convinced, however, that in today's educational environment high schools and their students will aggressively pursue avenues to obtain college credit. It is our responsibility to respond to this reality by creating dual credit programs which offer students quality college-level instruction and which unite teachers at both levels in a mutually beneficial professional undertaking.[2]

Notes

1. Our examination of the May 1984 AP information on the English tests showed that 80% of the students who took the test received a 3 or above. This discovery and those noted within the text convince me that credit by examination is another issue which deserves intense scrutiny and discussion by WPAs.

2. I'd like to thank Joan Gilson for her excellent work with University of Missouri-Kansas City's High School/College Credit Program and for her helpful comments on this essay.

Somewhere Between Disparity and Despair: Writing Program Administrators, Image Problems, and *The MLA Job Information List*

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There is a central irony in looking for work as a Writing Program Administrator. On the one hand, we have created several vehicles (including a Council, a journal, and a consultant-evaluator service) to help change the academy's traditional images of Writing Program Administrators. On the other hand, when we look for work many of us will still answer advertisements such as those listed in *The MLA Job Information List*. One problem for us is that the *JIL* is a conservative and somewhat outdated text. It consists largely of unedited job descriptions written and submitted by literary scholars who have serious misconceptions about the professional roles and responsibilities of Writing Program Administrators. Given this disparity between our self-images and the images reflected in the *JIL*'s job descriptions, two questions arise: What are the *JIL*'s dominant images of Writing Program Administrators? And how do those images relate to our own self-conceptions as teachers and scholars?

My purpose here is to examine some emblematic job advertisements published in the *JIL* during the past two years. My argument is that the majority of these advertisements militate against Writing Program Administrators' professional advancement. In fact, they often serve to undermine our professionalization, to misrepresent our work, and to keep us further "marginalized" (Trimbur and Cambridge 15) in the academy. Before reviewing these advertisements, I want to specify that it is the naive attitudes embodied in them that I find most troublesome. For me, the problem lies in the fact that the people who write these ads seem to have an unclear concept of the field of rhetoric and composition, of the specialties within the field, and of the particular difficulties that face untenured WPAs. In reviewing these job advertisements, I see them as presenting three major problems: 1) they recruit WPAs as untenured assistant professors, 2) they require a high degree of literary training on the part of candidates, and 3) they disguise the political dangers of administrating a writing program within the language of opportunity.

Varied Expectations and Untenured Vulnerability

Initially, the most compelling problem about many WPA job descriptions is that they are often targeted at beginning assistant professors, requiring them to assume too many different kinds of responsibilities while performing sustained and focused scholarship. Here are two examples from the *JIL* which illustrate my point. For Job #1, the prospective WPA is asked to

> . . . coordinate a writing center and a computer facility...including supervision of graduate students and adjunct faculty and to teach undergraduate and graduate writing and composition theory courses (10/88, 34).

For Job #2, the prospective candidate's responsibilities include

> teaching expository writing, directing Freshman Composition, coordinating course offerings in all basic skills courses, supervising adjuncts, and developing concern for good writing across the curriculum (12/89, 14).

Both jobs entail extensive teaching and administrative duties. The multiple tasks delineated in the first advertisement are intriguing in that they promote a blurring between the candidate's professional training (composition theory, writing center theory, and writing program administration) and field of specialization (computers and composition). By grouping the responsibilities of a Writing Program Administrator, a Writing Center Director, and a computer and composition specialist in one sentence, this advertisement disregards the fact that each of these fields has its own scholars and practitioners, its own body of philosophical and theoretical knowledge, its own special interests and concerns, and its own associations, conferences, and journals. This advertisement effectively deprofessionalizes Writing Program Administrators. It recruits us not as specialists with extensive skill, experience, and training in a focused field of study, but as a generalists--people who can be held responsible for all aspects of writing instruction at our institutions. In the second advertisement, it is the mention of "writing across the curriculum" that is especially risky. That particular responsibility creates opportunities that could jeopardize the future of a beginning assistant professor--especially one who is asked to retrain tenured colleagues who may not want to be retrained.

In "Directing Freshman Composition: The Limits of Authority," Olson and Moxley report that assuming a directorship can have a "deleterious effect on [a beginning] instructor's career" (55). They quote two department chairs who each admit to having hired an "underpaid lecturer without tenure" (55) to direct their writing program so that the directorship "does not destroy the career of an assistant professor" (55) through overwork and the resentment of colleagues.

Literary Training as Insurance

The second major problem with the advertisements is that they often require candidates to exhibit expertise in both composition *and* literary studies. The problem here is that while many departments are requiring prospective WPAs to show extensive training and commitment to rhetoric and composition, some of them are trying very hard to make sure that the people they hire in tenure-track positions can also function as literary scholars. Thus these departments require candidates to have at least two kinds of training: literary and rhetorical, not to mention "administrative," a word which seems largely unmentioned in the *JIL*.

This traditionalism is apparent in the December, 1988 *JIL* where we see an ad that reads:

> Director of Freshman Composition needed to organize writing center and establish development programs. Must be trained in composition theory. May also be required to teach World Lit. and/or Classics. Doctorate Preferred. Two years college teaching desirable . . . (16).

The first part of this advertisement is familiar. It features the same blurring of administrative specializations (Writing Center Director and Director of Composition) and the same potential to create tension among colleagues. It is the second part of the text that warrants our attention. By suggesting that the successful candidate may be "required" to teach World Literature and Classics, this advertisement presumes a considerable degree of literary training on the part of the applicant, especially if the term "world literature" includes nonwestern and minority texts. This advertisement illustrates the diverse teaching demands made on all faculty at smaller institutions. It also suggests that a rhetoric and composition specialist—particularly an administrator—needs a traditional disciplinary expertise to fall back on, both at tenure time and at budget cutting time.

Considering the extensive breadth of preparation and responsibility expected of faculty at small, mid-size, and even large institutions, it seems that the politically wise WPA Carol Hartzog (14) writes about needs to be exceptionally useful in both a departmental and an institutional sense. Being "useful" in this case translates into exhibiting a great deal of flexibility and versatility. On the one hand, the applicant needs to convince the hiring committee (who must convince the dean) that he is indeed a "specialist" in composition. He must portray himself as someone who is at the cutting edge of his field--someone who can design, coordinate, and direct a writing program that will serve and anticipate its institution's changing needs. Here, he must represent himself as something of a *voyant d'écriture*—someone who can foresee future trends of the field and the long range needs of the institution. On the other hand, he must convince the committee (and the dean) that he has, as one advertisement put it, a solid "grounding in a period or field of English or world literature" (10/89, 4) just in case all this writing stuff goes bust. Although I like the above-mentioned advertisement's inversion of the traditional intellectual hierarchy—citing literary expertise as a "grounding" while portraying training in composition as

something that is airborne and theoretical—this advertisement is still problematic. In fact, what is "new" about this ad is precisely what is "old" about the academy.

Job advertisements for Writing Program Administrator positions that make statements like "Background in literature preferred" (10/88, 10) make larger statements about the precarious position of Writing Program Administrators in American higher education. They also convey an institutional skepticism about the continuing role of writing programs at century's end. By recruiting people whose teaching responsibilities can be easily converted to full-time literature positions, these schools are insuring themselves and the people they hire against the possibility that the institutional phenomenon of a writing program may someday become extinct. In short, they are shoring up their tenure lines with literature-based scholars in the event that writing program administration, writing centers, writing across the curriculum, and computer-assisted composition instruction turn out to be fads. They want to be ready and safe just in case the "new" rhetoric which emerged during the sixties and seventies, and was popularized and politicized in the eighties, becomes compromised and pulverized in the nineties.

The Language of Opportunity

Finally, it is the language of these advertisements that betrays a fundamental naiveté about what Writing Program Administrators should be expected to do. Rather than simply listing the hiring requirements, some departments create mini-narratives in which the job's inherent risks and exploitation are cloaked within the language of challenge and hope. For example, one institution's advertisement for a Writing Program Administrator seeks to offer its candidates "opportunities for leadership in the ongoing development of a writing program, a writing center, writing across the curriculum, and teacher education" (12/89, 23). All of this while the candidate tries to write and teach her way to tenure. The point of a phrase like "opportunities for leadership" is to elicit a call in the candidate. The call is something like: "seize the opportunity! be a leader! be a Writing Program Administrator." In using the language of "opportunity" to lure beginning scholars who may be eager to gain professional experience, these advertisements romanticize a Writing Program Administrator's role by camouflaging the implicit dangers and vulnerability these leadership "opportunities" may hold for a non-tenured faculty member.

This "inspirational" language also reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of writing itself as a complex and dynamic field of study with its own emerging specializations. In April 1990, one institution was looking for someone to "provide leadership for writing across the curriculum" (4). The writers of the ad went on to say that the applicant's "Graduate emphasis must be in composition," and that the applicant "Must have knowledge of all elements of comprehensive writing programs" (4).

The use of such phrases is troublesome. It is both insulting and unfair. Certainly scholars in literature would not be asked to demonstrate "knowledge of all elements" of their field, or to define their field so broadly. Furthermore, how can a candidate apply for a position with such generalized criteria in a dignified and realistic manner? Think of it. The candidate's cover letter might read:

> I am writing to apply for the position of Director of Writing. I have extensive knowledge, training and experience in such areas as student placement and assessment, course design, faculty recruitment and supervision, teacher education, computers and writing, feminist pedagogy, ESL, and honoring diversity in the classroom . . . just to mention a few.

To address the ad in its own terms, the candidate would have to affirm in her letter that she is knowledgeable about all writing program issues. Such an affirmation would not only put her at risk as a credible scholar in the field, it would also create a tough promise to live up to should she be "lucky" enough to get the job.

Conclusion

Having examined some emblematic advertisements, I wish to offer a suggestion about what the Council of Writing Program Administrators can do to diminish the disparity between the roles that we wish to create for ourselves, and those that are typically created for us in *The MLA Job Information List*. My suggestion is that the Executive Committee of Council of Writing Program Administrators should consider establishing an evaluative coalition composed of tenured faculty, tenure-track faculty, part-time faculty, and graduate students, whose mission could be three-fold:

1. To create guidelines for WPA job descriptions that are sent to all relevant Departments in the United States. These guidelines should describe WPA positions at all levels of the academic hierarchy--from tenured full professor to non tenure-track positions. They should try to explain to departments how the vulnerability of an overworked, untenured WPA can negatively affect their institution over time.

2. To create a section in *WPA: Writing Program Administration* and *WPA News* that publishes reasonable advertisements, thereby modeling suggested job descriptions.

3. To begin a dialogue with department chairs to discuss ways that WPAs can address institutional needs while still receiving adequate professional support, protection, and status.

By doing these things, the Council of Writing Program Administrators can work toward insuring a more equitable representation of Writing Program Administrators in the text that drives and defines professional recruitment in our field. We can also try to make the job advertisements published in *The MLA Job Information List* more clearly reflect the concerns of Council members, and more accurately describe the candidates who try so determinedly, and sometimes so despairingly, to fit those descriptions.

Note

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