

# Untenured Faculty as Writing Program Administrators

Institutional Practices and Politics

Editors

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## 9 Graduate Students Hearing Voices: (Mis)Recognition and (Re)Definition of the jWPA Identity

*Brenda M. Helmbrecht with Connie Kendall*

[W]e do not simply fall into status positions that ‘hail’ us, nor set them aside in conscious resistance to calls from ideology. Positions in discourse are always provisional, even when they are assumed through language that is rooted in tradition and directly copied in a new circumstance.

—Susan Miller

Miller’s observation—though explicitly aimed at the rhetorical analysis of early American commonplace books and the ways in which ordinary acts of writing deploy already available subject positions—is all the more provocative for that which it implies: namely, the idea that discourses occasion the constitution, appropriation, and regulation of a range of meaningful, though ultimately transitory, identities. In Miller’s reformulation, subject positions are stabilized strategically—provisionally—when individuals discursively take up particular identities as a means of establishing rhetorical, institutional, and/or social authority. It was with our own subject positions stable and intact within the positions that we had been hailed into that my colleague, Connie Kendall, and I instantly recognized ourselves in the call for papers that resulted in this collection.

While we knew that the “j” in jWPA stood for “junior,” we assumed that the important descriptor provided by that one letter indicated that we, as graduate students, filled the subject position of a jWPA. After all, we reasoned, we both held a number of administrative positions as graduate students—or, we argued, as “junior” members of the profession. As advanced doctoral students enrolled in a rhetoric and composition program, we were regularly invited to apply for departmental administrative positions in an effort to “professionalize” our graduate education and ready us for the job market. We understood these positions to be assistantships, wherein a full-time faculty member oversees and bears the institutional responsibility for the administration of the program. We welcomed these important professionalizing opportunities and fully recognized them as evidence of a faculty committed to graduate student development and determined to maintain a departmental *esprit de corps*.

Furthermore, we were vaguely aware, though not always critical, of the material and institutional forces that hailed us, even beckoned us, into administrative positions that had been created for us to fall—or be pushed—into. It is this impulse felt by graduate students, and encouraged by graduate programs, that we will call into question in this chapter. Who or what is truly served when English departments in general, and rhetoric and composition programs in particular, create graduate writing program administrator (gWPA) positions? To that end, this chapter situates the gWPA experience squarely within the conversations shaping the definitional claims that give exigence to the issue of writing program administration in the twenty-first century, an identity that enacts Miller’s notion of a more strategic subject formation, fully provisional and meaningful. What must be addressed is the willingness of both WPAs and graduate programs to reassign this work. As we see it, the issue is not just whether or not gWPAs should be accounted for and encompassed within the current definition of a WPA—clearly they need to be—but whether or not writing programs in general, and WPAs (junior or otherwise) in particular, should depend on graduate students to perform administrative duties in order for composition programs to operate effectively. In short, the entire gWPA identity needs to be reexamined.

In the summer of 2001, Connie and I began our joint administration of the university’s portfolio program as graduate student assistants. Due to extraordinary and extenuating circumstances regarding

faculty availability, however, we were soon called upon to oversee the program in lieu of an experienced program administrator. Given these exigencies, we understood ourselves as being asked to assume the position of a WPA (read: we believed we were being “hailed”), and we eagerly and confidently accepted the challenge (read: we “hailed” ourselves into the subject position). During the ensuing months, we each claimed our new WPA subject position as a somewhat stable identity.

Connie and I knew that our subject positions as graduate students and future faculty in rhetoric and composition relied on our ability both to assume these positions and perform successfully within them—and we knew the consequences of disregarding the call to administer (i.e., we would be less marketable, our department would have critical administrative positions unfilled, and we would have to look elsewhere for the financial support these positions provided). In other words, it was not by accident or serendipity that we found ourselves within these roles, though we were acutely aware of the fact that it felt strange being there.

Furthermore, Connie and I jointly ran a writing across the curriculum program housed in the university’s school of business administration because the tenured faculty member in charge of the program was unexpectedly forced to take a leave of absence. Later, at the request of our director of composition, Connie, along with another graduate student, agreed to observe the adjunct faculty who taught the required first-year writing courses, and then composed the obligatory “letter of observation” for the director to read. Though I (Brenda) had also been offered this position, I turned it down to focus on my dissertation and prepare for the job market—a decision that was harder to make than it should have been. Even in my fifth year of doctoral work, even after writing three chapters of my dissertation, even after presenting at professional conferences and holding numerous other administrative positions in the department, a small part of me still believed that turning down administrative work that could be recorded on my CV would adversely affect me when I went on the job market, as though someone, somewhere, would know that I had turned down such an “opportunity” and would interpret that choice as my inability to work hard and contribute to a department.

Between the two of us, Connie and I served on our department’s graduate committee, job search committees (for both junior and senior hires), a university curriculum council, and our department’s compo-

sition curriculum committee. I also became the assistant director of composition (AD) at a time when our interim director of composition, a literary specialist, heavily relied on my training in rhetoric and composition. Due to these unique circumstances, I designed the curriculum for the required TA training course, a task not usually assigned to the AD. As I observed the new TAs in their classrooms, and again designed the curriculum for the weekly one-hour course in composition pedagogy that they took during their first two semesters, I became aware that I was doing my department a service by training, supervising, and supporting these new TAs for an entire academic year—without any additional compensation or reward. While I was financially compensated for some of my work, I was repeatedly told—and believed—that real payment came when I entered the job market with a CV full of administrative experience.<sup>1</sup> But now, given the current political and economic climate in which I live, I can't help but wonder: was I being professionalized, or was the work of a WPA being outsourced?

As *graduate students* invested with minimal institutional status (read: replaceable, temporary, one-size-fits-all), Connie and I were not “really” WPAs—we were not full-time faculty; we did not hold doctorates; we were not salaried like a WPA; and our positions usually lasted a few months. Rather, we were graduate students momentarily masquerading as WPAs. Why, then, did we imagine ourselves hailed into these positions? And through what mechanisms—discursive, institutional, and/or ideological—did we manage to take up the identity itself as a means of establishing rhetorical authority? In other words, had we simply been “hearing voices” and *mis*recognizing ourselves as the intended WPA subject, or does our (mis)recognition instead signal the need for a redefinition of the WPA identity?

Fortunately, by choosing to hear our voices, the editors of this collection are acknowledging the immediacy and importance of examining the consequences of asking—if not requiring—that graduate students heed the call of administration while they are still taking coursework, teaching classes, and completing dissertations and theses. No one denies the fact that graduate students are frequently recruited by their departments to assume positions that have been traditionally held by faculty responsible for administering writing programs, and current jWPAs and WPAs cite similar anecdotal evidence of the benefits of such institutional work. But because these graduate adminis-

trative positions are always already tenuous, temporary, and transitory, graduate students do not fit neatly into the institutional and professional definition of a WPA in its current conception. Therefore, any discussion of the peculiar nature of the jWPA experience, we believe, must make room for discussions of graduate students who assume that same identity.

From my present perspective as a first-year Assistant Professor directing a writing program. Undoubtedly, my subject position has been complicated in interesting ways. As was evident in my MLA interviews, my current institution and others looking to hire WPAs were attracted to my administrative experiences, and I am certain that these lines on my CV did, as had been predicted, help me find a job. Both my advising professors and composition journal editors continually told me, as Sheryl Fontaine argued in 1998, that “odds are high that individuals hired as rhetoric and composition specialists will be, at some time in their career, expected to take on administrative responsibilities in the department” (83). Such an understanding has become a given in the field. In response, rhetoric and composition programs have created more administrative positions for graduate students within their respective departments, while also designing curriculum to further train graduate students so they can qualify for administrative positions straight out of graduate school.

However, I question an institutionalized system that necessarily fragments graduate students’ identities as scholars, educators, and students, such that they must determine which of those subject locations make them most marketable: Should they focus on their teaching? Their scholarship (i.e., publishing or presenting at professional conferences)? Their coursework? Or the administrative roles they hold as junior, and easily exploitable, members of the profession? Some have argued that such a fragmented view of my graduate education simply prepared me for the work I do as an assistant professor. But now, as someone who has recently become a full-fledged member of the profession, I can honestly claim that I feel less fragmented now than I did as a gWPA. I *know* that I am less stressed, experience fewer sleepless nights, have lower blood pressure, and, frankly, have a clearer sense of my role within my department. In short, I am happier. I believe much of the anxiety I felt as a graduate student resulted because the gWPA tends to reside in a subject position that is never clearly defined; whereas today, I have been able to resolve the tension that manifested when I

tried to align the identities I thought I held as a graduate administrator with the one I *really* held.

In their essay, “How to be a Wishy-Washy Graduate Student WPA, or Undefined but Overdetermined,” Stephen Davenport Jukuri and W. J. Williamson explore the convoluted and intangible subject position of a graduate administrator. They explain that, at any one moment, this individual is “socially and experientially” a graduate student who maintains close personal connections with other TAs (106). In the next moment they evolve into authority figures on whom the WPA relies to supervise those very same people—their friends—“to help monitor, train, and develop their teaching performance” (106). In her essay, “The Peer Who Isn’t a Peer: Authority and the Graduate Student Administrator,” Johanna Atwood Brown recounts the social isolation she felt during her three-year stint as a graduate WPA. She found her role constantly fluctuating between that of administrator and friend when she interacted with her peers, and never became comfortable with her dual identity. She confessed that she “never fully understood what [her] power consisted of in this position and felt profoundly uncomfortable exercising it” (124). Brown admits that she wanted it both ways: she wanted to be regarded as an authority figure at school and as a friend outside of it. She never resolved those subject positions as she filled them, and uses her reflective essay to achieve greater identity cohesion.

I confess that even as I hailed myself into a gWPA position, it never occurred to me that I would be taking on a new identity that would greatly affect my relationships with both faculty and other graduate students. I somehow had more responsibility, but did not always have the power or authority to act on it. Within this definitional vacuum, “expectations of us—from other graduate students, from administrators, even from other faculty—can range anywhere from file clerk to spy to substitute teacher to pedagogical theorist” (Jukuri and Williamson 109), and it’s anyone’s guess which voices will enter our heads next.

As AD, I eventually became aware of the emotional sacrifices the position required. I remember one moment in particular when I was driving home from school. Before leaving campus, I had learned that I needed to conduct fourteen classroom observations for graduate students whom I had already been teaching and mentoring and that I had three weeks to do these observations. The stress consumed me as

I tried to figure out how I would observe fourteen classes, teach my first-year composition class, and study for my comprehensive exams. I pulled my car over to the side of the road and burst into tears. While I knew balancing my time would be important for this job, I honestly had not been prepared for what I felt at that moment. Significantly, when I accepted the AD position, I did not know how many TAs I would work with. During the previous year, roughly a dozen students had been admitted; during my tenure in the position, the department gave TA positions to twenty-eight students.

In my mind, it is telling that most graduate administrators find themselves working within what Jukuri and Williamson describe as an “undefined, overlapping space” (106). That is to say, we are not vested with the institutional authority to effect change in policy, attitude, or atmosphere. In fact, most of us understand that what little power we do have has been handed to us by the WPA, and, further, we generally need permission to use it. The daily tasks completed by the WPA were easily managed: I took minutes at the composition curriculum committee meeting and distributed them to members (after the WPA signed off on them); I mentored and advised the TAs to the best of my ability; I responded to the TAs’ teaching journals; I observed their classes. But when a *real* problem arose—when a TA was canceling too many classes, or refused to teach the departmental curriculum, or received bad evaluations—those situations were handled without my knowledge or input. Thus, I often heard about the *real*, thornier work of a WPA through rumor and observation.

Now, as a new WPA, I wish I could have participated in those conversations. As I make decisions about staffing courses and the first-year curriculum, and as I read student evaluations of TAs and lecturers, I don’t know what to do. In other words, I was trained to do the rote work and labor of a WPA, but I was not trained to navigate the tricky political ground that a WPA treads.<sup>2</sup>

In their article, “Writing Program Administrative Internships”—included in the recently published, *The Writing Program Administrator’s Resource*, edited by Stuart C. Brown and Theresa Enos—Daphne Desser and Darin Payne are acutely aware of this preprofessional identity tension. They argue that graduate administrative positions often lead to exploitation because “students may become overwhelmed in programmatic administration, neglecting coursework, teaching, or opportunities to develop research agendas and publishing records”

(90). As anecdotal support for this argument, I recall sitting in a graduate seminar in literature when a student who had not completed the required reading explained that when faced with grading papers or reading the assigned book, she felt like she had to choose between her students and her classes, and this time her students won. I, and many of my graduate colleagues and friends seated around the table, felt a great deal of resentment toward this person. We felt noble because we did not choose; rather, we did our best to live up to all of our obligations. We did the reading, did our best to tend to students, and maybe helped administer areas of the program in our spare time—because that’s what graduate students did.

Yet, I recall that the student who had the luxury of making this choice was studying literature, not rhetoric and composition—the area of study for those of us who felt resentment. Perhaps our harsh reaction was partly due to the fact that most of our literary colleagues did not have such a fragmented view of their graduate study. We were the ones who served on committees, presented at conferences, and held the administrative positions offered by our department. We had been hailed into those positions by our mentors, by other administrators in the department, by each other, and by ourselves because making sacrifices was part of our professional training. “You won’t get to choose when you are faculty,” we were told.

My experience watching graduate students in rhetoric and composition assume administrative positions echoes an observation made by Louise Wetherbee Phelps in her essay, “Turtles All the Way Down: Educating Academic Leaders.” She explains that while professional and administrative responsibilities are “not unique to rhetoric and composition, they are *unusually encouraged* and enabled in many of its doctoral programs” (5, emphasis added). Anecdotal evidence from my own life leads me to conclude my graduate colleagues in literature and creative writing did not feel hailed into administration in the same way as rhetoric and composition students.

Notably, my work as a graduate administrator did not “count” towards the doctoral degree I was seeking, a situation echoing that of gWPAs who find themselves in an administrative position that doesn’t “count” towards tenure. I think it’s essential for departments to determine how gWPA positions function within their departments. Too often, these roles are created because the already overworked and underpaid WPA (“j”) or otherwise needs an assistant to keep up with the

duties her role encompasses. As a new jWPA, I confess that my mind occasionally wanders and I find myself wondering what it would be like to delegate some of *my* responsibilities to one of our graduate students. I even know which students I would entrust with *my* responsibilities and which I wouldn't. Yet, when my mind focuses again, I am compelled to admit that I would only be furthering a cycle that forces graduate students to choose between more obligations than just their work and their students.

But much of the scholarship recommends that WPAs do just that. In "The Graduate Student as Apprentice WPA: Experiencing the Future," which appeared in a 1991 issue of *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, Trudelle Thomas acknowledges the field's move to professionalize graduate students. She sees candidates in rhetoric and composition entering the job market who "quickly discover that they, more than other new instructors, must assume administrative responsibilities early in their careers" (41). Thomas concedes that in a perfect world WPA positions would be filled by tenured faculty members, but she hopes that "*in the meantime*" her article can suggest ways for WPAs to "help graduate students in gaining understanding, and, better yet, experience, in administering a writing program, even while still in graduate school" (41, emphasis added).

She articulates three qualities she believes prospective and effective WPAs must possess: they must be willing student advocates; they need creative vision; they must be adept at dealing with many kinds of people (43). While I think these qualities should be possessed by anyone working within an educational setting, Thomas argues that being able to identify these "personal traits" within graduate students will help WPAs guide students toward administrative work both within graduate school and beyond. She argues that as a WPA, you ought to

observe your students' behaviors in various work and social contexts, such as graduate seminars, their own classrooms, conferences with writing students, and committee or departmental meetings. As you observe, watch for the abilities to speak diplomatically, to express ideas or convictions with force, to be an advocate, and to cooperate with other people. Do you have students who display initiative in organizing workshops or who are leaders of graduate student or-

ganizations? Which graduate students speak up most for their own students or for the writing program in general? Who are your best teachers? (43)

Regarding graduate students as little WPAs-in-the-making seems harmful to me. The qualities described above are not unique to students who would succeed at WPA work. Rather, they describe a student who is passionate about her own commitment to teaching, education, and scholarship. This passage describes a well-rounded student, not one whose professional and personal aspirations should be further weighed down and divided by the addition of overwhelming WPA work. At the same time, I appreciate Thomas's drive to place talented and creative people within WPA positions; however, I think she should recruit from a different pool—such as tenured faculty.

Naturally, Thomas suggests that departments begin creating “apprenticeship” positions for aspiring WPAs. She firmly believes that both the field and graduate students benefit if a “student unsuited to administration is better off to find that out now, before moving a thousand miles for a ‘permanent’ position” (50). Like much of the scholarship that addresses the issue of graduate administrators, Thomas does not step back to question the complications that arise when graduate students hold such positions. She never wonders why the field is moving in this direction, and even seems to see the situation as temporary, which is evidenced by her use of the phrase “in the meantime.”

Since 1991—i.e., *the* meantime—the conversation revolving around gWPAs has entered more complex realms, but still not to a satisfying degree. For instance, in a 1996 issue of *WPA*, Mark C. Long, Jennifer Holberg, and Marcy Taylor pull from their own experiences as graduate administrators to highlight the gaps in their own training. Their essay aims to “transform the intellectual work of the WPA by decentralizing and delegating day-to-day tasks of the program,” tasks which are relegated to graduate students who, they claim, will regard them as an opportunity to “learn the practices of composition studies by actually finding themselves in a position to shape those practices” (67). Though the authors allow for the importance and necessity of graduate administration, they take issue with the “apprentice model” of TA training because “apprenticeship implies a rigid differential between master and apprentice: the apprentice serves the master, with

the payoff for his or her labor being the learning of the trade” (68), or, I would add, the line on the CV.

I agree with Long, Holdberg, and Taylor that the model, as they define it, can be conceptually and intellectually limiting for a graduate student, forcing them to identify the moments when they will become “full-fledged” members of the field. But I begin to take issue with the conception of graduate administration when they argue for a “collaborative administrative model” to frame graduate administrative experiences. Within this model, they propose three guiding principles. First, graduate students need to “become active institutional agents,” a goal that is achieved by replacing the label “teaching assistant” with the more accurate title, “instructor” (72), a discursive change that I don’t think will truly change the lives of either TAs or instructors.

Second, they argue for a “multi-tiered professional development program” (73) that gives graduate students more opportunities to hold administrative roles, in part, because the potential for this “under-utilized resource has only begun to be explored” (74). They further explain that the most obvious consequence of handing over administrative duties to graduate students is a reduced workload for the WPA because it “frees the WPA from many time-consuming, day-to-day responsibilities of conferencing, mentoring, doing class visits, and preparing teaching materials” (74). In effect, the WPA who is liberated from day-to-day “program operation” can become “a more dynamic force in program development” (74).

Lastly, the authors want to create a “responsive and collaborative community of teachers” (74). In this situation, more experienced graduate student instructors mentor and support newer instructors, thereby—again—freeing up more time for the WPA. They explain that when more senior graduate instructors become ADs in the composition program, they can offer closer support than the already overburdened WPA. They conclude their article by arguing that while the

inclusion of 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, or 5<sup>th</sup> year graduate students in the administrative program has eased day-to-day burdens of the WPA, participation in the multiple administrative responsibilities of the department has given graduate students real experience in not only refining the courses they are charged to teach, but

the consequences of teaching in the department and university. (76)

I am struck by these authors' fond memories of the administrative positions they held while completing their doctorates at the University of Washington. Long, Holberg, and Taylor never address the long-term institutional ramifications of regarding the gWPA as requisite to maintaining a composition program. Nor do they explicitly address the issue of financial compensation. And, perhaps it's the less than nostalgic memories I have of struggling to pay my heating bills in the winter as I administered, as I taught and trained graduate students, but I can't help but wonder—when they did the same work as a WPA, did they earn the requisite pay? Or, as I suspect, is pecuniary selflessness another trait that potential administrators should possess?

In my mind, Long, Holberg, and Taylor's argument raises more questions than it answers. What happens to the value of WPA work if it is so easily outsourced to a second-year graduate student, someone who has probably not finished course work, written a dissertation in the field, published much, or presented at many conferences? Doesn't this particular move toward professionalizing graduate students ultimately *deprofessionalize* the work of a WPA? Shifting responsibility from a faculty member to a graduate student is never a "value free act" (Fontaine 84). I can attest to the fact that when work is passed down from someone with rank and status to someone with no institutional authority, messages are discretely passed along because the assumption is that "the importance of the task has diminished in the minds of those who make the assignment" (Fontaine 84). When Connie and I directed the portfolio program, we did so because the faculty member who was supposed to assume the role had a publication deadline to meet. So, yes, messages were sent: scholarship trumps administration. When a WPA passes off a task to a graduate student, how is that task reframed? Does it make the work of a WPA seem less like an intellectual endeavor and more like a series of jobs and tasks that have to be completed?

Yet, many graduate students who have played the role of administrator evidently see this departmental version of outsourcing as value-free. They don't want to admit that they are basically doing the work the WPA doesn't *want* to do, or doesn't have *time* to do. For instance,

in her study of the “professional preparation of graduate students” (65) in rhetoric and composition that appeared in a 1999 issue of *WPA*, Sally Barr Ebest observes that new WPAs are often not adequately trained to fully perform their role. Rather than question the ethics and politics that surround the moment when an untenured ABD applies for and accepts a position as a WPA, Ebest argues that “if we want future WPAs to avoid the burdens of overwork, understaffing, and insufficient funding which so many of us have experienced, we must ensure that our graduate students learn those skills which will help them run a strong and efficient writing program” (76). In other words, the issue is not the workload, the funding, or the staffing; rather, the issue is graduate education and training—which, in my experience, do not address workload, funding, or staffing.

Ebest explains that when she was in graduate school, her mentor, Marilyn Sternglass, arranged for her to get a course release to help administer the basic writing program. Later, when Sternglass was on sabbatical, Ebest served as interim director of composition. Predictably, she found the experience to be “invaluable to [her] understanding of writing program administration and a key element in [her] marketability” (81). Ebest also seems proud to have assisted the university with its budgetary problems because her decision to assume an administrative position as a graduate student also provided for a “means of cheap labor for the university. In this era of dwindling resources and a tight job market, developing these internships benefits all” (81).

After reading scholars like Ebest discuss their work as gWPAs, I know that I am taking on a dissenting voice here. While I did a great deal of administrative work, I am not—and never really was—convinced that I *should have* held all of those positions. And I was always aware of other tasks that seemingly deserved more attention than I gave them, including my coursework, my teaching, and my dissertation. But my goal here is also one of awareness; I honestly believe that many departments have lost track of the day-to-day contributions made by gWPAs, contributions needed for composition programs to function efficiently. The sheer number of positions I have held even impressed, and seemed to surprise, my department chair, who once commented in a letter of recommendation for a teaching award that I had held more administrative positions than most tenured members of the department. Furthermore, my own faculty mentors wondered why graduate students took more than four years (the number of years

that we were guaranteed funding) to complete our degrees—ostensibly unaware of the amount of time we gave in service to the department. Thus, I challenge WPAs, gWPAs, and English departments to (re)examine the institutional and professional forces that hail graduate students in rhetoric and composition into administration.

In some respects, I *am* proud of the work I did as a graduate administrator. However, I take pride in the fact that as a graduate student I was able to do the work of both junior and tenured faculty, and, as a result, felt relatively confident that I would land a job when I went on the market. But, on my first read through the MLA job list, I intentionally avoided WPA positions because I knew that taking such a position before I had tenure could overwhelm me and threaten my ability to earn tenure. At some point—perhaps while revising my CV—I realized that I had, in effect, been trained to be a WPA. Moreover, it should come as no surprise to anyone, myself included, that my first position as an assistant professor is that of a WPA. After all, my mentors and my coursework prepared me for such a position.

We can't lament the fact that nontenured faculty take WPA positions, and then turn around and train our graduate students to do that work. Right now, many institutions that grant PhDs in rhetoric and composition—my own alma mater included—offer coursework in writing program administration. The goal of such courses is to better prepare students to do WPA work—work we all know they will be doing anyway—fresh out of graduate school. This may seem like a good idea *only* if we are already resigned to the idea that ABDs and new PhDs will accept administrative work without first receiving tenure.

But we need to take a step back here. I took two years of coursework, not all of it directly related to my PhD in rhetoric and composition. As programs determine the kinds of coursework that will best introduce graduate students to the fields they will enter, should we devote these intellectual inquiries to rhetorical and composition theory, to teaching practices, to their own writing, or to preparing them to take on administrative roles where they will be overburdened? I remain unconvinced that simply designing graduate courses to help students understand the role they will likely hold as administrators truly gets at the real issues I have presented in this chapter. Perhaps certain graduate students should rightfully be hailed by their department to

take on administrative responsibilities, but only under certain, clearly articulated conditions.

In their discussion of gWPA positions, Desser and Payne argue for the following guidelines:

- a) internships should be appropriate to localized conditions of teaching, learning, and writing program administration;
- b) internships should extend graduate students' education by enriching their course work and enabling them to apply theories to practice;
- c) *internships should involve opportunities for students and faculty members to critically evaluate the political circumstances of their work;*
- d) *faculty members facilitating internships and students taking them need to be compensated appropriately for their work.* (91, emphasis added)

To me, this list represents an ethical approach to training graduate students to do WPA work. Based on my own experiences, the first two items in the list seem less difficult to achieve than the last two. The sheer nature of a PhD in rhetoric and composition inherently encourages graduate students to tie their work in graduate seminars to their work in the classroom and beyond. Furthermore, the field itself seems committed to the interconnected relationship between theory and practice. The final two items, however, seem far more difficult to achieve.

At no point in my work as a graduate administrator was I ever asked to “evaluate the political circumstances” of my work. I truly believed that if I did not take on administrative responsibilities, I would be less marketable and would fare poorly on the job market. However, it hadn't yet occurred to me that my work as an administrator was never really about *me*. Instead, it was about my field's and my department's near obsessive drive to propel me into a professional position before I was ready. Before expecting graduate students to assume these same positions, I think we—both students and faculty members—need to consider the personal, professional, institutional ramifications of doing so.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Compensation often manifested in one course release as I continued to earn my regular graduate stipend, roughly \$14,000 per year before taxes, of which I spent at least \$600 per year on my health insurance. As is often the case with WPAs, a course release did not make up for the additional time and responsibility required of anyone in an administrative position. Furthermore, my work with the portfolio program provided me with an opportunity to earn money in the summer when the university only provided graduate students with a small stipend, currently \$1,800, that did not cover my cost of living for three months. The compensation for portfolio work has since changed so that students no longer receive pay; instead, they are given a research budget, thereby preventing students from deciding for themselves what to do with their pay.

<sup>2</sup> The intellectual and theoretical work of a WPA, and the political overtones of such a position are seldom part of a graduate student's training. I am not suggesting that these issues are easily remedied by "more appropriate" collaboration between the WPA and graduate administrator. Nor am I convinced that such needs are fully addressed by instituting a stop-gap course on WPA work. The problem seems more insidious and complex. That is, to read my struggle in this essay as merely a personal anecdote is, in my opinion, a misreading of a system that coerces graduate students to hail themselves into these administrative positions.

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