

The Portland Resolution

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Background

The theme of the 1990 Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference was "Status, Standards, and Quality: The Challenge of Wyoming." Christine Hult, editor of *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, presented a paper at the conference that essentially called for extending the challenge of the Wyoming Resolution--and the subsequent Conference of College Composition and Communication (CCCC's) "Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing"--to WPAs. In "On Being a Writing Program Administrator," she invited WPAs to begin a dialogue toward formulation of a statement of professional standards by the WPA organization.

Such a statement would outline prerequisites for effective administration of writing programs as well as equitable treatment of WPAs. At the pre-conference workshop, participants were working on a similar document, which they dubbed the "Portland Resolution." A representative committee was commissioned by the WPA Executive Committee to draft a document; their combined work was presented at the 1991 summer conference and also sent to WPA members in *WPA News* to solicit comments toward revision of the document. This final version of the Portland Resolution, accepted by the Executive Committee at their 1992 CCCC meeting, is intended to help both Writing Program Administrators, and those with whom they work and to whom they report, develop quality writing programs in their institutions.

Council of Writing Program Administrators Guidelines for Writing Program Administrator (WPA) Positions

I. Working Conditions Necessary for Quality Writing Program Administration

Many WPAs at colleges and universities, and department or division chairs at community colleges, find themselves in untenable job situations, being asked to complete unrealistic expectations with little tangible recognition or remuneration, and with few resources. The CCCC statement points out the exploitation of writing teachers at all levels, including program administrators: "The teaching, research, and service contributions of tenure-line composition faculty are often misunderstood or undervalued. At some postsecondary institutions, such faculty members are given administrative duties without the authority needed to discharge them; at others, they are asked to meet publication standards without support for the kind of research that their discipline requires." The following guidelines are intended to improve working conditions for more effective administration of writing programs:

1. Writing Job Descriptions for WPAs. Each institution is responsible for providing clear job descriptions or role statements for its WPAs (See Part II below). Such descriptions should be flexible enough for WPAs and the institution--and open to negotiation, especially when hiring a new WPA or starting a new writing program. The institution is responsible for providing a clear formula for determining "equivalence" for a WPA: What responsibilities are equivalent to teaching a full load (as determined by that institution)? What release time will be given for administration and staff development? What administrative work will be counted as "scholarship" in tenure and promotion decisions?

In addition, WPA positions should be situated within a clearly defined administrative structure so that the WPA knows to whom he or she is responsible and whom he or she supervises. A WPA should not be assigned to direct a program against her or his will or without appropriate training in rhetoric and composition and commensurate workplace expe-

rience. If a WPA needs specialized training in any area outside the usual purview of rhetoric and composition studies, the institution must be prepared to provide for and fund that training.

2. Evaluating WPAs. The institution is responsible for setting forth informed guidelines for assessing the work of a WPA fairly and for determining how administrative work is to be compared to traditional definitions of teaching, research, and service in decisions involving salary increases, retention, promotion, and tenure. Assessment of a WPA should consider the important scholarly contribution each WPA makes by virtue of designing, developing, and implementing a writing program.

3. Job Security. WPA positions should carry sufficient stability and continuity to allow for development of sound educational programs and planning. The WPA should be a regular, full-time, tenured faculty member or a full-time administrator with a recognizable title that delineates the scope of the position (e.g., Director of Writing, Coordinator of Composition, Division or Department Chair). WPAs should have travel funds equivalent to those provided for other faculty and administrators and should receive a salary commensurate with their considerable responsibilities and workload (including summer stipends). Requirements for retention, promotion, and tenure should be clearly defined and should consider the unique administrative demands of the position.

4. Access. WPAs should have access to those individuals and units that influence their programs--English department chairs or heads, deans, the Faculty Senate, Humanities directors, budget officers, people in admissions and in the registrar's office, and those who have anything to do with hiring, class sizes, placement. WPAs should have ample opportunities and release time to work in close consultation with colleagues in related fields and departments--Writing Center Directors, freshman advisors and freshman affairs officers, basic skills or developmental writing faculty, English-as-a-Second-Language Specialists, student counseling services, committees on student issues such as retention or admissions standards.

5. Resources and Budget. WPAs should have the power to request, receive, and allocate funds sufficient for running the program. Resources include, but should not be limited to, adequate work space, supplies, clerical support, research support, travel funds, and release time. WPAs should be provided with administrative support, for example, clerical help, computer time, duplicating services, equal in quality to that available to other program directors and administrators

II. Guidelines for Developing WPA Job Descriptions

Each institution should carefully consider the role statements or job descriptions for its WPAs. Depending upon the size and scope of the writing program, the amount of administrative work expected of each WPA will vary considerably. Typically, however, WPAs have been exploited in these positions, that is, given unrealistic workload expectations with little credit for administrative work.

At large institutions with diverse programs staffed by numerous faculty or graduate assistants, several WPAs may be needed (e.g., Director and Associate Director of Writing, Writing Center Director, Basic Writing Director, Computer Writing Lab Director, Director for Writing Across the Curriculum, and so on). At smaller institutions with fewer faculty and less diverse programs, fewer writing program administrators may be needed. It is also desirable to provide advanced graduate students with administrative experience in the form of internships or assistantships to the WPAs.

The following outline suggests both the scope of preparation needed by an effective WPA and the diverse duties that WPAs at various institutions may perform. This list is illustrative of the kinds of duties WPAs typically are engaged in; it is not descriptive of an "ideal" WPA, nor do we wish to imply that each WPA should be assigned all of these duties. On the contrary, the workload of each WPA should be carefully negotiated annually with the administration in the form of a role statement or job description to which all parties can agree.

1. Preparation for a WPA should include knowledge of or experience with the following:

- teaching composition and rhetoric
- theories of writing and learning
- research methods, evaluation methods, and teaching methods
- language and literacy development
- various MLA, NCTE, and CCCC guidelines and position statements
- local and national developments in writing instruction
- writing, publishing, and presenting at conferences

2. Desirable supplemental preparation may include knowledge of or experience with the following areas:

Business

- accounting
- business administration
- grant writing
- information systems and computers
- personnel management
- records management
- public relations

Education

- curriculum design
- English as a Second Language
- testing and evaluation
- psychology of learning
- developmental or basic writing

3. As a particular institution negotiates job descriptions with each WPA, the responsibilities of the WPAs may be selected from among the following comprehensive list:

Scholarship of Administration

- remain cognizant of current developments in teaching, research, and scholarship in rhetoric, composition, and program administration
- pursue scholarship of teaching and curriculum design as part of the essential work of the WPA

Faculty Development and Other Teaching

- teaching a for-credit graduate course in the teaching of writing
- designing or teaching faculty development seminars
- training tutors
- supervising teaching assistants and writing staff
- evaluating teaching performance: observing and evaluating TAs and adjunct faculty in class; reviewing syllabuses and course policy statements; reviewing comments on student essays and grading practices
- preparing workshops and materials, conducting workshops, and conducting follow-up meetings
- Undergraduate writing, reading, language, teaching, courses, etc.

Writing Program Development

- designing curricula and course syllabi
- standardizing and monitoring course content
- serving on or chairing departmental committees on writing
- initiating or overseeing WAC programs
- developing teaching resource materials/library
- interviewing and hiring new faculty and staff
- selecting and evaluating textbooks (which may include establishing and supervising a textbook committee; maintaining a liaison with the bookstore; ensuring that orders are properly placed)

Writing Assessment, Writing Program Assessment, and Accountability

- coordinating assessment and placement of students in appropriate writing courses
- administering writing placement exams and diagnostics (this may include creating and testing an appropriate instrument, acting as second reader for instructors, notifying the Registrar and instructors of any change in placements)
- administering competency, equivalency, or challenge exams
- creating, or having access to, a database of information on enrollments, faculty and student performance
- administering student evaluations of teachers
- evaluating data on student retention, grade distribution, grade inflation, enrollment trends
- reporting to supervisors, chairs, deans, etc.
- conducting program reviews and self-studies

Registration and Scheduling

- determining numbers of sections to be offered
- evaluating enrollment trends
- staffing courses
- monitoring registration

Office Management

- supervising writing program office and secretary and staff

- supervising maintenance of office equipment and supplies
- (managing computer lab & staff)*
- (managing writing center staff)*
(*may be separate positions)

Counseling and Advising

- arbitrating grade disputes and resolving teacher and student complaints, such as placement, plagiarism, grade appeals, scheduling problems (which may include acting as liaison with the appropriate office)
- writing letters of recommendation for graduate students, adjuncts, and tutors

Articulation

- coordinating writing courses and instruction with other academic support services (e.g., study skills center)
- coordinating with English as a Second Language programs
- coordinating with remedial/developmental programs
- coordinating with high school (AP, CLEP, concurrent enrollment) programs
- coordinating with English education programs
- revising and updating any publications of the writing program
- discussing the writing program with administrators, publishers' representatives, parents, prospective students

