvious to many people during COVID. Although full-time academic workers are

covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), short- and long-term disability insurance, and similar protections, our work is not structured for us to be able to take advantage of those options as other workers sometimes can (for example, sick days that can actually be used not to work rather than simply shifting our own work into other days and times for us to complete ourselves). And some academic workers—notably part-time adjunct faculty and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs)—are still fighting for even these basic workers' rights.

When looking up scholarship about higher education workplaces and empathy, many of the search results were about bullying and harassment or a lack of empathy in academia (see Elder and Davila's collection about WPAs' experiences with bullying). While other writing studies scholars have discussed the vital yet sometimes damaging aspects of empathy (Blankenship; Thompson, Singletary, Morse, and Morris), carework (O'Donnell; Wootton; Ellisor-Catoe this issue), and emotional labor (Micciche; Adams Wooten, Babb, Costello, and Navickas), scholarship from disability studies scholars and scholars of color especially has pointed out institutional systems that constrain the ability of those operating within them—including WPAs—to support each other's lived realities and needs (Perryman-Clark and Craig; Vidali; Nicolas and Sicari; Webb-Sunderhaus this issue). For someone who has been very careful about establishing work boundaries and avoiding burnout (I even wrote "How to be a Bad WPA" about this), recognizing that higher education institutions aren't built to support faculty even if individuals in them are empathetic reinforces the reality that individuals can only do so much within academic systems that affect our professional—and personal—lives and are unyielding in what they demand from workers. Academia is not designed as an empathetic or caring system, and there is only so much that individuals can do to provide empathy and care for others in this system.

If institutions won't change at a pace that will support us or won't change at all, especially during times of crisis such as COVID, then we must figure out how to live as individuals with whole lives within unempathetic institutions and how to encourage others to do the same while still arguing for changes to those institutions. With ourselves, we need to do the work of setting our own boundaries that can, over time and collectively, affect the institutions we operate within. Technical communication scholar Rebecca Pope-Ruark and psychologists Pooja Lakshmin and Nedra Glover Tawwab offer strategies for what Lakshmin calls "real self-care"—self-care not predicated on exercise and wine nights (although those do have their places) but on working on ourselves to set boundaries, find self-compassion, define our values, and align what we do with those values. Perhaps this

serves as an extension of what I wrote in "How to Be a Bad WPA," a reconsideration given my own grappling with what it means to be a WPA whose dad has received a long-term cancer diagnosis. Enacting this work means countering academia's overwork culture and crafting for ourselves and others alternative pathways through academic lives (as Kristi Murray Costello in this issue also discusses in her study contrasting differences between experienced and new WPAs' approaches to their work).

As a first step, WPAs (and everyone in academia) should and, I would argue, must set clear boundaries on our work and the things we are and aren't willing to do for work, being careful in understanding that what WPAs are willing to do can affect what others are asked to do or what is seen as "normal" (and this special issue offers helpful insights into doing this boundary-setting work and avoiding burnout). While some WPAs have seen being boundary-less as part of the job, as part of being responsible to the groups of people we work with and the programs we run, I view this perception as a problem not only for ourselves but for others. I firmly believe that the boundary-setting I have worked on over the past nine years as a WPA at two institutions is what kept me from doing anything more than texting my colleagues to let them know what was going on while I was in the hospital with my dad (even though I couldn't keep my inner voice from continuing to worry about work). Lakshmin argues that part of learning to set boundaries is learning to live with guilt and not let guilt drive our actions; this remains part of my struggle—learning to live with the guilt of potentially shifting work onto colleagues if and when I have to leave to care for myself or others. This is a huge part of any WPA's struggle: not being equipped to cope with the guilt we will feel when we must walk away from our responsibilities to focus on our lives outside of work. Instead of trying to erase guilt, we need to learn to live with it while not letting it guide the actions we take to care for ourselves and those around us.

Beyond ourselves, though, WPAs need to recognize that we contribute to cultures in our programs and institutions—either contributing to overwork academic cultures or resisting them. I do feel guilty when it seems as if I am setting boundaries that other people aren't or can't, so part of my responsibility is trying to create a culture in which people can set boundaries and advocate for changes that also help others do this work. In my experience, setting boundaries also helps bring to the foreground what aspects of institutional systems differently affect different groups (thinking particularly of the contingent colleagues who work in my program) and make actions toward change possible.

What we need to own is that what we do trickles into what others do. When WPAs say that they must check their emails constantly because an

emergency might happen or refuse to walk away from work when a parent is dying in the hospital, others around us take notice and infer from our actions what their own should be. I would never want someone in the program I direct to think that I wouldn't support their stepping away to focus on their personal lives, no matter what might be going on and what they need to prioritize. Part of creating that culture, though, is in WPAs modeling what it looks like.

I don't offer here a magic wand because that isn't possible, but I do point WPAs toward questions to consider about their own relationships to work (modeled largely on Lakshmin, Tawwab, and Pope-Ruark, who I highly recommend) and in relation to the faculty, staff, and students who work in the programs we direct.

For ourselves:

- What boundaries on work, if any, have we set and why? If we haven't set boundaries, why are we struggling to do so, and how can we make a change?
- How can we grapple with feelings of guilt, knowing that they may not disappear but that we can learn to live with guilt and not let it drive our decision-making?
- How do we develop compassion for ourselves and others that supports our boundary setting?
- How do we align our values with the work we do? If WPA work never or no longer aligns with our values, how do we transition into work that does?

For everyone in our programs:

- How do we contribute to a culture in which boundary-setting—even if those boundaries seem small—is normalized?
- How do we help each other grapple with feelings of guilt about work and encourage others not to let those feelings guide their actions?
- How do we support others' self-compassion and exploring of values, even when that leads colleagues out of our programs and into other professional contexts?

On the ground, beyond trying to contribute to a boundary-setting culture and leading by example, this could mean understanding options others have for taking leave, doing alternative work, and so on when faced with difficult personal situations. It could mean encouraging faculty to set boundaries when faced with difficult situations and helping them navigate what setting those boundaries looks like. It could mean trying to ensure

that our program or department infrastructures support those who need to walk away from work, including making sure all courses have policies, assignments, and calendars set up at the beginning of each semester so that other faculty can step in as needed. It also must mean fighting so that institutional cultures *do* change such that everyone has more ways to set boundaries and more options that support them during times of crisis—what I would call a change toward empathetic institutional structures.

My promise to myself is that the next time I'm in the hospital with my dying dad, I will set those boundaries, walk away from work to support him and my family, and refuse to let my feelings of guilt drive my actions. My hope is that I can help contribute to a program—and maybe even on my most optimistic days, an institution—in which everyone feels they can do the same, whether during times of widespread crisis such as COVID or times when individual crises confront us.

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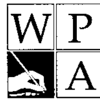

We Can't Be All the Things: Protecting WPA Labor from Mission Creep in Times of Crisis

Scot Barnett and Miranda Yaggi Rodak

In spring 2022, during one of the nightly emergency-response Zoom meetings addressing that day's crisis, we found a moment of levity listing all the roles we as WPAs had somehow—without quite knowing how—become expected to perform since the onset of the COVID–19 pandemic in March 2020. The list grew over a glass of wine: online course designers, 24-hour software/hardware/cloud tech support (for students, grad student instructors, and some fellow faculty), digital accessibility experts, medical specialists versed in virology and public-health communications, PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) authorities, chronic-illness accommodation consultants, therapists, labor lawyers and activists, enrollment forecasters (domestic and international), human resource managers, university call-center operators connecting people to campus resources, crystal ball and mind readers, human AI detection devices, and motivational speakers. We could have responded to every incoming call or email with "911, what's your emergency?" But . . . wait a minute . . . we never professed ourselves experts in any of these skills. We—a tenure-track associate professor in the role of Director of Composition and a non-tenure-track clinical assistant professor in the role of Director of Undergraduate Teaching—found our way into these positions because we're knowledgeable about writing pedagogy, course design, and teaching teachers. So, how did we get here? How did we become *all the things?*

Amid the pandemic, it was difficult for us to fully appreciate how our responsibilities were escalating and the tolls they were taking on us—in many of the same ways Kim Hensley Owens, another contributor to this issue, illustrates so powerfully in "When Too Much Really is Too Much: On WPAing Through the COVID Years." As months turned into years of ever-evolving crisis management, we came to realize the pandemic wasn't a single crisis but a many-headed Hydra from Greek mythology, where every victory added two more (at least) problems for us to battle. During the first waves of the pandemic, one challenge begot another and another, from the pivot to emergency remote teaching to bona fide online course design and hybrid and multimodal instruction and from state and campus-level fights over mask mandates to, eventually, lapsing mask mandates. During the later waves, we found ourselves in the center of a labor dispute between graduate student instructors (GSIs) and Indiana University Bloomington's

(IUB) upper administration, which the pandemic's amplification of social and economic inequities irreparably inflamed. Despite our sympathies and alignment with the GSIs, the picket line necessarily divided us on one side (responsible for thousands of undergraduates enrolled in courses instructors were picketing) and our GSIs and fellow faculty on the other (without the same institutional considerations to complicate their allegiances).

Feeling very much alone and unqualified, we were yet again called upon to be and do more. We advocated for our graduate students while simultaneously responding to both the pandemic's plus now the strike's very real cost and complications borne by our undergraduate students, many of whom were already distressed by two years of remote education and family/healthcare emergencies. How, we asked, could we address this disconnect so that we wouldn't be left to fight the Hydra alone? How could our department more equitably shoulder the prolonged crisis-related labor? How could we resist the mission creep that turned us from WPAs into jacks-of-all-trades? In this piece, we reflect on the dominant challenges the pandemic and strike accentuated for us within our institutional context and the strategies we developed to better integrate our interests as WPAs with those of other faculty and offices within the department and across our campus.

Battling the Hydra

Long before the pandemic, we already understood ourselves as occupying a liminal space, a kind of institutional seam. As WPAs at an R1 university, where Gen Ed composition and intensive writing courses (serving over 5,000 undergraduates annually) are taught primarily by GSIs and postdocs, our jobs exist at the crucial seam where undergraduate education meets graduate student teaching and professionalization. We soon came to realize that this seam becomes a fault line during moments of crisis, particularly when a crisis is not one but many, not discrete and unified but multifarious and spiraling. More troubling still, it's a fault line where WPAs too often stand alone—in our case, as a result of structural imbalances that disconnect composition and GSI training from much of the other work in our department.

Like many research-intensive institutions, our writing program is housed within a large English Department of almost sixty permanent faculty members, with the administration of undergraduate writing courses cordoned off from much of the department's other administrative and intellectual work. Although there is widespread support among faculty for the graduate students *as students* and for the department's graduate programs in literature, creative writing, and rhetoric, there has traditionally been less

active and informed interest in graduate students' teaching of composition and intensive writing since these courses fall outside their areas of research. This has had the effect of exacerbating already existing disciplinary silos by reinforcing the assumption that graduate student teaching is exclusively the domain of the writing program rather than an integrated issue of concern for all faculty in the department.

This tension, as we came to see more clearly during the pandemic and strike, was not merely disciplinary in nature but structural, baked into numerous institutional levels including our department where, traditionally, a bright red light separated the office of the director of graduate students (DGS), charged with overseeing graduate students' courses of study, and us, the WPAs who look after the teaching side of their careers. Even as graduate students rose up during the strike to remind the campus that they are both students *and* employees, our department culture and administrative structures continued to operate as if separating their scholarly and teaching pursuits were either sustainable or desirable.

Even in the best of times, this separation not only fragments graduate students' experience of their MFA or PhD programs, but it also exploits the structural inequities that uniquely burden those of us responsible for supervising their teaching and working conditions. In trying to manage the Hydra of crises during the pandemic and strike, this became toxic as we found ourselves at every critical juncture having to craft health, pandemic, and strike policies based only on vague announcements scattered across campus newsletters, town halls, Facebook discussions, and podcasts—emotionally exhausting work that often resulted in us becoming the face of confusing and unpopular policies for department colleagues and GSIs.

With minimal guidance from upper administrators, for example, we had to quickly draft new policies and processes for managing loosening mask mandates and covering classes if/when GSIs or their children became sick with Covid, including when to allow instructors to switch to Zoom at a time when the campus publicly insisted it was fully open for in-person business. Virtually overnight and without administrative assurance or support, we found ourselves in the impossible position of having to cobble together far-reaching instructional *and* public health policies for thousands of people. While many of the tenure-track faculty who preferred not to return to the classroom were able to continue teaching remotely, we and the GSIs had no such luxury. Given that our Gen Ed foundation courses serve as prerequisites for other courses and majors, the campus was especially watchful over our enrollments and on-campus presence, meaning we had little choice but to craft what we hoped were reasonable and humane policies that accounted for everything from potentially sick instructors to

students who ran afoul of the most recent mask or social-distancing mandates. Some GSIs and fellow faculty accused us at the time of putting students and instructors in harm's way. By being all the things, we inevitably fell short of almost everyone's expectations as our administrative responsibilities were constantly torn between the interests of our instructors and those of our undergraduates.

Looking back, we realize the isolation and mission creep we experienced was not unique to the pandemic. It was simply another turn of the screw wherein, as Adams Wooten et al.'s *The Things We Carry* documents, WPAs are innately positioned to absorb often-invisible burdens that, more and more, encompass forms of emotional labor and crisis response that exact a toll on exhausted faculty. Furthermore, as Kaitlin Clinnin reminds us, crisis response has become "an increasingly critical, albeit under-recognized, occupational responsibility of educators" (129). This is never truer than for WPAs who become, particularly during a long pandemic and strike, "programmatic crisis responders" acting "before, during, and after a crisis on behalf of the larger institution and the writing program" (132). For over two years, we created policies, triaged emergencies, and stood in the void to provide leadership to 100+ graduate students and postdocs teaching thousands of undergraduates, and we navigated the daily tensions and contradictions of the strike that often made us vulnerable to criticism from every side (the classic "damned if we do, damned if we don't"). Even as the GSIs justifiably (and with our support) advocated for the dignity of their labor, our labor was frequently taken for granted—assumed by the campus, department, and even by the GSIs to be limitless, boundaryless.

While such assumptions of WPA labor are not new, what the pandemic revealed was how the silos in our department fed the beast. Our fellow faculty were not ungrateful or uncaring; they were mostly unaware. What we needed was a way to better unify and leverage the various entities already committed to graduate student teaching and education. In other words, we needed more hands on deck—more colleagues and allies who could help us break down or work across long-standing silos and effectively integrate GSI teaching and labor into the department's structures and philosophy. In our own way, we came to much the same conclusion Sara Webb-Sunderhaus, another contributor to this issue, identifies in "Building Accessibility, Disabling Labor: Sustainable Models of WPA Work During a Pandemic," namely that supervising a massive body of GSIs during the pandemic forced us, "to [contest] the notion of the hyper-abled WPA (Yergeau) and disabling WPA work (Vidali) by distributing labor among various stakeholders in the composition program in ways that are equitable, interdependent, and diffuse." In our context, the major problem we needed to address

was both inwardly and outwardly directed: first, defining for ourselves and others where our responsibilities as WPAs begin and end, and then, building and equipping a coalition that incorporates more voices and expertise from stakeholders who share responsibility for graduate student training and education.

Connecting Silos, Crafting Hubs

Since that evening of gallows humor on Zoom, we have challenged ourselves to reimagine the siloed model in which we work that was so instrumental (and detrimental) to shaping our pandemic and strike experience. To better battle the multi-headed Hydra, we realized we needed to connect, to network, the silos with spokes and hubs. Silos exist, in part, because the information within a community isn't visible or accessible to those outside it. The Teaching Hub became one way to address this opacity and resulting isolation. Using our institution's Learning Management System (LMS), we built a robust platform to which all faculty and graduate students have access. The Teaching Hub centralizes our large and varied program's teaching infrastructure, making it open and intelligible. By bringing together things like course administration org charts, routine scheduling forms, eligibility criteria and course overviews, and modules for handling plagiarism cases, connecting students to support resources, and developing course proposals, The Teaching Hub serves as a single point of entry that visually and philosophically translates institutional complexity into something coherent and approachable. Better yet, it makes visible previously invisible aspects of our labor to non-WPA colleagues and GSIs, not to mention reduces GSIs' anxiety by giving them agency to find the answers they need.

The second hub we created is a standing committee of faculty directly responsible for graduate education and multi-course administration. This includes directors of our department's various graduate programs, such as the Director of Graduate Studies, Director of Creative Writing, and Director of Rhetoric alongside the faculty and staff responsible for GSI support. While we recognized the valid reasons our department historically delegated leadership along a line dividing those responsible for graduate students *as students* from those responsible for them *as instructors*, we felt these areas should be interlinked and sought our chair's support in establishing a committee that would support graduate students as whole people. Our committee's mission statement is simple: to foster a vibrant teaching community for graduate students by dismantling unproductive silos and working more efficiently and collectively to advocate within and outside the department for what our grads and multi-section courses need.

We will admit: initially, the organizational efforts of chartering and co-chairing this committee was more labor—yet another trade for our tired Jack. But in very short order, the committee has become a hub where we join together to inform, create, and move things forward. We meet monthly to address timely topics that cut across disciplinary lines and crowdsource not only our knowledge but influence. The DGS, for instance, can now more fully represent our collective concerns through their participation in the monthly DGS meetings hosted by the Dean's Office in the College of Arts & Sciences. Moreover, together, we craft (often modest) proposals for programming, policies, or resources that we take to the chair.

As another example, the committee recently took up the difficult topic of attendance in a post-pandemic landscape, where learning and retention languish. During our final meeting in spring 2023, this collaborative discussion became messy, even heated at times. In the end, however, the new committee structure helped us unearth important challenges and assumptions about policy language and different disciplinary applications and, most importantly, enabled us to build consensus around a new policy that would move the program away from penalizing absences to incentivizing the kind of active learning that not only supports writing development but also makes visible to students the efficacy of regularly participating in an engaged community of writers. Whereas during the pandemic and strike we would have been left alone to craft, implement, and enforce a new policy, with the committee we were now able to involve a range of voices to help us think through—and, yes, also explain and defend to audiences beyond our committee—the new policy and its rationale.

Our two "hubs" are modest but robust strategies that have begun addressing the isolation and curtailing (some of) the mission creep that accompanies WPA work in large R1 universities, which the pandemic only exacerbated. While these strategies by no means work in all contexts or address the many challenges WPAs face throughout the field, we offer them in the belief that understanding institutional structures and constraints is something all WPAs share regardless of where they teach and work. For many WPAs, the pandemic and its aftermath were stressful and exhausting, especially when we were called upon to be all things for everyone. And yet, at the same time, it also helped many of us—in this issue and throughout the field—to see our work from different angles and to realize we could innovate (sometimes modest) responses to challenges long entrenched within our department cultures. A silver lining to be sure, but one that has helped rejuvenate our two spirits after three long years of going it alone in the midst of so much chaos, uncertainty, and heartbreak.

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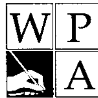

The Writing Program Has COVID: Community Pacing as Praxis

Sara N. Beam and Mark S. Rideout

Our humanity—and our humanism—compels us to recognize and treat each writing program coworker as a whole person, honoring each individual's relationship to time, as well as the relative pace of their labor within the collective. Instead of requiring disclosure of disability or family dynamics, we advocate for and enact flexible guidelines and policies, access-centered development and communication, and the abolition of unnecessary labor constraints and policing of such—all practices informed by an inclusive understanding of temporality. We maintain our early pandemic core value of first tending to basic physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs, which must be addressed before workers can labor at their own individual, sustainable paces within a constellation moving at its own viable tempo. Work does not require unrelenting engagement and unflagging excellence, with no room for rest, respite, or dreaming. Academics—chronic people pleasers—perennially need this reminder, repeated and modeled at every turn.

As mid-level managers, WPAs wield less power than upper administrators, but we do possess the latitude to interpret and query due dates imposed on us, to set our program's calendar, and to evaluate how workers adhere to deadlines. These powers became especially evident in March and April 2020, when we offered more accessible virtual meetings and trained instructors and consultants in more inclusive online instruction and support than before. We developed digital modes of delivery, engagement, and assessment for program activities while maintaining those HyFlex practices in person, accommodating our colleagues' labor when and how they needed, in accordance with their individual energy levels and rhythms. The result? Our student retention and success rates are relatively steady, we've both received raises and promotions or longer contracts, and we're seeing positive feedback from all constituents. Thus, we maintain a dedicated praxis of flexible work place and time, resisting calls for a "return to normal."

Surprisingly, as the pandemic crawls into its fourth year unmitigated by effective organized response, its persistence nevertheless generates data and discourses that expose narratives of debility exacerbated by complicity. Patterns of *effect* and *affect* may be of interest intellectually to us as writing instructors, literary scholars, and researchers; for those like Mark who live

and work with Long COVID (LC) and those like Sara with other autoimmune and chronic disorders—in fact, for the disabled community more broadly—these patterns illuminate how *pathological disruption* irresistibly contorts the ways we live and work. A perpetual inflammatory state hinders healing and worsens trauma, a touchpoint statement that resonates for us on many human levels.

COVID, ME/CFS, and Sick Programs

Clinical research clearly links COVID's long-term autoimmune interference (post-COVID sequelae or LC) and Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS), among other conditions. In response, social movements act in solidarity to promote awareness and action, like the disability justice advocacy campaign #MillionsMissing, comprising those with LC and ME/CFS. Meghan O'Rourke emphasizes resemblance in her study *The Invisible Kingdom*, noting that while such illnesses are distinct, "They are often characterized by dysregulation of the immune system and/or the nervous system, which are powerfully intertwined in our bodies" (5). Deficits in cognition, focus, memory, temporospatial perception, mood, and energy (not to mention concomitant physical impairments) are common and, so far, mostly resistant to treatments and therapies. The implications for those who work in public are sobering; when those implications remain unaddressed in meaningful ways, we find our programs literally disabled, with no staff well enough to run them. This would have been the case for AY 2022–2023, absent the option to offer online sections at our institution.

While administrators and bureaucrats persistently discount the cumulative effects of uncontrolled spread of an airborne, long-term disease, those who experience disability daily may feel alienated, as if they have willed themselves into this place of struggle. Too often, as O'Rourke contends (citing the work of Susan Sontag), "illnesses we don't understand are frequently viewed as manifestations of inner states. The less we understand about a disease or symptom, the more we psychologize, and often stigmatize, it" (6). When symptoms present in waves or cycles, sometimes subsiding, they generate false hope of relief—until the next episode of weakness, lethargy, or malaise sets in. This may increase a person's sense that they are imagining its severity and must remain silent in their suffering, particularly if they fear being met with very real discrimination or ridicule.

As we navigate each semester, these cycles impact staffing; we anticipate them, for example, by training instructors to create nimble course calendars and lesson plans (e.g., open deadlines/submission windows, multiple modes of engagement, and increased in-class writing time), explain to students

what a shift in class mode will look and feel like, and grant themselves and their students compassion. As WPAs, part of our job is to design accessible labor conditions. Without those, the psychological and emotional repercussions of repression have their own insidious side effects, as we know from discourse in critical disability studies extending ideas from Goffman's *Stigma*.

The Role of Trauma

Once the eugenicist narrative of mutation and adaptation (i.e., variants) infects social discourse, we may seek patterns to cope, accommodate, assimilate, and navigate creatively this treacherous new paradigm. It opens a generative space for acceptance that we are all survivors of ongoing shared trauma. To acknowledge our own trauma in tandem with that of others offers some self-compassion; however, much of the pain we share remains coded, unseen, unspoken, hidden, invisible. Like COVID spike proteins, it pools elsewhere in the organism, silently manifesting in myriad ways that mask themselves as symptoms far removed from their causes. In parallel with O'Rourke and her own experience of illness, we realize that "the silence around suffering [is] our society's pathology" (7). Trauma precludes moving forward or even laterally away from the inciting ordeal; we remain stuck at onset of the unanticipated unthinkable, convinced there was a way to avoid it that can and should be excavated, exposed, internally reinscribed—perhaps even retroactively punished—before recovery can occur.

Like a novel neurodegenerative pathogen, however, trauma alters accustomed pathways to full recovery (minimized as a "return to normal") with defamiliarizing tactics, insisting that we adapt to conditions we cannot control but which have devastating effects on our ability to function, often to simply think and feel. Time and again we find we must replenish ourselves from within ourselves, a conundrum. To be cast as the patient, diagnostician, and caregiver simultaneously is daunting. If, in response, we intentionally position the writing program as being "sick" (with that word's manifold valences), the implications for ourselves and our collectives sharpen while simultaneously manifesting as new vectors of distress themselves.

Institutions inherently are traumatizing. They typically exhibit a dehumanizing tendency to deactivate or amputate parts of themselves assessed as "broken" or "sick" via rubrics prioritizing harmful notions of "timeliness" founded on labor of a human who is always well, available, ambitious, and unencumbered by care work—or who is otherwise disposable. In contrast, we reframe the "sick" program as neutral, normal, and natural. If it has a chronic illness, like LC, then the program itself needs accommodations in

the form of various negotiable, long-term supports, most crucially those that remove barriers related to synchronous time and physically shared place, both of which relate to pace of work.

Effective response, however, may be constrained by diminished energy for problem-solving after workers struggle simply to get through the day, much of that energy having been consumed by volatile swings between feeling numb and rising to confront the perceived threat. Judith Herman asserts in her influential study *Trauma and Recovery*, “The dialectic of trauma gives rise to complicated, sometimes uncanny alterations of consciousness” (2), suggesting that we honor and attend to these alterations, not deflect them as symptoms to be palliated or ignored. Likewise, a productive way to frame pandemic-induced trauma emerges from the concept of “cripistemologies,” or, “[encountering] experiences of time, space, and place shaped by practices of survival rather than by an ableist aspiration toward an idealized horizon of recovery” (Critical). “Cripping” an entire writing program lends us a workable vocabulary for articulating how it adapts to new challenges and ways of being that arose through crisis, for describing our “practices of survival” (Johnson and McRuer 128). If the *program* exhibits qualities of unwellness, then we turn an individual burden into a structural one: we see that sick people are not the pathology and that eradicating them—however passively—is not the “one quick trick” to resolve staffing issues and assure quality. During the early pandemic, before the vaccines were ready, we ran the program based on the premise that we are all under duress and must find ways to educate in emergency conditions—ways that involve rethinking the measures of teaching and learning. Now, at the lifting of the COVID emergency declaration, we retain the premise that the program is chronically, often invisibly, ill to justify keeping features of the emergency redesign that successfully accommodated for flexible time, place, and pace.

Adaptation and Accommodation

In the absence of institutional relief, writing program workers develop compensatory strategies within their discrete academic and pedagogical spaces. Some people *in extremis* simply sit or sleep; others keep moving even though they too feel depleted. We share workloads when and where we can and pace ourselves to conserve what energy remains in order to meet obligations we cannot defer or refuse. And that, perhaps, gives us a metaphorical framework within which we can craft meaningful adaptation—one of collective pacing.

Pacing in all its forms and connotations implies self-care that is responsive, responsible, and, in small but effective ways, rejuvenating. Another

way of thinking about pacing is suggested by Laura R. Micciche's concept of "slow agency," described as the "arts of productive stillness, resource preservation, and slowness" (73). In this sense, moving at an intentionally slower, more sustainable pace is a method of resistance against the demand for production, performance, and "progress."

Clinical interventions include pacing as a treatment for post-exertional malaise (PEM), a telltale symptom for both those with LC and ME/CFS. Health experts recognize similarities between LC and ME/CFS, "chronic, multi-system disease affecting millions of people worldwide," one of which is PEM, distinguishable from typical tiredness by its "immediate or delayed onset," "prolonged duration," and "disproportionate intensity" (Bateman et al. 2861–2). Further, PEM is "associated with poor energy production and can be instigated by a variety of stimuli (e.g., physical/cognitive exertion; emotional, orthostatic, and sensory stressors)" (2871–2). Pacing, or carefully budgeting energy by limiting the number and duration of body-mind activities, is one of the non-pharmaceutical interventions for PEM. Applying energy management techniques to an organization and its infrastructure provides built-in flexibility and a more realistic workflow. In a writing program, these techniques include something as simple as sharing "living" instructor handbooks in Google Docs form, with permissions open to comment, so workers can share their valuable perspectives and inputs when they are able.

In "Cripping Time in the College Classroom," Tara Wood refers to normative speed as "commonplace pace" (261). As WPAs and faculty with backgrounds in performance, we draw on concepts of pacing from the realms of performing arts, athletics, and hospitality. Teaching and leadership are performative, too. Such recognition inspired us to develop a structural compensatory strategy, *community pacing*, which we define as setting a group pace that centers or defaults to those who typically are at the margins of the "commonplace pace," specifically those with LC. Pace, in this context, neither references linear movement nor readily serves Western binary notions of progress, instead denoting movement in plurality, like a murmuration. Community pacing holds space for every worker's pace without casting those who participate out-of-sync as, "slow," "lazy," or, "at the back of the pack."

Community pacing as praxis aligns principles and positions with intentional actions such as keeping time and building in rest—readers may recognize these as support for executive function skills related to time management. Whereas the normative sense of pace is distorted by commodification, under which thoughts, time, work, and bodies are conscripted as products for someone else's profit, community pacing is a skill

emergent in care work, in which laborers must work at the pace of those they support. In a culture that diminishes "pink collar labor," the communication, patience, flexibility, multitasking, and decision-making required for matching or cultivating pace are deeply restorative but rarely appreciated as professional work. Community pacing praxis includes valuing the talents required to organize a group with diverse relationships to time because we value those whose work is lost when barriers of time interpose between them and teaching and learning. Further, embracing neuropluralism (Perry) supports the presence of underrepresented voices in writing program leadership and teaching positions.

Finding a flexible group pace requires ongoing conversation, relationship building, and multimodal communication—body language, facial expressions, well-timed words, nudging or cueing, etc. It also cultivates a culture of mindfulness of one's working pace and what supports (e.g., screen readers, childcare, daily schedule, amount of sleep/rest, etc.) one needs. Normalizing variances in pace and support needs thus relocates any perceived pathology from the individual to the program and reconceives the relationship between academia and the body-mind. We offer this concept of community pacing as a means of pursuing equity, a method of resistance that fits within the concept of slow agency, not only as a cripistemology and practice of survival, but also as political and cultural action—for instance, recognizing and making space for the #MillionsMissing.

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Pandemic Administration, Neurodiversity, and Interrogating Writing Center Accessibility

Elisabeth H. Buck

Note: This reflection will discuss a traumatic car accident as well as obsessive behavior.

I began to suspect that all was not well when I hit hour four of auditioning rugs for my living room. These weren't real rugs, mind you. They were virtual representations of real rugs that one could theoretically buy. If you are unfamiliar with new technologies of interior design, many home furnishing websites now have this nifty feature where by taking a picture of your living space, you can with impressive verisimilitude place furniture or rugs in your room to see how well they match your existing decor. One by one I rejected each digital rug as too brown, too beige, too grey, too blue. It was not about finding the right rug, really—I absolutely did not *need* a rug—but about manifesting some illusion of control in the face of the uncontrollable. My obsessive-compulsive disorder, like so many other things during the pandemic, had gone virtual.

I have arrangement-oriented obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and I am also a director of a writing center at a mid-sized public institution. There is little disciplinary conversation written from the perspective of a neurodiverse writing center administrator; Karen Moroski-Rigney's important piece "Seeing the Air: Neurodiversity and Writing Center Administration" represents a rare voice here. In "Seeing the Air," Moroski-Rigney discusses broadening conversation about accessibility and writing centers, the intersections between disability and neurodiversity, and her own experiences as an administrator navigating her adult diagnoses of autism and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Importantly, Moroksi-Rigney argues that neurodiversity as a writing center administrator can be particularly difficult to navigate due to the field's precarity: "The consistent pressure to maintain funding, staffing, scheduling, training, and research for our centers becomes 'just part of the job.'" Moroski-Rigney continues, "However, disengaging from or questioning this intensive work—or to enlist support in doing it, or to seek ways to do [it] using methods that are healthier for disabled minds or bodies—remains taboo."

I write this reflection in response to Moroski-Rigney's call for more neurodiverse and disabled administrators to publish their own stories. I also hope to push back on what I see as a concerning trend for administrators

to expand exhaustively. I think that we WPAs and writing center directors tend to be a competitive bunch, often by necessity. We compete within our institutions for more resources, recognition, and support, but often our own discipline tacitly encourages rivalry. We vie for jobs, publication opportunities, conference spots, speaking engagements—all tend to reward those who demonstrate innovative resiliency and the ability to "do more with less." This has felt especially true since the pandemic. My OCD means that I exist with ceaseless and (often) misplaced momentum. At times I rather think our discipline does, too.

My History With OCD

The Mayo Clinic characterizes OCD as occurring when one experiences "a pattern of unwanted thoughts and fears (obsessions) that lead you to do repetitive behaviors (compulsions)." People with OCD "feel driven to perform compulsive acts to try to ease [their] stress." Many tend to associate OCD with excessive handwashing, intense germaphobia, or ritualistic counting, and while these are certainly behaviors by and through which OCD can be made visible, my OCD manifests in the need for spaces to be orderly and symmetrical. My therapist hypothesizes (and I am inclined to agree) that my OCD was likely triggered by a combination of genetic predisposition and a traumatic car accident that I witnessed at a young age. I was about six years old, and my dad and I were driving back from my grandmother's house late at night. We were the first to happen upon a horrific head-on collision, and my dad, a nurse, stopped to help. It is one of those moments that is forever seared into my memory. I was very young and alone in the car on the side of the road, knowing that things were very, very bad. My dad did not tell me explicitly what he saw but the look on his face when he returned to our car was enough.

Witnessing this had a profound effect on my sense of security and I soon developed an unhealthy relationship with arranging my personal space. My ritual would go something like this: stare at my bed, straighten one of the decorative pillows, pull the bedspread tight to make sure there were no wrinkles, walk back to my bedroom door to observe my work, notice that a pillow was crooked or a wrinkle had manifest, walk back to fix it, repeat. I would spend literal hours engaged in this obsessive bed-making and my behavior was always accompanied by intrusive thoughts. *If my bed is not perfect, harm will come to my whole family* repeated over and over as I marched back and forth across my bedroom. It has often been difficult to parse my OCD from the other aspects of my personality, including my tendency toward perfectionism. I am *driven*, it seems, by many innate

forces. I was good about hiding the extent of my obsessive behaviors and my symptoms waxed and waned throughout high school, college, and graduate school, so like Moroski-Rigney, I was not officially diagnosed with OCD until well into adulthood. Generally though, the more company and structure I had, the better I have been able to manage my symptoms.

Contextualizing My Writing Center Space

I was first hired to direct a writing center in the fall of 2016, and even before the pandemic, this was a difficult space to inhabit. I have been lucky enough to have the opportunity to write about why it was complex in a few other venues (Botvin and Buck; Buck), so I will not dwell on this extensively here but, in short, I was asked two years into my contract to develop a brand-new writing support center on campus, separate from the one I was originally hired to direct. My mental health was at a low point during this transition. My partner was unable to find a job in the area, so I moved to the region alone. My isolation, coupled with my very difficult labor conditions, contributed to frequent bouts of obsessive behavior. This manifest spatially (e.g., multiple times I completely rearranged my living room furniture at odd hours of the night) and in ways that look a lot like productivity. My tenure requirements necessitated that I write a book or four peer-reviewed articles for promotion; I wrote a book *and* four peer-reviewed articles in two years.

I share all this as a preface to the pandemic because I think my writing center context is important. Already I had internalized the narrative of perpetual progress that tends to characterize administrative labor. Genie N. Giaimo describes how workism is central to much of administration, particularly with regard to the continuous mentorship, training, and professional development initiatives we engage in and the "service work and other work that we do for free as our budgets and support structures shrink." I sometimes wonder if my OCD drew me to administration specifically because of how this labor validates the inclination to de-prioritize boundaries. For so long, my way of "coping" with my OCD in the absence of therapy or diagnosis had been to dive head-first into anything and everything that could help reroute my propensity toward obsessive behaviors. Administration is a vacuum that will consume all this energy but, critically, my newly-developed writing center pre-pandemic also had more constraints. We had a physical space open from ten to five Monday through Friday. We offered online consultations, but they were far from well-utilized. The center was liberatory in its participatory nature as I had both an assistant director and a graduate assistant who were fantastic, as well as a team of wonderful

tutors. My partner had also finally been able to move to the area. Right at the moment I reached something like stability, everything changed.

Navigating the Pandemic and Resisting the Growth Narrative

Like many institutions across the country, in mid-March 2020, our university moved fully online. Several tutors soon began to email me with similar requests. *My hours at my other job have been cut, can I get more tutoring hours at the center*? I made the decision to liquidate our remaining budget to give tutors as many hours as possible, and soon our ten-to-five, mostly face-to-face writing center had abruptly transformed into a 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. fully online writing center open every day of the week to incorporate the tutors' new and suddenly much more flexible schedules. Though I was very ill at the time (with what turned out to be COVID!) our writing center was nevertheless ready to go within forty-eight hours of our university announcing the modality transition. From March 2020 through May 2021, the assistant director and I fielded queries at all hours of the day regarding tech issues, provided support for difficult virtual tutoring situations, and facilitated ongoing tutor training. I was on my computer, in my apartment, nearly all the time.

Moroski-Rigney writes that her quality of life greatly improved when she was sent home to work during the pandemic. She shares, "I have more control over my environment—control I'd never had before. No surprise knocks on my office door. No excess noise or lights. No abrupt changes. No interruption." My response, however, was almost exactly the opposite. I began to fixate on every small detail in our apartment. This is when the rug thing started. Being at home with little division of time or space sent my OCD soaring to new heights. As is often the case, it (un)fortunately took getting to this low point for me to pursue a diagnosis and finally start therapy.

Recent writing center scholarship has tended to focus on how writing centers' compulsory adaptation or expansion of asynchronous and virtual tutoring was ultimately positive. Summarizing this perspective, Barron et al. write that writing center administrators should not be so eager to return to their "cozy" spaces and instead ought to "reflect and learn from our pandemic trials, forced though they were, to evolve and meet the needs of a student body who appear to find themselves increasingly at home in their homes or in alternative spaces." To be clear, I wholeheartedly agree that administrators must be conscious of how to make our centers and practices more accessible to students, especially given the tumult of the past few years. What I argue is equally important: if administrators are going to be

asked to expand in new and innovative ways, attention must be paid to the resources that are needed to make these shifts happen *meaningfully*. This has yet to occur at my writing center. We never returned to a ten-to-five operation; instead, up through last semester, we more or less kept our pandemic schedule as demand for online hours exceeded in-person appointments. We were effectively on call for twelve hours a day. Simultaneously, we lost funding and institutional support for our graduate assistant position, and my fantastic assistant director had his time divided by upper administrators who compelled him soon after our return to campus to coordinate an embedded STEM tutoring program. Our center's resources drastically diminished as we were called to do more and be more.

And yet, I experience tremendous guilt. My obsessions have often felt enabled by my white, privileged positionality and ample time, space, and resources—particularly so during the pandemic. *Here I am fixating on rugs when people are quite literally dying, not just from COVID but from endemic racial and social injustices.* Even though having OCD means that I often experience a heightened response to realities outside of my control, I suspect that I am not alone in feeling intensely and personally responsible for the success or failure of the center or program I direct and the students who work there and use its services. As well-intentioned as recent scholarship about increasing access and modality is, we must also acknowledge that the constant pressure to expand in any and every direction has consequences. What I hope to see in conversation with these calls is concomitant discussion about what would be needed to accomplish these shifts effectively and healthily. For example, many writing centers have vastly increased their online offerings, but I suspect very few have had the means to hire a dedicated online tutoring coordinator. We must say to whatever institutional authority needs to hear it that we cannot accomplish *x* without *y*, as much as we might want or need to. For the fall 2023 semester, I have made some difficult, but probably long overdue, cuts to the writing center's schedule. Will students' ability to access tutoring be impacted when we no longer offer synchronous online evening and weekend hours? Absolutely. Can I continue to supervise twelve-hour shifts while also teaching my courses and undertaking research after the provost's office definitively announced that the writing center will receive no additional support or resources? Absolutely not.

If someone were to ask what accommodations I need as an administrator with OCD, it would be to provide me with clear and specific expectations. Boundary-setting is particularly challenging for me, and when my tasks and spaces are liminal and ill-defined, I will assume that everything is my responsibility and mine alone. I surmise others would also benefit

from clarifying similar parameters, but we need our supervisors' and our discipline's support in this. I see many of my wonderful peers lamenting their burnout while simultaneously expanding their speaker series, workshop rosters, research agendas, and more. I ask what it would mean for us to collectively resist this inertia, especially when so many aspects that truly impact the success of our administrative practices—things like our budgets, the perceptions and priorities of campus leadership, and our physical and ideological positionality within institutions—are largely out of our control. I hope a key lesson of the pandemic can be that we more thoughtfully consider what accessibility means, not just vis-à-vis the students we serve but also as applied to ourselves and our labor.

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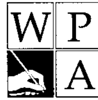

Lessons from Caregivers

Paige Ellisor-Catoe

When the world shifted drastically in March 2020 in response to the COVID–19 pandemic, I was strangely comforted by the spirit of community that characterized the initial stages of the lockdown. Though the fear of the unknown was palpable, I also saw the shared trauma become the means of inspirational group-building: friends were scheduling Zoom get-togethers, celebrities and organizations were creating free online content for viewers of all ages, and social media was buzzing with recipes for people to bake their way through this new reality. Though I was physically isolated from friends and family, I felt connected to others via a shared mission to flatten the curve and keep the most vulnerable among us safe. We were all in this together, even as we were physically separate from one another.

At that point, I had been a cancer spouse for approximately a year. In April 2019, my then 38-year-old husband had battled extreme headaches and nausea for 1.5 weeks before our worst fears were confirmed: A CT scan revealed a brain tumor that was causing dangerous swelling. The tumor was successfully removed, but the pathology revealed that it had been caused by advanced metastatic melanoma, and so my journey as a caregiver began. I suddenly had to juggle caring for my spouse, parenting my 7-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son, and maintaining my career as an English professor at a mid-sized, faith-based university. Previously I could find easy camaraderie with working parents and colleagues in higher education, but now, I felt completely alone. None of our other friends had faced a potentially terminal diagnosis. None of my coworkers had to manage caregiving plus parenting plus teaching. It was all too much, and I felt that no one could understand my new reality enough to help me. Thus, when the pandemic began approximately one year into my family's cancer journey, though it was challenging, I did feel relieved that at least this was a trauma that we could all endure together.

However, as we know, this initial spirit of determination gave way to the politicization of a public health crisis, and, as weeks turned into months and years, the collective resolve weakened. Instead, most professionals found themselves being charged to handle never-before-seen problems, and, as a result, were left with never-ending to-do lists and the anxiety that accompanies so many unknowns.

In March 2020, my institution did what many others did: We pivoted online for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester. We then returned to

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in-person classes in 2020–2021, but we did so by using a hybrid approach: Most classes had one in-person class meeting per week, which was supplemented by either Zoom attendance for another class session, or other online activity in our learning management system. This hybrid model helped classes maintain classroom caps for physical distancing and created necessary flexibility for students who needed to quarantine.

As the coordinator of the general education first-year composition sequence at my university, I led my full-time and part-time faculty colleagues through these sudden shifts in instruction modalities. My job title and over fifteen years of experience teaching in higher education equipped me for this challenge, but in retrospect, I can see that I was drawing from the lessons learned from serving as a caregiver. Living amid the trauma wrought by a global pandemic, I unconsciously reverted to caregiver management strategies to accommodate these multiple pivots.

No one wants to be a caregiver: This role designation means that some unforeseen circumstances have created pain and suffering for a beloved friend or family member. The job is often foisted upon someone, there is no training for it, and the stakes are often incredibly high. Though the role seems far removed from the academy, research has demonstrated that caregiving duties often creep into higher education, especially for female faculty (Guarino and Borden). The emotional demands of teaching, serving, and mentoring can often lead to burnout (Pope-Ruark), which is prevalent among caregivers (Talley and Crews).

Though being a caregiver poses significant challenges, it also prompts necessary self-reflection and action for survival: Caregivers must be able to manage their time and energy very carefully, or else they jeopardize the health of the patient and their own health. In a similar vein, writing program administrators must be able to manage their time and energy very carefully, or else they jeopardize the health of their writing programs and their own health. Though I stumbled upon my role as the result of my husband's illness and the ripple effects of pandemic life, I have found that caregiving strategies are helpful strategies in my professional life as a writing administrator. Wilkes, Mina, and Poblete's *Toward More Sustainable Metaphors of Writing Program Administration* provides various new metaphors for reflecting on the work of the WPA, and I suggest that the role of caregiver is an apt addition to this lexicon.

Simplify and Prioritize Commitments

When the shift to online occurred in March 2020, my first recommendation to our faculty was to simplify one of the major assignments in our

curriculum. We typically have a collaborative multimodal project, which was scheduled to begin in late March, built into our ENG 102 classes. Though we could have continued with this complex multimodal project, which typically takes the form of a video argument created by student groups, I recognized that it was not advisable to maintain a project that would involve intense collaboration via distance. We abandoned the collaborative element and moved to the individual creation of a visual argument for a print poster. We prioritized our focus on visual rhetoric, but we simplified the project to make it more manageable under these new circumstances.

In a similar spirit of simplification, when we moved to our hybridized model for in-person classes in 2020–2021, I decreased the number of required essays to be written in our ENG 101 classes. With alternating attendance days and the constant threat of another online pivot looming over that academic year, I believed that prioritizing fewer major projects would make this shift in instruction more manageable for both students and faculty. This change was also a nod to how much the typical first-year composition sequence has expanded in recent memory. Our classes have specific learning goals tied to written communication, oral communication, and information literacy. It is challenging to teach, assign, and assess projects for these learning goals in a standard semester. I thought attempting to maintain the same pace and schedule during this new modality would be foolish, and rather than narrow the scope of content for our courses, I chose to reduce the number of assignments.

Even though this change was welcomed by most faculty, one of my colleagues challenged this decision. This challenge included a comparison to other institutions and their required number of essays in first-year composition classes. What seemed to be at the root of this faculty member's concern was how many essays *should* be assigned in a first-year composition course for it to be a first-year composition course. This subtext was clearly raising questions of standards and identity, which are both worthy concerns, but discussions of standards and identity often exist in a hypothetical, ideal world—one that is not usually available to caregivers and patients. I gently pushed back on this faculty member to remind them that we were living amid a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, and some changes would have to be made, even if they flew in the face of our idealized conceptions of the classroom.

Accept Reality

Most faculty members have a strain of idealism in them: It is probably what compels us to pursue higher education, for own studies and for our

career. We want to create the best learning experience for our students that we can. There is a continuous string of articles, webinars, and workshops that teach us the newest practices that we simply must incorporate into our teaching, which will surely help us create the most student-centered, most high-impact, and most successful classroom learning experience ever. It is a noble enterprise, but it is also an exhausting enterprise. As writing studies faculty and administrators, we have an added burden: writing can always be made stronger. It is never finished, as opposed to a math problem that reaches its final solution, or a straightforward scantron test that is put through the machine. We can always teach our students to be more effective in their communication, and, as a result, we often feel an even greater push to pursue more and more excellence in our classrooms. We want the ideal, and we often hold ourselves accountable for creating that ideal learning experience for our students.

However, as caregivers and patients know, the ideal is not reality. Reality, instead, includes a life-altering diagnosis, treatment complications, appointment after appointment, pain, fatigue, and mental health challenges. Reality, for caregivers, includes juggling these challenges and keeping things running—for the patient and the rest of the family.

When I first began working with my therapist, who has worked with oncology patients and their families for over twenty years, she set a goal of acceptance for me. She helped me see that many of my struggles were caused by the root problem of not accepting that our new reality as a cancer family was in discord with my previous expectations for our family's life and my role as a mother. I had to let go of the picture perfect to survive—for myself, for my husband, and for my kids. I had to bid farewell to the Pinterest-worthy, beautiful Bento box daily lunches for my kids. Instead, I had to accept that peanut butter and jelly is just fine. I had to let go of the ideal and accept the reality that had been handed to me.

The pandemic handed most people a new reality. It was hard and required new coping strategies. As we shifted to fewer in-person class meetings and daily updates on our students and colleagues who were either sick or quarantining, it became quickly apparent that we must accept this new reality, which was simply a familiar truth: time and energy are finite. We must accept that time and energy are not endlessly available, which, by extension, means that the ideal is usually not attainable. We must make peace with not being able to do it all.

Rely on Support Systems

Accepting the reality of a situation, rather than clinging to a hypothetical ideal, does not have to mean settling. Society and social media have conditioned us to believe that anything short of perfection is a failure, but this fallacy usually rests on an unhealthy sense of individualism. Much of our work as professors and researchers comes down to individual methods of labor, but we lose opportunities when we ignore the collaborative aspects of our profession.

When my husband was first diagnosed with cancer, many people repeatedly advised me to ask for help when I needed it. I knew this was good advice, and I also knew that many friends in our community genuinely wanted to help, but I struggled to ask. I have always been a fiercely independent person, which is one reason why I love teaching in higher education: I have a lot of freedom in how I teach my classes. However, even I could recognize that a brain tumor and cancer diagnosis call for radical change. The infrastructure of daily meals, transportation of kids, and playdates were all elements of our lives that did not change just because of a cancer diagnosis, and these were the places where friends could help with minimal planning. I left a cooler outside our front door for friends to drop off meals. One friend offered to pick up my son from daycare during a particularly busy week. Friends would take our kids for weekend playdates so that we could have some rest. These regular elements of our lives can provide much-needed stability in moments of crisis, and they can be even more comforting when friends can help shoulder the load.

During multiple shifts in teaching in the pandemic, I leaned into the pre-existing infrastructure of our composition sequence. I build and maintain a course shell in our learning management system for each course in our first-year composition sequence. Within this shell, I include sample assignments, recommended class activities for each week of the course, video tutorials, model projects and essays, and rubrics. Having so many elements already built in the learning management system made the pivot to online and then hybrid more manageable. I also crowdsource these materials, inviting faculty to submit their own ideas and collecting them together for all faculty to access. These resources are a helpful support when navigating a crisis, but they are also a rich repository that helps us be more collaborative in our teaching.

Preserve Necessary Boundaries

Just as I am an independent person, I am also an overachiever. I am usually not happy until I have given my all—and then some more. When my

husband became ill, everything was about him. Our world revolved around his treatments, his appointments, his dietary needs, his pain, and his feelings. The diagnosis and initial treatments merited this approach, and I do not regret it. However, this type of complete self-abnegation in service of others, even a beloved husband, is not sustainable. Only after being a caregiver for over two years did I finally initiate therapy for myself. My therapist instructed me that I could not continue ignoring myself as I was caring for my husband and children. I knew this logically, but I needed someone to give me permission to stop being constantly available to everyone but myself.

My therapist told me that I needed to set up some boundaries between my husband and myself. I needed to stop him whenever he began treating me as a doctor, nurse, or therapist. Instead, I just needed to be his wife—that was enough. I started prioritizing more time for myself, and I consciously worked not to feel guilty about taking time for myself.

Academics are often drawn to the flexibility of our schedules. However, this same flexibility can be our downfall, too. We may be able to leave campus before 5 PM, but we are usually grading, reading, researching, or responding to emails at all hours. We must be better about setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries. Even though we may find some aspects of our work enjoyable, and so we may not mind cracking open the laptop at night, we must recognize that it is our job to set our own boundaries: no one else will do it for us. Instead, students, other colleagues, and administrators will push us to break those boundaries, but for our own health, we must hold firm. Meeting the elements of our job description is enough, and we cannot be constantly on call to others.

Conclusion

When my husband was first diagnosed, many people told me to keep in mind that the cancer journey is a marathon, not a sprint. These words continue to ring true, as now, more than four years upon this path, my husband now faces not only the potential of cancer recurrence, but also the multiple ways aggressive treatments have created other chronic conditions. Caregivers must prepare for and expect the marathon, rather than simply getting through the sprint.

Many academics recognize the familiar script of "I just need to get through this semester," which turns out to be a recurring refrain every semester. Academics often treat their professional lives like sprints—class to class, meeting to meeting, article to article, semester to semester. However,

by completing all these sprints consecutively, we are actually running the marathon, perhaps even several simultaneously.

As a caregiver, I must rely on certain strategies to care for my husband, my kids, and myself on this exhausting cancer journey. Yet, these strategies are not specific to our family's experience with melanoma. In fact, these management strategies are common logic, though most people choose to ignore them. Cancer became our moment of reckoning. The COVID pandemic has been revelatory for many others. These strategies are not useful just in the wake of trauma; these perspectives are necessary to build a sustainable life. In the Afterward of *Toward More Sustainable Metaphors of Writing Program Administration*, Douglas Hesse notes that the two consistent challenges in his WPA work have been handling emotionally charged situations and managing the health of the program (239). The caregiver metaphor is implied in both challenges. Perhaps recognizing and accepting the caregiver metaphor will help writing program administrators take better care of themselves, which also helps them be more effective with their students and colleagues.

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Communities of Practice, Communities of Care: Building a Writing Program Community at the Height of COVID

Andy Frazee

Issues of community building have long been part of WPA work and scholarship. When theorizing composition teachers as simultaneously experts, autonomous agents, and community members, Penrose frames community as "continuous interchange with others as colleague, mentor, [and] co-learner" (118). Such community concerns are paramount in Georgia Tech's Writing and Communication Program (WCP), which houses the Marion L. Brittain Postdoctoral Fellowship; the fellowship uses a cohort-based model of professional development to support recent PhD graduates in developing their teaching skills and exploring career possibilities.[1] Community-building in the program faced major challenges during the height of COVID when instructors could not connect with students or colleagues in person. Like other writing programs at the time, we struggled to reconcile our professional ideals with unprecedented constraints. In response to the opportunity provided by this special issue to "explore how WPAs responded and continue to respond to shifts in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic," (CFP) in what follows, I weave together strategies we used to build community with the results of a study in which our 2020 cohort of postdoctoral fellows reflected on their experiences integrating into our program.[2] I conclude by considering the ways WPAs might consider their programs as communities of care as well as communities of practice.

Community in Writing Programs

As reflected in Penrose's article, issues of community in writing programs are generally framed as communities of practice. Wegner defines communities of practice as having a particular domain (e.g., teaching writing), community (e.g., engaging in "joint activities and discussions" about teaching writing), and practice (e.g., doing the work of teaching writing). Communities of practice in writing programs are often established through faculty development programming in that these initiatives seek to foster a consistent and coherent curricular and/or pedagogical practice (see Wardle and Scott). While communities of practice are central to many programs, they may be particularly important for programs such as mine that are comprised of contingent, non-tenure-track (NTT), and/or graduate student

instructors. In fact, the potential lack of community for contingent faculty is reflected in two of the five recommendations offered in the MLA Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession's *Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members* ("professional development and recognition" and "integration into the life of the department and the institution") (262-263). In response to this challenge, communities of practice may strengthen the professional identity of NTT writing instructors and help integrate them into the life of the program (Fitzpatrick et al.; Fedukovich and Hall).

While communities of practice are important to many aspects of writing program work, the concept, as defined by Wegner, may not be capacious enough to describe the importance of programmatic community in light of COVID. Communities of practice as an organizational concept emphasize collaborative professional learning, thereby setting aside, at least implicitly, the affective factors social scientists use to characterize communities writ large—factors such as "the feeling of belonging, "a sense of mattering," and a "shared emotional connection" (McMillan and Chavis 9). Yet these are precisely the elements that the pandemic—with its ongoing anxiety, isolation, and loss-made into daily concerns in writing programs and elsewhere. In my program, belonging, mattering, and emotionally connecting have been strong aspects of our cohort model. Conversely, the nature of the pandemic ensured that the postdocs in the 2020 cohort were not all in the same room until August 2021. At that moment, as they locked arms for a photo, it was clear that they had become close both in professional and affective senses despite their distance and isolation. Understanding how that community came together and the role the program's efforts—particularly its faculty development efforts—played may help us better understand the ways writing program community develops.

Community-Building in the Fall 2020 Cohort

To better understand the community the fall 2020 faculty developed, I invited the five faculty—three of whom work at my institution and two of whom have moved on to other positions—to share their reflections about their first semester. Using a brief IRB-approved survey,[3] I asked the faculty questions about their sense of community and the formal and informal ways that community was built. All five faculty members opted into the study; because two of the faculty are currently my direct reports, I kept the survey anonymous to avoid feelings of pressure to opt in. The responses to the survey shed light on the ways the faculty respondents forged a

community at the time as well as the role of the writing program in facilitating—or failing to facilitate—that community.

As conveyed in their responses, the five new faculty felt strongly connected to each other despite the distance among them, noting that their group was "very close" and "tight knit." Their relationships displayed characteristics of both communities of practice (e.g., supporting one another in course design and pedagogical problem-solving) and more affective elements of communities writ large (e.g., becoming friends and offering emotional support related to both work and the pandemic). All respondents noted that the situation itself fostered connection. "COVID restrictions ironically brought our cohort together," wrote one. Another wrote that "COVID restrictions created both physical distance and desperation for human contact." A third emphasized the group's supportive nature: "Because so many of us were teaching online for the first time, working remotely pushed us to get comfortable sharing successes and failures quickly."

Tellingly, multiple respondents characterized the situation in relation to the academic job market. The postdoctoral faculty we hire tend to view the job market with exhaustion; the apparent further collapse of the job market in response to COVID led some of the respondents to describe their full-time employment in frank and sometimes ecstatic terms. "Searching for jobs in the previous two years was a demoralizing, frustrating process of being told by employers that [my PhD] had marked me as unhireable," wrote one. "Imagine my elation once the fellowship liberated me, at least for a while, from that embarrassment." "I felt a shared sense of going through something together," wrote another, "navigating the pandemic while also having just been freed, so to speak, from the academic job market." While the respondents felt strongly connected to each other, four of the five faculty expressed difficulties connecting with other colleagues outside of the cohort. The job market was at play here as well.[4] One respondent recalled the "ubiquitous bitterness" of other writing postdocs "poisoned with a near constant sense of dread" who had "lost an entire semester of professionalization."[5]

All the respondents found the existing modes of building a community of practice helpful in promoting connections among themselves. These modes included a one-week online pre-semester orientation, a weekly pedagogy seminar throughout the fall, and service on program and department committees. These initiatives were adapted to remote work and supplemented with other efforts to build belonging, such as small group meetings, remote teaching observations, and optional, informal WPA "office hours." Despite these initiatives, it was informal opportunities for connection that respondents identified as difficult or lacking in their fall 2020 experience.

One recalled that the cohort's remote happy hours "helped" but could not "recreate the casual movement between multiple ongoing conversations that is part of in-person socialization." Another noted that "the lack of spontaneous opportunities to meet probably hampered those connections" outside the cohort.

Communities of Practice as Communities of Care

The survey responses paint a picture of a group of new postdoctoral instructors coming together as a community despite their physical separation. Their connections were facilitated, at least initially and in part, by the program that continually fostered a community of practice through the online orientation, the pedagogy seminar, and committee service. Penrose's framing of community as "continuous interchange with others as colleague, mentor, and co-learner" was further supported through mentoring groups and an instructor-only Slack channel. Though these structures fostered connections within the group, integrating the new instructors into the life of the department and institution was more difficult. While some of this difficulty can be attributed to pandemic isolation, the survey responses align with anecdotal accounts of previous cohorts, and the question of how to best foster connection with departmental and institutional colleagues remains open.

Seemingly as important as the modes of connection, respondents noted that their awareness of their shared situation—being defined by the pandemic, quickly adapting to a new job, and facing the difficult academic job market—was an important factor in bringing them together. These responses suggest our writing program is not just a community of practice but also a community of belonging, mattering, and shared emotional connection. While the practice of teaching writing is the core of this community, the pandemic made clear that the community of practice does not exist—or at least does not function—without the mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing of its members.

As seen in listserv discussions, social media posts, and this special issue, the pandemic has prompted WPAs to attend more heartily to issues of care. Fisher and Tronto define caring as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (40). As WPAs, we are responsible for maintaining, continuing, and repairing the writing program so that we can live (work, teach) as well as possible. Such work may seem like yet another burden in an already challenging time. And yet, one survey respondent suggests we already have the necessary tools at our disposal:

> Amid a period of intense uncertainty in both our field and in the world, it was incredibly helpful to work in a program that was run so efficiently and with care for its faculty. It was a relief to work in a program that had very clear administrative structure, operating procedures, and development opportunities.

Put another way, one might characterize caring WPA work as, at least in part, good administration—and for those of us leading contingent faculty, administration that's attentive to contingent faculty needs, including professional development and integration into the life of the department. The future promises additional crises that, like COVID, will strike at our wellbeing in ways we cannot predict. While I and the program I direct will necessarily need to adapt, I am reassured that I have tools available (clear policies, processes, and organization; consistent modes of faculty connection; a set of shared experiences and values; and an ethos of caring I try to model) for our community to approach these challenges with intelligence, creativity, and compassion.

In closing, I offer an illustration of how communities of care exist, often unseen, amid the day-to-day work of professional life. In October 2020, a postdoc in the program passed away unexpectedly. She was a real community builder, from her scholarship in the rhetoric of food to her partnerships across campus, to her engagement with community partners in her classes. Her death hit hard. Yet within a day, another instructor in our program organized a time for those interested to meet remotely, remember our colleague, and be together. Soon, I worked with two colleagues from the department—an associate professor and a lecturer—to build a little free pantry in our colleague's memory. It currently sits in the writing program building to support students and others who face food insecurity. On top of that, the five new faculty emailed me to suggest that we not meet for that week's pedagogy seminar—not for them, but for me. "You knew [our colleague] well and are particularly impacted by her passing," they wrote. "We want to give you a chance to make more time for self-care, too" (Lewis). The gesture was small, meaningful, and absolutely needed. I hope to create the conditions for this kind of community, this kind of care, to be evident in everything our program does—not just on the bad days, but every day.

Notes

1. Since January 2022, twenty-five Brittain Fellows have moved into full-time positions, with eleven of them moving into tenure-track positions.

2. Thanks to the 2020 cohort for supporting this article: Danielle Gilman, Jill Fennell, Eric Lewis, Shane Snyder, and Anu Thapa. Thanks to Melissa Ianetta for her constructive feedback and editing.

3. Georgia Tech IRB protocol H23139.

4. Alternately, one respondent noted how the programmatic committee structure allowed for quick connection into the programmatic community.

5. In response to the pandemic, the program extended the terms of third-year instructors by a year in 2020 and again in 2021; in 2022, the program returned to the standard three-year term with an option to apply for an additional year. Recognizing the need for additional support, the program has bolstered career development efforts through an academic job search seminar and an optional alternative and non-academic careers seminar.

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Appendix: Survey

In this survey, please reflect on your experience during your first semester [in the program], during which you worked remotely due to Covid (August–December 2020). This study is particularly interested in the ways you felt (or didn't feel) connected with each other and with the writing program community.

1. How would you characterize your cohort community during that first semester?
2. How would you describe the ways that working remotely affected your connection to your cohort?
3. How would you describe the ways that working remotely affected your connection to the broader writing program community?
4. What formal ways—orientation, digital pedagogy seminar, committee service, etc.—proved helpful in strengthening your sense of belonging to a community?
5. What informal or unofficial ways—perhaps calls, emails, or meetings among yourselves or with other colleagues—proved helpful in strengthening your sense of belonging to a community?
6. (OPTIONAL) What other thoughts do you have that would be useful for understanding your sense of belonging to a community during Fall 2020?

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Advocating for Adjuncts During COVID-19

Teresa Grettano

In fall 2020, amid COVID lockdown and without a vaccine, The University of Scranton opened on-campus housing and delivered courses in five tiers ranging from fully remote (online) to fully face-to-face. Scranton is a medium-sized, Catholic, Jesuit university in northeastern Pennsylvania that serves about 4,000 undergraduates. Our first-year writing (FYW) program delivers ~70 sections of courses a year taught by ~15 instructors, 85% of whom are contingent faculty, most of whom are part-time (PT) instructors, and many of whom teach at other institutions. Faculty submitted their preferred mode of delivery for provost-level administrative review. In theory, the process hoped to honor faculty autonomy; in practice, the precarity and logistics of contingent faculty employment were not considered.[1] As then-director of FYW, I advocated to keep all FYW courses at fully-remote delivery for 2020–21.

In this reflective piece, I chronologically narrate the ways in which I advocated for our faculty: brainstorming options before modes were announced, approaching administration about authority and decision-making, consulting with instructors, intervening on their behalf when systems and procedures did not consider their positions, arguing to administration to go fully remote, and collaborating with the registrar to do so. I also recount ways I supported faculty remotely through one-on-one consultation, faculty development, and the creation of new programmatic guidelines.

This piece serves as a case study in advocacy and support for contingent faculty in times of crisis. Crises often make systemic injustices more evident, and the vulnerability of those in insecure positions often is not only highlighted but worsened by the crisis. Such was the case at Scranton and throughout much of academia, where even a well-meaning administration did not recognize the precariousness of the contingent labor on which many of our FYW programs depend. I felt ethically it was my responsibility to advocate for my instructors.[2]

Spring 2020: Initial Lock-Down

Like other institutions, Scranton went on "temporary" lock-down, announcing on March 11 that our spring break would be extended a week so that faculty could prepare for emergency remote instruction, to be delivered

from March 30 to April 14.[3] By March 27, we were informed we would not return to campus for the rest of spring 2020.

When lock-down initially began, I was concerned about our students' well-being, as well as my cadre of instructors having to juggle different situations at different institutions with added family needs and the anxiety of the pandemic. From March 19–22, I met with each instructor by video or phone to adjust collaboratively expectations, schedules, and assignments to fit our crisis environment and revise their courses for the rest of the semester.

Instructors were at different points in their schedules with a variety of assignments still planned. My goal was to help streamline the rest of the semester for the students and instructors while maintaining the integrity of the program. I recognized that everyone was in crisis mode, and I wanted to make our FYW classes spaces for empathy, relief, and care. Our guiding question was, "What more do your students need to produce in order for you to assess if they are meeting the learning outcomes for the course?" Each of the 15 instructors and I mapped an individualized plan for their courses, and I checked in with them weekly to discuss and adjust the plan. As difficult as the semester was, most of our students successfully completed their courses, and faculty were grateful for the easing of pressure to teach as if nothing had changed.

Summer 2020: COVID Protocols

I started brainstorming fall 2020 course delivery prior to the announcement of the university-wide options. Since there was no precedent for this kind of crisis, I wanted to (1) shape the decision-making process, and (2) alert the provost that I would be involved even if not invited officially. I made sure to do so respectfully but with the evidence needed to be successful.

Early in May 2020, I alerted our provost to the possibility of hybrid teaching for the FYW program, that we could meet with half our students once a week, the other half another day a week, and then shift to remote instruction for another meeting. He commended my flexibility and proactive thinking and assured me the option would be kept in mind. That option was never actualized, though. Once the university announced the options for fall 2020 COVID instruction around July 1, I advocated to shift the entire FYW program to emergency remote instruction.

Fall 2020: The FYW Director Response

While establishing masking and social distancing mandates, classroom seating maps, and cleaning protocols, the university offered faculty five delivery options for fall 2020 courses:

1. Fully Face-to-Face (F2F): Faculty and students meet traditionally F2F in classrooms, masked and socially distanced, with no remote options for instruction guaranteed.
2. Rotational F2F and A/Synchronous Viewing: Faculty meet with half the students F2F while the other half are synchronously on Zoom or accessing course material asynchronously; the groups rotate delivery every other class meeting. Students not meeting F2F are not expected to interact during class.
3. F2F Classes with A/Synchronous Viewing for Quarantined Students: Faculty and students meet mostly F2F, but sick students are provided remote access to class without the expectation of interaction.
4. Hybrid F2F and Synchronous Remote Instruction: Faculty meet with half the students F2F while the other half are synchronously on Zoom and expected to interact for the entire semester.
5. Fully Remote: Classes meet online synchronously through Zoom and on our Learning Management System. No in-person meetings are held.

The administration stressed faculty preference was their first consideration but noted other factors like classroom space and pedagogy would affect final decisions. While I commended and shared the university's commitment to faculty autonomy, I was concerned that contingent faculty would not only be overwhelmed by the choices, but also would not be comfortable requesting their preferred delivery mode for fear of job security. I felt I needed to advocate for them.

I asked instructors not to respond to the university's request for delivery preference while I remained in conversation with the provost so that the administration would not receive conflicting or confusing information, and instructors would not make themselves vulnerable in choosing a delivery method that countered what I was advocating for or one that was not preferred by the administration. I made my initial argument to the provost via email based on the following points:

- **Program Continuity:** I argued that to have a significant number of sections delivered differently disrupts the continuity of the program, student learning, and student experience.

- **Faculty Development:** I explained the FYW program shifted to emergency remote learning well in spring and that I had met with each instructor individually to revise their courses and pedagogy.

Moving forward from the shift to emergency remote learning and preparing for the possibility of fall 2020 remote instruction, I procured funding from the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS) dean's office to provide Darby and Lang's *Small Teaching Online* to our instructors. Over the summer, we convened three 90-minute Zoom meetings to discuss how to apply the suggestions in the text to our courses.

I explained that we were in the process of collaboratively developing a FYW program Zoom Etiquette Guide to communicate expectations for remote instruction, covering issues like the use of cameras and student privacy, student backgrounds and ethos-/community-building, productive and distracting uses of the chat function, and other issues.[4]

Finally, I alerted the provost to the 40 years of online writing pedagogy scholarship to assure him there were resources to access to improve online instruction if necessary.

Faculty Preference and the Ethics of Adjunct Dependency

I indicated that of the 37 sections of FYW scheduled for all 2020, seven would be taught by FT faculty, an 81% adjunct dependency for the program. I reminded the provost that adjunct instructors earn $2,500–$3,000 per course without health insurance benefits, and that it would be unethical to ask them to risk their health for little in return. I also noted that many of these instructors teach at other institutions, and mixing exposure across campuses would undermine safety protocols.

I surveyed the faculty anonymously, asking for their (one) preference among three options for delivery: F2F, hybrid, or fully remote. Responses were mixed in the first survey with about half favoring remote instruction, reinforcing my concern for program continuity. Questions by PT faculty also made me aware some instructors were hesitating answering even the anonymous survey candidly for fear of disappointing me or the administration.

Classroom Space

The university had not yet released the social distance capacity for classrooms, so I speculated that if student capacity for our FYW classrooms remained at the 18-student cap, then allowing FYW to go remote would free up classroom space for first-year seminar (FYS) courses.[5] If the social

distance capacity in these rooms was lower, then delivering FYW remotely solves a space problem for 37 sections of courses.

My initial email to the provost was met with gratitude and understanding. He stressed his concern for faculty preferences, though, and that he wanted to further investigate the classroom space issues. I responded by thanking him for his commitment to faculty autonomy, indicating that I would check with my instructors to learn how strong their preferences were.

A second survey asked instructors one question—if they were opposed to remote instruction in the fall—and almost all said they were not. Before I could deliver these results to the provost, I received a phone call from the registrar on Saturday, July 18, at 8:30am informing me that classroom space for FYW was limited and asking if I preferred courses be taught through the rotating hybrid model or remotely. We made the decision to move the entire program to remote delivery. I informed the provost via email, and he was pleased with the decision. So were my instructors. We continued remote faculty development and morale meetings throughout fall 2020, and aside from addressing excessive student absences, things ran relatively smoothly.[6]

Spring 2021: More Advocacy for Adjuncts

On September 12, 2020, the provost messaged university faculty commending us on our teaching through spring and summer 2020 and alerting us that while no campuswide decision had been made about course delivery for spring 2021, an updated system for requests was launched. Because FYW courses are not staffed with PT faculty until after registration, PT faculty were not on the schedule yet for spring 2021 and subsequently did not receive the provost's email, nor were they granted access to the new system. Once again, I found myself explaining to administration the logistics of contingent faculty labor and advocating for adjuncts.

On September 23, I emailed the provost and registrar to explain that PT faculty had not received the email, that I had forwarded it to them in case they needed to update their health information, and that I took this opportunity to survey them about their preferences for spring 2021 delivery. All preferred remote delivery, so I informed the administrators that if there was not a campuswide return to F2F teaching in spring 2021, I wanted FYW to be taught remotely again. I was determined to keep as much stability for our instructors as possible, as well as to utilize the processes and pedagogy we had developed. On September 28, I received an email from the (new) CAS dean asking me to "give a little background on why [I] would like the courses to be delivered remote beyond faculty preference," so I forwarded

her the email I sent to the provost initially and summarized how the fall 2020 decision was made. On October 2, the dean responded that FYW courses could be totally remote for the spring.

Take Aways

Like everyone else across the US and the globe, for us at The University of Scranton, the COVID semesters were exhausting, but they offered time to reflect on and revise our personal and professional lives and taught us many lessons about the choices we make in the relationships we cultivate with others. As a WPA, I had to draw my own boundaries but also recognize the privileged position I inhabited. I chose to advocate forcefully but respectfully for the instructors in our program, trusting our administration to have the best interests of our employees and students in mind but appreciating they needed further information to make ethical decisions. Above all, we needed to keep in mind that our instructors are people with lives and concerns of their own, and our institutional systems many times are not designed to treat them with the respect and dignity they deserve. Crises make these injustices more visible and more dire. As a WPA, I am grateful I was in a position to advocate for those more vulnerable than I.

Notes

1. While this reflection critiques the administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to contingent faculty concerns, I want to commend The University of Scranton for our overall response. Short of closing our doors for fall 2020, which would have been financially devastating for our tuition-dependent institution, I think we exceeded expectations for the learning and community environment we were able to provide students. I particularly want to thank our then-Provost Jeff Gingerich and Registrar Julie Ferguson for their willingness to work through decisions collaboratively and respectfully.

2. I must recognize the privileged position I was in during the pandemic. I earned tenure at my institution, and my ethos as WPA was well established. I also am unmarried and without children, so my home life during COVID did not change much, meaning I was not contending for workspace in my home like many faculty across the country were, and I had little more to care for daily than myself. These positions allowed me the security and energy to advocate for instructors in ways other WPAs may not have been able to.

3. Many faculty and our FYW program especially made it a point to differentiate between "online teaching" and "emergency remote instruction"—the former courses designed for online learning environments and the latter not.

4. The FYW program Zoom etiquette guide can be accessed here: https://tinyurl.com/anrjy3kw

5. First-year seminar (FYS) is a mandatory course for all first-year students that introduces them to the Catholic, Jesuit mission of the university and aids with their transition to college. All but three of the 50+ FYS sections were taught F2F in fall 2020, a decision made collaboratively by faculty and administration aimed at easing students' transitions back into a classroom space, making their first semester in college as "normal" as possible even with masking and social distancing, and increasing student retention.

6. Much of our faculty development shifted to anti-racist pedagogy because of the murder of George Floyd and the racial (in)justice reckoning of the summer of 2020. We developed a programmatic anti-racist statement and a resource guide for teaching, especially given the first-year read for the incoming class was *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin. The anti-racist statement and resource guide for teaching can be accessed here: https://tinyurl.com/anrjy3kw

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The "Always On" Demands of Digital Technologies: Finding Space to Turn Off

Stephanie Hedge

It is mid-July 2022, and the sun beats down on my shoulders as a I pace between the bird and small mammal houses at the St. Louis Zoo, fielding a Zoom call with my dean and department chair to navigate a COVID-related staffing crisis. "We have no instructors for a quarter of our composition sections," I say with growing impatience, watching my 13-month-old son in the distance as he sees a panda for the first time. More than two years after COVID first forced my institution online, we were still feeling the repercussions—this staffing crisis was created by pandemic conditions, and I am in triage mode. My son eats an ice cream cone as I pull up documents on my phone app. "If you'd refer to the appendices in the report I prepared," I sigh into my wireless headphones, absently wiping sticky hands.

It is the time of COVID, and I am always on.

Understanding the relentless connectivity afforded by emergent digital and social medias as being "always on"—tethered by our mobile devices into a state of perpetual accessibility—is not a new idea. Sherry Turkle uses the word "tethered" to describe early technology adopters who were so connected to their digital devices and emerging internet networks that they were, effectively, cyborgs. Turkle uses the tethered framing to describe the intimacy and physicality of an invisible force in our lives—we hold the devices that connect us to our wider networks, which are alive through our interactions with them. As these devices are integrated into our lives with increasing intimacy and obligation—as they become what Rainie and Wellman describe as "body appendages" (12)—the more users are thrust into a state of being "always on," always connected.

In her germinal 2008 text *Always On*, Naomi S. Baron argues for the always on individual, the features of our mobile technologies allow us to "control the volume" of our interactions. She posits that a ringing landline phone used to be a "drop everything" signal, while digital tools allow us to *choose* the volume of our conversations: constantly checking email on a phone is a high-volume choice; muting a chat thread is a "low volume" choice, literally (31). Similarly, danah boyd opens her 2012 essay "Participating in the Always-On Lifestyle" by exploring the ways that she establishes boundaries while being always on and describes a kind of "digital sabbatical" where she sets all email messages to bounce back to the sender (71). For boyd, this strategy is an example of "artificial structures" (74) that

seek to find balance in her life between the on and the off and this sabbatical is how she controls the volume on her networks. This volume concept is important because it brings with it the reassurance that the tethered, networked, always on individual is firmly in control if they harness the digital tools available for them to exert that control.

As a digital literacies scholar and WPA, I was already "always on" before COVID, tethered to the campus networks through my laptop, my phone, my little apps. But I felt confident that I, like boyd or Baron, could control the volume of my networks—a polite fiction. But COVID put an impossible strain on this system and laid bare the lie that I was ever in control. How could I hope to control the volume of my networks when everything was turned up to 11? The early days of COVID were full of fear, grief, confusion, loss, and uncertainty, and every call, every ping, every message, every meeting, felt so necessary and crucial. We were making massive changes at rapid speed—we went from spring break one week to fully remote the next—and my instructors were teaching in a format unfamiliar to many. How could I choose to ignore the messages from the administration, who were offering what guidance they could? How could I "mute" the students who were scared, struggling, and still determined to finish out the semester?

As the WPA, I felt that I had to be the person who answered the calls. In "And So I Respond," Kaitlin Clinnin talks about the role of the writing program in/as crisis response, and the responsibility and emotional labor that falls to the writing program administrator. I felt that I had no choice but to respond (as did so many of us in this volume)—as the sole rhetoric and composition scholar at my institution, there was no one else. When the pandemic started, I was still pre-tenure, and I applied for tenure in summer 2020 (while undergoing fertility treatments and building a remote curriculum for the writing program) and the pressure of the added scrutiny of the tenure application made the volume of the crisis calls seem that much louder.

And then, the volume never got turned down. We stayed in crisis mode for weeks, then months, then years. We kept working remotely into 2021—we needed online and remote policies for the composition program; training and support for instructors; technology support for students; systems for developing belonging on a campus that students were not physically at; mental health care for students and instructors alike; and; and; and . . . The volume was stuck at 11, and being "at work" all the time, every day, became my new normal, weekends were a fiction and evenings were the best time to speak with non-traditional students. I was always at home, which meant I was also always at work. My phone stayed firmly in my hand, tethering

me inexorably to a campus that I, like my students, was both not physically at and never far from.

The trap with thinking about "always on" as a technology problem is that it is easy to blame the technology. After all, it is the affordances of technology that allow me to be tethered. Indeed, I fell into this trap when I first pitched this reflection, as I felt that I had "figured out a solution" to being always on that used the affordances of my technologies to "turn off" occasionally, reinforcing Baron and boyd's illusions of choice and volume control. I was swayed by a kind of technological determinism that sees the technology itself as the root of human behaviors and activity. We could, therefore we would. But being always on is not, inherently, a technological state: it is a social and cultural expectation, shaped and guided by the systems and institutions that we work within.

I could better understand the root of the problem when I began to think about being always on as a kind of emotional labor. The links between writing program administration and emotional labor work have been well documented—see Adams Wooten et al.'s *The Things We Carry* for a thorough exploration of this work across multiple contexts, particularly Clinnin's chapter referenced above—and this labor intersects with the demands of being "always on" in striking ways. Turkle's tethered self requires so much work to maintain. In a piece on the emotional labor of writing center directors, Rebecca Jackson, Jackie Grutsch McKinney, and Nicole I. Caswell share the experiences of "Joe," a new director. In his interviews, Joe says that he is "always on"—in this case, he means that as he walks around campus as the first tenure-track writing center director, he is constantly representing the center, and must be constantly available as a resource that is not just knowledgeable but "friendly, welcoming, and warm." Because he is using the "always on" phrase in a performative context, not technological, it highlights the inherent connection between the demands of "being on" and emotional labor—to be constantly "on" for our work networks requires a constant performing of our work selves, and for writing program administrators in particular, this constant accessibility comes with an expectation of emotional availability and crisis management.

In "The I in Internet," the first essay in her *Trick Mirro*r collection, Jia Tolentino uses Erving Goffman's performance theory to explain the emotional toll of always being "on" for the virtual audience observing Turkle's tethered self, where users lack the relief of a "backstage" area to stop performing. "Worst of all," she says, "there's essentially no backstage on the internet; where the off-line audience necessarily empties out and changes over, the online audience never has to leave" (15). This is what being a WPA during the time of COVID felt like—a constant performance with no

downtime. My technology meant that I was always at work, regardless of where I was, and I felt like I had to answer every call, regardless of what I was doing. My own circumstances contributed substantially to this, thanks to a high-risk pregnancy that started in fall 2020, which meant that I spent a considerable amount of time in doctors' offices, clinics, and emergency rooms. I would answer work emails during non-stress tests, hooked up to several beeping machines. I took Zoom meetings from a hospital bed. Even as I fought to be a mother, I was always a little bit the WPA in those spaces, unable to untether myself from those networks. I could work anywhere, even a hospital bed, so I did.

I had no volume control and no backstage. And I was losing my mind. At the time, I was searching, desperately, for solutions to a problem that I could not understand as being non-technological. I knew that the constant accessibility, the constant performance as WPA, was killing me, but I blamed my phone. Maybe if I blocked out this time on my calendar, toggled this Zoom setting, set this auto-response, I would find peace. Moreover, I understood that finding this solution was a personal problem. An additional hidden trap of the technology-first framing is that the volume control metaphor implies agency and obligation from the user. If the volume was too loud, it was my fault for not being able to turn it back down. Never mind the ways that the institution was merrily stomping past any semblance of reasonable boundaries, I owned the phone, so the fault was mine for answering the call.

I had so internalized that the problem was me and my technology that, when my son was born in May 2021 and the institution did not find a replacement WPA for my parental leave, I blamed myself for continuing to do WPA work over my leave rather than the institution that failed me. In a previous draft of this piece, I wrote: "I took a meeting the same week that my son was born; I pushed a new human being out of my body and still, I was the WPA, tethered to campus through the same phone that recorded videos of my newborn." The blame here was with my phone, not the person who scheduled that meeting, and not the campus culture that expected me to attend. I couldn't see past the technology until a peer reviewer for this piece pointed out how appalling this was, and very gently told me that this was not a Taylor Swift moment: I was not the problem. It was not enough to re-frame being always on as an emotional labor or a performative problem; I needed to completely reconsider where the noise was coming from in the first place.

In "'But This is Bullshit': Enforcing Boundaries as a Pregnant WPA" (this volume), Christina M. LaVecchia writes about how the changes to her body were the catalyst for helping her to re-frame the crisis-mode work

of being a WPA during COVID—sharing her body with a new life was a reminder of the ecosystems that support and surround us, and she began to understand her WPA work as likewise part of an ecosystem. She could not solve every problem alone, and the idea that she should was "bullshit." My "technology" problem was only solved when I was able to understand the same thing: the system was broken, not me.

The thing that eventually allowed me to "turn off" was not a technological change but a work disruption. In fall 2022, I went on sabbatical and a colleague took over as WPA. In "The Joys of WPAhood," Kate Pantelides writes about the ways that parenthood "necessarily, and fruitfully, interrupts WPA work" (104), and that these interruptions create space for an "impious" change in what being a WPA can look like. For me, the interruption from my sabbatical meant a colleague—who had not weathered the eternal crisis of COVID with the volume turned to 11 and did not have the background in writing program administration that engenders sacrificial crisis response—unknowingly reestablished boundaries about when, where, and how WPA work is done, changing the systemic expectations of my role and giving me a choice about when and if I "turn off." My phone didn't need to change, my work did.

Today, I am at the zoo with my son. I will come home and keep working, but for now, my phone is silent in my purse, and together we watch the pandas play.

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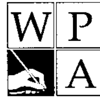

When Too Much Really Is Too Much: On WPAing through the COVID Years

Kim Hensley Owens

2020: Preparation, Triage, and Pivoting, Pivoting, Pivoting

First were the rumors, the whispers that maybe campus would shut down after spring break, or maybe somehow everything would move online? It sounded implausible, impossible. WPAs stalked one another's feeds and DMs, seeking insight from other schools. How could we prepare for . . . whatever this was? It was awful, but I was on it.

I met with our full-time writing teachers to discuss options for our standard curricula in case we had to move online. Then I created a Google doc, "University Writing Program Policies and Advice for Teaching in the Time of Coronavirus," which included tips for online interaction and headings like "Keep Everything Human. Be Kind." I shared that evolving document with our 75 writing teachers (80% GTAs; 20% full-time teachers) a week before we got the lockdown and modality change news. When we shifted online, without any practical pedagogical guidance from the university, our writing program teachers were at least somewhat prepared.

As part of that initial pivot, I revised expectations for our existing teaching support teams for new GTAs and created additional teams to support experienced GTAs, including those who had left the writing program to teach creative writing for the semester. We did weekly wellness checks and lesson-plan swaps to keep everyone connected. I couldn't come up with a plan to help the GTA in the ICU on a respirator, but I got her class covered and managed to find funding to pay for that overload and continue her salary (she recovered).

Throughout this initial stage, I sought to "make space for carework and well-being" (CFP for this issue) for others, with some success. But I was burned out as a WPA *before COVID,* and a bit crispy from doing administrative assistant work, too. We'd lost ours four months prior and only replaced her two weeks before the lockdown began. According to my contract, I should have rotated out of the WPA role that summer, but the bureaucratic machine forbade a search for a new WPA. I had agreed to stay on for one more year (one that became three).

In April, the annual search I chaired to re-hire full-time teachers for one-year contracts was abruptly cancelled; I had to tell 13 then-full-time

instructors I couldn't hire them again. Those phone calls, made while sobbing and walking an endless loop in my neighborhood, haunted me for months. Telling people they would lose employment—and its accompanying health insurance—during a global pandemic was by far the most difficult thing I've ever had to do. Then, two days before their insurance ran out at the end of May, two of our three continuing lecturers, both pregnant, were laid off by our interim dean. I'd not been consulted or even told. I tried everything to get them hired back, but my power was nonexistent. Discovering in the fall that more than enough students had enrolled to fill every section all those teachers would have taught, but still not being allowed to hire them back, despite begging in countless emails, phone calls, and meetings, was devastating.

In mid-June our president announced that fall semester would be moved up by two weeks: the thinking was that if the semester ended by Thanksgiving, students could go home then and not return as disease vectors. Suddenly our two-week August orientation for GTAs would start in July, and classes would start the first week of August, not the third. I planned and re-planned that orientation, first as in-person, masked/distanced; then as a hybrid—one week online, another in person. Finally, after being allowed to hire one instructor, I met with her and our remaining lecturer in my garage and over Zoom to re-plan it entirely for Zoom. I went to our university's "hyflex" training, which offered basic online teaching tips, including gems like "learn students' names," but nothing specifically helpful for the Zoom + in-person "flex" teaching we ended up doing throughout 2020–2021.

After the intensity of spring 2020 and the early summer changes, I asked if I could take two weeks of earned vacation that summer. That request was denied: too many time-sensitive decisions being made. Maybe. While it's true that there were near-weekly "emergency" Friday evening Zoom meetings or calls with deans (interim and then new) and provosts that summer (the writing program always seemed to be the last thing on their lists for the week, perhaps for purely alphabetical reasons), with accompanying demands for acres of data from me "before Monday," that data was almost never used and typically no one even responded to anything I prepared. I was exhausted, but not allowed to rest—not for vacation, not even for weekends.

Because of the extra-early start in an already early-starting state, I was the first person I knew anywhere who was training new teachers or running classes fully on Zoom, learning as I went. With a paucity of university guidance, I was creating ad-hoc policies left and right. With publicized plans for in-person classes, yet with no COVID policies or signage in place by July 2020, I went into every writing classroom and taped off desks with

blue painter's tape from home to determine six-foot spacing, per CDC guidance. I had to have answers for questions like: Can students attend via Zoom instead of in person whenever they want? What do I do if a student gets COVID? What can I do if students don't wear masks? Can I get an accommodation to teach on Zoom from home? (The university required us to teach on Zoom, but to do so from the classroom because our classes were all "in person," even if no students, or very few students, showed up in person.)

Preparing teachers for these new permutations required constant puzzle-solving. Upper administration was not available to help, as they were dealing with budget cuts, layoffs, increased class sizes, and sometimes, increased teaching loads for no additional pay. At one memorably awful meeting, a member of the upper administration told English faculty that if we weren't willing to teach additional classes without compensation, we "didn't care about student learning."

I mention all of this not to put my university on blast, but to illustrate how the context here required the writing program to operate on its own—and we did. I did. Honestly, although it was incredibly stressful, difficult, and scary, it was also okay. I'm good at solving puzzles; I was used to making seemingly impossible situations work. I just kept doing that, and even experienced some small wins. In summer 2020 I convinced two incoming GTAs not to quit before they started, which felt like a win, and my (entirely Zoom-taught) pedagogy class in fall 2020 got its highest evaluations ever.

At 4pm the day before Thanksgiving, I was told to hire instructors off our cancelled April search list for spring-only, 15-credit workloads (not the 12 + mentoring norm). It was made clear that these offers needed to be made *before Monday*. I spent that evening and the Friday of Thanksgiving weekend calling people to offer them (admittedly less-than-desirable) positions. Many said no. One, a friend/colleague of five years, accepted, and then after she was officially hired a week later, called, emailed, and texted me a dozen times between 6 p.m. Sunday and 9 a.m. Monday, demanding various modifications and scheduling changes I could not make, until finally she yelled at me, hung up on me, and later that day, after I'd started researching how best to address the harassment I was experiencing, called back to quit.

I spent 2020 constantly trying to figure out how to keep our students and faculty feeling safe, connected to one another as humans, and reasonably functional at their studies/jobs. What I wasn't always doing, I see now, was making space for my own well-being—largely because of the constraints of the job, and partly because I'd fallen down the identify-as-your-role rabbit hole.

2021: Persistence, Pummeling, and Panic

At 11:30p.m., just before 2021 began, one of the GTAs I'd been so proud of convincing not to quit that summer emailed me a resignation—an unwelcome New Year's gift. The new semester opened with Omicron, renewed COVID fears, and newly revised program policies based on what we'd learned in fall. Not counting absences at all had proved disastrous for students, for example, so I'd modified the attendance policy again—for the third time in three semesters, but who's counting.

Part of persisting in 2021 meant picking up the assessment we'd scrapped for spring 2020: I spent hours on distance logistics and securing funding for participants. Inexplicably, this assessment led to another GTA quitting—the other GTA I'd previously convinced not to quit. I now see my "success" in retaining those hesitant GTAs as a mistake: staffing problems are more easily addressed in mid-summer than in January or March.

I kept pivoting and persisting, trying to do the right things and care for everyone in the chaos. In response to modality changes, I increased teaching support. In response to teacher concerns, I revised policies, held meetings, and extended my Zoom office hours. In response to the unrest and racial reckoning of the summer of 2020, I rewrote the standard curriculum and shifted the entire program to contract grading by fall 2021.

The hits kept coming, though: more modality changes; class caps raised from 19 to 24 the week before classes started (after upper administration had agreed to permanently lower them, and after I'd geared the revised curriculum specifically for the lower caps); GTAs were up in arms, sometimes for good reason, sometimes not; the GTA who lost his father to COVID—I encouraged him to cancel a week of class and sent him a gift card for a grocery store, wishing I could do more. A colleague in my department, but not in our field, whose well-meaning but wildly misplaced concern for GTAs led her to harass me about everything from GTA workloads to GTA hiring standards (as in: having any) to how I taught the practicum. It was a lot.

Hiring that spring was all but impossible: for GTAships, we got less than half the applications we normally would, and many more than usual declined offers, either initially or by the end of the summer. For full-time positions, we had fewer than a dozen applicants, even with national searches, and many who got offers said no. One said yes in May, only to quit two weeks later. I hired everyone I could, planned for an in-person orientation, and started to feel like things were getting back to "normal."

In July 2021, that miraculous month when things seemed safe, my family took a cross-country road trip, a real vacation, entirely sans work email! I would return the week before orientation. A week into vacation, my jaw

had stopped automatically clenching and I was getting enough sleep for the first time in a year and a half. Then my chair called. I inexplicably took that call while literally standing on the edge of a cliff—metaphors don't get much better than that. An instructor—and not just any instructor, but a longtime friend I had mentored for years—had quit. My chair wanted me to hire someone right then. Although I had previously hired people while on personal time—from outside a child's performance, in a Starbucks parking lot, at an airport—this time was different. Before, I'd had ranked lists of vetted people to call: this time there was no one.

I kept a small boundary up by refusing to spend my remaining vacation trying to hire someone, but I couldn't put a boundary up in my mind, which affected the rest of that trip. I was beyond shocked that the instructor/my friend had quit at all, much less so close to orientation and after we'd recently commiserated together about that year's hiring challenges. I was stunned that she had quit as she had, when she knew I was on vacation, without any advance hint about the possibility, despite our being close. As a supervisor in a place with low pay and a high cost of living, I've accepted several inconveniently timed in-person resignations, never with any ill will. I've offered congratulations or condolences, as the circumstances merited, and often a hug. None of those outcomes were possible this time. Further, I could no longer consider this person who dropped such a bombshell, and who didn't reach out with even a text once she knew I was back, my friend.

That dual loss, of an instructor and a friendship, was quickly followed by the news that Delta was rapidly and dramatically changing the COVID landscape again, threatening the optimistic plans I'd made for an in-person, masks-optional orientation. Suddenly everything was a question mark again, and I had to figure out how to prepare and pivot again. Only I couldn't.

Fresh from vacation, walking from my car to work for the first day of orientation prep meetings, I found myself in the throes of a full-blown panic attack, suddenly sobbing and gasping on my hands and knees on the sidewalk. I got myself together enough to reach my office, grateful I'd arrived early enough that no one saw me, collapsed again, and eventually backed myself into a ball between a filing cabinet and the wall and called counseling services.

I needed help, in every sense.

In addition to regular therapy, when told again there would be no search for a new WPA and that none of my tenured colleagues would take a turn, I started working in earnest on a shared-administration plan, with an associate director. I spent acres of time in 2021 and the first half of 2022 working out possible details, crafting multiple versions of one-page proposals.

I also continued to have panic attacks. I submitted research on other programs and peer institutions and met repeatedly with my chair and deans, even with a vice provost, to discuss, negotiate, and re-negotiate how it could all work. I argued the program's leadership would be more sustainable if it wasn't just one person writing a standard curriculum for 4000+ students and training and hiring every GTA and every faculty member and responsible for every question from every area of campus.

2022: Burnout is Institutional, Not Individual: Finally Passing the Baton

In fall 2022, I unexpectedly got my wish; I will no longer direct the program as of July 2023, and from then on there will be a director and an associate director, instead of a sole WPA. I won't benefit from any of the work I put in to making the program's administration a shared endeavor, but I'm glad the people who next run the program will have an easier time. I suppose I'm gratified that two people will replace one me, but it's hard not to take that as a bit of a slap in the face when I'd been asking for help and/or to be allowed to step aside for several years, with no relief.

Burnout is a real and growing problem in all of academia, not just in WPA roles, but WPAs are uniquely situated and therefore uniquely vulnerable. To be clear, burnout is not an individual failing. Instead, it is baked right into some jobs and contexts. Rebecca Pope-Ruark, a former English professor who wrote the most recent academic work on the phenomenon, explains in an *Inside Higher Ed* interview that burnout is, "a workplace problem that impacts individuals, not an individual-person problem that impacts institutions" (qtd. in Flannery). This perspective is helpful, especially for WPAs who tend to think they can solve any problem if they just work hard enough or in the right way.

Pope-Ruark also says, "we have to start looking at the culture" to change it, which, sure, but we also must use the options that already are/should be available (qtd. in Flannery). Although WPAs often hear "Once a WPA, always a WPA," that mantra doesn't mean we have to literally work as WPAs forever. Time-delimited contracts should be respected and honored on time; rotating out of WPA roles needs to be the norm. Regular rotation is a sanity-saving measure, one with benefits for outgoing as well as incoming WPAs. Regular rotation is also ultimately beneficial for programs, too, even if—maybe especially if—the prevailing mood is that a particular WPA is somehow indispensable.

I did good work as a WPA. I constantly advocated for those in less privileged positions. I crafted policies and curriculum carefully. I revised

curriculum and policies annually in response to feedback and assessments and to keep up with changes at the university and in the world. I trained and supported GTAs professionally as well as personally. Among my final accomplishments as WPA, I secured significant raises for our GTAs and got five previously term-limited instructors converted to more stable, much better-paying roles. I will never not feel proud of that work.

Although there are good outcomes and memories, too, a sentence I came across in a novel about witches readily maps onto my experience as a WPA at this institution: “to be a [WPA] is to be exploited when it’s convenient and turned against when it isn’t” (Manganna 22). Extricating myself from this role has been mentally exhausting and emotionally excruciating, largely because I held it for so long—and for three years after my term was over, against my wishes—that I melted into the identity. Pope-Ruark writes that after her breakdown, she, “eventually recognized that [she] was mourning … grieving for the [person] [she] used to be but would never be again” (55). I, too, am mourning that version of myself, that identity, even as I revel in the prospect of feeling free of the constant demands, misplaced blame, and oppressive responsibility. It is (past) time to pass the baton, and to hope that it’s passed more easily and more often in the future, not only in my specific institutional context, but in everyone’s.

WPA jobs looks different everywhere, but WPA roles are notoriously misunderstood, notoriously outsized, notoriously boundary-less (whether by design, demand, or [over]devotion), and notoriously Sisyphean. In a context where almost any choice can elicit outcries from students, writing faculty, GTAs, other colleagues, upper administration, parents, and/or the public, and where every hard-won success is at best temporary, eventual burnout is all but inevitable. Normalizing regular rotation is one way to help WPAs let go and protect them from burnout.

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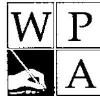

“But This Is Bullshit”: Enforcing Boundaries as a Pregnant WPA

Christina M. LaVecchia

In March 2020, I was seven months into my first WPA position at a small Catholic university and already feeling stretched thin. Although my title was director of writing across the curriculum (WAC), reflecting my dean’s attempt to represent my work as that of directing a single program, in reality, I directed two: a first-year writing sequence and a fledgling WAC program that was founded the same semester I arrived on campus. The WAC program had been created under the auspices of a Title III federal grant, and with the grant reporting period already underway, administration was keen to document immediate progress in building the program. (This, for example, led to asking me to facilitate a summer faculty development workshop “on transforming writing intensive syllabi” one week before my start date.) Due to this administrative load and sky-high expectations to “hit the ground running,” I’d had trepidations about taking the position, but trailing spouses must make do under emergent conditions. Less than a year earlier, my husband had matched into a gastroenterology fellowship across the country, and this was the only full-time job offer I’d received in our new city.

On top of this administrative context, I carried an untenable 3/3 teaching load. Class caps were low (18), but our student population was largely at-risk and majority first-gen. And although I was nominally appointed as an assistant professor, my institution lacked a system of tenure. I felt the chilling effect of this fulltime-yet-contingent position keenly, particularly as my administrative work made me directly answerable to a micromanaging, bullying dean who was himself answerable to a toxic, directive vice president for academic affairs. It was under these already unsustainable conditions—which later led to my leaving the institution after two and a half years on the job—that COVID hit.

I had always thought of my physician husband as the person in our household that had to be mindful of bodies. But now, I could think of little else as I warily continued to commute to campus in early March, listening to NPR reports of Italy’s cataclysmic conditions. The bodies of our students, whom I implored to wash their hands, two of whom soon disclosed that they had chronic conditions and were afraid to keep coming to campus. The bodies of the first-year writing (FYW) adjuncts, many of whom were over 65, some of whom also disclosed medical conditions or their

roles as caregivers to at-risk family members. That of my husband, who was potentially going to be redeployed from his gastroenterology inpatient service to the emergency department or the COVID ICU. My own newly pregnant body. I was still in my first year on the job, trying to figure out how to even be a WPA, and now I felt newly responsible for everyone connected to FYW in a whole new and overwhelming way.

When campus shut down on March 16, I was relieved for everyone's bodily safety but now found our program in a newly vulnerable position. Faculty were asked to pivot online on four days' notice without any days off from instruction, and I knew many of the adjuncts staffing FYW were completely ill at ease with technology. Meanwhile, some of our students did not have laptops at home, spaces conducive to work, or even internet connections. One of my students video-conferenced with me with a TV blaring, seated between a toddler and her grandmother. Another was commuting to a cousin's house to use Wi-Fi, and still another couldn't stream video on his slow connection, speaking with me over the phone instead. The very bodies I was so keenly aware of were now worryingly isolated from one another via faulty connections and uneven access. If I was so disconnected from my own students, how were the rest of the FYW faculty and students faring?

WPAs are accustomed to playing a role of hyper-competency, and so amid the relief-then-scramble of lockdown, I started asking myself what, as a WPA, I was "supposed" to be doing. How should I be actively directing the program? I should have realized every WPA likely felt as lost as I did in this genuinely unprecedented moment, as other reflections in this issue suggest. But still I felt an internal pressure, fueled equally by imposter syndrome and an internal drive to be a helper, to offer my instructors unflappable guidance so they wouldn't feel adrift in the absence of leadership from the top. I'd seen WPA friends post to social media copies of emails they'd sent to their own programs, full of reassurance and pragmatic points of advice. So, I composed my own email, compiling resources (links to Facebook groups like "Pandemic Pedagogy"), tidbits on best practices for teaching online scraped from viral academic Twitter threads, and advice like "be kind" and "keep it simple." With the pressures mounting from every direction, for every one of us, I worked to hold a stiff upper lip, holding myself to a higher standard than I expected from my instructors or experienced from my upper administration.

Somehow, we muddled through the spring semester and moved into both summer and my second trimester. We were no longer in emergency lifeboat territory (Krause); now we needed to build more seaworthy vessels for the fall semester. But even in "normal" times, my position provided no

summer compensation for work that was required to keep the FYW program running: interviewing and then onboarding adjunct faculty hires, watching enrollment and adjusting the FYW schedule, updating FYW syllabus templates and Blackboard shells, and creating curricular materials. Now on top of this labor I also needed to help faculty—many of whom had never touched Blackboard in previous semesters except to upload their syllabi—learn how to teach online for real in the fall. I also continued to worry about their bodily safety: administration was pushing for in-person sections in the fall but gave instructors the option to request online sections if they or a family member were at risk. My own request to teach virtually was immediately approved due to my pregnancy, but I knew the adjuncts who staffed just about every one of our FYW sections were feeling pressure not to make requests of their own. Like Teresa Grettano (this issue), I encouraged and facilitated the request process for them. However, unlike Grettano, I had virtually no resources to support those faculty professionally.

I remember looking on in jealousy at friends and colleagues at other institutions who had access to summer development programming to meet the demands of online education. We had no support for online pedagogy, only instrumentalist tutorial sessions from IT (e.g., how to use MS Teams), but even those sessions didn't meet my adjuncts' needs with learning the technology. Once again, I saw this gap between resources and need as my responsibility to fill with my unpaid time and energy. In between daily walks around our Philadelphia neighborhood and prenatal appointments, I scheduled extra meetings. I recorded and uploaded video tutorials. I individually walked instructors through things like designing their Blackboard course and, both memorably and unsuccessfully in one MS Teams call, how to use the mute/unmute function. I continually clarified ever-shifting mandates from administration for my "freeway flyers." I sent out scores of emails about free workshops and resources offered by GSOLE (Global Society of Online Literacy Educators). As I wrote in an email to a mentor, "I've tried to fill in gaps as best as I could, but it's all an individual battle against a systemic issue."

Indeed, the pandemic was lifting the veil on my institution's many years of under-investment in both its instructors and its previous FYW coordinators, whose insufficient release time had hampered their ability to keep a close eye on what was happening in classrooms. Coming into my position, I had thought I had an established FYW program that could run smoothly on its own while I concentrated on building the WAC program. Now the pandemic was both revealing and exacerbating many long-standing needs in FYW: the curriculum, itself in need of a refresh to better meet student

needs, was being delivered unevenly across sections. Although many instructors were incredibly competent, I observed two class meetings that were entirely lecture-based (one only actively engaging students in a multiple-choice grammar quiz). Placeholder language (like "introduce yourself here") I had built into the Blackboard course template was visible to students in several published course shells. These needs felt difficult to ignore and yet unsustainable to address alone (see also Wilkes, Mina, and Poblete).

We WPAs routinely normalize our individual efforts to compensate for lack of leadership from the top (see also Kim Hensley Owens, this issue). Perhaps this is because writing program administration can, at baseline, resemble the work of managing crises, as many stories attest in *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration* (Adams Wooten et al.). Often, our pragmatic response to reflecting on crises is to consider strategies for better preparing ourselves and our programs for the next crisis to come. But I want to ask a different question: instead of only considering what we can *do*, what is our ethical limit for doing? As Laura R. Micciche writes in her foreword to *The Things We Carry*, "What's important to say is that we need to take better care of each other and of ourselves *when* (not *if*) something terrible happens" (xi). How might we better account for our own well-being?

The only option available to me before ultimately joining the Great Resignation the following year was to change my philosophical approach to my work: to think in terms of limits, rather than needs. We WPAs tend to be "fix-it" type people, but in the face of such unfixable realities and in the additional embodied context of my pregnancy, I found surprising strength to clarify for myself what I would and would not give to the job.

My pregnancy was a constant physical and emotional reminder of limits. It made me incredibly fatigued because of all the internal changes my body was enduring as well as the insomnia (a very common pregnancy symptom). When I overexerted myself physically—by walking too far or simply not drinking enough water sitting at my desk—I experienced Braxton Hicks contractions (pains that mimic the feeling of labor). Before pregnancy, I might sometimes push past the point of comfort to meet a goal: perhaps sitting too long at a desk without moving and stretching because I'm "just about" to finish what I'm working on. But in pregnancy my body had become a shared space, and my limits were being reset in ways that I was constantly having to relearn.

Sometimes I needed to take time for prenatal yoga in my living room to find relief for my aching hips; oftentimes I needed to nap during work hours to recover from overnight insomnia. I had to attend scores of medical appointments. I had to find time and energy to research cribs and bassinets

and buy onesies and diapers. I needed to devote mental and emotional space and energy to the upcoming and radical shift in our family life that our first child would bring. Hormonal changes heightened my desire to distance myself from stressful situations—a well-founded protective instinct in hindsight, given the biomedical evidence associating maternal stress with poor outcomes for birth, fetal development, and even childhood health (e.g., Hobel, Goldstein, and Barrett; Mulder et al.; van den Bergh et al.). My awareness of the new life growing within me drove a deep want, even need, to hold space for *joy* in my day-to-day life. Beyond my deeply felt responsibility for the teaching and learning happening in the writing programs, as well as the well-being of the faculty and students who comprised them, I needed to attend to my own life, too.

I soon became grateful for the work-life balance these new limits imposed on me (see also Kate Pantelides on the value of personal interruptions like parenting in WPA work). They gave me the perspective I needed to step back from what was happening and whisper to myself, "but this is bullshit." To understand that one more workshop, meeting, handout, or email wasn't going to address the problems I faced. To realize that I had been handed a garden hose to tend to an institution and world on fire—fires that had been perpetuated at my institution by the persistent de-valuing of a program that has an outsized effect on the retention and persistence of our first-year students.

WPAs don't exist in isolation from larger ecosystems, yet this mindset is pernicious. As Courtney Adams Wooten reminds us, we often "naturaliz[e] sacrifice of our selves to the greater cause of the writing program as a part of our happiness scripts that is obviously potentially destructive" (275). It has become commonplace for WPAs to do what we know we can't sustain: placing the program before our own selves. My pregnancy helped me to recognize that I couldn't be a lone hero figure holding outside forces at bay (Charlton et al.; Hancock and Reid; Reid; Vidali; see also Cicchino, Snyder, and Szymanski, this issue). I couldn't individually propel our writing programs from institutional neglect and lack of resources any more than I could will away Braxton Hicks contractions. Through my pregnancy and the subsequent birth of my son, I acknowledged the unfixable, set limits and boundaries, and, eventually, found the strength to walk away.

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Achieving Community Amid COVID-19

Mary Lutze

In January 2020, I sat in my Chicago apartment dining room with Lydia, my roommate and fellow doctoral candidate, and she showed me news story after story of troubling events happening in Wuhan, China. She and her partner were convinced that it was only a matter of time before the Coronavirus—a word still a stranger to our lips—would find its way to the United States. She'd already ordered N-95 masks and Lysol wipes. Lydia had much more foresight and presence of mind concerning the issue, for I was more concerned with my upcoming doctoral defense and the trip home I had scheduled after its completion. My mother had undergone a major surgery, and I had promised to spend a couple of weeks helping her recuperate; I would have the rare experience of downtime after finishing this final step in my degree.

By the end of February, my dissertation defense had passed, but rather than celebrating, I sat in rural Nebraska and watched all hell break loose across our country. A brief trip turned into a four-month shelter-in-place, as my family and I joined the masses in disinfecting groceries, praying for toilet paper to appear on shelves, and wearing medical grade masks even when walking alone outside. With several family members at heightened risk and a lack of understanding how this virus could spread, we opted for an abundance of caution. At that time, Loyola University Chicago—like most universities in America—pivoted fully online for the first time, and being the university's writing center Associate Director, I was tasked with helping to maintain our services and assisting virtually in the training course for a new cohort of hired writing tutors. Around the same time, I was also virtually interviewing for the position of Assistant Professor of English and Writing Center Director at the University of Arkansas Fort Smith (UAFS), a position that eventually became mine. In the fall of 2020 and in the height of the pandemic, I would spearhead the launch of a brand-new campus service: the UAFS Writing Center. But before then, I watched from a screen as the last months of my doctoral experience slipped by, and I watched from a screen as anticlimactic graduation slides announced I had completed a major milestone, and I watched helplessly—like so many others did—as friends and loved ones became victims and statistics of a global pandemic.

How can we ever return to "normal"? There is a new "normal," if we can call it that, but when we stand on the other side of the wreckage of this pandemic—intimately aware of the loss of family and friends we'll never

see again—life can never be the same. After that first unexpected phone call where I heard the hitched voice of my father relay the news, *"Mary, we've lost Chris,"* and experienced the reeling shock I felt at the sudden loss of a brother, I was plunged into the new normal that so many of our students and employees now inhabit. I will always experience moments of panic and dread when receiving phone calls from loved ones, fearing that it will be a phone call like *that one.* I am not alone in this, and the fact of this weighs heavily on me as the director of my university's writing center. My student tutors and colleagues have experienced their own hardships and the loss of loved ones, and the flexibility granted to me in my grief was the instigator for similar flexibility in my administration of the writing center. I have a team of student and professional tutors that I dearly love and admire, and I recognize that the "hats" we wear are often those of counselors for individuals who are wrestling with their own posttraumatic stress (Ryan and Zimmerelli). In many ways, the pandemic has called upon me and other administrators to bear, "The emotional labor . . . of identifying, understanding, and responding to students' . . . needs," and this labor compounds as my tutors themselves often bear the stress and trauma of students they serve and carry those emotional burdens back to me (Clinnin 139). Many tutors carry their own trauma while also attempting to carry the burden of grief for others. We are called upon to reach deep within ourselves and support the peers around us, and there are many days when we can no longer muster anything left of us to give.

Our philosophies, practices, and policies at the UAFS Writing Center have shifted irreversibly because of COVID-19 because there was no other way of moving forward. Our Writing Center was founded in October of 2020, so our practice never had to adjust to pandemic protocols: it began with them. From our opening, we instituted policies and procedures to incorporate social distancing, PPE, utilized technology to avoid physical papers or close proximity, and allowed flexibility for pivots to online training and tutoring. Beyond this, my whole staff—including myself and assistant director, Jeffrey Warndof—were completely new employees at a new place of employment, so I felt compelled to begin forming a community among this team I didn't know. The primary motive for establishing this community was to bond with my team, despite all of the factors of the pandemic that encouraged distance; over time, the mindset of a team built on community eventually shifted and became a means of providing purposeful care work for our team.

Jeffrey and I are intentional in our leadership, and even friendship, with our student tutors; however, we became even more community-oriented because of the pandemic. We took seriously the call to, "Take better care

of each other and of ourselves *when* (not *if*) something terrible happens," because we were experiencing the *when* and its aftermath (Micciche xi). What we have learned from our own experience leads me to argue that writing center and program administrators ought to reshape their administrative identities to allow for more aspects of thoughtfulness and caring as well as rethink how communities of care can function as oases amid our anxiety-inducing new normal. Prior to the pandemic, our positions might not have necessitated the support role in a post-traumatic environment that we so often play for our tutors, but this additional aspect of writing center administration has become another of the things we carry—emotional labor that we are called upon to bear in writing program administration and that could join the compendium of "things" outlined in Adams Wooten et al.'s *The Things We Carry*.

In my position as the assistant and later associate writing center director at my previous institution, we kept a cordial administrative distance from our student tutors. We were teachers, bosses, schedule managers, troubleshooters, and often were called upon to correct and redirect tutors when their actions called for it. We were always friendly; however, it was clear to me that we were never friends with our student tutors. There was a clear line between employer and employee. We were available if there was a problem, but we weren't available in the daily lives of our tutors—we weren't present during their shifts to simply further a spirit of collaboration, relationship, and teamwork. I now have the privilege of running my own center and of employing my own staff. Because of this, I could encourage my professional and student tutors in building relationship around a common goal. Ultimately, together, my team launched a new student service; together, we fought our way through the pandemic and learned the absolute necessity of flexibility in pedagogy and practice; and together, we discovered that we could have only achieved what we'd achieved by working together.

At UAFS, Jeffrey and I are in the trenches with our students and tutors; we don't sit behind the closed doors of our offices (which are located in the writing center rather than in a separate building or department). Whenever we get the chance, we make ourselves present to our tutors, and Jeffrey and I have our own ways of showing genuine interest and care for our tutors. From the beginning, Jeffrey has scheduled after-hour appointments with our student tutors, bringing creative works to the writing center to bond with them and indicate his trust in their creative writing expertise. He chooses every day to take his lunch hour in the open lounge of the writing center so that he can strike up friendly conversations with the tutors. He participates in our tutor organized workshops and also takes candid photos throughout each semester, compiling them into a video slideshow with

music that we share at the semester's end. He plays an active role throughout training, and our established ethos with the tutors is one where we encourage unapologetic authenticity. We are ourselves around the tutors, and we give ourselves the permission to let our tutors glimpse who we are as people rather than keeping a distanced professionalism that limits true teambuilding and trust. Likewise, I circulate the writing center and spend extended periods of time in the lounge with the tutors, getting to know the tutors beyond their roles as employees and investing in them as the complex people that they are. I have made a point to get actively involved in the interests and hobbies of Jeffrey and my student tutors: reading their favorite novels, watching their favorite anime series, attending their sporting events, hosting end-of-semester parties at my home, stocking a private "tutor pantry" for them so that they never go hungry, establishing traditions like our once-a-semester trivia games, attending any evening workshops the student tutors plan, and facilitating a game night after hours for the tutors at the writing center, among other activities. I also send out surveys to the tutors each semester to gauge my and Jeffrey's effectiveness as leaders; we value their input and have also adjusted our administration based on their anonymous answers. For instance, one tutor in fall 2022 stated feeling somewhat unsupported during a particularly hectic semester; Jeffrey and I then redoubled our efforts in the spring 2023, making ourselves even more available for friendly communication and practical guidance.

Over the semesters, our intentional care of our tutors has reaped numerous benefits; though some of the tutors were a bit guarded in the first semester, our returning tutors became increasingly comfortable with us, bonding with us in genuine ways. We began to honor the experience of our returning tutors, "shed[ding] the desire for control and embrac[ing] the reality of collective agency" (Bousquet qtd. in Strickland 13). We invited them to participate in the training of new cohorts and developed a mentorship program for newly hired tutors, and the returning tutors' easygoing and good-humored demeanor with us and their mentees helped to break down barriers with new student tutors and further our efforts in community building. However, we also honored our tutors with these opportunities, paying them for their time whenever they participated beyond their normal tutoring hours. In this way, we also showed genuine care and respect for them and never allowed our community ethos to be a source of manipulation for unpaid labor. By trusting the returning tutors in training and administration—such as letting them organize workshops, lead class visits, or play roles in our crowdfunding events—the tutors have unique ownership over our center and its ethos on campus. They are personally invested in the writing center and care about our team beyond simple employment. With

our intentional presence in the Writing Center, Jeffrey and I can more easily counsel and support our student tutors as they so often counsel, teach, support, and guide their peers in communicating ideas well and simply managing the stress of everyday life, in and outside of the classroom.

In both physical space and tutoring practice, we have prioritized creating an environment of welcome, flexibility, and inclusivity—mirroring the community-oriented environment we foster with our team and extending it to include our student clients. We have literally torn down the walls between us; favoring glass walls that create bright and open, airy rooms and avoid the feeling of a dark, enclosed spaces. We have painted our walls with a combination of cheerful and calming colors, depending on the room, and even added a colorful mural in our computer lab to add appeal and enhance the visual environment. Our center is flooded with plants to assist us in establishing an inviting and comforting atmosphere that feels homelike. We also determined that we would do our part in combatting the food insecurity that is common in our area of Arkansas. To that end, from the beginning, we have prioritized buying the supplies we'd need to stock a coffee bar and snack station for individuals utilizing our writing center for study, class, or tutoring. This way, our campus clients and our tutors would not fight the distraction of hunger while attempting to engage in writing center appointments.

Since our opening in 2020, we have chosen to create a writing center that wasn't solely focused on tutoring; to forever eradicate the ethos of a paper mill and to encourage students in the recursive practice of writing, we allocated spaces in our center where students could study freely. We have made space for any student to use the writing center, with or without scheduling an appointment. We fuel their studying and active writing with food and coffee, and we circulate our spaces in a nonintrusive way so that if students have a quick question, all they need is to catch the attention of one of our tutors as they pass by. With the approval of my supervisors, I also began to bring my pup, Nori, to the center with the full intention of certifying her as a therapy animal. She has become somewhat of a fixture in our center, offering support when words aren't enough to calm anxiety or soothe a troubled student. She also played an active role in our university's crowdfunding event—The Day of Giving; in fact, Nori won a prize for the most unique number of donations in her name through her participation in a Puppy Kissing Booth. She even made the local news! Nori is known as the "Writing Center Dog" and is so popular that some students come to the writing center to work *with* her because her presence alone makes the task of studying and writing more palatable.

This rebranding and repurposing of our space to reinforce community and support has become one of the most important changes to our philosophy and practice as a writing center. We have allowed ourselves the flexibility to not be so absorbed with tutoring that we exclude students who may never intend to make appointments with us—there's always a chance that they may in the future, and that chance becomes all the more likely when they have grown accustomed to our space and bonded with our tutors. Nearly three years into our opening, and now tentatively approaching life on the other side of COVID-19, we put forth effort—more than ever—into maintaining this safe space where so many of our students are choosing to be rather than forced to be.

If I could sum up this reflection with general advice for other writing center directors, it would be to challenge us all to consider the ways in which our intentional connection and carework with our employees and students have become our own means of self-care. In the era of "Zoom University," we all realized that having countless individuals literally at our fingertips, through our devices, was not synonymous with experiencing true connection and support. Clinnin relates in her chapter "And So I Respond" that, "The emotional labor of supporting students under normal circumstances, let alone during a crisis, requires that the teachers and administrators are similarly supported and cared for" (139). Many of us have experienced so much isolation that we crave genuine connection, and our practices as student services, departments, and university offices now call for us to wear a different kind of hat than we might have otherwise. But in wearing this hat of connection, care, and support, I find myself more supported. If COVID-19 taught me anything, it was to be more vulnerable and to allow myself the freedom to create my own definition of who I should be as an employer and colleague and what the writing center should mean to our campus community. Perhaps it was always okay for supervisors to mingle with the supervised, for writing centers to do a little bit more than tutoring writing. All of us have the unique opportunity to rebrand our physical spaces and ethos on campus to invite connection for the students we've been tasked to serve, and that has been our mission at the UAFS Writing Center.

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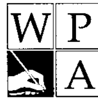

A Eulogy for an Awful Time That Just Won't Die

Bradley Smith

Recently, a friend reminded me that Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken," contrary to popular belief, is about the fantasies we tell ourselves as we look back, even though it has been widely interpreted as hailing the virtues of forging ahead into adventure by leaving the beaten path. Instead of an attitude in the present, the poem is a commentary on reflection. The two roads are the same, more or less. The road "less traveled by" is a myth of our own making. What's different is our perception of those memories, the things we choose to highlight and the story we tell ourselves. So here are some half-truths about how I made it through these past few years as a WPA and teacher: a reflection on a disagreeable time, like a eulogy for a relative no one likes. In eulogies, we tend to gloss over the worst aspects of a person. These memories I share here are true to my best recollection and shored up by rereading journal entries and social media posts from that time, but these memories gloss over half of the story. The lie of what I write is what's left out: the deaths of friends and family, community and country, line graphs that spike exponentially, the ever-expanding number of commas in total columns. But this is the story I choose to tell at this moment. I'll leave my reflections on these deaths for another day.

Parent-Teacher Convergence

> *How stressed are you all right now? I'm currently-dipping-pita-chips-in-a-jar-of-Skippy stressed. I didn't know that was a thing until just now.*
>
> — *Facebook post, July 16, 2020*

During the pandemic, say September 2020 to January 2021, I trudged through my work while trying to keep my daughter on track in her second grade Zoom sessions and gamified curriculum. During these months writing productivity settled into a dull routine of editing a database of all the post-secondary institutions of education in the US. Google search, click, highlight, ctrl C, ctrl V, repeat. With my splintered focus, this was the best way for me to be productive while keeping one eye and ear on Addie as she clicked through math-fact games or read passages aloud to her reading group. At other times, I shut my home office door and let Addie and her brother, Evan, watch YouTube and sneak entire bags of chocolate chips

out of the pantry so that I could sit and think and write; remote learning went off the rails.

> *[Screenshot. YouTube clip. The caption reads: "Sesame Street: Ernie is loud while Bert reads."] "Actual footage of me working while Addie does remote learning."—Facebook post, November 2020.*

This is what Addie sounds like while working on her second-grade math facts. She sings, "Two plus three equals fi-high-hive, three plus four equals seven. Everybody's got their own way, so we don't have to rush. Seven minus two eee-he-he-quals a different number than them. It was that. Six plus two equals eight so we will go there. One plus zero equals whoa-o-whoa one. One. Oooohhh! But I don't know what these two equal so I can go five minus two eeequals three-he-he. One plus zero equals one-hun-hun. Whee!" As she answers questions, she works her way around a maze in a math-fact Pac-Man knockoff, where her answers move her toward gems and away from monsters and eventually toward the end of the maze. As she makes it to the end, her computer gives a small ding, which prompts her to say, "Whee!"

I am next to her in an antique armchair more suited for decoration than comfort, working along to this dulcet ambient soundtrack. As we entered November, I realized that I needed a better chair to sit in and write. So, I masked up, made a special trip to a furniture store, and found one that would be more comfortable for long-term sedentary work. It didn't arrive until April. Supply chains . . .

Sometimes, Addie asks me to pull up a chair next to her to help with math facts or reading, and I do. I model my best writing center praxis. I am patiently prompting and asking questions. My laptop goes to sleep perched on the end table behind me. Some days we free write together. Addie writes about mermaids or horseback riding, panda bears, garbage. I write about how awful the educational computer programs are that she's required to use. They are right out of Linda Adler-Kassner's description of the Education Industrial Complex ("2017 CCCC Chair's Address"), and they claim to make learning easy by diagnosing and fixing Addie's problems through targeted curriculum. These programs seem to identify a lot of problems that I don't see in Addie, and I'm further reminded of Sharon Crowley's description of the rise of Harvard's English A—how the examination legitimized the need for the course (*Composition in the University* 72). I write about whether I'm being "that parent," who claims, "My baby is perfect," and can't see that Addie is struggling with reading, writing, and math. The program tells us that she reads at a kindergarten level, and her teachers tell

us that too, based on what the program tells them. But then each night she reads to us passages from *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and then later from *Charlotte's Web* and then *Harry Potter*. The program asks her to read a passage about pandas. Addie skips to the end and clicks the answers that she knows already and guesses on the rest. She gets most of them right. She is proud of this life hack.

I dive deep into the research about one program. There are no peer-reviewed texts that indicate this program is effective. The literature is comprised of a few dissertations; some of them demonstrate positive results, some negative, others demonstrate no significant differences when the program is used as an intervention. This is how I cope with the stress and anxieties of processing how Addie is doing in school. I use the biggest weapon I have: my disciplinary training. I research the problem. I try to learn and to understand. It doesn't help much.

I do the same thing at work when I am faced with external pressures that require me to rethink our first-year writing curriculum and add a co-requisite course that doesn't seem to fit with our institutional context. I do the research. I look at curricular structures from across the state. I look at peer institutions. I study what HBCUs and HSIs are doing. I read gobs of literature. I write a 4,000-word memo on the problems with the proposed co-requisite and then offer an alternative plan. It's a battle that I lose slowly and progressively. We pilot it and there are some small wins, but generally, it's a disaster in all the ways listed in the memo. During this period, much of my administrative time was spent thinking there must be a better way to address these exigencies. I never found a suitable solution. That failure still eats at me.

This approach to problem-solving, diving in, digging down to find the truth and understand it, maybe isn't the best. It turns writing sessions and reading sessions into angst-fueled binges that spiral down time-wasting rabbit holes. This is how I arrive at some of my worst moments, mentally. It's not clear to me still if this is cause or effect, or maybe it's a little of both. Here's the truth of this strategy for problem solving: it didn't solve any problems. All that research, all that time and energy didn't do much of anything to change the circumstances either in Addie's education or my administrative work. So, what was the point of it besides being an outlet for my anxieties?

Finding a Different Way, Finding Friends

> *[Overheard on Zoom] Addie's Teacher: "When making something plural, you add an 's' or an 'es' to the end. If a word ends in a consonant, like 'books', or 'cards' you just add an 's', except for some special cases. You wouldn't say 'book-es'.*
>
> *Two days later: "Writing on my own today. Addie is doing a school diagnostic in the next room, and I don't want to disturb. I'm beginning to do research into language policies and attitudes surrounding the use of Black and White English. . . . Often, people use the metaphor that language is like clothes that you change with the context. The more formal the occasion, the more formal your clothes. Nah. Language is skin."—Writing Group Journal Entry*
>
> *Computer Diagnostic in the next room: "Select the correct spelling of 'cloth-es.'"*

Jelena leads the work portion of our "Show Up and Write" group each week with the question, "So what are you working on today?" We meet on Zoom and start with hellos and small talk. Then, after sharing our goals, for the next two hours we all write. It ends with a quick reflection. From time-to-time, Addie and Evan pop in, stare into the camera over my shoulder, and receive smiles and waves. I smile and wave at Jelena's daughter. I say hello to Chris, Crystal, Novia, and others who pop in and out over the months and years. With Jelena's question, I turn my mental focus away from the nervous energy of thinking about the world's problems and my own problems toward little things that I have been noticing, intellectual itches that I scratch during these two hours. Curiosity spurs me to spend a few weeks reading and writing about risk communication, public health information, and the rise of the neoliberal subject with only a vague expectation that it might become a conference presentation at some point. Later, I set this aside to learn and write about why and how we use reading in first-year writing. When George Floyd is murdered, I revisit Asao Inoue's 2019 CCCCs Presidential Address, read April Baker-Bell's book *Linguistic Justice*, and do some soul searching about how to ethically teach writing given my position as a white, male teacher. Reading a friend's scholarship on restorative justice makes me think about its potential for our discipline and for writing pedagogy, so I read and write about that.

In these moments, my journals and writing shift away from fear, anger, exhaustion. I find myself writing things like "surprisingly, another productive day." The word "fascinating" comes up again and again.

Yet looking back, I see that my writing goals and reflections are conspicuously absent from the "Show Up and Write" group starting in March 2021, and they don't reappear until the following fall. March 2021 was especially difficult; I was balancing a large research project with a major decision about the proposed co-requisite. This writing group absence marks when I'd finally reached the point of exhaustion. Looking back on what I accomplished during that time, I was frenetically productive in ways that I'm still reaping the professional benefits. But it makes me wonder why I cut out the portions of my work that are the most rewarding. Why did I turn away from chasing those curiosities? Why did I spend my time writing long memos that no one would read? If the writing group is the most rewarding and fulfilling aspect of my work, what does that say about my work as the director of first-year writing?

> *Ethics of care is focused on "relationships rather than on the dispositions of individuals" (Held 4).*
>
> — Research notes entry

The "Show Up and Write" group is one of two writing groups that I belong to. The second group draws from Joli Jensen's book *Write No Matter What*. In this group, our discussions focus on our writing goals and our writing/researching processes. During meetings, I talk with Christopher, Fran, and Ben about their efforts at putting together a book prospectus and selecting publishers, working at the intersections of scholarship and our personal lives, working with reviewer comments, etc. The group offers the opportunity to celebrate our scholarly successes. Over the years, we cheer each other on when books, articles, and conference presentations move from concept to publication. This group offers support when one of my reviews comes back with a comment about how the work is beautiful and wonderfully written but that I should cut two-thirds of it and rewrite the final third. They commiserate with me when another piece is rejected in a desk review. Sharing these failures with them is helpful. This group helps me process the news and think more ambitiously about my work. With their encouragement, I start to envision more prestigious venues for my scholarship. I start taking risks that I had shied away from in the past.

Something to Take With You

> *The band Chicago on the radio: "Will you still love me for the rest of my life?"*

Addie: "Is this Kristoff from Frozen? [Sings] LOST IN THE WOOOOOODS"

To suggest that pandemic times are dead and gone is a myth, of course. Carrying through the motif of Frost's poem, we're still in the yellow woods. Moreover, the threat of burnout for teachers and academics is nothing new and isn't going away in this "new normal." The pandemic just exacerbated it to the point where many of us could no longer ignore what was happening. But, perhaps, it's useful to say that we're done with these things, that we are past the pandemic and everything else from these recent years. Maybe if we can tell ourselves that we have made it through and that we are changed somehow, we can feel better about it. I notice, though, that my enthusiasm for being a WPA waned during this time. I notice that I now approach the same old conversations about the writing program with a new administration with a little less patience. Those routine WPA tasks, like assessment and planning professional development sessions, take a little longer for me to start and are put off until they must be done. I don't have the same eagerness for this job. But still, I do love it . . . at times . . . in many ways.

What sustained me during these past few years was the caring relations and the intellectual curiosity from these writing groups: the two formed with my colleagues and with Addie. Even through the growing apathy that made it harder to show up for colleagues and peers and family, I could still find fascination in the things that I noticed in the world around me and comfort in these mini connections on Tuesday mornings and Thursdays once a month. Elizabeth Gilbert writes that "curiosity is the truth and the way of creative living," and that resonates with me (237). Thinking deeply, reading openly, drafting some throw-away scraps that might someday become something helped draw me back and remind me why I love this job. The conversations in these groups spurred me on, encouraged my ideas, and added to their complexity. Now, mellowed with time, the frustration and worry has been drawn out of those memories of sitting next to Addie while we worked. When I willfully forget the daily grind, I'm left with those delightful moments when Addie and I read and wrote together. Truly, she is the Ernie to my Bert.

It is disastrous to ignore the worst parts of history. Such erasures fuel continued oppression, but I think that there is value to carving out contexts where we can selectively remember what was good about bad times. It allows us to cultivate hope for a better future; it allows us to carry forward that which is useful and discard those things that are a burden. It allows us to see the difference between them. And so, looking back, I can see

now that we did it, we made it through together. At least, that's the story I choose to tell myself.

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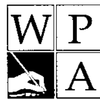

Building Accessibility, Disabling Labor: Sustainable Models of WPA Work During a Pandemic

Sara Webb-Sunderhaus

August 2020. A 12-hour day at my computer—another 12-hour day after months of similar days. Today was even more intense, as I'm teaching the composition theory and pedagogy course for new TAs. While I've taught the course many times, because I'm high-risk for COVID, my chair designated the course's modality as synchronous online—my first synchronous online course ever. After a spring and summer of moving the composition program online, building a new FYC Canvas shell, and creating a shared syllabus and assignments that introduce a new curriculum, my right arm, hand, and shoulder—disabled by a traumatic injury I sustained in a fall three years earlier—have been even more painful than usual, and my neck and left shoulder ache. I can't go on like this, I say aloud to myself. I cry myself to sleep that night, the entire upper half of my body in agony.

I will cry myself to sleep for many nights to come.

In January 2021—after eight months of too many days like that one—I took action on a plan I had long considered: developing a Peer Teaching Mentor (PTM) program in which veteran TAs mentor new TAs through monthly, small group meetings called teaching circles. Since I was hired in 2018 as a tenured WPA at Miami University of Ohio—a large, public, doctoral institution offering the MA, MFA, and PhD in English—I had wanted to implement peer teaching mentors and circles (Marshall). However, in Fall 2018 I was newly disabled. I was still recovering from multiple surgeries and medical procedures within a six-month period; I was in physical and occupational therapy 2–3 times a week; I was in psychotherapy to treat the C-PTSD (complex post-traumatic stress disorder) triggered by my fall and medical trauma; I had moved from another state; and my father was dying.

As a result, survival was the goal my first year. In my second year (2019-2020), two graduate WPAs (gWPAs) and I began developing a new curriculum for our first-year writing course and brainstorming strategies for enhancing TA support, particularly beyond TAs' first year. This work was difficult, especially since continuing support and professional development of TAs was not part of our department's culture; while other entities on campus offered workshops and other opportunities, the department did not. There was little money or incentive for professional development, and

there was no mechanism for compelling TAs to participate. Thus, I knew any type of professional development beyond our existing TA training would be a tough sell requiring a cultural shift.

And then came COVID.

As horrible as the pandemic has been, it created a kairotic moment for me to rethink the composition program, my WPA role, and how the program could best support TAs. As Sarah Beam and Mark Rideout argue in "The Writing Program Has COVID" (this volume), during the pandemic WPA work has mutated like a virus, and its illness has been exposed. The pandemic forced me to (finally) prioritize myself over the program and protect my health by extending my commitment to feminist, collaborative models of WPA work (Ratcliffe and Rickly) and contesting the notion of the hyper-abled WPA (Yergeau) by disabling WPA work (Vidali). I did so by distributing labor among various stakeholders in the composition program in ways that are equitable, interdependent, and diffuse—while also extending the work of the program—through Peer Teaching Mentors and teaching circles. Further, the conditions of the pandemic, and in particular the isolation felt by new TAs, created a felt need in the department for additional TA support.

While Peer Teaching Mentors wouldn't be introduced until the 2021-2022 academic year, my department chair and I implemented an emergency version of teaching circles during the summer and fall of 2020. As Margaret J. Marshall writes, we hoped the circles would give TAs "a sense of community [and] a shared understanding of pedagogical goals" (414) at a time when TAs were isolated from each other and living all over the world. Beyond altruistic mentorship, we had another, pragmatic motivation. In May 2020, our provost "swept" all departments' carry-forward money, claiming those funds were needed to avoid financial crisis. Pre-pandemic, my department used carry-forward money to pay substitutes if a TA needed medical or family leave. As my chair and I planned for Fall 2020, that money was not available when we feared we would need it most. What if half or more of our instructors were sickened by COVID? What if multiple instructors died of, or lost family members to, COVID? These questions were especially pressing because of the uncertainty surrounding the resumption of on-campus instruction, which throughout the summer was pushed back further and further into fall semester. Finally in mid-September, the provost announced all courses would remain online for the rest of the semester, with instructors choosing their spring classes' modality.

In addition to the very real fears I had for instructors' health and safety, I also had to ask a pragmatic question: Who would cover all of our classes in the event of mass illness or death, especially since there was no way to

pay substitutes? The best solution my chair and I devised was a bare-bones version of teaching circles for FYC instructors. We asked groups to Zoom with each other approximately once a month, discuss how they and their students were doing, and cover each other's classes if needed by meeting virtually and grading their work. Each group had at least one experienced instructor of first-year writing, and we asked that person to schedule the initial group meeting; the group collaboratively scheduled its meetings thereafter. This wasn't formal peer mentorship, as there were no designated mentors, and no one was trained or paid to mentor; it was a stop-gap measure to provide coverage and give instructors, especially new TAs, a ready-made group that shared the challenges of that very difficult year.

By midterm of Spring 2021, things felt more hopeful; vaccines were available, upper admin started returning funds, and the department had not seen mass illness. While we suffered a devastating loss when our chair's assistant was killed in a car accident, no faculty, staff, or graduate students died of the virus—an outcome that felt miraculous. As mass vaccination efforts began, I felt as if I could finally start to plan for the future.

A major part of that plan was the formal development of Peer Teaching Mentors and teaching circles. While I was apprehensive about the additional labor of creating a new program, I knew I could not continue as I was, and neither could the gWPAs. That certainty convinced me the benefits to the long-term health of myself, the gWPAs, and the TAs outweighed the risks of additional, short-term labor. The emotional labor the TAs needed had intensified; across the board, they were struggling with feelings of isolation and disconnection, and I began seeing issues among TAs I had never encountered. They needed help—more help than the gWPAs and I could provide. We were burned out, and I was dealing with additional challenges. My increased time online caused more pain and symptoms in my disabled arm, and I knew I could lose additional functionality if I continued to work at that pace. Further, as someone with chronic, low-level depression, I knew I had to take better care of myself to avoid sliding into the darkness.

Peer Teaching Mentors relieved some of those burdens and made the work of administering the writing program more diffuse. I hired five PhD students in comp-rhet and literature to work as PTMs for the 2021-2022 academic year, extending the Composition Office's mentorship by matching new TAs with a caring, knowledgeable peer they could turn to, without the anxieties they may feel about reaching out to the gWPAs and me. A WPA's supervisory function can potentially lead new TAs "to be less than frank with you" (Reid 254), as they may understandably worry about appearing competent in front of the person who can recommend that their

TAship not be renewed. Similarly, while gWPAs may be TAs' peers in the graduate program, they work closely with the WPA and may be perceived to have a supervisory function, even if they do not.

The PTMs' positionality and role enable them to sidestep these concerns. Peer Teaching Mentors are truly peers, in that they do not have teaching responsibilities for the TA training course or practicum like the gWPAs. What PTMs learn in teaching circles is confidential, unless they learn of issues that cause harm to students, other TAs, or the TA themselves. This firm boundary gives new TAs peace of mind that—with exceptions they fully understand—what happens in the circle stays in the circle. Further, the mentors are able to avoid some, though not all, of the tricky issues that can come with the in-between positionality of gWPAs. While PTMs bring generalized concerns of their circles to me, individual TAs are never identified except in the rare cases identified above.

There have been multiple benefits to distributing the responsibilities of WPA work more broadly. Thanks to peer mentorship, new and returning TAs are receiving more support than ever. In addition to meeting with their PTM during peer teaching circles, new TAs can contact them individually. Second-year TAs are observed by a PTM, who consults with them before and after the observation to discuss the TA's questions and goals. During Fall 2022, the PTMs began offering workshops on topics of interest, such as contract grading and discussion leading strategies, to all composition instructors. By sharing in multiple responsibilities that formerly only belonged to the gWPAs and me, the peer teaching mentors earn additional money, further develop and demonstrate their pedagogical expertise, and gain experience in writing program administration. Multiple PTMs have said this work has enhanced their pedagogy; they have grown into better, more reflective teachers as they have re-examined their own entrenched teaching practices and assumptions and have gained WPA experience that is beneficial in the competitive academic job market. Finally, this program has assisted me in making concrete the invisible labor of mentoring TAs, which can be challenging to document and justify.

The Peer Teaching Mentors have also played an important role in my efforts to protect my health, as well as that of the gWPAs, and disable WPA work by making it more interdependent, sustainable, and accessible for not only myself, but also colleagues who will follow in these roles. By sharing with the PTMs the emotional labor that comes with mentorship, the gWPAs and I no longer bear that increasingly onerous burden alone. There are still many challenges that must be addressed by me as the WPA; due to their nature, it would not be ethical or advisable for TAs' peers to intervene. However, sharing the mentorship typically needed by new TAs

has given me the time and resources to focus on the more difficult cases, without sacrificing my physical or mental health. I could not have accepted Miami's WPA position without knowing I had two gWPAs with whom I could collaborate and rely; as a disabled person, I knew that I could not do this job without that interdependence. As the pandemic intensified the demands of the role, it quickly became clear to me I could not remain in the position without sharing the labor in the ways disability studies urges. The PTM program has further disabled WPA work in ways that benefit all stakeholders—not only myself, but also the gWPAs, the PTMs, and the TAs—by developing an interdependent model of labor and enriching the learning that comes with WPA work.

The program is not perfect, and challenges remain. While my department's chair and director of graduate students are supportive, other colleagues question the program's importance and undermine its value to their students, who are pursuing degrees in composition and rhetoric, creative writing, and literature (for more on these tensions, see Beam and Rideout in this volume). One colleague told me their students are "here to write and think deeply, not teach," and unsurprisingly it is students in their area who are least likely to engage with their peer teaching mentors and circles. As someone who spent the first 12 years of my career on a regional campus, I am also deeply aware that this program requires funding not everyone has; I could create the program because I had a steady revenue stream from sales of our custom textbook.

However, I also see exciting possibilities on the horizon. This fall, our required TA training course will move from a two-week, pre-semester sprint to a semester-long course. While this change was demanded by upper administration and has had significant challenges and frustrations, it has given me the opportunity to reimagine TA training. As part of this reimagining, the Peer Teaching Mentors will be integrated into the course in ways they couldn't before, potentially enabling them to build deeper, more meaningful relationships with their peers. The PTMs and I are still designing what this integration will look like, as we want to be careful with their positionality; in other words, we don't want to lose the "peer" in Peer Teaching Mentors. However, we are confident that with careful planning and consideration, we can embrace these new possibilities in ways that allow for continued growth.

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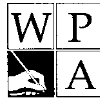

Research Articles

We've Been Burned Out and Exhausted: GenAdmin WPA Labor Issues Exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic

Amy Cicchino, Sarah Elizabeth Snyder, and Natalie Szymanski

Abstract

This article highlights the pandemic experiences of GenAdmin WPAs, a term coined by Charlton et al. (2011) to describe individuals who received explicit preparation for administrative work in graduate programs and sought administrative positions post-graduation. The authors contend that instead of returning to the status quo, the field should seize this moment and envision new administrative models. Analyzing interviews with 11 GenAdmin WPAs and drawing from the experiences of the three GenAdmin WPA authors, the study reveals unsustainable working conditions before and during the pandemic, including excessive expectations, resource limitations, toxic behavior, isolation, and exhaustion. The authors call for further research into decentralized coalitional community models for writing program administration and suggest feminist, collaborative, and decentralized administration could respond to the ongoing challenges of WPA labor and are particularly well-suited for the concerns participants mention in these data. This article contributes to the dialogue among WPAs, shedding light on the unique experiences of GenAdmin WPAs during the pandemic and advocating for transformative change. It emphasizes the importance of building resilient and supportive administrative structures that prioritize WPA well-being, ultimately enhancing the quality of writing programs and the academic environment as a whole.

We've been burned out, and we've been venting to each other about it for years. We—Sarah, Amy, and Natalie—met years before the pandemic and (trauma) bonded over passions for and disillusionments with our GenAdmin career paths. Like others who embrace the descriptor GenAdmin, we received explicit preparation for administrative work in graduate programs and sought out administrative positions post-graduation (Charlton et al., 2011). When the pandemic hit, our bond solidified—over Zoom, of course.

Sarah, a WPA at a two-year college, was too invested in her career after completing her PhD and muddled her success at work with her self-worth.

When the pandemic hit, burnout from insufficient funding, pandemic pedagogy, supervisor turnover, and the statewide dismemberment of a WAC program that she rebuilt coincided with being pregnant and going on maternity leave. She was tired before, but now she was having a *mother*-teacher-scholar-activist identity crisis.

Natalie, a WPA at a four-year institution, was burned out from (re) building two first-year writing programs at different small liberal arts colleges amidst intellectual loneliness, age and gender discrimination, political bullying, administrative gaslighting, and emotional burnout. When the pandemic hit, her students called out her programs' white supremacy on social media, causing the program to need to take accountability. At the same time, her childcare needs superseded her mad dash toward tenure. She was traumatized before, but now she was forced to face the trauma her program was inflicting on students and her kids' home lives.

Amy, a twelve-month staff/faculty member, was adjusting to a WAC position when the pandemic hit. She soon realized staff were not given the same consideration for safety or flexibility as faculty and students. She knew staff were treated differently, but now she saw their lives were being placed at risk.

When the three of us started this project, we wanted to understand if our GenAdmin experiences were an anomaly or the norm. We shared stories and wondered, was everyone living like this? Through a study on GenAdmin labor, we hope to call the field of writing program administration to reassess foundational labor documents like *The Portland Resolution*. Even as we write this article, filled with interviews from GenAdmin WPAs similarly struggling with burnout and balance, we fear, is the problem the system, or are those of us in crisis seeking each other out? In "The Quiet Revolution: How New WPAs are Shifting the Profession" in this special issue, Kristi Murray Costello asserts that some WPAs are finding balance—just not us.

Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, voices in WPA literature identified exhaustion (Moore, 2018), bias (Craig, 2016), and bullying (Elder & Davila, 2019) in WPAs' lived realities. While the pandemic did impact WPAs in significant ways, this article highlights that participating GenAdmin WPAs felt they were operating in unsustainable working conditions before COVID-19, with the pandemic heightening already fraught circumstances. We explore GenAdmin WPAs' experiences during the pandemic in hopes of moving the field of writing program administration from individualistic, lone-WPA models towards decentralized, communal approaches (Adams Wooten, Babb, Costello, & Navickas, 2020; Hancock & Reid, 2020) that build and maintain healthier writing programs.

This research-driven article draws on qualitative analysis from a larger mixed-methods study.[1] The original study focused on workload, evaluation, and promotion for GenAdmin WPAs in their first eight postgraduate years. The COVID-19 pandemic was an unintended topic; because of timing, interview data was collected in summer 2020 when participants were moving from their "rush to remote" spring to prepare programs for the unknowable fall when some institutions would continue remotely while others would fluctuate across modalities without warning as variants peaked. One-hour, semi-structured interviews had three parts: First, participants described their titles and declared if they had moved institutions. Second, WPAs elaborated on tasks they reported doing as part of their administrative workload on a corresponding survey they completed before the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, highlighting new tasks they had been asked to take on since their initial response. Third, participants explained how tasks aligned or misaligned with their understanding of local tenure, promotion, and evaluation processes. Participant demographics are presented in figure 1.

Participant Demographic Information

We have chosen not to include individualized demographic information about study participants because we are concerned that our small sample size (n = 11) creates a risk of de-anonymizing participants. As figure 1 indicates, we can generally describe participants as male (4) and female (7); Asian (1) and white (10); between the ages of 25–20 (1), 31–35 (3), 36–40 (5), and 41–45 (2); Doctoral degree recipients (11) in rhetoric and digital media (1) or rhetoric and composition (10); and renewable non-tenure-track (2) or pre-tenure/tenure-track (9); ranked at institutions categorized as Historically Black Colleges or Universities (1), small liberal arts colleges (1), public four-year universities (2), and comprehensive research and MA-granting universities (8). WPA roles included directors of WAC/WID (2) and multiple programs simultaneously (including first-year writing, basic writing, writing centers, WAC/WID, and second-language writing) (4).

Interview transcripts were divided into stable t-units and coded in two waves to conduct the thematic analysis. The first wave used a deductive, descriptive framework, sorting each t-unit according to the study's five research questions. The second wave applied Saldaña's (2013) method of inductive subcoding, meaning t-units were analyzed to identify emerging themes and patterns. The inductive framework was revised twice. All data were coded in duplicate to establish an intercoder reliability rate of 90%.

The results below discuss the inductive themes that emerged in that second wave of analysis.

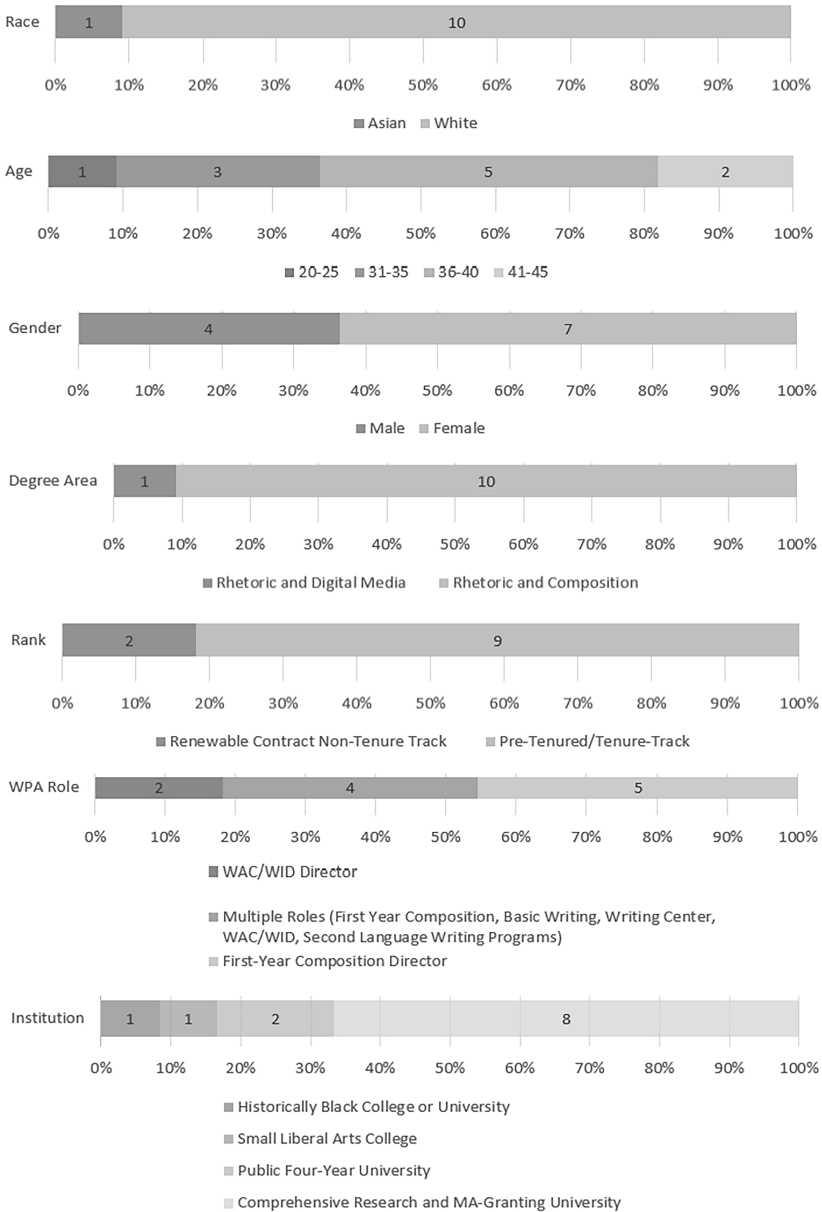

Figure 1

Normal Wasn't Working for Us

In the sections that follow, we intentionally blend participant voices with existing literature. We want these layered voices to illustrate that the ideas and experiences present in our data are neither new nor unknown. As our title alludes, WPAs have been documenting exhaustion and unsustainable circumstances since before the COVID-19 pandemic, although the pandemic compounded these issues into further dire circumstances.

Burnout and Unsustainability

Jane Detweiler, Margaret LaWare, and Patricia Wojahn (2017) offer a feminist analysis of WPA ailments, including unsustainable working conditions and the failure of many institutions to properly recognize WPA work as either scholarship or leadership. They urge WPAs to stop leaning in so as to force institutional hierarchies to reframe and validate their essential contributions. Burnout and unsustainable working conditions were widely present in our data, too. Sometimes from the start, WPA positions were created without the "intentional thought and support . . . necessary to create. . . sustainable and functional" positions. Other times, that support was absent for different reasons.

Interviewees highlighted their inhibited ability to do WPA work because of lacking tangible and intangible resources: absent administrative titles, no course releases, unofficial budgets controlled by chairs outside of the writing program, or an inability to hire in programs they administered. Sometimes, promises would be made to eventually compensate WPAs if only they would "start coordinating this program, coordinating six different instructors, coordinating them solo by helping them have shared resources, etc., and set up an assessment—as [they] teach a 4/4 load—with no extra pay, no extra course release, or anything." Other times, WPAs would be apologetically told by deans and chairs that they "should have a course release . . . should be paid more . . . All these things should happen. We just can't." In states with waning budgets and dropping enrollments, especially, WPAs felt there was "no hope of obtaining the funds needed" to make their work and programs sustainable.

In other instances, reasons weren't given for under-resourcing writing programs as the university culture made it the norm to "teach four classes and act as chairs and as program coordinators" without additional compensation. As one participant said, WPA work without the resources needed to compensate and sustain the person doing the work felt like they were being asked to "lay a new track for the train" but were also being told "you can't get off the train to lay it." Combating the unethical working conditions

Detweiler, LaWare, and Wojahn (2017) write about requires systemic restructuring and deep change, but advocating for such change cannot fall to solo administrators and compositionists.

Loneliness, Isolation, and Toxicity

Isolation, especially when GenAdmin WPAs are lone compositionists or solo administrators, left them susceptible to more malicious effects, like targeted bullying or intentional undermining. A participant working as a solo administrator said, "I was only the second rhetoric and composition person they had ever encountered. It was me and the writing center director, who was pushed out shortly after I got there, which left me alone in a literature department." In *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace,* Cristyn L. Elder and Bethany Davila (2019) highlight horrific stories of bullying experienced by WPAs, including anonymous submissions written so because the authors continue to work in toxic environments and fear retribution.

Staci Perryman-Clark and Colin Lamont Craig include testimonies of microaggressions experienced by Black WPAs in their (2019) edited collection, *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration: From Margins to the Center*. In the introduction, Perryman-Clark and Craig share being undermined and critiqued by senior white colleagues. Our participants also experienced gaslighting when they tried to advocate their education and training. For example, a participant was told by their department chair that they "had no real responsibilities in spite of having responded to a job that outlined a number of WPA responsibilities." This GenAdmin WPA told us, "It became very clear with all the work that I tried to do that they didn't really want my expertise." Jeffrey Klausman (2008) writes about this, noting that rhet-comp faculty members at two-year colleges are most often outnumbered by faculty members from other disciplines such as literature and creative writing. As Annie Del Principe (2020) found, this isolation can make creating a cohesive pedagogy and program difficult. Our participants working in isolation struggled to convince institutional communities that the field existed and that their expertise was real without senior allyship.

Participants were WPAs who identified as GenAdmin and were explicitly professionalized to take on administrative positions. However, they highlighted the conflation of WPA work with other, more general service roles. One participant explained:

> my previous institution didn't realize what the discipline—and what the field—was and what this type of position involved. And so, they advertised something that they didn't really want. It was very clear that while, like, they all were very kind to me as a person, they didn't actually want me as a professional.

Participants also identified hardship when working with non-GenAdmin administrators who did not feel an identification with their administrative role, seeing it as service or a hopeful entry point that could lead to a tenure-track position free of administrative obligation. One participant alluded to their writing center director who should have been an ally but "was a spousal hire who was hired when her husband was hired as the graduate dean." She went on to explain that they did have a professionalized WPA apply to the writing center position, but that candidate was passed over for the spouse with a sociology background when the graduate dean hire was negotiated. Others saw WPA positions as expendable, targeting them first when budget cuts came: "They had to find a way to take $73,000 from our department. They decided not to keep my position for next year; it's just gone . . . a woman who has been teaching adjunct for us, they hired her as a one-year interim for me."

Scholarly isolation left lone compositionist WPAs feeling like they lacked the support needed "to learn more about how to effectively do [their] job," even when working in a friendly environment. WPAs worried too much emphasis would be placed on their "thoughts and feelings about what . . . a writing program should do" without considering how that vision might be over-reliant on their "scholarly agenda or . . . background." As one participant noted, "there is a lot of collaboration that is needed for WPA work," and finding points of connection and feedback is difficult, if not impossible, when you are the sole WPA at your institution.

The Pandemic: Making a Bad Situation Worse

Again, the grievances are not new, but the COVID-19 pandemic further stressed measures for sustainability recommended by WPA scholars, like boundary setting, self-care, and opportunities for the WPA community to gather and reinvigorate (Wetherbee Phelps et al., 2019). During interviews, it was clear these GenAdmin WPAs were overwhelmed by labor, uncertainty, and fear for their safety and the livelihood of their programs. Justin H. Cook and Jackie Hoermann-Elliott (2022) note that in safe working environments, failure can be an important part of the administrative process in that it can prompt reflection and critical assessment but not when WPAs cannot get beyond the base need of survival.

As many institutions transitioned online with little-to-no notice, the labor to support instructors and students fell to already under-supported WPAs. One participant "posted the file with just [the WPA's] online shell so that [instructors] could download and upload it if they wanted to and just edit that to have something to work with, but I know our more experienced teachers started a Google Drive and put a bunch of resources in there." This WPA said by rallying the community, "We got everybody where they needed to be, but it was certainly more labor-intensive for some of my teachers than for others, especially when we only had a week and a half of notice that we were going online." Another noted, "I have spent probably 8–10 hours in the last week on recorded Zoom calls." One WPA who considered themselves familiar with digital tools "worked with my department pretty closely to help them learn how to use things like Zoom and stuff." She still reinforced how transitioning their WAC orientation to an online asynchronous format was "really exhausting to do." Others described hosting extensive training over Zoom, forcing "two three-hour professional development trainings" or "six hours of workshops" online. Without surprise, WPAs found the rush to remote work to be "more labor-intensive," "exhausting," and "not super-efficient," sentiments non-WPAs would likely have used to describe the summer of 2020, too.

An exhausted WPA leading an exhausted community further compounded the difficulty WPAs experienced as they tried "to support faculty emotionally getting through what's been really, really difficult things and trying to make them feel like someone sees the work they're doing and cares about their work they're doing." Documenting their labor was equally challenging. One participant said, "I think emotional work is really hard . . . What do you say, 'I checked emails and answered emails?' I mean, you don't want to make faculty sound like they're needy or whiny. How do you even explain to people that that's such an important part of your job?"

At the same time, WPAs were also confronted with scary budget forecasting from upper administration. For one WPA, this meant having to realize that "the lecture positions that I worked so hard to finally get, we're probably going to lose." They went on that, aside from this disappointing realization, they would now need to take on the labor of informing full-time colleagues they would not be able to renew their contracts. Another WPA noted that a request for additional compensation for time, labor, and professionalization for instructors during the pandemic was denied: "the dean's office rejected the funding because we're in the midst of a pandemic. So, at the same time as the work doubles because we're in chaos, the administration said, 'no, we're not going to fund you to do that.'"

Failed and Temporary Solutions

Despite the problems, participants often found reasons to stay in these environments. They feared the fate of their colleagues and programs if they left, with one confessing, "What horrifies me the most is I don't know what's going to happen to my associate directors if I leave." In a personal conversation, WAC WPA Dan Melzer described this state as being "one Provost away from doom" (D. Melzer, personal communication, April 18, 2023). Another participant who planned on leaving said, "Because of the nature of the department, I can do all of these things, and then I will leave and they will go with me." Multiple participants had worked to create systems and structures that they felt improved their programs and the lives of instructors and students, but they acknowledged those systems were often temporary because they over-relied on the labor of the WPA and were not sustainable without them.

Participants also noted that some institutions switched to rotating WPA positions to spread administrative labor across a group and promote a shared administrative mindset. One participant worried this was not true decentralization, instead describing it as a position that contained the time-consuming managerial tasks without enough time or authority to enact a vision or develop momentum. Another described this as the "sliding door effect," continuing that this model "doesn't really give you enough time to do much of anything. So, by the time you're getting the institutional knowledge built that you need in order to accomplish any kind of curriculum change or assessment change, you're cycling off." While rotating WPAs are likely intended to mitigate burnout, risk, or loneliness, this model restricts those in temporary positions from being able to enact the visionary leadership that is necessary to lead to long-term change (Fedukovich, 2021).

Reimagining Something New

The concerns and troubles voiced in our data are not new (Dew & Horning, 2007). We struggled before the pandemic, and many are struggling now. This left us looking for sustainable and healthier ways forward post-pandemic. Given enrollment drops, student demographic changes, and substantive calls for equity, higher education itself appears to be on the cusp of an evolution. We suggest GenAdmin WPAs seize this exigence to re-imagine administrative workload.

It's been nearly 30 years since Marcia Dickson (1993) and Jeanne Gunner (1994) wrote about the potential of feminist, collaborative, and decentralized administrative styles for WPAs. The 1990s were ripe with scholarship exploring the Gordian Knot that was collaborative administration,

including political implications, collegial and gendered power dynamics, effects on systems of tenure and promotion, a wide array of logistical configurations, and the inherent paradoxes of employing decentered feminist structures inside our institutions' hierarchical, patriarchal superstructures (Goodburn & Ritchie, 2000; Goodburn & Leverenz, 1997; Long, Holberg, & Taylor, 1996). By 2010 when Krista Ratcliffe and Rebecca Rickly's *Performing Feminism and Administration in Rhetoric and Composition* was published, it was clear that "many within the field still want[ed] to think about these possibilities, and still struggle[ed] to think beyond the apparent contradictions of such couplings" (Micciche & Strickland, 2013, p. 175).

We argue that there is still potential (and perhaps sustainability) in these past models; therefore, we would like to follow the lead of current scholars (re)exploring feminist and collaborative WPA administration (Cole & Hassel, 2017; Fedukovich, 2021; Maimon, 2018). GenAdmin participants reported feeling isolated; feminist collaborative models in the past have reported assuaging this to some degree in some contexts. Could that be true for programs post-pandemic? For co-author Amy, working on an administrative team creates rich, collaborative environments that can speak back to feelings of isolation. When anchored in feminist, egalitarian ideals, administrative teams can both discuss and develop programming, curriculum, and responsive solutions and share labor, accountability, and risk.

Finally, GenAdmin participants who were lone compositionists or solo administrators voiced concerns about the singularity of their knowledge base. Recent calls for actionable and meaningful equity, inclusion, and antiracist practices require a diversity of perspectives to operationalize. Could feminist, collaborative models provide a response to these concerns post-pandemic? For co-author Natalie, her choice to intentionally flatten programmatic hierarchies among her faculty led to a slow growth of community, and from this communal space emerged conversations around her curricula, policies, and leadership. Awkward and sometimes painful, these conversations during and after moments of contention humbled her and her white faculty and spurred the program to do better, evolve, and burn a few things down in service to BIPOC students and their needs.

Louise Wetherbee Phelps, Sheila Carter-Tod, Jessie L. Moore, Patti Poblete, Casey Reid, and Sarah Elizabeth Snyder (2019) "call for individuals and collectives to advocate systemic changes that proactively foster sustainability, both on our campuses and in the profession" (p. 30). One participant similarly admitted, "the number of structural changes that would have to be made to make the job not feel completely undoable are just not things that could happen quickly. I just don't even know that they are changes that can happen with me." Like in Christina M. LaVecchia's

article "'But This is Bullshit': Enforcing Boundaries as a Pregnant WPA" in this special issue, co-author Sarah's pregnancy forced her to realize that she could no longer feel the misplaced need to be responsible for the dysfunction of larger systems impacting her program and needed to establish boundaries for her health. Revisiting 1990s and 2000s scholarship on collaborative administration may help with our burnout, loneliness, and isolation, but the work of Jennifer Heinert and Cassandra Phillips (2017), Natasha N. Jones, Laura Gonzales, and Angela M. Haas (2021), and Lorgia García Peña (2022) can help us imagine feminist collaboration as a mechanism for administrative system altering or even breaking.

Heinert and Phillips (2017) argue that "over 30 years of static or worsening conditions have shown that collaboration alone is not an effective tool for systemic change because the system itself must also change" (p. 128). To change that dynamic, they contend, we need to reconceptualize that work in a feminist way. Change requires not only collaboration but also collaboration in support of a strategic purpose: "A coalition has common goals, works purposely toward them, and shares credit and responsibility for the work. Creating a coalition begins with identifying, including, and supporting colleagues who share values, concerns, and goals" (p. 129).

Perhaps intentional coalitions of writing administrators working in contextually situated collaborations could indeed "destabilize the status quo of work environments that contribute to marginalization and devaluing of disciplinary work" (Heinert & Phillips, 2017, p. 129). Jones, Gonzales, and Hass's (2021) work leans into the same use of coalitional frameworks, asserting, "Instead of building these initiatives within the same institutions of power while maintaining the same systems of power, white and non-Black POC can further advocate for Black faculty, students, and staff by leveraging personal and coalitional privilege and power in material, tangible ways" (p. 32). García Peña (2022) works between these intersections as a woman of color, similarly advocating that "Community is the most effective form of rebellion" (p. 31). Instead of coalitions, she uses the language of accomplices: "We cannot survive academia without accompaniment" (p. 47). Her work passionately urges scholars to find, build, and care for communities because ". . . social change is a process that is not given to but emerges from the people. Allies cannot create social change alone" (p. 73).

These more recent scholars turn us to the work of affect and care in their collaborative arrangements and encourage us to think about how coalitions of community members who share values, concerns, and goals can ". . . [increase] the political capital and [disburse] the workload" (Heinert & Phillips, 2017, p. 129). These ideas were in our data, too. As one participant suggested, "What you really need in this is some sort of network

of mentorship and that can be like vertical or horizontal . . . And we're bouncing those ideas off of each other in this kind of a reflective practice." Another went on to say:

> if people are in these isolated contextual unique situations, there's got to be some sort of network in place that they can draw on when they get completely lost, like I'm doing this multimodal thing. I really believe in it. Am I doing it well? What am I missing? What am I leaving out? Am I leaving out primary research? Am I leaving out these other things that should go into a writing program because things get lost when you get hyper focused on leading your transformation.

Political capital gained in sustainable ways can potentially destabilize patriarchal, racist, and exploitative systems for the benefit of WPAs, our colleagues, our students, and the future of the field.

Conclusion

Doing research on WPA labor and evaluation during a pandemic was exhausting yet affirming. Like many readers, and like our GenAdmin participants, we faced exhaustion and burnout. We hope important disruptions can lead us to confront unsustainable working conditions. Instead of returning to normal, these data push us to reflect and join voices of other WPAs who similarly hope for something new (Wilkes, Mina, & Poblete, 2023). Perhaps community with a united purpose could be the key to moving towards more sustainable administrative structures that make us feel connected and realize administrative load as a shared coalitional responsibility we all have a stake in. Perhaps community and decentralized administrative structures like those that exist at some community colleges (Hancock & Reid, 2020) are legitimate and sustainable paths forward—as long as we make the work visible (Graziano, Halasek, Hudgens, Miller-Cochran, Napolitano, & Szymanski, 2023). Perhaps graduate preparation for becoming a GenAdmin WPA should emphasize the many different options for professional identities, including coalitional, community, and multiverse (Hancock & Reid, 2020; Snyder, 2020). And perhaps younger (Millennial and Gen Z) generations of GenAdmin are already doing a better job at articulating and enforcing sustainable work/life boundaries than those of us represented here (see Costello, this issue).

Coalitional community structures are not new (Heinert & Phillips, 2017; García Peña, 2022), even in WPA scholarship (Dickson,1993; Gunner, 1994). Now is our time to build respectfully on these existing ideas to create more sustainable futures for GenAdmin WPAs. This must include investing in community models of administrative work and redefining

what professional success looks like, whether that's assessing if tenure criteria include administrative workload or creating more expansive definitions of professional success beyond the tenure/tenure-track faculty as WPA model. As well, we hope WPAs who are currently practicing coalitional models will write about their experiences and that data will be collected on these WPA organizational structures. Finally, we recognize how difficult it will be to meld a coalitional model of administration into a higher education structure that thrives and profits from hierarchy, but we feel practicing wellness and balance in writing program administration requires radical change.

Note

1. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Buffalo State, SUNY IRB Sponsored Programs Office, listed under study #STUDY00001707.

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Practicing Equitable and Sustainable Trauma-Informed Writing Program Administration through Disability Justice

Kaitlin M. Clinnin

Content warning: References to suicide, deportation, gun violence, and other sensitive topics.

Abstract

Given the increasing prevalence of widespread trauma and its effects on individuals and communities, how do we create trauma-informed writing programs that are radically inclusive, accessible, and sustainable? In this article, I present a framework for trauma-informed writing program administration that combines trauma-informed care practices with intersectional disability justice activism (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). Trauma-informed writing program administration is a community effort where all faculty and administrators are responsible for trauma-informed practices and have equal access to trauma-informed support. This approach can ultimately make trauma-informed work inclusive for all who need it and more sustainable for those who enact it. I present several concrete ways that other administrators and instructors can implement trauma-informed writing program administration in their own contexts.

Writing Programs (And Administrators) in Traumatic Times

I am writing again in the midst of writing program traumas.[1] Right before spring break, a long-time adjunct faculty member died by suicide, leaving colleagues and students bereft. Meanwhile, a graduate student is concerned about one of their students who has been missing class and assignments. The cause emerges: there is a very sick child at home, and the family is scared to seek medical care for fear that their undocumented status will result in deportation or, at the very least, prohibitively expensive medical bills. Another graduate student sends me an email sharing their suicidal ideations and letting me know they are a bit behind on their lesson planning and grading. These are just the traumas that I am aware of, and I know

that, like an iceberg, the vast majority remain unseen with the potential for future wreckage.

An unexpectedly high percentage of my job as a WPA is triage. I triage situations to assess damage, determine action, and, when appropriate, act. It is work that I have not been trained to do but that I am surprisingly adept at, most likely thanks to my own trauma exposure. I am no longer surprised by trauma; I anticipate it and greet it with weary recognition. Oh, it is you, trauma, again. What is it this time? Will this be a situation I have seen before—a student in distress, a disclosure, a violent threat to campus, a hate crime? Or will this be a new tragedy, like an ongoing global pandemic?

I am not alone in serving as triage or a first responder in the writing program (Clinnin, 2020). WPAs have written about their roles in the wake of traumas like student sexual assault, terrorism, shootings, pandemics, student death, and racial violence (Blackburn, 2022; Boquet, 2016; Borrowman, 2005; Hensley Owens, 2020). Although trauma's appearance in writing program administration does not surprise me, I am continually surprised by the lack of a professional response to this unrecognized job responsibility. There is no CWPA statement on even the existence of trauma, crisis, or tragedy in writing programs, let alone guidance on how to prepare WPAs for this work, support them as they undertake it, or value this labor (because if we must do this work, it should be recognized in some way). Separately, Jessie Blackburn (2022) and I have recognized the need for trauma-informed approaches to writing program administration. Perhaps this is a pessimistic take that suggests I do not believe that trauma will disappear from writing programs (true). Perhaps I am buying into neoliberal labor conditions because I suggest WPAs must take on additional responsibilities in a profession that already overworks, under-compensates, and exploits, especially untenured, female, and/or administrators of color. And yet, I am regularly faced with the reality of students, staff, faculty, and administrators and their trauma, past and present. Ignoring trauma means ignoring people. I cannot do that. I will not do that.

In this article, I ask: How do we create more trauma-informed writing programs that are equitable and sustainable? At its best, current trauma-informed approaches make space for trauma in learning and working; at its worst, trauma-informed approaches further marginalize individuals and communities who already face substantial barriers while burning out those who try to help. I present a framework for trauma-informed writing program administration (TI-WPA) that combines trauma-informed care principles with disability justice activism (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Sins Invalid, 2019). By rooting trauma-informed principles in disability justice's anti-ableist and antiracist activism, TI-WPA becomes a community effort

where all faculty and administrators are responsible for trauma-informed practices and have equal access to trauma-informed support. This approach can ultimately make trauma-informed work inclusive for all who need it and more sustainable for those who enact it.

Trauma-Informed Approaches in Education

Faced with the presence of trauma in the writing classroom and writing program, I turned to research to answer questions like "How do I teach writing in the midst of trauma?" and "How do I continue to show up to the classroom, one of the locations of my own trauma?" I found some initially comforting answers in trauma-informed pedagogy, answers that validated the pain that I saw and felt in writing classrooms. Although there is not a single definition of trauma-informed pedagogy, there are some shared premises.

First, trauma is widespread. 57.8% of adults have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE) such as abuse, food and housing insecurity, or a family death (Giano, Wheeler, & Hubach, 2020), a statistic that does not account for traumatic experiences that occur in adulthood. Second, individuals who have experienced trauma may experience various degrees of physical, mental, emotional, social, behavioral, and learning effects (Felitti et al., 1998). Finally, trauma is not a singular event. Traumatic responses can compound due to new and continuing traumatic events, including secondary exposures to trauma. Even during recovery, trauma survivors may experience stress responses when they encounter situations similar to past traumatic events, an experience known as retraumatization.

Given the prevalence and effects of trauma on learners, trauma-informed pedagogies (TIPs) seek to create educational environments for students who have experienced trauma and may have traumatic stress disorders. Trauma-informed educator Alex Shevrin Venet (2021) offers four general principles of TIP that can be adapted to various classes and students: predictability, flexibility, connection, and empowerment. Venet encourages educators to provide consistent structure and transparency in the classroom (predictability) while also working with individual students to meet their socioemotional and learning needs as they may change from day to day or over time (flexibility). Educators should also establish healthy relationships with students and encourage peer relationships (connection), while students should feel that they have some agency in the class and can make choices related to their learning (empowerment). Notably, TIPs do not attempt to diagnose or treat students' trauma but instead seek to consciously design

learning environments in which all students can succeed, regardless of whether they have or have not experienced trauma.

Writing instructors have increasingly adopted trauma-informed writing pedagogy (TIWP) due to the nature and structure of writing classes. The small class size and frequent, meaningful interactions with peers and instructors can result in students disclosing traumatic experiences. Trauma-informed practices already align with many "best practices" in writing pedagogy, like active learning, transparent assignment design, backward design, and Universal Design for Learning. In one of the few published articles on TIWP, Melissa Tayles (2021) offers two components of her own TIWP practices: the instructor as a buffer and classrooms as psychologically safer spaces. In her role as a buffer, Tayles discusses topics such as mental health, coping strategies, and resilience with students throughout the semester. Psychologically safer classrooms attempt to avoid triggering or retraumatizing those who have experienced trauma. Tayles cultivates a psychologically safer writing classroom by removing authoritarian language from course materials, changing conferencing procedures to be more egalitarian and comfortable for students and herself, and providing a clear structure for class sessions. By making relatively small changes like replacing syllabus language that mandates ("students *will* do") with more invitational phrasing ("you have the opportunity to . . ."), Tayles fosters connection and empowerment for students who may have experienced trauma. TIWP recognizes the effects of stress and trauma in the learning process and helps students to develop their own health(ier) strategies.

A student may be fortunate enough to have one faculty member like Tayles, but the student will likely encounter other instructors and institutional barriers that are not trauma-aware and may even, inadvertently, retraumatize or exacerbate symptoms of trauma exposure. Instead, a programmatic commitment to trauma-informed practice is necessary. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) explains that a trauma-informed program, organization, or system

> **realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; **recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and **responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively **resist re-traumatization**. (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 9)

In a trauma-informed organization, all organization members share basic knowledge about trauma's prevalence and its effects on individuals and communities. All members recognize signs of trauma and respond to

trauma within their respective roles. Furthermore, the organization's structure, policies, and procedures reflect the knowledge of trauma-informed practices. Finally, trauma-informed organizations attempt to prevent retraumatization of both clients and practitioners.

Trauma-informed approaches to educational administration have emerged primarily in K–12 settings but increasingly in higher education. Trauma-informed schools integrate trauma-informed practices into the school culture, classrooms, administrative levels, and faculty and staff strategies so that all feel safe, welcomed, and supported (Cole et al., 2005). Drawing on the work in K–12 scholarship, writing studies scholars have called for TI-WPA to extend trauma-informed support to all students, faculty, and administrators in writing programs (Blackburn, 2022; Clinnin, 2021). Writing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial protests, Jessie Blackburn (2022) encourages WPAs to use a trauma-informed approach to "build [trauma-informed] professional development for their faculty; lead trauma-informed program initiatives; conduct curriculum mapping for trauma-sensitive matter; and create intersectional, responsible, and culturally sensitive responses" (Conclusions section, para. 1).

The 1 October 2017 shooting a few miles away from my institution initiated my commitment to becoming a trauma-informed WPA as I struggled to manage my own trauma response while also supporting students and instructors as they responded to and, eventually, recovered from that traumatic event. Over the past six years, through deaths, campus violence, and pandemics, I took actions to recognize, respond to, and recover from trauma in the writing program that align with Tayles's and Blackburn's respective suggestions. I removed the programmatic punitive attendance policy to establish a more flexible one so that students did not fail based on a set number of class absences. I facilitated trauma-informed professional development events for faculty and staff across campus as the institution returned to face-to-face operations. I organized department resource fairs and invited the campus psychological center, disability resource center, student support triage team, and other local resource centers to present to graduate teaching assistants, part-time instructors, and full-time faculty. I created resource guides for students that listed institutional and community organizations that could provide financial and emotional support and a complementary guide for instructors that listed organizations that could assist their physical, mental, and financial health; printed copies of the one-page guides were placed in every instructor's office space. These efforts created a general program awareness of trauma, helped instructors understand their role when working with a student in distress, and made referral

resources easily available. And yet, it never felt like enough, and it never felt like these actions were arcing toward justice.

If not implemented with equity and sustainability in mind, TIP can perpetuate existing social inequities (Dutro, 2019; Venet, 2021). TIP can also operate from a medicalized perspective of disability. Oprah Winfrey and Bruce D. Perry's (2021) recent NYT best-selling book on trauma asks, "What happened to you?" The question is a common one that perpetuates the idea that there was an event, a catastrophe, a crisis, and ultimately an injury that has fundamentally changed one's ability to think, learn, and retain information. From this neurological understanding of trauma emerges a deficit perspective that compares those who have experienced trauma to normative assumptions about learning. TIP guides list "symptoms" such as challenges focusing, retaining, and recalling information; challenges with attendance; challenges with anxiety; and challenges with emotional regulation (Davidson, 2017). These are challenges that so many students (and instructors) experience, but in the context of trauma, these challenges become a list of symptoms, a list of ways that the traumatized learner is neurologically different from their peers, and a list of ways that a traumatized learner cannot succeed in a neurotypical classroom without accommodations. TIP can problematically identify the "problem" as the student who has experienced trauma instead of the real problems: an inaccessible learning environment and a traumatizing society.

Trauma becomes a lens through which we see not only individuals but also their communities. Elizabeth Dutro writes, "it is a slippery slope between identifying trauma in a child's life and ascribing pathology to children, families, and communities" (2019, p. 33). An individual who has experienced trauma represents their entire community, whether that community is of veterans, LGBTQIA+, low-income households, or families of color. There is the potential to ascribe the trauma to the community itself rather than the systemic conditions that cause or make trauma more likely. By focusing only on individuals, the root of the trauma, their need for accommodations, and the pathology of their communities as inherently deviant, there is no need to confront the traumatizing and oppressive structures and systems. There is no need to build a radically equitable, accessible, and caring society.

My own experience with TIP demonstrates some of the challenges. I work at an institution that serves many of the communities that trauma-informed guides identify as most likely to have experienced trauma. As I presented on trauma-informed education across campus, I heard many well-meaning educators discuss what was "wrong" with our students compared to "normal" students at other institutions (notably, institutions

with a whiter, more affluent student body). I heard how we would need to lower the academic expectations for students because they were "incapable," "damaged," and "broken." I became increasingly aware that trauma-informed scholarship was legitimizing deficit perspectives about our students and their communities.

The sustainability of trauma-informed practice was also called into question. I became the trauma go-to person, essentially serving as a mental health first responder for the writing program and department that far exceeded my role and training. I completed Mental Health First Aid training to be "certified" to recognize signs of distress and to respond appropriately. But in the absence of others in the program, department, and institution who were trauma-aware, let alone practicing trauma-informed approaches, any student or faculty situation that involved the slightest negative emotion or trauma was diverted to me. I referred to my office as the "crying room" because so many people came to my office, shut the door, and broke down. I wanted to help everyone who came to me in need of support, but the emotional labor took a toll (Clinnin, 2020). I was not able to focus on my actual job responsibilities, nor was I feeling safe or satisfied in my position. My own PTSD symptoms were exacerbated by the situations that I encountered; a threatening email sent me into a dissociative episode or a discussion about gun violence would activate an adrenaline surge. I was present less on campus and less present when I was there. In short, I burned out.

Despite these challenges, I remain committed to trauma-informed work. We need trauma-informed practices and practitioners. Trauma will not go away, and ignoring trauma means ignoring the lives and needs of those who experience it. It means ignoring our students, our colleagues, and ourselves. But we need a trauma-informed approach that does not further marginalize or pathologize those who need it. We need a trauma-informed approach that does not try to "fix" those who have experienced trauma by fitting them into normative ideas about ability, productivity, and value. We need a trauma-informed approach that confronts the traumatizing *systems* instead of focusing only on the individuals who have been traumatized. We need a trauma-informed approach that proactively confronts the causes of trauma and does not just react to the effects of trauma. We need a trauma-informed approach that does not burn out or (re)traumatize those who practice it. In the rest of this article, I offer disability justice as a generative framework to help reconceptualize trauma and to develop an equitable and sustainable model of TI-WPA.

Disability Justice and Trauma-Informed Approach

Disability studies approaches to writing program administration are already evident. In their 2016 CWPA keynote address, Remi Yergeau called out the discipline on the structural ableism that excludes people from WPA work, scholarship, and the conference. Yergeau encourages WPAs to start "disabling and cripping and fucking with everything" (2016, p. 160). Similarly, Amy Vidali calls for WPAs to disable writing program administration, an ongoing process of "knowingly and innovatively thinking through and with disability . . . making our writing program work accessible and inclusive" to "innovate, include, and transgress expected and exclusionary norms" (2015, p. 33). I take Yergeau and Vidali's calls to examine the ways that structural oppression is enacted within writing programs and to take radical action. I turn to disability justice scholarship as a framework to understand trauma in more equitable ways and to enact trauma-informed practices that are more equitable and sustainable while working towards more radical societal change.

Disability justice emerges from disabled, queers of color activists working individually and in collectives such as Sins Invalid and the Disability Justice Collective. According to activist-artist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, disability justice is a political movement that "centers sick and disabled people of color, queer and trans disabled folks of color" (2018, p. 22). Disability justice is an active commitment to eradicating structural ableism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, colonialism, and other forms of oppression that harm all throughout society. A disability justice framework strives to create a future of collective liberation and access through intersectional social justice activism. Previous traditions of disability activism sought full inclusion of disabled people into "mainstream" society, most notably through retrofits and accommodations that offered limited access and necessitated individuals fight for every entry point into an innately inaccessible society. Disability justice seeks the radical recreation of the world so that disabled people do not need to adapt to normative standards of how to move, work, learn, live, and be. Instead, disabled people can fully engage in the world in ways that are most comfortable for them in the moment, knowing that their access needs and preferences will change over time.

The goal of disability justice is universal, collective access that will lead to universal, collective liberation. Disability justice activists co-create this radically accessible society through shared principles of intersectionality, leadership of those most impacted, anti-capitalistic politics, cross-movement solidarity, recognition of wholeness, sustainability, commitment to

cross-disability solidarity, interdependence, collective access, and collective liberation (Sins Invalid, 2019, pp. 23–26). Notably, disability justice begins with intersectionality as the core premise that "each person has multiple identities, and that each identity can be a site of privilege or oppression" (Sins Invalid, 2019, p. 23). Just as important is the tenet that all people are valuable as they are. Relationships are foundational in disability justice. Building relationships and coalitions across identities, struggles, and communities will create a society that is radically accessible and non-exploitative. This work is achieved by centering those who are multiply oppressed within current society. Sustainability is a key concern as activism is an ongoing process, but collective action and care allow individuals to attend to their needs while the work continues.

Disability justice does not explicitly define itself as trauma-informed, but the presence of trauma is inherent within disability justice work, and applications of disability justice to trauma offer the following insights:

- **Trauma is a systemic problem:** Disability justice expands the focus of trauma from an individual experience to a broader societal critique of the conditions that enabled or exacerbated trauma. Trauma is widespread in current society due to historical and contemporary structural oppression, exploitation, and violence against individuals and communities, not because of individual or community pathologies.
- **Trauma is disparately experienced:** Disabled, queer crips of color and their communities are more likely to have experienced traumas due to their multiply oppressed identities. This increased likelihood of trauma exposure is due to inherent racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, transphobia, and other structural forms of oppression. Trauma effects are exacerbated by the frequency, duration, and intensity of traumatic events. Trauma effects may be shared and compounded across communities and generations.
- **Trauma can be disabling:** Trauma exposure can affect the holistic wellness of individuals and communities. Trauma survivors and communities may have different and diverse needs, behaviors, and preferences, some of which may be painful. Disability justice rejects the medicalized perspective of trauma that seeks to "cure" trauma survivors, emphasizing that trauma survivors are inherently worthy as they are.
- **Trauma is not a deficit:** Like all disabilities, trauma exposure is not deviant but a divergent way of engaging with the world. Trauma survivors are not inferior. People who have experienced trauma may not conform to societal norms and expectations, nor should they need to.

> Trauma survivors should be able to engage in society as they need or want without being criticized, pitied, or excluded.

A disability justice approach to trauma means supporting trauma survivors while simultaneously working to eradicate traumatizing conditions and systems. Disability justice activists recognize that this work is demanding, ongoing, and essential, so such activism must also be sustainable. The call to action and the principles of disability justice can guide this trauma-informed work in writing programs.

Equitable and Sustainable Trauma-Informed Writing Program Administration

In the following section, I consider what a trauma-informed writing program administrative practice rooted in disability justice could be. Disability justice activism is a continual imagining and striving towards a just and accessible future, a process that is never completed and always ongoing. These efforts toward disability justice in TI-WPA are nascent. I offer them in the hopes that others will further expand on this work in their own programs and scholarship.

The foundation of TI-WPA is trauma literacy, which I define as knowledge about trauma that a practitioner uses to understand a situation, act appropriately, and sustain these efforts over time. Previous instantiations of trauma literacy, including the professional development offerings that I facilitated, may have focused primarily on helping others to identify signs of trauma, retrofit their classrooms, and engage in self-care without contextualizing trauma within larger systems of oppression or striving for radical changes. Trauma literacy from a disability justice perspective employs an intersectional approach to fully realize the extent to which trauma is intertwined with racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, transphobia, colonialism, and other forms of oppression. Developing an intersectional trauma literacy requires practitioners to engage with culturally-relevant and sustaining approaches to trauma work,[2] not only the dominant Western model of trauma that emerges from military research on the experiences of predominantly white, male soldiers returning from war. More intersectional and culturally-grounded trauma work expands what is considered trauma, how trauma may be differentially experienced, and how to support trauma survivors in culturally relevant and sustaining ways.

Trauma literacy is not inert knowledge but must be implemented in an activist practice of understanding, acting, and sustaining. Returning to the SAMHSA's definition of trauma-informed organizations presented earlier, I build on the actions contained within the definition (the "4R's") to offer

six actions that can guide the practice of equitable, sustainable TI-WPA: realize, recognize, respond, resist, rest, and reciprocate. In table 1, I pair the actions with implementation suggestions within the work of writing program administration.

Table 1
6 R's of Trauma-Informed Writing Program Administration

6 R's Action	Writing Program Implementation
Realize how trauma relates to identity, power, and oppression	• Establish relationships with campus and community groups (identity affiliate groups such as veterans) to understand the experiences and needs within local context • Offer professional development that names the root of trauma in racism, sexism, ableism, colonialism, capitalism, anti-Semitism, etc. • Understand how writing classrooms and programs can (re)traumatize students, faculty, and staff, especially with regard to linguistic injustice and exploitative labor conditions
Recognize signs and effects of trauma on individuals and communities	• Establish relationships with campus and community social service providers (counseling services; women, LGBTQIA+, disability centers) or institutional departments (social work, counseling) • Facilitate compensated professional development (ideally offered by local providers) for all faculty to develop trauma literacy
Respond to individual traumas and structural causes of trauma	• Form compensated student and faculty-directed communities of practice to review program policies and curricula and to recommend new materials that are accessible, transparent, and flexible for faculty and students • Create accessible and usable resource lists for students and faculty • Develop writing program crisis response plans (see Clinnin 2021)

6 R's Action	Writing Program Implementation
Resist traumatizing systems	• Review programmatic policies for placement, attendance, grading, staffing, and scheduling to avoid (re)traumatization • Advocate for humane labor conditions and benefits for all faculty • Practice fugitive administrative rhetorics (see Dibrell, Hollinger, and Shelledy in this issue)
Rest intentionally	• Set and maintain boundaries to protect personal time and space (email hours, set working hours) while recognizing that these boundaries may change over time • Create a program environment where urgency does not mean immediacy and practice slow(er) responses • Engage in slow, reflective program work by being intentional about program priorities and establishing realistic deadlines and milestones
Reciprocate through caring relationships	• Center people (students, faculty, administrators) in all program decisions and actions • Engage in open dialogue with all campus and local partners, including student, faculty, and community members; be willing to be called out or in, and make changes appropriately

The first two actions, realize and recognize, develop trauma literacy throughout the writing program. Drawing on disability justice and culturally-responsive trauma studies, TI-WPA practitioners **realize** how trauma relates to identity, power, and oppression. They can also **recognize** the signs and effects of trauma on individuals and communities, understanding that these signs and effects will vary across contexts. The signs and effects are not a diagnostic tool used to identify and punish deviance from norms but instead should be treated holistically as observations to prompt further curiosity and conversation. These observations may demonstrate non-normative ways of engaging rather than a greater circumstance that requires additional discussion and response. The next two actions, respond and resist, compel TI-WPA practitioners to address individual needs while also combatting systemic issues. TI-WPA practitioners **respond** to individual traumas and structural causes of trauma. They also **resist** traumatizing systems and strive to create new systems that do not traumatize or retraumatize

students, faculty, or administrators.[3] The final two actions, rest and reciprocate, contribute to the sustainability of TI-WPA initiatives and practitioners. Encountering trauma and being in a community with those who have experienced trauma while simultaneously managing one's own physical, mental, emotional, and other needs is difficult. This work requires intentional **rest,** as difficult as that concept may be for WPAs. Rest is possible when TI-WPAs **reciprocate** the loving labor of caring for themselves and others through collectives. Reciprocating means building care collectives so that all involved share the responsibility for and benefits of a caring community that is working towards a radically just future.

In my work as a trauma-informed WPA, I have attempted, imperfectly and incompletely, to create a program where all members understand, act guided by, and sustain trauma-informed approaches. Many of these actions remain the same as my prior trauma-informed actions: connecting campus resources, reviewing program policies, and showing empathy to students and faculty. What has changed is how these actions are contextualized within a larger inclusive, collaborative, and programmatic framework. Understanding is not simply something that I as the "trauma person" am solely responsible for. I create new professional development materials that focus on broader trauma literacy and move away from prescriptive checklists that identify "deviant" behaviors. I encourage others to notice people from a position of curiosity, openness, and care rather than investigation and evaluation. I still offer campus resources and other trauma-informed materials but with greater awareness of their limitations and their caveats. I more intentionally cultivate relationships with local community resources that provide culturally relevant care.

More of my attention has been devoted to rest and reciprocation, which I am admittedly uncomfortable with. Instead of immediately acting, I slow down so that I can rest and reflect. I ask questions instead of making statements. In the time of accelerated learning, what does a writing curriculum that is intentionally decelerated look like? How do we build in strategic rest, pauses, and contemplation rather than pack a curriculum full? How do we care at a programmatic level rather than relying on individuals to attempt self-care in a capitalistic system that seeks to extract and exploit as much as possible? What does a writing program that is a community of care look like, act like, and feel like? TI-WPA is my current, imperfect answer, and the practice is following.

Not Really a Coda

I organize a memorial for the late part-time instructor. It is the most difficult thing I have done in my time as a WPA. There were fond memories, bittersweet reminisces, and tears as we collectively grieved and celebrated. What I thought was an opportunity for closure for part-time instructors was also for me.

I spend a day contacting every university connection and resource I know to help the student with a sick family member. I speak to allies for undocumented students. I talk to lawyers. I compile community resources and share my research with the graduate student. She is grateful and passes them along. The student disappears by the end of the semester. I hope the baby is well.

I talk to the distressed graduate student. The lack of accessible, affordable, and ongoing mental health care is frustrating. A group of junior faculty, department staff members, and graduate students join together to be a support network. I watch the student cross the stage to receive their diploma. I worry about what happens next for them when even the fragile safety net that graduate school provides is gone.

I keep going. I keep going in the face of this trauma. I continue to watch and reach out to those who need it. The difference now is that I do not go alone. I invite colleagues to the work. They watch and reach out to me. They recognize my tendencies; they can tell when I begin to lose my center. They care. They force me to rest, echoing my own admonitions and care to all in the writing program. It is not perfect. It is imperfect. It is enough. For now.

Notes

1. Throughout this article, I use the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) broad definition of trauma as "an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by as individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (2014, p. 7).

2. As a starting point, I recommend Renee Linklater's book *Decolonizing Trauma Work* for Indigenous approaches to trauma and Alex Shevrin Venet's book *Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education* for an education-focused overview.

3. Resistance is not futile, but it is complicated when WPAs are part of higher education institutions that are built on trauma from their inception (built on land stolen from Indigenous communities and built by the labor of enslaved African peoples) and continue to perpetuate trauma on students (marketing access while

gatekeeping and excluding students and burdening students with insurmountable debt), faculty (relying on contingent faculty labor without providing adequate pay, benefits, or respect), and communities (continuing expansionist land acquisitions and exploiting communities as research subjects without reciprocal care). I encourage you to read "Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics" by Denae Dibrell, Andrew Hollinger, and Maggie Shelledy in this issue.

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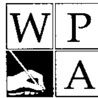

The Quiet Revolution: How Newer WPAs Are Shifting the Profession

Kristi Murray Costello

Abstract

Drawing from interviews with twenty-five WPAs categorized into two cohorts, Newer WPAs (N-WPAs) and Long-Term WPAs (LT-WPAs), this article compares and contrasts the expectations and varied approaches to self-care, self-preservation, and boundaries of LT- and N-WPAs during the pandemic (specifically the interview period, August 2021–July 2022) and the origins of their approaches. In addition to providing a snapshot of WPA life during the pandemic, the data suggest that while many LT-WPAs are still struggling with life-work balance, the conversations our field has been having regarding the affective dimensions of WPA work and the importance of boundaries and self-care have extended beyond field lore to become an important, intentional, and consistent consideration for N-WPAs as they negotiate and navigate their roles.

Throughout my career, I have reminded my colleagues and students that our jobs do not love us back. Over the past few years, these conversations went from being shared in the hallways and over coffee to being woven into the fabric of our scholarship and graduate courses. I now encourage students to recognize the emotions and emotional labor of our work, interrogate neoliberal rhetoric and myths about productivity, and examine the role of work and carework in their lives. However, I am still behind on implementing these recommendations in my own life. Since conducting this study, I have started to hypothesize that it is because I have so many habits to unlearn, disrupt, and break. These problematic habits became clearer to me during the pandemic when the lines between home and work blurred even further, so in January 2021, when I learned that I would be teaching a PhD seminar in WPA the following spring, 2022, I wondered, *What does the work of a WPA look like today*? *How can I best prepare future WPAs to develop sustainable and healthy habits from the start of their careers*?

In early fall 2021, I began informally interviewing WPAs to learn about what their positions look like in terms of tasks and workload since the beginning of the pandemic, the emotional labor of their work, the role carework was playing in their day-to-day jobs and lives, and how they were doing and feeling in their positions. I also asked them about their

relationship with work, its evolutions, and its origins. The conversations were surprisingly emotional and organic, and after just a few interviews, I opted to seek IRB approval and design a larger-scale qualitative study.[1] Though I certainly continued to consider how I could redesign and reimagine my WPA class, the utility and impact of the interviews with newer, more recently hired and more experienced WPAs extended far beyond my future class and helped me begin to reimagine a healthier, more sustainable future for myself and the field at large.

My first four interviews were with Long-Term WPAs (LT-WPAs) who had been working as WPAs at the same four-year institution for seven or more years at the time of our interview (though some may have been administrators but not WPAs and/or not in the same position the whole time). Having felt rather overwhelmed by the personal and professional challenges attributable to the pandemic—illness, isolation, fear, uncertainty, and concerns over university policies, to name just a few—we assumed Newer WPAs (N-WPAs), especially those hired in 2019 and 2020, must really be struggling. We had difficulty imagining how we would have negotiated the quickly changing and ever-evolving needs, processes, and protocols for nearly all aspects of WPA work that we experienced during the height of the pandemic if we had not already had ample experience managing them under more "normal" circumstances. Tasks like scheduling courses, allocating classrooms, supporting faculty members who were out sick, consulting with faculty about course attendance and assignment submission policies, and communicating university policies (such as shifting mask mandates) had become more complicated; additionally, for many of us, our duties had expanded to securing access to technology and Wi-Fi for students and faculty and providing expanded pedagogical support for online teaching. As one of the LT-WPAs mused, "I don't think I would have made it through this past year if I didn't know how these things [worked] unmired by crisis. I've been doing this work a long time and it was still so . . . it was just so much."

However, despite our initial hypothesis leading into the study that N-WPAs—more specifically WPAs who started working in WPA positions between fall 2019 and fall 2021—must be overwhelmed and maybe heading toward burnout, the N-WPAs I interviewed were composed and even optimistic (for example, fourteen of sixteen N-WPAs used a positive word to describe their outlook at the time of the interview).[2] Though this data represents just a snapshot into WPA life during the pandemic and, as such, cannot be used to make a generalizable claim about workload or approaches before or after this period, I do think they point to an inductive argument I feel comfortable making: The conversations our field has been

having regarding emotional labor, the importance of boundaries and self-care, and the affective dimensions of WPA work have officially extended beyond field lore to become an important and consistent consideration for N-WPAs as they negotiate their roles as WPAs. The data further suggest that while LT-WPAs may still be struggling to enact our own meaningful steps toward self-care and self-preservation, many of us are embedding these concepts into our mentorship of newer and prospective WPAs, the graduate courses we teach, and the trainings we lead, and it is making a difference. That is not to say that these N-WPAs have achieved ideal life-work balance but rather that they are actively working to develop healthy habits and thinking frequently and intentionally about how emotional labor and carework factor into their positions.[3]

About the Study

At present, this study consists of interviews with thirty-one WPAs at various ranks and levels of experience from a range of institution sizes and types, including public and private schools, a religious-affiliated school, three minority-majority serving institutions, a historically black college, a military school, and one for-profit institution. For the purpose of this article, I will be focusing on twenty-five of the thirty-one participants broken into two distinct cohorts because of the consistent commonalities among those included in each cohort and the differences between the two cohorts. Nine were WPAs who had been WPAs or faculty administrators at the same four-year institution for seven or more years at the time of the interview (LT-WPAs), and sixteen were WPAs hired at four-year institutions since 2019 who were nearly all recent graduates in their first full-time WPA position (N-WPAs).[4]

The interviews were each scheduled for one hour (though interestingly, many participants offered to speak for longer than the allotted time) and conducted over Zoom. Interviewees chose a pseudonym to protect their identities and self-disclosed the identity factors and cultural locations that they felt impacted their work. I urged them to only share what they felt comfortable sharing, recognizing two factors: (1) standard demographic questions can be constraining and intrusive and (2) our colleagues who occupy multiple historically marginalized identities and cultural locations, particularly BIPOC, are vulnerable to having their identity recognized due to the current and consistent homogeneity of the WPA field, especially when combined with other data such as institution size and location. I shared the interview questions in advance, including a model for the identity question (e.g., "I identify as a queer cis white woman and a first-generation college student with a medical disability"). A full list of the demographic questions can be found in the appendix.

The interviewees' positions during the interview period included directors and coordinators of composition, first-year writing, writing and

communication centers, and WAC/WID. Some positions included overseeing departments, programs, or other university writing-related initiatives, including upper-level or graduate writing, dual enrollment, general tutoring centers, and general education programs. Three of the participants included in this study were serving as co-directors, associate directors, or assistant directors. Though I will provide some additional detail about the two cohorts, I will not connect and combine university context, position information, and demographic data in order to respect the anonymity of study participants. Please note that the identity markers participants used to describe themselves are not mutually exclusive.

Of the twenty-five participants, one identified as Asian, four identified as Black and/or African American, two identified as Latino/a/Hispanic, fourteen identified as White, and four identified as multiracial, with all four respondents who referred to themselves as multiracial noting concerns that their responses could be traced by colleagues at their institutions and in the field. Fourteen of the interviewees identified as women, seven identified as men, and two identified as nonbinary. Four identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, and two identified as being disabled. Lastly, approximately 90% of interviewees had completed all requirements for a PhD in writing studies or a related field or a doctorate in education at the time of the interview. The nine LT-WPAs had all been WPAs or faculty administrators at the same four-year institution for seven or more years at the time of the interview except for sabbatical or leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), though their particular administrative positions may have changed through the time period. The sixteen N-WPAs had each been hired at four-year institutions since 2019 and were nearly all (thirteen of sixteen) recent graduates in their first full-time WPA position (see the appendix for the full list of demographic questions).

Except for one LT-WPA who identified as a poet and another who preceded their gender with the adjective "old," the LT-WPA cohort shared no additional identity markers. As a group, the N-WPAs shared much more detailed identity and cultural location information than their LT-WPA counterparts. For example, participants in the N-WPA cohort included a range of markers, such as: "queer anarchist queen," "pregnant," "blue collar," "middle class," "first-generation college student" (two), "raising feminist sons," "South Asian-American child of immigrants," and "grew up poor in a small town." The increased diversity of this cohort is hopefully a sign of growing diversity in WPA as a field and an increased understanding of the myriad ways our identities and cultures shape how we view and experience the world. Likewise, the homogeneity of the LT-WPA cohort is surely a limitation in both my study and WPA as a field. If I continue this research

or further explore generational field differences among WPAs, I will need to further address this gap and increase the diversity of participants.

I went into each interview having shared with the participants ahead of time a series of fourteen questions that asked them about their training in and experience with WPA work, the tasks they feel they spend the bulk of their time doing, the priorities and expectations of their positions and who sets them, and the extent to which they engage in self-care and direct carework in their positions (see the appendix for full list of interview questions). Based on their responses, I added some basic follow-up questions and omitted others; as the interviews progressed, I found that some participants anticipated or responded to not-yet-asked questions, negating the need for me to ask them. Also, because responses for some questions took more time than I had anticipated, some questions were not asked due to time constraints.

As the interviews were in progress, I took notes and time-stamped quotes of interest in the live transcript to return to. These actions increased and became more intentional as I conducted and transcribed more interviews because I started recognizing more connections among the interviewees, particularly those shared by participants of relative experience. When I completed the interviews, I saved the transcripts under the respondents' chosen pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and deleted the videos. Then, I engaged in open and axial coding informed by grounded theory methods (Charmaz) and used descriptive codes (Saldaña). In this article, I will explore findings derived from the following coding clusters: "Preparation and Experience;" "The Work and the Workload;" "Expectations and Perceptions of the Work;" "Carework;" "Emotional Labor, and Life-Work Balance;" and "Reflections."

Findings and Analysis

Though there are several avenues yet to explore based on this data, in this article, I will discuss LT-WPAs' and N-WPAs' varied approaches to self-care, self-preservation, and boundaries and their origins as well as the differences in the tasks expected—or at least perceived to be expected—of LT- and N-WPAs during the pandemic (specifically during the interview period, August 2021-July 2022).

Great Expectations: Pandemic Expectations for Newer and Long-Term WPAs

While one of the LT-WPAs who was interviewed late in the study has recently moved into a new role at their institution and described themselves as having been previously worn out but recently "rejuvenated," their eight

LT-WPA counterparts all shared that they were some version of tired, ranging from "feeling meh" to "utterly exhausted." Five of the nine LT-WPAs referred to themselves as "burnt out," with two of them inserting colorful expletives in between. Two of the others characterized themselves as approaching burnout. As Jacob Babb points out in "Seeing the Forest and the Trees: A Rhizomatic Metaphor for Writing Program Administration," "According to the National Census on Writing, the vast majority of WPAs do not maintain their roles for more than ten years, with most serving in those roles for five years or fewer" (37), so perhaps these feelings are typical at this stage in a WPA's career. In fact, maybe some of the LT-WPAs even stayed for longer than they had intended because of the pandemic, which might also play into these feelings.

Interviews illustrated that the positions of LT-WPAs became far more complicated by the pandemic, which could be contributing to LT-WPA burnout. It could also be argued that many of the N-WPAs' positions—or at least the expectations of them in their positions—had been somewhat simplified due to their newness to the position and the pandemic. All the LT-WPAs mentioned at least one entirely new routine task or role that had been added to their proverbial already-full plate since spring 2020 due to pandemic conditions; many shared several examples, such as reverting to manual scheduling rather than central scheduling, moving from committee or peer evaluations back to WPA-centered evaluations of faculty performance, and subbing for ill tutors and colleagues. Several also noted the heavy labors—emotional and workload—of increased austerity measures, such as taking on an additional role because of a vacated position or taking on an extra class. This might also shed light on why eight of the sixteen N-WPAs stepped into their positions due to the departure of the previous WPA; two others stepped into assistant or associate WPA positions during the height of the pandemic, with one noting that their stepping in was to "keep the [WPA] from walking."

To the contrary, many of the N-WPAs interviewed (nine of sixteen) were told by their supervisors upon entering their positions that their primary role was some version of "keeping the lights on." Though these N-WPAs shared excitement about improving their programs by taking on curriculum revisions—particularly revisions aimed at making curricula, policies, and spaces more inclusive, accessible, and antiracist—building communities of practice and collegiality, and developing more robust trainings and campus partnerships, most of them also shared that they were not given explicit priorities from their supervisors or upper administrators beyond maintaining the status quo, which may have allowed them more freedom to assess for themselves what needed to be done first and more autonomy

in setting their own priorities and timelines. One N-WPA said the message they got from upper administration was simply "we need better writing support" but felt that her "top priority was kind of—do whatever you want; we're just so happy you're here." Another N-WPA shared, "Everyone [had] their ideas, but none of them tried to pressure or push priorities."

Of course, this was not the case for everyone. One N-WPA discussed that her institution "kept pushing the curriculum [work] because it was a massive overhaul." She explained to her supervisors that such work would take time and gave them a schedule and timeline with benchmarks, and she said it went over well. One of the more experienced N-WPAs who had already begun a course redesign initiative when the pandemic hit the U.S. felt that "the pandemic accelerated everything . . . led us to make two years of progress in a semester and a half," which they characterized as "both great and challenging." This was somewhat of an anomaly, though; many of the N-WPAs talked about the pandemic slowing down their initial plans. Like their LT-WPA colleagues, N-WPAs noted keeping up with email and attending virtual meetings as the sorts of tasks that took up much of their time and wished they could spend more time doing more visionary work. However, all of them seemed to be making progress on at least one tangible program priority that was important to them, which was not the case for most of their LT-WPA colleagues.

Readers may note the lack of conversation about the conflicts many WPAs experienced as our duties and values clashed with the priorities of university officials during the pandemic, especially as universities reopened and sought to demonstrate a return to business as usual. WPAs encountered resistance as they worked to keep faculty members, graduate tutors, TAs, students, and themselves safe. While these experiences and concerns came up in many of the interviews, it was not a focus of my questions or a topic covered extensively in any of the interviews. Perhaps unsurprisingly, data illustrated that WPAs of all types and with varied years of experience encountered similar kinds and levels of frustration with university approaches and directives during the interview period, particularly during points of policy-related and logistical transitions.

Saving Space and Showing Grace: Life-Work Balance for Newer and Long-Term WPAs

The N-WPAs showed inspiring intentionality when it came to considering their well-being and setting boundaries, and all of them shared concrete steps they take toward life-work balance. Just one N-WPA shared significantly fewer steps than their peers and was also the only N-WPA who did

not mention having instituted specific, intentional email boundaries, even though they acknowledged needing and intending to. Fourteen of the sixteen N-WPAs have set quiet hours for email and, of those fourteen, nearly all of them said that they rarely read or respond to emails over the weekends. Several of them have developed set schedules, which include at least one day of working from home, and only work within their scheduled hours, and nearly all of them leave early at least one day a week for something personal. One N-WPA said, "on Fridays I work from home doing whatever needs to be done and let the naps come if they need to;" a few of the other N-WPAs noted having a similar system. One N-WPA holds an office hour during her lunch in her campus cafeteria as a way of engaging socially and professionally on her own terms, so she feels more comfortable closing her door at other times. The same N-WPA also shared about her journey learning how not to think about work when she is not working. She said that the physical part—leaving work and going home—was simple, but "leaving work at work," or what she referred to as "the mental part," was far more difficult and took practice. Another interviewee shared, "Don't let [WPA work] bleed into your other work and your life. This might mean not doing as much. This might mean taking shortcuts. Saying no to things. This means I went into the job with the intent of keeping it small." This sentiment about intentionally keeping the workload manageable from the start was shared by several of the N-WPAs.

However, what I was most impressed by was the way that the N-WPAs have taken actions to address the simple but difficult realities of WPA life that so many of us experience: managing the ebb and flow of the work and expecting the unexpected. Several of the N-WPAs talked about the ways they save space for the "fire of the day" through not overscheduling themselves, limiting the number of meetings they will schedule in a day, scheduling extra "empty" office hours (or what one N-WPA called their "study hall"), and considering "unexpected" labor as they develop their strategic plans. One N-WPA discussed how her role as a WPA and her gender played into this approach, saying that as a woman, "if a student has to cry, they'll cry to us. They don't go talk to the chair [in this case, a man]. They come to us, and so I make time for that." The same N-WPA talked about how she "works a little bit all the time" and spreads out larger projects, so typically busy times of the year do not feel as busy. Several of the N-WPAs discussed taking advantage of slower weeks and using them to "fill [their] reserves." Though I expect that it will only increase with the release of the recent collection, Graziano et al.'s *Making Administration Visible: Data-Driven Advocacy for Understanding the Labor of Writing Program Administration*, I was also thrilled to see how many of them are not only documenting their

task-based labors—meetings attended, classes observed, evaluation letters written, trainings conducted, disputes mediated, etc.—but also their emotional labor, which I hope to detail further in a future publication.

A recurring theme that came up in N-WPA interviews but only once in LT-WPA interviews was grace. The N-WPAs showed kindness to themselves and a willingness to cut themselves some slack. One respondent shared, "It's okay to mess up. In fact, you will mess up. Like repeatedly. And life will go on. Be kind to others when they mess up too." Another participant said, "I usually get it done, but sometimes I don't . . . There was a time I'd lose sleep over it but not anymore. I like what I do, but I love myself." Five of the sixteen N-WPAs specifically mentioned giving themselves some version of "a pass" when it comes to writing by taking more time to complete their dissertation, revise their dissertation for publication, or write original scholarly work, with three of these WPAs having made an active decision to give themselves this space before officially beginning the job. One of the N-WPAs said that the year of our interview was her "Year of Nope." Additionally, several N-WPAs discussed integrating walking, yoga, boxing, running, and other activities into their workday, and almost every one of them mentioned activities they engage in outside work, such as hiking, dancing, performing music, and playing indoor soccer. Many of the N-WPAs also discussed experiencing joy and relaxation through play and making; participants mentioned video games, board games, trivia nights, knitting, crocheting, creating costumes, painting, reupholstering and repurposing furniture, and baking.

Even though the questions were the same, the interviews with LT-WPAs included few mentions of activities that bring them joy, and their mentions of self-care and life-work balance were more passive and aspirational than active and concrete. Though seven of the nine LT-WPAs shared that they are currently working on "work-life balance" and setting better boundaries with work, only four of them were able to detail any steps they had taken toward doing so. All four of these LT-WPAs noted not working *as many* evenings or weekends as steps they had taken, but only two responded with additional specific strategies used, which included adding a proxy to email when out of the office to decrease the pressure to read and respond and delegating more duties to an assistant.

Discussions with the LT-WPAs quickly evolved into things they *could* do and *hoped* to do the next semester or after an event or milestone like promotion to full professor or leaving their current position, such as taking off work more often for non-emergencies, taking up hobbies, eating dinner each night with their families, leaving the university by a certain time, saying no more often, and reading more for pleasure. As I reflect on their

responses, which, in the interest of full disclosure, I expected would not be so different from my own, it occurs to me that most of the aspirations they noted are not actually self-care but basic boundaries that most workers should be able to expect and feel comfortable setting in the workplace.

Causality & Cautionary Tales: Tracing the Origins of Newer and Long-Term WPAs' Approaches

Some LT-WPA interviewees shared that the strategies they aspire to enact are things they frequently encourage their graduate students to do. This tracks with what the N-WPAs, who were mostly recent graduates, had to say, which leads to potentially the most exciting finding of this study: Interviews with N-WPAs revealed that *all* the N-WPAs had discussed some combination of self-care, burnout, emotional labor, and the affective nature of teaching and WPA work during their graduate experience through mentoring and/or in their coursework. Interestingly, the LT-WPAs I interviewed had not discussed similar concepts during their training and mentorship. After I asked, "Were concepts like burnout and self-care a part of your formal training?" one participant laughed for nearly fifteen seconds. In Laura R. Micciche's 2007 chapter "More than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work," she called for recognition of the materialist conditions of emotional labor in WPA and the importance of mentoring of prospective WPAs. Maybe, together, LT-WPAs and N-WPAs are answering that call. Though none of us were prepared for the pandemic, interviews with N-WPAs indicate that they have been well prepared for the day-to-day realities and affective dimensions of the profession in ways their predecessors were not, which feels like a win.

There was a secondary contributor to N-WPAs' understanding of these concepts. In addition to learning from what their WPA predecessors and mentors had to say about self-care, burnout, and the like, they also watched many of us do the opposite. Though N-WPA respondents, by and large, spoke very highly of their WPA mentors and their influence on them as students, scholars, and administrators, in response to, "Where did your approach to work-life balance come from?" nearly all the respondents in this group of sixteen referenced their mentors' lack of life-work balance as a key motivating factor in their current approaches to self-care and self-preservation. One N-WPA shared, "I saw these people who never left the office or saw their kids. I thought, *I love what I do, but I don't want to be you*. I ended one of my emails to my profs, 'have a great weekend.' and she said, 'I won't, I will be researching all weekend. What is that?'" Others said, "I don't want to be the mad person in the basement," and "This middle-class

position is not worth dying for." The latter N-WPA described, just as several others had, the toll WPA work had on their WPA mentor's body, well-being, mental health, and relationships, but then he shared his gratitude as well: "We're not building these programs. We're retrofitting. Revising. We're coming in later. We're not staying late because [previous WPAs] did this for us and we saw what it did to them. I appreciate them." The subtext behind each of these statements is the same: It is time for mid- and later-career WPAs to be kinder to ourselves

Push Boundaries by Setting Boundaries: Concluding Thoughts and Future Directions

Despite having entered the profession during an unprecedentedly complicated time, the sixteen N-WPAs illustrated through these interviews that not only had they not been "irreparably broken by the pandemic," as one LT-WPA feared, but most of them appeared to be thriving during the interview period, even though they may not necessarily have characterized themselves as such. The N-WPAs are setting boundaries, practicing self-care, and engaging in thoughtful strategic planning with consideration for their own goals, such as tenure, and their ability to achieve these goals while maintaining sustainable program growth factoring in their time, energy, and bandwidth. It seems these approaches come from two main sources: discussions of self-care, emotional labor, burnout, and boundaries in the field with their mentors and in their graduate courses and as a result of seeing the toll the profession has taken on the generation(s) of WPAs before them.

The interviews in this study also illustrate a clear paradigm shift in the field: The unequivocal recognition that our work is emotional and WPAs experience emotional labor based on our identities and cultural locations, institutional contexts, and the profession. As we move forward as a field, I hope we will continue to discuss and be transparent with our students, colleagues, and ourselves about the affective dimensions of WPA work and encourage WPAs to "resist WPA happiness scripts predicated on high workload, constant navigation of political relationships on campus, and the sacrifice of personal relationships off campus" (Adams Wooten 317). We must continue to push back together against the messages that successful WPAs need to be always accessible, always visible, and always at work. This leads to another point illustrated through the interviews—the need for more inter-WPA communication. In the "Reflections" portion of the interview, I asked participants if there was anything they would like to add or share before the interview concluded. Several of them noted at this

time or in an unsolicited email post-interview that the interviews had been "connective" or "connecting" (two participants), more emotional than they had anticipated (three participants), and therapeutic (eleven participants). Though the pandemic was a time of pervasive isolation, even in non-pandemic times, WPA positions can be incredibly isolating. Given the affective nature of our work and the emotional labor we experience, I call on us to create more space(s) to meaningfully connect with one another.

As I mentioned earlier in this article, this data represents a snapshot and a future window to the strange and uncertain times of the pandemic, specifically during the interview period (August 2021–July 2022). Currently, we do not know whether these WPAs' circumstances or the conclusions reached in this study will hold. Therefore, I hope to re-interview at least the sixteen N-WPAs three to five years after their initial interview to see (1) if they are continuing to consider and engage in strategic and sustainable program planning, boundary setting, self-care, and self-preservation; (2) if their interviews change in tone and content to be more like those of the LT-WPAs interviewed in this study; and (3) how and to what extent they embed concepts and conversations about the affective dimensions of our field and professions, self-care, self-preservation, and emotional labor into their training and mentoring of graduate students, colleagues, and prospective WPAs. As I continue working with this rich data, I intend to explore further conceptualizations of identity and WPAs, other potential generational and longitudinal patterns and differences, the roles of gender, sexuality, and age in the emotional labor and carework expectations of WPAs, and how the findings of this and other recent studies can improve graduate-WPA student preparation, support, and mentorship. As a field, I hope these conversations will continue to explore how threats and attacks to BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ lives, same sex marriage, trans rights, reproductive rights, critical race theory, and education directly impact the work and wellbeing of WPAs and contribute to the labors—emotional and otherwise—and realities of their positions.

Increasingly over the past decade, the WPA field has been acknowledging the tolls our work can have on our bodies, relationships, and lives. While LT-WPAs might still be struggling to enact our own meaningful steps toward self-care and self-preservation and are far less likely than our N-WPA colleagues to have had discussions about the affective dimensions of WPA work and how to navigate them when we were students, many of us have been intentionally embedding these concepts into our mentorship of newer and prospective WPAs, the graduate courses we teach, and the trainings we lead. The interview responses of N-WPAs are evidence of the positive impact of these choices and suggest that this recent generation

of WPAs were not only listening but have been reimagining and planning strategies for a better, more sustainable future for themselves and the field that they are now putting into action.

Notes

1. This research was characterized as exempt under Category 2 (reference # 1802960-1).

2. Due to space limitations, I intend to explore data about participants' outlooks entering their positions and at the time of interview elsewhere.

3. During the interviews, a few of the respondents explained that they have reversed this term to better indicate the relative importance of the two. As such, I am trying to use this term in my own life as well, but I will revert to using "work-life balance" when referring to the interview questions since that is the term used during the interview.

4. The remaining six study participants included a graduate assistant director who is not actively doing WPA work, two-year college WPAs who face a host of additional liminalities and challenges, and long-term WPAs who had recently started WPA positions at new institutions.

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Appendix: Demographic and Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

Name/pseudonym and preferred pronouns
Age/highest degree earned/in-progress
Self-disclosed identity/cultural locations that impact your work
Job/Professional details:
Institution size (small, <10,000; medium, 10,000–20,000; large, 20,000+; extra-large, 30,000+)
Institution Type:
2-year, 4-year
Public, Private
Course load
Title (director, coordinator, associate director, etc.) and scope of position (what do you oversee?):
Length of time in position:
Length of time in field:

Interview Questions

1. Briefly describe your training in and experience with WPA work.
2. To what extent has your training/experience prepared you for the position you have? Is there anything you wish you had learned through mentoring or graduate school to better prepare you for your work as a WPA?
3. What task or tasks do you feel like you spend the bulk of your time doing? Is this what you expected coming into the position or has this changed?
4. Upon entering your position, what do you think your supervisors/upper administration thought should be your top priorities? Have those priorities shifted and, if so, why and how? How do you feel about this?
5. Upon entering your position, what do you think your peers/colleagues/employees/staff thought should be your top priorities? Do you think those priorities shifted and, if so, why and how? How do you feel about this?
6. Upon entering your position, what did you isolate as your top priorities? Have those priorities shifted and, if so, why and how? How do you feel about this?
7. Is there anything you feel like you are doing well in your position? Is there anything you feel that you are not doing well?

8. Which parts of the job are you most excited about right now? What is your biggest obstacle or concern right now? What are you looking forward to? What do you expect will be your biggest projects/hurdle/s next semester?
9. What word would you use to describe your outlook coming into your position? What word would you use to describe your outlook now? Are there any particular factors that you feel have factored into/shaped your outlook?
10. Do you engage in direct care work in your position? What does this look like? What percentage of your work would you estimate is direct care work? Where does your approach to care-work come from? How does care work impact you and your work?
11. How is your work-life balance right now? Do you feel adequately supported and cared for (spiritually, physically, and emotionally)? What would help you feel better supported and cared for? How do you preserve and care for yourself? Where do your approaches to work-life balance come from?
12. You described your identity/cultural location as ____. How do you feel your identity/cultural location has impacted your experience in your position?
13. I am teaching a WPA course this spring. What is one suggestion you have for me? Do you have any advice for new WPAs or have you learned anything recently about what it means to be a WPA?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share?

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Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics

Denae Dibrell, Andrew Hollinger, and Maggie Shelledy

Abstract

This article is a work in defining fugitivity in writing program administration. We return to the intersecting phenomena of the pandemic, of climate change, of state-sanctioned violence, of gerrymandering, and of stolen rights. We recognize the complicity writing programs have with this status quo, and we hope that Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics is a helpful framework for developing WPA practices that diverge from this complicity. Our writing is intended to acknowledge a deep scholarly debt within rhetoric and composition to the first fugitives of the academic space, the multiply marginalized students and faculty that built the undercommons: Black, Indigenous, Latinx, queer, women, immigrant, neurodivergent.

> *[T]he proliferation of borders between states, within states, between people, within people is a proliferation of states of statelessness. These borders grope their way toward the movement of things, bang on containers, kick at hostels, harass camps, shout after* ***fugitives****, seeking all the time to harness this movement of things . . .*
>
> — Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitivity and Black Planning* (p. 94; boldface added)

> *Justice is possible only where it is never asked, in the refuge of bad debt, in the* ***fugitive*** *public of strangers not communities, of undercommons not neighbourhoods, among those who have been there all along from somewhere. To seek justice through restoration is to return debt to the balance sheet and the balance sheet never balances.*
>
> — Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitivity and Black Planning* (p. 63; boldface added)

This writing is fugitive, something stolen. It's a labor within the University but not for the University. Harney and Moten (2013) would say *criminal*—fleeing but not escaping. From? Racism, misogyny, entrenchment.

Capitalism. The perpetual assimilation of students into white language supremacy and racial capitalism (despite whatever liberal brainwashing certain media outlets claim is occurring). And it's important to start here, like this, because conversations about carework are rarely (ever?) preventive. Carework[1] in the workplace is reactionary, undervalued, gendered, and racialized. It is a necessary response to those in harm's way but does not necessarily address the source of the harm. Hassberg, Esparza, Baralt, and Alimahomed-Wilson (2022) demonstrate the ways that the undervalued carework of women of color in the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated their undervalued carework at home, creating a crisis for caregivers. Writing programs like ours and yours reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic. It happened to us, and then we scrambled to "pivot." So much *pivoting*. In the pivoting, we (us, the field, each other, our colleagues, you and me) realized, or perhaps were confronted with the realization, that we were not all right—but also, and more to the point, that we weren't really okay before either. The institutional response was that we should continue our teaching, mentoring, and department meetings. Some universities and colleges moved online or offered hybrid sections. They said, "Take care of yourself first!" but there was a silent ellipsis hidden at the end of their well wishes . . . *so that you can return to work.* And the second silent ellipsis is . . . *because the institution needs your labor to survive*. Harney and Moten (2013) again:

> In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony . . . to be in but not of—this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university. (p. 26)

Real carework, then, must begin with fugitivity.[2] Look, what if we shift our frame of reference? Instead of carework, mutual aid. Mutual aid = carework + solidarity + critical consciousness. Dean Spade (2020) defines it as "collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them" (p. 7). The shift from carework to mutual aid is a shift from liberal caring to radical caring. It seeks social systemic change. People care. Or, we hope they do. But the institution does not care. That's not pessimism or cynicism. Whatever we might argue about the ontology of the University, our emotional-mental-physical well-being is not part of its mission (unless there was suddenly no one with which to replace us . . . and even then . . .). The US University has, from its inception, been a tool of racial capitalism, founded on principles of (among other things) exploitation and accumulation. Look no further than this issue of *WPA*. It's about the local work WPAs and

writing programs are doing to respond to burnout and exhaustion. We are on our own. If we care for ourselves and for others, we do it in secret, stolen moments. If we don't do it, then it doesn't happen. Fugitive.

This article should feel fugitive—in its affirmation and confirmation of the illicit work you're doing, in its theoretical foundations, and even in its paragraphs, punctuations, and asides. This work owes a debt—the kind of debt that is "social" and "mutual" and "runs in every direction, scatters, escapes, seeks refuge," a fugitive debt that "seeks refuge among other debtors, acquires debts from them, offers debt to them" (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 61). It owes this debt to scholars like Harney and Moten; to Jacqueline Jones Royster (1996; 2014) for calling us toward deliberately reciprocal inquiry within contact zones, including our own discipline; to Genevieve García de Müeller and Iris Ruiz (2017) for calling us to question white assumptions about the effectiveness of antiracist WPA approaches and to García de Müeller (2016) for calling us to reimagine WPA work in an activist context; to Cody Jackson and Christina Cedillo (2020) for calling us to our own accountability for disability justice; to Neisha-Anne S. Green and Frankie Condon (2020) for calling us to not flinch from the pain of confronting white supremacy; to Victor Villanueva (1997) for calling us to consider the colonial impulses of writing instruction and program administration; to Lynn Z. Bloom (1996) for calling us to attend to the ways first-year writing assimilates students into (white) middle class values; to Alyssa Cavazos (2019), Vershawn Ashanti Young (2010), April Baker-Bell (2020), Steven Alvarez (2016), Stacy Perryman-Clark (2012), and others for calling us to resist white, monolingual language ideologies in first-year writing programs; to the CWPA task force members (Asao B. Inoue, Beth Brunk-Chavez, Vershawn A. Young, Tanita Saenkhum, Melvin Beavers, Iris Ruiz, and Neisha-Anne Green) for calling us to confront white supremacy in our institutions and ourselves; and to Asao B. Inoue (2021) for calling us to address the connection between white racial violence and white language supremacy and for reminding us that "[s]ometimes, the best way to fix fucked up things is to fuck them up *right*" (para. 15).

To be clear, the ways this article might push against traditional scholarly-publishing guidelines are not stylistic flourish. We are writing against conventions that are socially and professionally stifling. While many genre conventions are about facility and accessibility, too many are about uniformity, propriety, and reifying academic "standards" (scare quotes) and conventions that are really meant to entrench institutional and white language supremacy. Our teaching can't move beyond reading statements about linguistic justice until our professional journals move past myopic views of what is and isn't academically rigorous writing. The first step of fugitive

rhetorics, and the first real moment of disciplinary mutual aid, is to enact our scholarship in real ways. Further, true fugitive rhetorics cannot co-opt marginalized knowledges to fortify the whitestream. Our writing style is intended to acknowledge a deep scholarly debt within rhetoric and composition to the first fugitives of the academic space, the multiply marginalized students and faculty that built the undercommons: Black, Indigenous, Latinx, queer, women, immigrant, neurodivergent. (And, yeah, this could have been a footnote. But fuck that. It needs to be above the line.)

Finding the Undercommons

Where were you when you realized you were tired with a kind of exhaustion that had nothing to do with sleep? Was it early days? Or was it after picking up your second and third pandemic hobby? That tenth loaf of homemade sourdough? Zoom class? For us, our burnout bubbled to the surface after the pandemic ("after the pandemic" = when we had to come back to campus and has little to do with access to vaccines, local infection numbers, or faculty and student feelings of health and safety). We sat at a picnic table outside a cafe writing our calendars and syllabuses for the next semester when we, all together, confessed that we didn't have the bandwidth to do this, to create our materials, to pretend like we weren't exhausted, to continue feigning that everything would be okay.[3] To be clear, we were burned out much earlier, but there's a sort of shame stage associated with burnout where you bluff about doing just fine. Vulnerability is difficult even for folks who work at it. Together at that picnic table, we found the space to talk through how and why we were burned out. And it's all the same reasons you've heard at your own picnic table confessionals and within this issue: overwork, too many "high priority" agenda items, never-ending pivoting, continual stress about job security, health, and current events. The sociologist Lara Maestripieri (2021) explains that the COVID-19 pandemic is "an intersectional phenomenon" (p. 1). The pandemic was amplified by police violence and the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, the January 6 insurrection and the increasing political upheaval leading up to and through it, and climate change. We were, all of us, enmeshed in intersectional injustice, stress, and fear, and then one more meeting request or exhortation to take attendance or reminder that we needed to be on campus—and our candle was blown out. Then began initiatives of self-care.

The pandemic was a radicalizing moment (for those with privilege). Everyone else knew that we were all overworked and treading water in a system that used our labor while rarely ever implementing our knowledges. The turn toward self-care was also a turn toward coalition, initiating the

privileged into the undercommons, into fugitivity. In an interview included at the end of Harney and Moten's (2013) *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, Moten explains that pandemic (in this case) coalitions "emerge[d] out of your [the privileged] recognition that it's fucked up for you, in the same way that we've already recognized that it's fucked up for us. I don't need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker" (p. 140). The pandemic wasn't when things got bad; it showed us just how bad it's been for a long time. For some of us, that's an indictment. But, it's also a way forward.

It's not like burnout is new. Before 2020, we'd all seen or felt varying degrees of burnout. Why are we talking about it now? Why is self-care/us-care/we-care important now? Undoubtedly the sheer ubiquitousness.[4] But the implication, at least institutionally, is that when a few people struggle, it's just a thing that happens sometimes, but when everyone struggles, it's worth an initiative. The silent ellipsis is that institutional care or mental health programs aren't about care but are about continuity. (For some of us, that's an indictment. But, it's also a way forward.) Actual mutual aid and carework is a fugitive act.

Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics as Theoretical Apparatus

The thoughts and views expressed here are our own and do not represent the views of our employer.

Fugitivity begins with a recognition that the US University is, administratively, an institution of statecraft that replicates racial capitalism and insulates it from insurgency. The good news is that there is no escape. No position to which to withdraw that does not require accountability to modes of accumulation and domination. Ideological purity? In this economy?! We might as well keep our jobs. The question is not (only) what *other, more just* society could the University produce, but what is the way forward *from here*? How do we work with the knowledge that our labor supports an institution that produces social injustice? If carework, including social justice work, is co-opted by the University, how do we move forward without becoming hopeless, giving into cynicism, and selling out?

Fugitivity is a kind of double consciousness, and Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics is the practice of administering a shadow program within the official one. The underlying apparatus that allows Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics to function is a capacity for strategic decision-making about when to resist institutional formalization. Don't write everything down.

Meet, instead, in empty classrooms, offices, and across picnic tables and talk, scheme, connive. This is a direct contradiction to the writing program's instinct to survive. It feels counterintuitive to how we build things. One of our discipline's threshold concepts is that "our identities are the ongoing, continually under-construction product[s] of our participation" in discourse communities and that our writing is "about becoming a particular kind of person, about developing a sense of who we are" (Roozen, 2015, p. 51) or perhaps a particular kind of writing program. If mutual aid was about program building, then certainly, "producing public documents [is] one enactment of this productive theorizing [program building], as one way of materializing the program and bearing witness to the breadth of the activity system it represents—past, present, and future" (Charlton et al., 2011, p. 143). Documentation and policymaking are designed to render the writing program within the institution, to help justify its value and purpose, and to describe its scope of existence (e.g., a writing program that partners with the library and the writing center and the learning center is an active and enmeshed program, and projects, symposia, papers, presentations, and policies help describe and define those relationships).

But mutual aid isn't exactly program-building work. It also definitely is. Just not how we normally think about program building. There is programmatic building space in the undercommons that doesn't get formalized in the same way student learning objectives and annual peer review and curriculum "[bear] witness to the breadth of the activity system" (Charlton et al., 2011, p. 143) of the writing program. Why not simply make it a part of the writing program's stated goals and objectives? Why not put everything public-facing and in writing? In fact, Roozen (2015), explaining how writing and identity are connected, argues that "writing serves as a key means by which we act with and come to understand the subject matter [of a discourse community, person, rhetorical ecology, etc.] . . . as well as the beliefs, values, and interests they reflect" (p. 51). Why wouldn't we want our programs to be overtly associated with care and community? (We do though. This is difficult.)

What we don't want is to create nonperformatives. In the summer of 2020, many organizations, universities, and even writing programs published (sometimes on a website but usually on social media) statements in support of the ongoing protests and against police violence. DEI statements were a focus for the summer and fall of 2020 as well. What did those statements accomplish? Sara Ahmed calls such statements nonperformatives that "'work' precisely by not bringing about the effects that they name" (105). How many statements were followed by scholarship programs, housing initiatives, holistic changes to affirming and linguistically inclusive

curriculum, and other document-worthy policies and partnerships? There were some. As many as there were statements?

Carework is often gendered, exploited, and co-opted by the University. During the pandemic, faculty, particularly women and faculty of color, burnt themselves out trying to fill the gap in mental health support for struggling students (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020). Carework, like antiracism, has been taken up as a nonperformative. Mutual aid is always vulnerable to co-optation. Mutual aid within a state institution is especially vulnerable.

When we cite Inoue's boycott of CWPA in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, who is co-opting whom?

The answer is discomforting.

We have to remember that "we are never outside the networked interconnection of forces, energies, rhetorics, moods, and experiences . . . [and] our practical consciousness is never outside the prior and ongoing structures of feeling that shape the social field" (Edbauer Rice, 2005, p. 10) of the rhetorical ecologies in which we work and live. Our United Statesian social field is marked by corrupt and harmful abuses of power, entrenched in systems of domination. Whatever statements or policies we write operate within these structures.[5] We are drawn to formalizing things, maybe, because it's evidence of the work we're doing and notable on annual reviews and end-of-year program reports, and writing programs are constantly on the move justifying their existence. But, Moten speaking with Harney (2013) again:

> It's funny, this ubiquity of policy making, the constant deputisation of academic laborers into the apparatuses of police power. And they are like night riders, paddy rollers, everybody's on patrol, trying to capture the ones who are trying to get out—especially themselves, trying to capture their own fugitivity. That's actually the first place at which policy is directed. (p.120)

We want to make change and to do good (we hope that's the core readership, anyway). As WPAs, however, we embody strange precarities, both representing and never fully representing students, faculty, upper administration, or even ourselves. Our own future professional goals (dean? provost? president?) further muddle how and why we work. We are employed in the system and trying to change the system, but the "possibility of change is muted by the fact [that we are] interpellated with the dominant ideology. Actions oriented toward change will tend to be conducive to power maintenance rather than to its removal" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 94). Muted, not destroyed. Change is possible but it's counter to the institutional and

United Statesian hegemony. We have to be careful, most of all, not to confuse our fugitive labor with however the institution has deputized us into authority. The labor of authority is policy making and ensuring that policy is followed (even good policy involves supervision). Those approved and sanctioned policies will generally work for the institution and not against it, and policy-ensuring (perhaps it's worth coining a portmanteau, "polic/ing"?) is a state action. What happens if care and policy are at odds? Is the WPA an institutional agent or a fugitive operative?[6]

> Is it possible for *us*, three white/white-passing faculty, to engage in fugitivity without appropriating Black liberation on behalf of the University? The answer is discomforting.

A commitment to fugitivity is a commitment to building a third university within the first. In la paperson's (2017) formulation, "The first world university accumulates through dispossession. The second world university 'liberates' through liberalism. The third world university breaks faith from its own machinery by inspiriting the academic automaton with a fourth world soul" ("A Third University Exists," para. 6). Like Moten and Harney's undercommons, the third university exists within the first and second and is "made up of their scrap material" (la paperson, "A Third University Exists," para. 20). Fugitivity is creating from the material and ideological resources of the University machines for decolonization and just ways of being together. It is not a utopian project of decolonizing the University but a pragmatic, imperfect project of creating a decolonizing university. Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics are strategic, kairotic experiments in building justice machines from the time, energy, materials, and rhetorics of an unjust institution. It is the ability to discover in any particular case the available means of liberation.

Fugitivity in Motion

The activity that counters policy, according to Harney and Moten (2013), is planning, and planning is hope (p. 73-82). While policies are laws on the books, planning is the passed word. Policy will come after planners, eventually, to formalize participation and capitalize hope (and by doing so reframe the planning-participation-hope into an institutional structure). Fugitive Administrate Rhetorics, though, are always planning again, inventing, experimenting, and revising.

Heuristic pre-requisite: a commitment to invention and experimentation.

Heuristic: Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics of mutual aid has (at least) three co-occuring strands, none particularly more important than the next.

The limitations of the page might suggest an order or hierarchy, but these items essentially happen together.

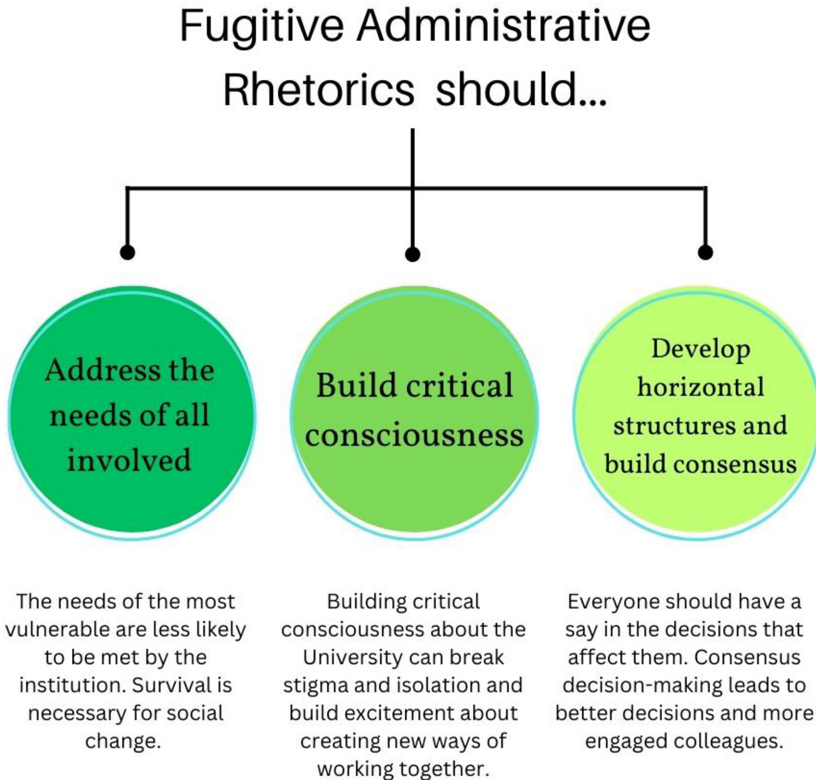

Figure 1. Components of Fugitive Administrative Rhetoric

What might this actually look and feel like? What are the avenues, and how do we plan so that it's not just possible but likely that a mix of lecturers, WPAs, and tenure-track faculty can find themselves vulnerable at a picnic table outside a local coffee spot? We offer our attempts not as a model but as an invitation to experiment. Our project began as a relatively simple question: How do we get to the other side of pandemic burnout? The first coffee confab was snarky, sarcastic, depressed, funny, mournful, and tiring. But it was not cheerfully fake. Something began in the honesty. It's still developing and hard to name. As we shared our work-in-progress with our writing program colleagues, who spoke in hushed tones about their own feelings of inadequacy, exhaustion, depression, and cynicism, we realized the need for a space of recognition, a space of creating and making that

was outside the surveillance of the University. For us, this has taken shape in a series of moments and experiences that make us feel valued, supported, and as though not being okay is not a personal fault. We are beginning to whisper about where to lay the blame.

Survival

This shit is killing us all, remember? There's no one way this looks. And it's not as though mutual aid is labor-free. To provide for or support another's survival is work. Crucial to mutual aid, however, is reciprocity (though not necessarily person-to-person). Fugitivity is incurring debt and never quite paying it in full. You can never pay in full. We all get help when we need it and provide it when we can. Sometimes it looks like travel pub Fridays, where we all show up at someone's house after work and chat about nothing and everything. Sometimes it means covering a class last-minute or leaving a bottle of hand sanitizer on a classroom desk that doesn't have any. Maybe it's a monthly venting session. It could be paying for a meal or literally buying groceries. We can't do anything if we don't survive.

Critical Consciousness

In the University but not of the University. Understanding how colonialism, land acquisition, languaging, white supremacy, capitalism (and so much more) work within the University and the state and the United States and how we (un)consciously support those systems is essential for understanding our own fugitivity and the fugitivity of those around us. It's hard work, too. It can be emotional or cognitively dissonant. Building a critical consciousness can cause us to mourn the time it took to develop it. We are indebted to Maya Angelou: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." She doesn't absolve us of our former selves, but she makes space for the identities we can step into while also reminding us to always do better.

From our position as faculty and lower administration, it's natural to focus on pedagogy and curriculum as the University's primary ideological front. But raising critical consciousness among faculty means, in addition, laying bare the history of the University's mode of accumulation. Regardless of what or how we teach, the University continues to occupy a central role in racial capitalist regimes of accumulation. With the Morrill Act, for example, states were not only given recently appropriated Indigenous land for the purpose of building campuses. States were also encouraged to sell tracts of this land to build capital for these new universities (la paperson,

"Land," para. 3). What the University does as a colonizing machine is not only about syllabuses and classroom management. It isn't even the half of it.

One way we operationalized building critical consciousness was by co-opting our professional development (PD) programming. We were required to develop PD for the year. Large-group PD was often slow and tedious and impersonal. We redesigned PD to be small group and led by faculty. Each semester, six topics were offered, and each session was capped at ten people. From book studies (so far we've had faculty lead studies on April Baker-Bell's *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*; Lisa King, Rose Gubele, and Joyce Rain Johnson's *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story: Teaching American Indian Rhetorics*; and Jonathan Malesic's *The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives*) to special topics in pedagogy, writing studies, or educational technology, faculty self-selected what to attend. The goal of this small group professional development was to develop proficiency, sure (that's the University objective), but also to create small enclaves of discussion, challenge, and support. Every session was developed through frames of antiracist pedagogy, affirming languaging, personal growth, and responsibility.

Horizontal Organization

Of the three of us, only one is a WPA from the University's perspective. Yet all of us participate in the administering of our writing program through (still unevenly) shared decision making. Against the default practices of hierarchy within the University, Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics engage in building a horizontal organization that distributes decision-making in and responsibility for the writing program. For us, this means orienting toward consensus and ensuring that those most impacted by decisions are centered in making them.

For example, our writing program has recently begun revising our student learning outcomes (SLOs). Our goal is to update our SLOs every five years to ensure they are progressive, equitable, and inclusive. In the past, SLO writing was obscure. They just sort of showed up. But in 2017 and then again in 2022, we revised our SLOs with the goal of being more transparent and to have greater lecturer representation. All faculty who taught in the writing program were invited to participate in deliberation about the future of the program, but only lecturers were invited to make the decisions. Tenured and tenure-track faculty at our institution have less investment in the writing program because they have more opportunities to teach a variety of courses outside the program and more institutional protection and entitlement to depart from established programmatic norms when they

do teach first-year writing. But consensus is hard. It takes a long time. It requires training and practice. It is at odds with the University's culture of scarcity, particularly labor scarcity. We must plan and pace our work in accordance with our collective abilities and capacities (Spade, 2020, p. 70). It takes as long as it takes (and it took eighteen months, but it was a fulfilling eighteen months).

The Silent Ellipsis

Dean Spade (2020) reminds us that "disasters are ruptures" (p. 31) and that we must intentionally sustain the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic: racial capitalism and other forms of domination continue to create asymmetrical vulnerabilities, and the University is an institution invested in the maintenance of racial capitalism. Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics is not exactly a solution. It's not a straightforward path fully free from statecraft. This essay will be included in our annual reviews and pass through the administrative levels of accounting (not accountability) for the labor that it contributes to the University's accumulation of knowledge, publications, and prestige. Rather than an outright incursion against the University, Fugitive Administrative Rhetorics steal away in the neglected surplus of the institution, patiently tinkering with new forms of relationality, epistemology, and habitus in order to bring forth the otherwise. It is not utopian, it is not unproblematic, it is not revolutionary. But it works at building capacity for revolution.

We'll leave you with this: perfectionism is a byproduct of the scarcity and competitive logics of the University. Perfectionism siphons collective care in service of ego's anxieties. What we pose here is a struggle, not a respite from the exhaustion of the pandemic. But you must survive. Mutual aid is sustained by sustaining ourselves and each other, extending grace, and recognizing that none of us knows what a just university truly looks like or how one is built. As long as we are committed to the cause and actually accountable to each other, then imperfection and limited capacity are okay. What is worse is letting the fear of fucking up keep us from acting on our obligation to the lessons of the pandemic.

We return to the intersectional phenomenon of the pandemic, of climate change, of police violence and the state-sanctioned murder of Black and Brown people across the United States, of gerrymandering, and of stolen rights. We return to being burned out and overwhelmed. We return to and turn over the shit that's killing all of us. What is the way forward? Debt to the undercommons. This time from Assata Shakur (1973):

It is our duty to fight for our freedom.
It is our duty to win.
We must love each other and support each other.
We have nothing to lose but our chains.[7]

Notes

1. For more on carework, community building, and the emotional labor of WPAs, see Wooten, Courtney Adams, Babb, Jacob, Murray Costello, Kristi, & Navickas, Kate. (2020). *The things we carry: Strategies for recognizing and negotiating emotional labor in writing program administration.* Utah State University Press.

2. This entire article is a work in defining fugitive/fugitivity in administrative and rhet-comp/first-year writing contexts. But you already know what it is. It's the impulse to do something good while enmeshed within the persistent colonizing structures of the University. It's the activist instinct to remake the University while earning its wages. It's a third space speakeasy—the "undercommons" (Harney & Moten, 2013)—where the real but unauthorized work of a university finds sanction.

3. We are a white tenure-track rhet-comp faculty member, a white "quasi-WPA" (Hollinger & Borgman, 2020), and a white-passing Latina writing program lecturer.

4. The most energetic person you know is burned out (and if they're "not," it's because they're still in the shame-bluff stage . . . the more energy someone had, the longer the bluff period).

5. And this is not an argument not to write diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statements or not to be vocally against police brutality. It's a reminder that these artifacts can be used by inequitable power structures as evidence that work is being done, however slowly (McNair, Bensimon, & Malcolm-Piqueux, 2019). The things we make can sometimes work simultaneously for and against social justice.

6. This one isn't for us to answer here or ever. This one's on you.

7. Nicknamed "Assata's Chant," this quote from Assata Shakur (1973) is often used in street protests, particularly in the Black Lives Matter movement.

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Snapping from the Center: Institutional Absurdity and Equitable Writing Center Administration

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Abstract

Working in unsustainable pandemic conditions has helped reveal the oppressive institutional absurdity we are often subject to. The authors of this article, tenured and tenure-track writing center directors at public universities, have experienced the buildup of pressure as our respective institutions demand more energy, time, and emotion. These pressures, as Sara Ahmed (2017) argued in Living a Feminist Life, lead to "snap"—a painful breakage that, when recognized, can be generative and useful. In this article, we theorize the significance of snapping—a breaking point when it is clearly understood that something must change—in writing center administrative contexts. After identifying the significance and utility of snapping, we fold this concept into a set of working rhetorical strategies that help us resist oppressive institutional absurdity. These strategies—roadblocking, changing the narrative, and coalitioning—can lead to more sustainable and equitable writing center administration practices.

Like many *WPA: Writing Program Administration* readers, we have recently navigated budget cuts, increasing workloads, resource scrutiny, state health policies that contradict CDC guidelines, and more while overseeing operational changes and modality shifts in our writing centers through a pandemic. These conditions laid bare familiar and oppressive institutional absurdities. As our institutions demanded more energy, time, and emotion, the pressure built for us. Such pressure, as Sara Ahmed (2017) argued in *Living a Feminist Life*, leads to "snap"—a painful breakage that, when recognized, can be generative and useful.

Here, we theorize snapping in writing center administrative contexts. This project emerged from shared commiseration among four writing center directors navigating institutional absurdities. Each of us experienced a snap, a breaking point when it was clearly understood that something *must* shift, transform, change. We analyze the pressures that reared up in sharp clarity during the pandemic and led to a feminist snap as we grappled with unsustainable administrative demands. After identifying the significance

and utility of snapping, we fold this concept into a set of rhetorical strategies that resist oppressive institutional absurdity.

By taking up Ahmed's (2017) feminist snap, we hope to encourage transformative interactions among WPAs and institutional entities to work towards more equitable labor conditions. Ahmed showed, as we hope to, that the feminist snap can be generative and discursive. The snap can lead to optimism, to a space where we might imagine new futures for ourselves and our centers. We will describe the significance of connecting emotions and labor in writing centers to the administrative moves we make when we inevitably snap. We cover three rhetorical strategies that have been effective for us: (1) roadblocking, (2) changing the narrative, and (3) coalitioning with accomplices. We follow Ahmed's (2017) lead in believing that "telling the story is part of the feminist battle. A feminist ear can be what we are *for*. The more wearing it is, the more we need to hear" (p. 203). Sharing our stories of navigating writing center administrator (WCA) life during a pandemic allows us to work across institutions to develop connections with other practitioners and puncture through, examine, and subvert everyday absurdities.

Emotion, Labor, and Workism

The emotional dimension of writing center administrative labor is important for understanding feminist writing center administrative practices. Recent collections such as Adams Wooten, Babb, Costello, and Navickas's (2020) *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration*; Morris and Concannon's (2022) *Emotions and Affect in Writing Centers*; and Giaimo's (2021) *Wellness and Care in Writing Center Work* have continued the field's turn towards understanding emotions as a way of knowing. Grutsch McKinney, Caswell, and Jackson (2022) argued that while the emotional dimensions of our work may bring us joy, our labor is often "poorly understood" and "undervalued," leading to "emotional exhaustion" (p. 17). Nelson, Deges, and Weaver (2020) urged WCAs to describe emotional labor as "a critically important strategy for responding to the emotional toll our jobs can take on us" (p. 173). Kleinfeld (2020) argued for a more realistic view of workloads in light of emotional labor. These scholars call for more pragmatic expectations rather than subjecting faculty to unsustainable measures for success or productivity, especially in times of crisis.

Examination of emotions can serve as a site of inquiry and action. In recent work on harnessing emotions to develop meaningful administrative responses, Cirillo-McCarthy and Leahy (2022) advocated for a process of

listening, reflecting, and responding as a way to contextualize our emotional response to conflict. Our work builds on this idea; however, while we advocate for listening, reflecting, and responding, and while we agree that slowing down and sitting with our emotions can be generative, we want to be more cognizant of rhetorics of absurdity that we must disrupt. Listen, reflect, respond, and disrupt. We find the concept of an emotional epistemology that centers embodied experiences useful when the limits of our patience and emotions are tested (Jaggar, 1989; Micciche, 2011, 2016).

Therefore, acknowledging emotional labor is crucial. Sicari (2022) argued that not only is emotional labor intellectual, but also, without acknowledging that labor, we reproduce unsustainable conditions. Our jobs are emotionally draining not just because of the relational aspects of our work but because of institutional absurdity. Compelled to continue our work despite obstacles during a pandemic, the four of us connected in group chats and met in weekly lunchtime Zoom sessions (we labeled these meetings "Radical Sandwiches" in our calendars). We were noticing increasingly absurd demands within our universities, and our commiseration quickly turned to theorizing. In our view, institutional absurdity is best discerned by the ways in which communication and expectation manifest tangibly across the university in conflict with our values. In other work, we used annual reports to illustrate ways in which this particular genre reproduces absurd expectations that conflict with our values and obscures emotional labor (Cirillo-McCarthy, Del Russo, Fields, & Leahy, 2023). In these reports and elsewhere, WCAs can consistently push back on misconceptions of writing center practices. We explain what we do, convey the centrality of writing across the institution, and seek to educate faculty and students about the value of collaboration, reflection, and multifaceted writing processes. Whether we are proactive or reactive in these explanations, "We deplete ourselves further as our institutions become more and more extractive" (Giaimo, 2022, para. 15). The COVID-19 pandemic couldn't have made this clearer.

Writing at the beginning of the pandemic about the precarity of writing center labor, Giaimo (2020) warned of "moments where we need to simply say that enough is enough. We may be subtly pressured to perform through coercive Pollyannaish stories our institutions highlight featuring employee 'grit' and 'resilience'" (para. 21). Giaimo (2022) has sharply critiqued the "workism" culture that pervades academia, lamenting "the frenzied approach to work" (para. 8) made visible particularly in the pandemic. Workism asks us to feel a commitment to an institution akin to family. As such, workism culture infects academic narratives about sacrifice and even martyrdom—no exaggeration if we consider the numerous stories of

immunocompromised teachers steeling themselves to head into the pandemic classroom if they wish to keep their jobs. Still, while many academics strive to make labor more apparent, few (if any) WCAs could state with certainty that we reject workism. After all, we perceive our writing centers as communities for mentoring. We take our work home with us, including emotional responses to absurdity. We make ourselves readily available to talk with tutors, students, and administrators in person and online. Even writing in the collective "we" indicates a commitment to workism and an inherent tie between workism and identity.

The four of us are writing center directors at public universities in the South and Northeast. Erica and Amanda are tenure-track, and Celeste and Beth are tenured. However, all four of us were pre-tenure when we enacted the strategies we are sharing. Each of us has worked in writing centers as administrators, students, and contingent workers, and we recognize that positionality and labor conditions greatly influence the power to demand change. From these standpoints, though, we perceive the need for a radical reframing of what we expect from our institutions. We try to use our privilege as white women to build more just working spaces. Examining how we are implicated as white feminists (but may also be empowered when we snap) is one way to rethink these implicit connections among workism, emotion, and labor.

Theorizing the Snap and Its Utility

Ahmed's (2017) feminist snap reframed our focus from the individual to the institution, allowing us to identify the functions and damage of workism culture. Further, Ahmed offered useful language for emotions, conflicts, and their effects on mental load. The feminist snap is the breaking point at which we respond to built-up pressures. Ahmed (2017) provided a metaphor of a snapping twig:

> When a twig snaps, we hear the sound of it breaking. We can hear the suddenness of a break. We might assume . . . that the snap is a starting point. A snap sounds like the start of something, a transformation of something; it is how a twig might end up broken in two pieces. A snap might even seem like a violent moment; the unbecoming of something. But a snap would only be the beginning insofar as we did not notice the pressure on the twig. If pressure is an action, snap is a reaction. Pressure is hard to notice unless you are under that pressure. Snap is only the start of something because of what we do not notice. (pp. 188-189)

From Ahmed's work, we examine the role of the snap in our temporality, including the pressures of time, performance, and labor. WCAs are often praised for their adaptability or resilience. Each of these terms indicates the ability to handle more pressure, which elides the realities of unsustainable conditions. Ahmed (2017) described resilience as "a technology of will" that "functions as a command: be willing to bear more; be stronger so you can bear more" (p. 189). The idea of resilience

> becomes a deeply conservative technique, one especially well-suited to governance: you encourage bodies to strengthen so they will not succumb to pressure; so they can keep taking it; so they can take more of it. Resilience is the requirement to take more pressure; such that the pressure can be gradually increased. (Ahmed, 2017, p. 189)

Resilience, like hypercapitalism, can result in depleted resources across writing centers, classrooms, offices, and homes, and it can even affect our attitudes beyond academia. We must be able to critique the concept of resilience to unravel narratives that keep us firmly on the capitalist hamster wheel.

The snap draws our attention to the pressure that caused it so that we can reassess our work and examine absurd expectations. Naming absurdities can allow us to use our rhetorical training to resist and reframe the narratives we tell about ourselves, our work, and our centers, thus challenging the status quo that expects a particularly high level of performance regardless of context. In the pandemic, absurd demands from our institutions moved us toward the snap.

At first, snapping made us think that we were the problem. When we snap, we often emote, and people don't tend to like it when feminists emote. As Ahmed (2017) explained, while responsibility is often placed on those who have snapped, "a feminist politics might insist on renaming actions as reactions" so that the one who snapped can "show how her snap is not the starting point" (p. 189). Through reflection and commiseration, we realized that workism and its accompanying absurdities are the problem. We realized that snapping could lead us to rhetorical strategies that could serve us in that moment and beyond. Still, we're acutely aware that precarity and positionality influence not only the ways in which WCAs respond rhetorically to the snap but also whether they feel empowered to do so. As a result, we have identified three types of strategies through which a variety of responses could be organized:

1. Roadblocking, which includes saying no, stalling, and setting boundaries. This strategy is useful when your work balance is in

danger or when time is of the essence. It is an immediate response to absurd expectations.

2. Changing the narrative, which includes reframing, renaming, repeating, or naming absurdity. We use this after the snap brings our attention to absurd demands and when there is time and opportunity to speak back to absurdities.
3. Coalitioning with accomplices, which demands the most time but potentially has the largest impact because it is a way to amplify speaking back to absurdities by finding ways to speak to each other.

Roadblocking

The first strategy is to create a roadblock that delays or shuts down whichever absurdity barrels your way. We have each engaged in roadblocking, usually by saying no to an unreasonable request or running out the clock when there's an unreasonable deadline for a response. This strategy can be difficult to practice, particularly if we conflate doing more with demonstrating value. As Deacon (2015) argued, many newer WCAs feel pressured to "continually justify their center's worth" (p. 12). This may result in WCAs taking on labor that "does not clearly relate to their center's mission, fall within the parameters of their job description, or fit comfortably into their slice of reassigned administrative time" (pp. 12-13).

Still, we are conditioned to think saying no is dangerous and uncollegial. Women, BIPOC, and openly queer administrators may feel this pressure to appease others in the name of collegiality. For WCAs who were already overextended, pandemic-induced austerity measures intensified the pressure to say yes. We urge WCAs to consider the real constraints of their positions and their centers because positionality influences which rhetorical strategies are viable. Employing roadblocks can help WCAs set realistic boundaries, affirm writing center values, and shine a light on unsustainable workloads and labor practices.

Beth began saying no during the summer of 2020. This resolve came after a period of intense labor exploitation wherein she had to cover an associate dean's responsibilities, without additional compensation, while managing her suddenly remote writing center. Snapping helped her become more attuned to the labor expectations on her campus, especially how these expectations did not always address pandemic impacts on workloads and budgets. While planning for fall, she learned her tutoring budget would not be fully funded until a few weeks into the semester. Additionally, funds she secured for an assistant director position were to remain on indefinite

hold. However, there was an expectation that her center would remain open the same number of hours per week and that she would continue to offer instruction and special programming for faculty around campus.

For Beth, snapping forced her to say no, temporarily cutting the center's hours and turning down instruction requests until her tutoring budget was restored. Beth was two years away from applying for tenure and promotion in the library, where she was the only writing studies faculty member in a service-oriented department, so saying no felt risky. However, in an environment where she and her colleagues were constantly expected to do more with less, she realized the only response was to do less with less. Instead of stretching herself and her staff more thinly, Beth used this opportunity to be explicit about the limits of her time and resources, which ultimately helped demonstrate the ongoing need for an assistant director position (finally funded in 2022).

Meanwhile, Erica snapped when she realized she was saying yes to too many last-minute instruction requests. Faculty workshop requests increased dramatically during COVID, and Erica and her staff worked to accommodate every request to show the value of the writing center. As a pre-tenure faculty member only two years into her role, Erica was eager to showcase her center's expertise and provide support for faculty. However, faculty were not always thoughtful about ways to integrate these workshops into their semesters or respectful of Erica or her team's time. One instructor, who had rescheduled already due to having COVID, called Erica the wrong name and informed her that only four students would be participating in the workshop Erica had spent hours creating for a complicated senior capstone project.

Snapping helped Erica realize the need to set strict boundaries and time standards for workshop delivery. She and her staff developed a structured process for requesting instruction, including asking faculty to articulate clear learning goals with their requests and emphasizing that workshop work was collaborative. In these examples, the generative aspect of the snap is clear: it's not just "no," it's "no AND here is a new, more equitable way to do things." "No AND" can also be a rhetorical strategy for WCAs who do not feel like they can say "no" without material consequences.

Saying no can be a simple act of avoiding burnout; we have felt ourselves reaching the breaking point, and it was the only strategy we could find that brought some relief. Snapping is the exigency for saying no, and upon reflection, it affords us the opportunity to notice the conditions that led to our "no" response. Snapping offered Beth an opportunity to be more mindful of the work she said yes to, and to feel confident in saying no. Saying no aligned with Beth's value of cultivating an ethic of care in the writing

center and her administrative work. It was also generative because it helped Beth reflect on how much work she was doing with an asymmetrical payoff for her and the writing center and advocate for additional resources. For Erica, snapping helped generate more ethical ways to support faculty and students—ways that do not deplete but instead invite a shared workload.

Changing the Narrative

Changing the narrative involves a subversion of rhetorical strategies: reframe, refocus, repeat. These are strategies that WCAs often learn from interacting with and observing other administrators. To shift the narrative, we often employ rhetorical repetition related to a consistent through-line. Administrative austerity rhetorics take on many forms, such as talk of being "all in this together" as a team or family. Along with this, student retention in whatever way it can happen will be emphasized over student development and well-being, and quantitative data is valued for its seeming concreteness more than qualitative nuance. When we snap at these common narratives, we have an opportunity to change them.

The pandemic assisted us in changing narratives in response to austerity and emergency rhetorics. At Amanda's campus, quarantine hit in a matter of hours. Computer monitors flashed an emergency message ordering everyone to leave campus immediately, including emptying out the dorms. Amanda fled to the writing center and threw Girl Scout cookies at tutors as they left ("Take them home!" she yelled, as if this were the most important thing in the world). While she fretted about weird stuff, her staff went home, got online, and texted her to check in. Staff emailed students, managed to shift a few to online appointments, and walked them through the new process. They did this because Amanda had initiated online training several weeks before. This was one kind of reframing that simply came from a gut-led foresight about the virus.

Over the next week, as quarantine protocols swept the state, Amanda was placed on a student support committee. The writing center had been the only support service that was ready to go; others required at least a week to transition to remote services. Next, the university decided that all student workers would be paid whether or not they worked. Everyone on Amanda's staff kept working anyway, saying they appreciated checking in online and reassuring anxious students who had been kicked to asynchronous coursework.

Despite the writing center's smooth pivot and resulting campus praise, Amanda was hit that next spring with the news that two longtime graduate assistant (GA) positions in the writing center would be cut. She was

informed of this a few weeks before the semester was set to start and after the GA paperwork had been signed. From administrators, she heard about grave financial losses; she also heard that, of course, she would get those GA lines back if she could make this sacrifice now. Over the course of three weeks, she created a roadblock by repeating, "No. I know how this goes. Once you lose something, you don't get it back." She had snapped. Then she refocused, reframed, and repeated.

Historical context was key to refocusing. The GA lines in the writing center were two of the oldest on campus. Graduate students, with part-time contingent instructors, sustained the fledgling writing center for years until the university hired a director. Amanda emphasized this history to clarify the graduate students' and writing center's roles in institutional success. But this wasn't enough. She reframed using institutional and administrative repetition that created a through-line: She emphasized student retention rather than development and well-being. In other cases, she might have described how working in a writing center offers transferable skills as well as job opportunities. She might have presented evidence of the touching support tutors provided students and vice versa in online synchronous sessions.

In this context, though, such reasoning would have been futile. Instead, she took up the idea of graduate student retention, knowing that the university was having trouble with this population particularly at the level of capstone projects and theses and especially with the capstone projects of graduate students in nursing, who were relentlessly working at hospitals alongside faculty. And even though she knew that any staff member could work with any writer, she also reasoned that graduate students are more comfortable with graduate student tutors. Eventually, she retained the GA lines and scrambled to fill them.

When she was then told that there would be a 10% cut across the board for every department and program, she continued to reframe. She took up the language of being all in this together, a team, something upper administration was using to explain why belt-tightening was warranted. The writing center was a true team; the administrative logic was flawed. A 10% cut to a department may mean not bringing in a speaker or limiting printer copies. A 10% cut to the writing center meant people—namely, the very students the university wished to retain, who had worked remotely, on their own devices, in a quarantine, even though they would have been paid regardless. She continued with the through-line about student retention. She repeated herself until she was left alone.

That time, it worked. She retained the GAs. There were no cuts to the writing center budget. She also threaded this through-line into her annual reports, trying to make it clear: This one will fight when somebody tries to

take something from students. This one will snap. She snapped because she was enraged at the audacity and glaring contradiction of telling faculty it is their responsibility to retain students and then requesting that they cut the hours of or let go of highly skilled student tutors. There is great risk in snapping and in setting these boundaries. In this case, thankfully, a raging snap flowed into a narrative shift and material hope.

Coalitioning with Accomplices

Where roadblocking is a more immediate action we can take when faced with an absurd request (or absurdity) and where changing the narrative is a strategy we use when we have some time to reflect and reframe, our third strategy—coalitioning with accomplices—is only cultivated over time. Coalitioning asks WCAs to draw agency from and turn towards our relationships with others. It potentially has the largest effect because it is a way to identify accomplices who can amplify our response to absurdities. Stone and Cirillo-McCarthy (2021) described coalition work as a snowball: "As interpersonal connections are made and trust is established, a coalition's work picks up speed and space, gathering more collaborators, expanding not only its range but its power" (p. 132). In previous scholarship, we have described how cross-institutional coalitioning can lead us toward "a pedagogy of resistance and equitable transformation" (Cirillo-McCarthy, Del Russo, Fields, & Leahy, 2023, para. 4). As a way forward, coalitioning with accomplices might be our most powerful rhetorical strategy for affecting local change.

Ahmed (2017) described the snap as the "feminist hope" that contributes to a "feminist communication system" (p. 211). Without the snap, we are unable to identify the "situation that demands our collective impatience" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 211) and, therefore, collectively respond. A feminist communication system builds coalitions and identifies accomplices, a term we are decidedly choosing over allies, as Neisha-Anne Green (2018) made the clear distinction that accomplices go beyond allies to take risks and forfeit or angle their privilege. Accomplices choose to make waves to support others, using their privilege to amplify marginalized voices.

As the pandemic summer semester approached, Celeste (pre-tenured) was asked to pare down the writing center schedule to "essential workers" and work on a proposal to justify her summer contract and the work of tutors during the lower—usage summer months. Summer programming from the writing center extended beyond tutoring hours to include participation in summer bridge programs for first-generation students, neurodivergent populations, international students, new and transfer students, and

orientations. Coalitioning with writing center accomplices on campus—such as the first-year writing coordinator and scheduler, the MA program coordinator, student service coordinators representing affected student groups also asked to justify their summer workloads and programming to upper administration and financial stakeholders, and all who also articulated the value of the summer months in preparing student groups for success—led to a successful outcome. Celeste and fellow accomplices amplified the need for summer hours and pushed against absurd demands grounded in rhetorics of austerity. Building and cultivating these relationships takes time, but they are crucial for this last strategy and a key component in sustainable work conditions during times of crisis and otherwise.

Conclusion

Strategically acknowledging and making use of the inevitable pressure and snap in our work seems integral to our health. The pandemic exposed much of the inequity ingrained in our systems, and sustaining our health and work feels crucial not only for ourselves and our centers but for the health and transformation of higher education. Beyond COVID, we hope these strategies continue to be applicable and useful. If we continue with the status quo, if we don't call out absurdity, we risk the survival of so much. As Ahmed (2017) noted, survival "refers not only to living on, but to keeping going in the more profound sense of keeping going with one's commitments . . . Survival thus becomes a shared feminist project" (pp. 235-6). Survival is a collaborative effort.

We share these stories, then, to demonstrate how we have used the feminist snap to clarify our administrative values. Not every WCA has the support or stability to respond to institutional absurdity in these ways. But we know they've snapped, too, and we invite them to consider ways to respond to absurdity that protect their health, their centers, and their values. Snapping, while stressful, served our decision-making and was generative in developing rhetorical strategies to respond to pandemic absurdities. Our hope is that these stories offer readers and writing center administrators a framework (and permission!) to snap, reflect, recenter, and respond rhetorically in and beyond the pandemic.

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Note

1. This is a feminist collaborative project, and as such, all authors contributed equally.

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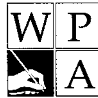

Book Review

Metaphors That Move Us in the Right Direction

Megan Boeshart Burelle and Kristi Murray Costello

Wilkes, Lydia, Lillian W. Mina, and Patti Poblete, eds. *Toward More Sustainable Metaphors of Writing Program Administration.* Utah State UP, 2023.

The metaphors we use to help ourselves and others better understand WPA work at a given time provide a snapshot of WPA life at the time. For example, the metaphors in Diana George's 1999 edited collection *Kitchen Cooks, Plate twirlers, and Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories* drew attention to the difficult and often invisible labors of WPA work: heavy workloads, lofty expectations, and complicated intellectual, physical, and relational demands. Over the past few years, WPAs and faculty have responded to uncertainty, precarity, danger, and bigotry, including pandemics, mass shootings, sexual violence, and attacks on BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, reproductive rights, and our curriculums, we have (understandably) in our scholarship and in conversations with one another compared our roles to those of first responders, therapists, firefighters, and people at war to name a few (Adams Wooten, Babb, Costello, and Navickas; Clinnin; Bishop). However, as Lydia Wilkes, Lilian W. Mina, and Patti Poblete's recent edited collection *Toward More Sustainable Metaphors of Writing Program Administration* illustrates, some of the metaphors we have used to describe our work, high-alert metaphors in particular, may not be sustainable or healthy long term.

The collection is divided into three parts: "Organic Relationships," "Institutional Landscapes," and "Performance Crafts." It begins with a preface and introduction from the editors and a foreword from Susan Miller-Cochran and concludes with an afterword by Doug Hesse. Each section consists of several chapters that cover an extensive range of topics, from quantum physics to artisanal making.

In the introduction, the editors effectively tie the chapters together by emphasizing the evolving and contextual nature of WPA work and the importance of sustainability in our changing academic landscapes. But more importantly, the introduction models for the readers sustainable ways of moving forward in the field together through the amplification of diverse voices and solidarity with labor. They acknowledge problematic histories, particularly evidenced through their footnotes and acknowledgement of

critiques of "sustainability" shared by Seth Kahn in his 2015 CWPA plenary address, recognizing the need to push back against the idea of "sustainable" when it means upholding the status quo and exploitative practices in many institutions.

Section I: Organic Relationships focuses on the interconnectedness of WPA work—the ways in which WPAs are inextricably linked to the people in their programs, department, and institution, as well as to the larger WPA community and the field. The chapters in this section encourage WPAs to be mindful of these connections as a way to consider how to situate themselves in the complex and diverse roles that WPAs occupy and how to make these positions sustainable. The book starts with a call for WPAs to "nurture sparks of equity and justice" and the first chapter, "From Putting Out Fires to Managing Fires: Lessons for WPAs from Indigenous Fire Managers," by Lydia Wilkes does just that. It sets the tone for the collection. In her piece, she shares a rich counternarrative to existing WPA fire metaphors, moving us from settler-colonist narratives of the firefighter, to Indigenous understandings about land caretaking and being a fire manager.

The other three chapters in the section build on the idea of interconnectedness Wilkes posits in Chapter 1. The chapter that follows, "Seeing the Forest and the Trees: A Rhizomatic Metaphor for Writing Program Administration," by Jacob Babb, captures this idea best when he says, "WPA Work is most sustainable when we are mindful of our connections to those we work with and for—to see the roots that are often invisible in our daily work" (37). Babb focuses on five case studies of WPAs, focusing on "the kinds of relationships they found most important to their work" (40) and offers useful ways for WPAs to consider their work and their relationships to others on their campus, including undergraduate students, and the ways WPAs make connections professionally outside of their institutions. Babb reminds WPAs that while improvement is important, nurturing the relationships that sustain us and help us grow is just as important. Andrew Hollinger & Manny Piña's chapter, "Light and the Quantum Physics of WPA Work," fascinatingly compares WPA work to light, challenging classical ways of understanding WPA work and embracing that WPA work is emergent and diverse. Rounding out the first section, Ryan J. Dippre's chapter, "Grounding WPA Work: A Phenomenology of Program Development as a Liminal WPA," also centers the local and contextualized needs of a program and the people that make up the program. He argues that it was grounding himself in the contextualized data of interviews, observations, and needs of those who are a part of his program that allowed him to make decisions, especially since he started his WPA work in an already successful writing program.

Section II: Institutional Landscapes continues the thread of interconnectedness, expanding on the necessity for WPAs to map their institutional contexts and advocate for their programs, the people within it, and themselves because as Katherine Daily O'Meara points out in her chapter, "Learning, Representing, and Endorsing the Landscape: WPA as Cartographer," "WPAs are frequently called upon to represent and advocate for the ever-changing landscape of their writing program and its position in the larger university" (97). In the first two chapters of this section, the authors share replicable methods for mapping and decision-making. O'Meara encourages WPAs to use mapmaking as a way to make visible all the work they and those in their writing programs do, and John Belk, in his chapter, "The WPA as Labor Activist" calls on WPAs to consider adopting a metaphorical framework that prioritizes "radical collectivity, anti-exploitation, and diversity" as a decision-making heuristic for WPAs (83). Then, Christy I. Wenger's "Approaching WPA Labor with Ahimsa: Mapping Emotional Geographies through Sustainable Leadership" builds on Belk's heuristic by also taking into account emotional well-being in the decision making process, invoking the metaphor of *ahimsa*, or "nonviolent, mindful consideration for oneself and for others" (123) as a way for WPAs to practice mindfulness and work towards "increased emotional well-being" (125)—in other words, a way for us to care for ourselves, as well as those in our writing programs. In the chapter that follows, Alexis Teagarden's "Representing the Basement" puts into practice Wenger's metaphor and provides a refreshing look at the common metaphor of our field and programs as located in the basement as she demonstrates new possibilities for such a location metaphor by considering fantasy literature and engineering approaches to basements. Finally, Cynthia D. Mwenja's chapter, "Interlocking Circles," brings the section back to considerations of interconnectedness through restorative practice since WPAs "are well positioned to engage in dialogue to nurture ideals of inclusivity and egalitarianism within the interlocking circles of stakeholders" (159).

Section III: Performance Crafts considers performance metaphors for WPA work recognizing the chaotic, unscripted, and surprise moments we may encounter in WPA work. The chapters demonstrate the ways metaphors can work for us, while also urging us to be aware of the impact and potential risks certain metaphors can evoke. The authors employ metaphors that compare WPA work to artisanal production, building a plane while flying it, and improv. Robyn Tasaka's framing of WPA as artisanal in her chapter, "The Affordances and Risks of Artisanal Production as a Metaphor for Writing Program Administration," sustainably values quality over efficiency. Rona Kaufman and Scott Rogers emphasize the improvisational

nature of WPA work in their chapter, "'Building the Plane as We Fly It': Revising Our Thinking about Our First-Year Experience Program," noting that the "unfinished airplane captures the dynamic, protean nature of writing programs" (200). In the final chapter of the section, "I'm Just Playin': Directing Writing Programs as Improv," Kim Gunter highlights the kairotic moments of WPA work and emphasizes that like improv, WPA work is "marked by rules, and it is negotiation of these rules that result in virtuoso performances" (217).

Since the book was "composed, reviewed, and revised prior to summer 2020" vii), as the editors are quick to note, there are ongoing, emerging, and important events not explicitly responded to in the text, such as the senseless murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and other people of color, and the pandemic as well as the recent calls to action in the field for inclusion, representation, and equity. Of course, this is not a critique or the fault of the editors or the authors but instead the reality of the relative sluggishness of book publishing; we mention it only because we find ourselves wondering about how the authors might have incorporated these issues into their chapters if only the book's development had come just a little later (as Doug Hesse did in the afterword) and wishing that we could be privy to those insights.

Perhaps our favorite result of reading this text was a reminder of something we recall thinking the first time we read George's text: WPAs are typically masterful rhetoricians, interesting people, and compelling storytellers. The chapters are well written and well organized with tones that often seem to mirror conversations among engaging, experienced colleagues rather than the overreliance on jargon-laden displays of bravado and expertise so frequently encountered on college campuses. The inclusions of humorous and surprising moments throughout the chapters add a sense of personality and levity, making the text enjoyable to read, from Dippre's "I have joked that I 'earned' that award the same way that Reagan 'won' the Cold War: after others" (77) to Babb's "We may never attain the Zen-like status of Bob Ross's 'happy little trees'" (47). Further, we found ourselves thinking about how we might arrange the readings throughout the semester in a WPA graduate seminar; for instance, Hollinger and Piña's chapter would make a wonderful first week reading, we imagined assigning Wilkes' chapter mid semester, and Gunter's chapter could make a great reading near the end of the semester. In sum, Wilkes, Mina, and Poblete's edited collection did exactly what it set out to do. It has us considering and re-considering how we view, frame, and discuss WPA work. Even more importantly, their book comes at a kairotic time when WPAs are no longer interested in

finding out how to manage the status quo but are instead looking to reject it entirely, asking ourselves, *how do we do this work in sustainable ways*?

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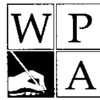

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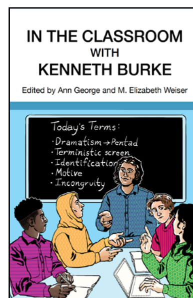

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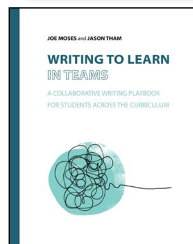

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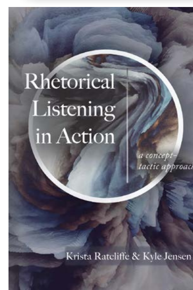

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