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# Gender Differences in Writing Program Administration

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In a 1990 interview, Janet Emig commented that while there are now more women than men in composition/rhetoric, "there is a lack of status for both rhetoric and for women . . . I [have seen] the AAUP tables on this and I don't think women are moving on" (Kuhlman 8-9). As a woman and a WPA, I found this statement slightly ominous. If women compositionists were being held back, what was happening to women WPAs, whose duties and responsibilities seemed heavier than those of the average professor of composition/rhetoric? If male professors of rhetoric were also looked down upon, what happened to them when they assumed the workload endemic to WPAs? Would writing program administration help them, or was it holding us all back?

I forwarded these concerns to the Executive Board of the Council of Writing Program Administrators. In response, they agreed to fund a research study to determine the status and progress of WPAs. This paper presents the results of this study. By comparing the similarities and differences between male and female WPAs, I discovered that Emig was right: despite their common training, background, duties, and responsibilities, the men fare far better than the women. They publish more, they are paid more, and they are more likely to be tenured. My purpose in reporting these results is to point out the problematic issues that these findings raise, to discuss their causes, and to offer recommendations for improvement.

## Demographics

Using the WPA membership list, in April 1992, I mailed questionnaires (see Appendix) to 584 WPAs from all levels of post-secondary education. During the next six months, I received 201 replies, a response rate of 34%. Of these, 129, or 64%, were from women; 72, or 36%, were from men. To determine the reliability of this relatively small segment of male WPAs, I compared their demographic data to that published by the AAUP. The similarities between the two (in age, years employed, salary, and tenure) led me to assume that the reports from this cohort were representative of the group as a whole. I classified and analyzed the survey responses in two ways: by gender and by institutional type. Overall, 42% of the respondents were from doctoral-granting universities, 31% from comprehensive (four year plus MA-granting) universities, 21% from baccalaureate colleges, and 5% from two-year colleges. (Because of the small number of the latter, they were not included in this report.)

Male WPAs have been working in higher education for an average of

seventeen years, six years longer than the females. Ninety-three percent of the men and 90% of the women hold PhDs. Both men and women became WPAs approximately four years after receiving their degrees, whether or not they were prepared for it. Among the male WPAs, 62% had earned a PhD in literature and 28% had doctorates in composition/rhetoric; the remaining 10% held doctorates in related fields, such as linguistics or English Education. Among women with PhDs, 47% majored in literature and 46% in composition/rhetoric, with 7% earning doctorates in linguistics or English Education.

Although the male WPAs were significantly more likely to major in literature than in composition ( $p < .05$ ), these differences probably reflect the era in which the WPAs attended graduate school rather than their gender. On the average, male WPAs entered the job market in 1977, the end of the hiring boom in English (Slevin 3). Female WPAs received their doctorates an average of four years later. After 1977, the decreasing job market in literature combined with the growing demand for composition specialists may have contributed to the tendency of women graduate students to change the emphasis of their degree program from literature to composition/rhetoric. Timing and pragmatics may have also influenced the degree of administrative training that potential WPAs received in graduate school.

Three-fourths of both groups reported that they received no specific training in writing program administration; nevertheless, their explanations of how they learned suggest that both groups were equally qualified. (See Table 1.) Ten percent of the men and 20% of the women reported administrative experience during graduate school, most often as assistant WPAs. The rest were self taught: 5% of the men and 8% of the women took relevant graduate coursework; 4% of the men and 3% of the women attended annual conferences and workshops held by the Council of Writing Program Administrators; 12% of the men and 14% of the women learned from attending other conferences, primarily 4Cs. Finally, 12% of the men and 3% of the women reported that they learned about administration through reading and research.

Most of the WPAs said that they learned primarily through trial and error. How well they learned, or how quickly they progressed, may be due in part to the role of mentors. Men were twice as likely as women to have received guidance from mentors; they attributed 60% of their positive on-the-job-learning to mentors. At the time of this study, the men had served as WPAs an average of ten years, the women an average of seven. AAUP figures for 1992 report the ratio of all college professors as 71% male and 29% female (*Academe* 30). It is safe to assume that when the women became WPAs (roughly seven years earlier), the male-female ratio was even lower, which suggests they had even fewer female role models to choose from for mentors.

## Duties and Responsibilities

Despite their lack of training, WPAs are expected to be responsible for a broad assortment of duties—almost twice as many as those listed by Olson and

**Table 1:**  
Preparation for Writing Program Administration  
by Institutional Type and Gender  
(Percentage of respondents claiming type of preparation)

	Doctoral-level				Comprehensive				Baccalaureate			
	Public		Private		Public		Private		Public		Private	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
None	74	58	86	71	92	66	50	89	50	69	67	65
Admin. Asst.	9	28	0	26	46	13	33	11	25	25	0	18
WPA Conf/Wk'shlp	9	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	12
On the job	62	82	71	48	46	62	50	50	50	69	44	24
Grad Courses	0	3	14	0	0	9	0	0	25	6	22	24
Reading Research	17	0	14	0	15	9	17	11	0	26	0	36
Misc.	12	8	0	14	23	6	17	11	0	26	0	36

Moxley in their 1989 study. (See Table 2.) The present survey listed eighteen duties and asked the respondents to check all that applied. WPAs at doctoral level and comprehensive universities checked every one; WPAs at baccalaureate colleges checked all but two—those that related to TAs. Interestingly, men and women differed in their perceptions about their main duties. On the average, male WPAs claimed primary responsibility for 78% of the duties. They were least involved with hiring and firing adjuncts, training TAs, and training adjuncts. Conversely, these were the areas the women WPAs claimed as their primary responsibilities. Such personnel matters may also be the most stressful, because they deal with those faculty least prepared to teach.

However, given their workload, stress appears to be unavoidable to WPAs of both genders. In doctoral-level institutions, both male and female WPAs receive an average of two courses off, or 40% release time. The male respondents estimate that administration actually takes approximately 46% of their time; female respondents believe they spend an average of 60%. In comprehensive universities, the annual course loads are higher and the release time is lower. Male and female WPAs report an average 25% course reduction; nevertheless, males estimate they spend approximately 45% of their time with administration, while the females believe they spend an average of 52%.

**Table 2:**

Duties and Responsibilities, by Institutional Type and Gender  
(Percentage of respondents indicating specific responsibilities)

	Doctoral-level				Comprehensive				Baccalaureate			
	Public		Private		Public		Private		Public		Private	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
hire/fire adjuncts	54	49	71	43	38	57	33	78	0	56	44	47
select TAs	66	66	57	71	62	54	33	22	0*	0*	0*	0*
budget	37	36	43	58	15	48	67	33	50	50	33	0
train TAs	83	93	71	88	62	57	33	22	0*	0*	0*	0*
train adjuncts	69	50	71	47	46	63	67	67	0	88	44	94
train faculty	46	44	57	43	69	54	83	89	50	31	89	59
train tutors	26	25	43	88	31	37	76	56	50	25	78	24
super-verse teaching	86	83	86	88	69	54	50	33	50	25	56	0
teach theory/pedagogy	71	86	71	43	78	68	17	3	50	19	33	24
schedule design curriculum	60	44	71	100	38	60	33	22	50	44	78	53
select texts	71	69	100	88	92	71	33	56	100	50	44	59
chair committees	69	78	71	57	92	74	33	67	50	38	33	24
write reports	86	72	86	43	100	77	67	33	50	69	78	88
adjudicate disputes	51	58	86	71	54	49	67	78	50	75	89	88
placement	74	69	86	76	69	63	33	44	50	50	56	53
counsel adjuncts & TAs	43	44	86	29	54	57	33	44	0	38	67	41
	86	92	71	57	77	74	83	33	0	69	44	65

Table 2 (continued)

assessment	49	44	43	57	77	54	33	37	0	63	78	41
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Male n = 72

Female n = 119

\* Indicates institution had no TAs

The workload is more evenly distributed in baccalaureate institutions, most likely because they have no graduate teaching assistants. In public colleges, male WPAs estimate they spend an average of 51% of their time on administration, females 46%. In private colleges, the estimate for both genders is an average of 39%; if this latter figure seems unnaturally low, it's because almost half of the women at these institutions receive no release time for administration. In other words, they spend 39% of their time on WPA work, *in addition to* their regular course load.

In sum, male and female WPAs share a number of similarities: the majority are PhDs who became writing program administrators after four years in their tenure-track position; they became WPAs with relatively little formal training and therefore learned on the job, where they perform virtually the same duties, teach the same number of courses, and receive the same amount of release time, which both genders perceive as inadequate. They differ, however, in the amount of time they devote to administration, in their area of graduate work, and in the amount of mentoring they received. Taken together, these factors may have some effect on the ability of women WPAs to "move on."

I include this information to point out that statistics can be misleading. As a rule, both male and female WPAs work very hard at their jobs, but the patterns are more varied for males than females. All female WPAs report working longer hours than they are given release time for. Among the men, however, a sizable number report spending time equal to or less than their release time would indicate. (This group was all literature majors). If you remove this group from the analysis, male WPAs' estimates of time spent on the job are equal to females'.

My purpose here is not to denigrate literature professors (my own major was American literature), but to suggest that there may be some correlations among gender, major, and the ability to "move on." WPAs who majored in Rhetoric and Composition appear to devote considerably more time to administration, and a significantly higher percentage of women than men (46% to 28%) have such backgrounds. This workload may be taking them away from research and publication. Then again, the major itself may be a factor.

The feminist movement has a saying: "the personal is political." Politically, a major in composition/rhetoric may be hurting women. Most respondents agree that a background in literature makes it easier to relate to the rest of the department and to find supportive friends and mentors. Such a background

could be particularly helpful for inexperienced female WPAs. According to one respondent, "women who are untenured . . . [are] even less likely to be involved or knowledgeable about male social networks that inform administrative decisions." A mentor may serve as a role model for research and publication; if mentor and WPA share a background in literature, their conversations may lead to research and publication in that area. This guidance could be particularly useful for WPAs who, unprepared for the position, know little about research in composition.

I hesitate to include these findings because estimates of workloads are open to interpretation; therefore, I cannot state categorically that these correlations are altogether clear. What is clear, however, is that writing program administration consumes time which might otherwise be devoted to research and publication. Whether it is this focus on administration at the expense of research, the lack of a mentor to emphasize research, or research and publication in the field of composition rather than literature, women WPAs are negatively affected. Read on.

## The Effects of Writing Program Administration

Although there is a considerable difference in the productivity of male and female WPAs (the men produced 18% more articles, 26% more scholarly books, 25% more chapters, 11% more reports, and 22% more textbooks) this difference may in fact be attributable to men's longer lengths of employment. (See Table 3.) However, a significant difference between men's and women's publications lies in the focus of the research which contributed to them. Across institutions, the majority of the women's research and publication was the result of their WPA work. If we accept Emig's claim that rhetoric and composition are held in lesser regard, then the fact that the primary source for the women's research lies in that area strongly suggests that their work in writing program administration may be holding them back in more than one way. Not only are they publishing less; they are also publishing in the "wrong" field.

How does this affect the WPAs' tenure? The answer depends on where they work. Sixty-three percent of the respondents employed at doctoral level institutions cited research as the primary criterion for tenure and promotion, while only 26% believed that teaching and research were equally weighted. Among the latter were comments which suggested the naiveté of such a belief. "On paper, they're equal, but in actuality—research gets you tenure and promotion. There is a large difference between what is said . . . and the actuality." Equal weight was only "a popular line from the administration." In doctoral institutions, the average tenure rate for women WPAs was 57.6%. The national average for women professors in similar institutions was 63.2% (Association's 26).

In comprehensive institutions, expectations for research appear to lessen. Fifty-eight percent of these respondents believed that teaching counted more heavily than research, whereas 33% believed that teaching and research were

**Table 3:**  
 Publication Rates, by Institutional Type and Gender  
 (Number of works published in each category)

	Doctoral-level				Comprehensive				Baccalaureate			
	Public		Private		Public		Private		Public		Private	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
articles	467	223	42	36	98	269	34	31	7	66	51	130
books	47	23	3	4	4	16	0	0	0	6	1	6
chapters	124	67	3	14	6	36	2	6	1	4	5	30
reports	31	34	5	1	12	17	10	0	1	3	18	10
text-books	58	45	8	20	16	15	3	2	0	7	5	3

Male n = 72

Female n = 121

equally weighted. Here, too, the cynics spoke up: the two might be considered equal "de jure," but research was primary "de facto." At these institutions, 60.5% of the female WPAs had tenure; nationally, an average of 63.6% of the women professors at similar institutions were tenured (Association's 26).

Two-thirds of the respondents at the baccalaureate level maintained that teaching was primary, but the other one-third felt it was equally weighted with research. Again, the women WPAs' tenure rate fell below the national average: 46.2% of the women WPAs at baccalaureate institutions were tenured, versus a national average for female professors at similar institutions of 62.9% (Association's 26).

Overall, 57% of the female WPAs were tenured, 37% were untenured, and 6% were non-tenure track. Among the tenured women, an average of 19% felt that WPA work had impeded their progress; among the untenured, however, 66% felt it had. Their concern is echoed in comments about how writing program administration has affected their personal lives:

"Of course my duties have affected my personal life. I might be able to have a healthier life if I weren't always in service of the institution."

"I find I will do the administrative work first and save research for last."

"I think I've become an angrier person! maybe more forceful, demanding more from everyone around—pre-tenure adds to the crazies."

"No time to breathe, much less publish."

"The overwhelming struggle for respect and acceptance makes it difficult to continue believing in oneself. Colleges need us, but literature faculty, who are given power over us, scorn us. They are rarely qualified to judge us."

"I work from 10-3 a.m. on weeknights to get my writing done—and arise at 6 a.m. to get kids to school."

"Essentially, I gave up my personal life in order to sustain my scholarship and teaching while doing administration, and to make my administration itself scholarly and creative."

"Actually, despite all the stress and the heavy workload, I've become a lot tougher and more forthright."

"Yes. I am a mess."

"Hard to tell, but a divorce happened after 7 years; the stress of dealing with recalcitrant school districts, threats on my safety and integrity, worry over publishing enough for tenure, and the sheer amount of time required to administer 12 months a year."

"My job is pretty much my private life. I think I must want it that way."

"It is all-consuming."

"One must be all things to all people if you are a female."

Male WPA respondents, who entered the job market an average of six years before the females, had an overall tenure rate of 77%—well above the WPAs' combined national average of 68% (Slevin 4). (See Figure 1.) Male WPAs were also tenured more often than other male professors in doctoral and comprehensive universities. At the doctoral level, where research and publication count the most, an average of 89.5% were tenured, well above the national average of 64%. In the comprehensive universities, the male WPAs' tenure rate again exceeded the national average—77.8% as opposed to 64.9%. Only in the baccalaureate colleges was the men's tenure rate less—50%, as compared to 63.3% nationally (Association's 26). With established research records and a higher rate of tenure, these WPAs' concerns turned towards self and family:

"Administration is so overwhelming I've only barely been able to maintain my marriage. I'm resigning largely as a response to my wife's entreaties."

"The time I spent away from my children and family costs more than I wish it had. I regret the lost time with them now, but I am making it up with my granddaughter."

"This job can take over your life."

"Well, I have no personal life. I rarely see my wife and child because I have to work all the time just to keep up. As soon as my assistant has tenure, I plan to step down. Unfortunately, that's probably five years ahead. I hope I can survive that long."

"Thanksgiving in the Cardiac Care Unit! Enough said!"

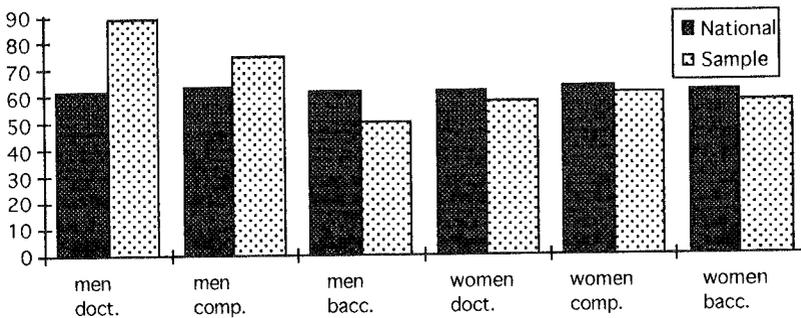
"For me the job/position has become a major part of my identity. I could easily (and often do) spend most of my waking hours in the role. . . ."

The more I do, I find, the more is expected of me (and the more I expect of myself)."

"The pressure can easily lead to depression."

Overall, there is a big difference between the national tenure rates and those held by WPAs. Nationally, men and women at all levels are tenured at approximately the same rate. But among WPAs, there is a clear discrepancy. While male WPAs at the doctoral and comprehensive levels are swimming along, too often the female WPAs are desperately treading water. Whether they are not producing enough, or whether they are producing in the "wrong" field is not clear. What is clear, however, is that writing program administration does appear to be holding them back.

Figure 1. National and Sample Tenure Rates, 1991-92



## Salary, Gender, and Writing Program Administration

Salary is an area in which women professors have traditionally been discriminated against. According to *Academe*, "In 1975, male professors, across all institutions outearned females by 9.2 percent. . . . By the 1990-91 academic year, the disparity for full professors had climbed to 11.5 percent" (Association's 34).

Among female WPAs, salaries ranged from \$20,000 to over \$50,000; the average salary was \$35-40,000 annually, less than the national average of \$42,175 (Association's 20). While male WPAs' salaries fell within this same range, the distribution was less even. Whereas only 26% of the women's salaries were between \$35-40,000, 50% of the men's salaries fell into the same range. These salary differences are not anomalies; they correlated highly with the national average, significant at the .01 level. The variations between males' and females' salaries become clearer when we look at the differences between institutions, as shown in Figure 2.

These differences are not a reflection of the number of months worked per year. Forty-two percent of the men and 58% of the women worked on nine months salary; 28% of the men and 20% of the women had twelve-month

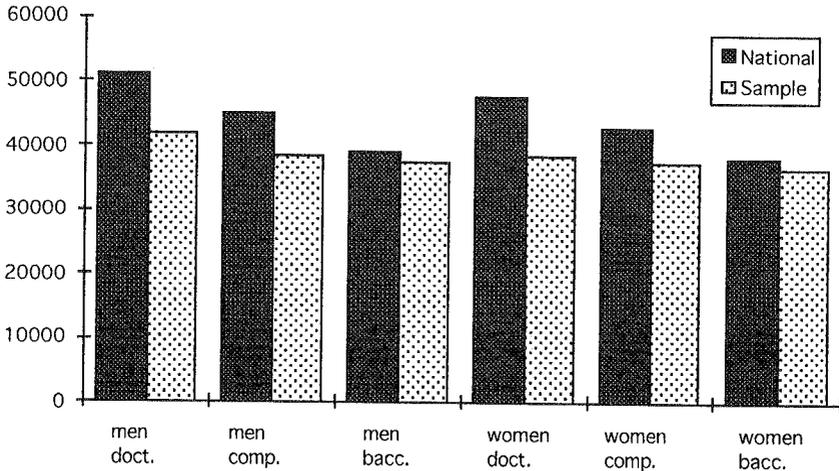
salaries. While salaries vary per institution, there are none in which the women are paid more than their male counterparts. Nor can we say that one type of school discriminates more than another—salary inequities appear across the board.

However, the effects of sex differences on salary are mediated by years employed. Recall that male WPAs have been employed an average of six years longer than females. When years employed are held constant, the original relationship between sex and salary disappears.

In other words, there is no real disparity in salary between the genders. The men are paid more because they've worked longer.

There is, however, a clear difference between the salaries earned by the WPAs and those earned by ranked professors nationally. This is particularly striking for WPAs at doctoral institutions, where salaries differ by 18% for the males and 19% for the females, and at the comprehensive universities, where the difference is 15% for both genders. While we in the humanities typically earn less than professors in other disciplines, these differences suggest that in terms of salary, WPAs of both genders may not be "moving on."

Figure 2. National and Sample Salary Averages, 1991-92



## Areas of Concern

Seventy-eight percent of the women and 42% of the men in this survey agreed with Emig that women were not "moving on" in the profession, an opinion which is supported by the disparities we've seen in male and female

WPAs' tenure and publication. The disempowerment of female WPAs appears to stem from four separate, but related issues:

1. the failure of deans and department chairs to distinguish between service and administration;
2. their uninformed conceptions of the complexity of writing program administration and the variety within the field of composition;
3. their failure to establish clear guidelines for tenure and promotion; all of which are exacerbated by
4. ingrained and often unconscious sexism and socialization.

None of these issues are new; most only confirm what Olson and Moxley found about issues of authority and what Joe Janangelo suggests about English departments' "unclear conception" of the field. Nor is sexism a surprise. However, its pervasiveness and its pernicious effects on female WPAs is disquieting. In the following sections, I draw upon the responses from the survey's respondents to develop this discussion.

### Administration vs. Service

Universities make a clear distinction between administration and service. The former connotes respect for an academic appointment as chair, dean, or provost, while the latter suggests busy work and public relations. Writing program administration is too often seen as the latter. Unfortunately, WPAs themselves sometimes unwittingly perpetuate this misconception. In disagreeing with Emig, one male WPA said, "Women move too fast. Most of ours are faculty for only a few years before they are tapped for higher administrative jobs. . . . Talented women accept these jobs—whereas some men prefer to remain teacher-scholars." Another dismissed Emig's statements as "ridiculous and self-serving" because "the director before me was a woman who received promotion to full professor on the basis of a single book, *nothing more* than her work as WPA" (emphasis mine).

### Unclear Conception of the Field

Too many faculty and administrators are unaware of the theoretical underpinnings of composition/rhetoric, the breadth of the field, and the amount of time writing program administration entails. This attitudinal problem is a result of the institution's and the faculty's misunderstanding of how the field has changed, both theoretically and pedagogically. "With the focus on response groups and conferences," composition is seen as "touchy feely" teaching. This perception contributes to the belief that composition is "a second-tier field," a designation made worse because it is regarded as a "feminine" one. And "feminine" still connotes "the pedagogical (as opposed to the scholarly) activities of the department."

In addition to misunderstanding writing pedagogy, there is also a lack of knowledge about what encompasses writing theory. As Joe Janangelo points out

in his analysis of the *MLA Job Information List*, this lack of awareness causes deans and department chairs to conflate, for example,

professional training (composition theory, writing center theory, and writing program administration) and the field of specialization (computers and composition) [and] 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. (62)

The truth of this statement is underscored by the fact that the WPAs surveyed claimed responsibility for at least 16 of 18 duties listed.

Ignorance of the amount of time entailed in administering the writing program is evident in comments which ridicule women's concerns about the lack of respect their work receives: "You create status by doing important work. Teachers of writing motivated by concerns for status should either choose another field or do their work well enough to become essential to their institution's mission." "Women who have simply done the job of WPA have fared far better than those looking for discrimination against them as they did the job." "Lack of status is a personal issue. Individual WPAs need to gain respect through merits of program—demonstrated."

These comments did not come from uninformed deans or department chairs—they came from male WPAs. They are epitomized by one male WPA, who replied, "I personally don't see lack of status for women—in graduate school and in my current department, women seem to have as much if not more responsibility than male counterparts." That is the crux of the problem, especially if it is true that, as another respondent put it, "Women tend to do those jobs with more attention to detail and with more support for others. [T]his work is largely invisible to those who don't do it." These issues are summarized best by one male WPA, who wrote,

Both men and women suffer from this lack of status. Women are able to 'move on,' but they have to prove themselves in other ways; again, the publishing makes the difference. The problem is in the fact that administration doesn't leave much room for publishing. So a woman administrator has 3 strikes against her before she gets to bat (to use a macho metaphor). The lack of status affects male WPAs by their being marginalized in the discipline in the same way as ALL in rhet/comp are. BUT—their penis protects them against the triple blow that women have—2 strikes when men get to bat. Most insidious is that as 'word' people, people in English are very smooth at hiding their sexism and at playing the game of having none of 'those' feelings about professional women (I refer to many women in literature as well as men).

## Guidelines for Tenure and Promotion

Calls for tenured WPAs are not new. The 1987 CCCC Committee on Professional Guidance to Departments and Faculty made the need very clear,

and yet the problem continues. When the subjects of this survey were asked how to remedy this problem, the most often-mentioned reply was to refuse an administrative position before tenure. But this seldom happens. Both men and women begin administration an average of four years after receiving their degrees. One respondent observed that "English departments are only a reflection of the larger institutional disdain higher education has towards writing instruction. By putting nontenured women into these positions, it simply assures that these positions will remain relatively powerless." Another puts the blame directly upon the English department: "Show me a department that has an untenured, junior faculty WPA and I'll show you a department that does not take the writing program seriously. . . . How many departments can you think of that have untenured chairpersons or heads? How many colleges have untenured deans?" The truth of this statement was clearly illustrated in the statement by one department chair who pointed out benignly that he had ceased using untenured assistant professors as WPAs, so that their careers wouldn't be "destroyed" (Olson and Moxley 55).

Nevertheless, male WPAs are tenured more often than females, especially at those institutions requiring research and publication. What makes the difference? One respondent maintains that "Males tend to be focused on what counts for promotion and tenure, females on students, knowledge, and relationships." Another argues that

Without actively pursuing publication—which is made more difficult by the degree women WPAs seem to get involved with nurturing their programs—I believe women WPAs will lose departmental respect and 'hover' at the associate professor level. I expect men will more likely . . . gain seniority as WPAs and rely on trained staff to relieve them of some of their responsibilities.

## Sexism and Socialization

When we consider the fact that both male and female WPAs have similar courseloads, release time, duties, and responsibilities, yet the women publish less and are less tenured, we have to look at other factors. Chief among them is institutionalized sexism. As one respondent put it,

The Writing Program is kind of like the university's kindergarten—and we know who teaches that. For years, the Writing Program staff was either all TAs or mostly part-timers. . . . If a course can effectively be taught by TAs, by definition it has low status and doesn't require much expertise. People associated with the course therefore have less (if not low) status in the department and the university. Mostly women are associated with the course(s), hence low status.

Another respondent revealed the cynicism this treatment inspires when she wrote, "Women who are WPAs are no more devalued than women in any position—which is, of course, saying a lot. But since WPAs of either gender are not taken seriously, women WPAs get a double whammy: they're scorned as

women and as WPAs."

Both male and female respondents reported a continued misperception about respect and authority, best summarized by the woman who noted: "Women take responsibility; men take authority." This feeling was echoed again and again, by both genders:

"Women work harder for fewer rewards, status, and their personal lives are more difficult."

"Women are expected to do more—to be mothers to unruly staff members—to listen to men talk about their embarrassing personal lives—to always be polite and accommodating."

"Women are used for the hard, time-consuming work but not rewarded with power."

"Women get to do work; men get to plan it."

"Women are challenged more often, relegated 'housekeeping' chores. This is true within or without the WPA designation."

"Women still have. . . to insist on how they wish to be perceived, treated and constructed by their colleagues. It's definitely tougher."

These perceptions exist partly because of sexist attitudes, but also because of socialization. How women have been raised may inadvertently help to perpetuate sexism within the academy:

"The men were better at delegating; taken more seriously, and had more respect from students. I believe women are more likely to do something themselves rather than delegate."

"Men get more respect; are better able to wield authority; men seem more willing to say 'no' to additional work."

"The women worked much harder—because they had fewer assistants—were more available; accessible, responsible, and humane."

"It's not so much our lack of status as our female conditioning to be very service-oriented, placating, and caring. These qualities cause us to attract responsibility but not rewards."

"I observe classic Carol Gilligan differences: cooperation vs. hierarchy; talk of action vs. action (or what academic men perceive as action)."

"Many of us take on greater responsibility than our male colleagues, especially if we bring feminist principles to our work lives (eg.—valuing collaborating; working closely with grad students, etc.)."

But socialization is only a small part of the problem. Those women who speak up and fight for their program are doubly damned. "Women are forced to be agreeable and easy to work with. Women are labeled as 'shrews' or 'bitches' when they assert themselves." Women WPAs are required to balance competence with aggressiveness: "When we're helpful, that's seen as our role. When we're tough, we're 'bitches.'" "My older male colleagues expect me to be deferential, silent, to know my place and follow their recommendations about how to teach composition since they have been at it for 40 years."

If women are not dealt with condescendingly for their WPA work, they are viewed with distrust. The traditional label of "women's work" has taken on new, sinister meaning as female WPAs are now associated with the negative connotations surrounding feminism. This feeling appears as an unconscious manifestation of sexism, often expressed as the author is ostensibly agreeing with Emig:

"I have also observed within WPA activities a scary number of 'academic feminists': women who have adopted male behavior and leadership patterns of aggressiveness and 'I'm in charge,' hiding behind feminist cries of sexism when challenged."

"Occasionally, insecurity among female WPAs, bred of their having been excluded or trivialized in the past, manifests itself as a kind of toughness (a 'male-ness,' if you will) that works against them by alienating people or creating a hostile, adversarial context."

These attitudes clearly work against women WPAs. "Reflecting the sexism of contemporary society, women are resented in positions of authority, and hence may be harmed by negative evaluations by their colleagues."

## Conclusions and Recommendations

When I went up for tenure, I had a solid case—a number of publications, an informed department chair, and a strong proponent in the leader of my tenure committee. I also had my detractors. Unbeknownst to me, a conservative member of the literature faculty had circulated a slanderous, multi-page letter attacking me and ridiculing my research. The tenure meeting went on for three bitter hours. When it was over, the faculty were shaken and my committee chair was hoarse, but the vote was 12-2 in my favor.

My jubilation was short-lived. At my university, departmental faculty who vote "no" in a tenure case must explain their vote in a letter which goes forward with the department's report. Everyone told me that in my case, this letter would not be taken seriously because of its author's reputation. But they were wrong. When I inquired about the status of my case, I learned that on the basis of this letter, the College committee had voted against tenure. In shock, I called the chair of my tenure committee, who immediately took action. He got permission from the Senate committee chair to write a letter refuting the unfounded and uninformed accusations, and for our department chair to present counter-arguments at the Senate committee's meeting. In the meantime, again unbeknownst to me, one of my female colleagues discussed the matter with a member of the Women's Studies faculty, who was also on the Senate committee. As a result of my colleagues' united efforts, the Senate committee dismissed the accusations, my tenure case proceeded, and ultimately, I was granted tenure and promotion.

I pass this on, not as yet another horror story, but as a paradigm of the status of WPAs and of women in the university. Within the department, knowl-

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edge and support are growing, but outside the department, most faculty still know very little about writing or writing program administration. In the past decade, statements from CCC and the MLA have defined the field, explained the duties of the WPA, and called for a halt to the hiring of untenured WPAs. The Council of Writing Program Administrators has held joint conferences with the MLA and ADE, sponsored speakers at MLA and AERA, circulated the Wyoming Resolution and adopted the Portland Resolution. A variety of books and articles have explained the current state of composition/rhetoric and its role in the university. And yet, as this survey illustrates, progress has been slow.

If WPAs—especially women WPAs—want to “move on,” we will have to do it, once again, on our own. The results of this survey yield some clear recommendations:

- **Educate your dean, department chair, and tenure committee.** Meet with them personally, give them the above-mentioned documents, and press for their adoption in your department. Once your role has been defined, present a completed statement to the department and request that it be made an official part of the guidelines for tenure and promotion. Keep requesting until it's adopted.
- **Publish.** Even with these documents, you are unlikely to get tenure, promotion, or merit pay in comprehensive and doctoral level institutions if you don't publish. Writing program administration offers a wealth of opportunities for research. Decide what you're interested in and what methodology suits your temperament and writing style, and start collecting data.
- **Find a mentor, talk, and observe.** Become informed about power, politics, and publication. Then become a mentor: pass on your knowledge to the next generation of assistant professors through example and support.
- **Educate your graduate students.** A specialization in composition/rhetoric should include more than theory. The students also need to know about power, pedagogy, politics, and publication. Give them practical experience as administrative assistants, teach them research skills, show them how to apply theory to teaching and administration, and make them write.
- **Network.** Join groups or attend meetings compatible with your interests. Don't be shy—listen and ask questions, but also share your interests and research. People need to be educated about what we do; the best way to do it is by getting to know them.
- **Build bridges to literature.** Literature is not the enemy; in fact, it is probably the reason we're in this profession. If you get the chance, teach a literature course (Women's Studies is always looking for good people) and practice what you preach: apply composition theory and pedagogy in the literature classroom. Then write about it.

- **Finally, take care of yourself.** Choose your battles carefully. Learn to distinguish between being efficient and being what John Warnock calls an “enabler.”

In self-help groups, “enablers” are people who enable loved ones to continue substance abuse by taking on their responsibilities and protecting them from the consequences of their actions. Such behavior adversely affects both parties. The protected one is freed from responsibility and so continues his or her destructive activities; meanwhile, the enabler becomes over-burdened, fulfilling his or her own responsibilities as well as those of the other. These actions can bring on a cycle of co-dependence which is not healthy for either party. While enablers may enter this cycle out of a sincere desire to help, Warnock points out that this behavior can also have a dark side, leading the enabler to simultaneous feelings of power and resentment.

When Warnock introduced this term, he was referring to styles of mentoring, but the analogy also applies to writing program administration. Both male and female WPAs need to look closely at the sources of their workloads, determine the reasons for their work, and recognize the consequences of over-extending themselves. Inadvertently, our behavior may perpetuate the tendency of English departments to dump all “writing problems” on the WPA, to remain oblivious to requests for assistants and secretarial support, to allot insufficient release time, and yet paradoxically, to expect research and publication on a par with non-administrative faculty. If we want to “move on,” we need to realize that in taking on all responsibilities, we are not necessarily helping our writing programs: we may be enabling our colleagues to continue behavior that is destructive to the writing program, to those who teach writing, and to those of us who administer the program.

## Note

1. I would like to thank Frances Hoffman, Director of the Institute for Women and Gender Studies at UM-St. Louis and Chris Reichard for their help in the statistical analysis.

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## Appendix: Survey of WPAs

This survey included 43 questions covering the WPA's background, training, duties, and responsibilities; course load, release time, and salary; the effects of writing program administration; and general institutional information to provide a context for each school. This paper focuses on that information which addresses Emig's charge.

To provide a context for interpretation, I categorized the responses according to the individual's institution—i.e., public and private doctoral, public and private comprehensive, and public and private baccalaureate colleges. Within each category, I tabulated responses and determined percentages for that class. In reporting and comparing results, I weighted and then averaged these percentages to compare and contrast the situations of male and female respondents.

### Background

1. How many years have you been employed full-time at the post-secondary level?
2. What is your highest degree? When did you receive your degree? If you received a Ph.D., what was your area?
3. Please check the administrative positions you have held within the English department or relating to your institution's writing program:
 

a) Director of Composition	b) Director of Writing Center
c) Coordinator of WAC	d) Director of Graduate Studies
e) Supervisor of TAs	f) Director of Writing Assessment
g) Supervisor in Eng. Ed.	h) Other (please write in)
4. When did you begin writing program administration?
5. For how many years have you directed some aspect of the writing program?
6. What training, if any, did you have for an administrative position?
7. If you had no training, how did you learn?
8. What roles did mentors play? Were mentors male or female?
9. Are you male or female?

## Duties and Responsibilities

10. How many hours per week does administration take during fall semester? during winter/spring semester? during the summer?
11. Please check the administrative duties you perform:
  - a) hire and fire adjuncts      b) select TAs      c) manage budget
  - d) conduct training/in-service workshops
    - 1) for TAs 2) for adjuncts 3) for other faculty 4) for tutors
  - e) supervise TAs' teaching      f) teach TA theory or pedagogy course
  - g) schedule writing courses      h) design curricula i) select textbooks
  - j) chair writing-related committees (how many?)      k) write annual reports
  - l) adjudicate grade or placement disputes
  - m) organize/supervise placement - students? student teachers?
  - n) counsel TAs and adjuncts      o) writing assessment
  - p) other (please list):
12. What is your department's annual course load? How much official release time do WPAs get? What percentage of your time does writing program administration actually take?
13. Is administration a nine-, ten-, or 12-month position?
14. What is your salary range?
  - a) less than \$20,000/year b) \$20-25,000 c) \$25-30,000 d) \$30-35,000
  - e) \$35-40,000 f) \$40-45,000 g) \$45-50,000 h) more
15. Is the WPA a rotating position? If yes, how many years/term? How many terms have you served?

## The Writing Program

16. How many sections of writing courses are offered per year?
17. How large is your writing faculty? Please write the number of each in the blank:  
\_\_\_\_\_ full-time, tenure track    \_\_\_\_\_ full-time instructors    \_\_\_\_\_ part-time  
\_\_\_\_\_ Teaching Assistants    \_\_\_\_\_ # of males    \_\_\_\_\_ # of females
18. Please check the types of courses you design, staff, or supervise:
  - a) freshman composition b) advanced composition c) WAC d) other upper division writing courses e) basic writing f) Writing Lab/Center g) other (please list):
19. How many new TAs enter the program each year?
20. Do TAs teach courses other than freshman composition? a) yes b) no
21. Are you responsible for preparing TAs to teach other courses? a) yes b) no
22. What other duties can TAs perform?
  - a) research asst. b) tutor c) mentor d) administrative asst.
  - e) other (please list)
23. What kind of support staff do you have?
  - a) full-time secretary b) part-time secretary c) dept. secretary d) work study persons (how many?) e) full-time asst. f) part-time asst.
24. Is the staff a) assigned to you, or b) do you choose/hire them?

## Institutional Information

25. Please check the letters which describe your institution:
  - a) 2-year college      d) university      g) M.A. granting

- b) 4-year college      e) public      h) Ph.D. in English  
 c) vocational/tech school      f) private      i) Ed.D.
26. Please check the rank(s) of the majority of writing program faculty:
    - a) full-time lecturer
    - c) TA/graduate students
    - e) assoc. professors
    - b) part-time/adjuncts
    - d) assistant professors
    - f) full professors
  27. What is the primary emphasis at your institution?
    - a) teaching
    - b) research
    - c) equally weighted
  28. Apart from refereed articles and scholarly books, what counts for promotion and tenure at your institution?
    - a) textbooks
    - b) WPA
    - c) software development
    - d) workshops
    - e) conference papers
    - f) program evaluation
    - g) other (please list)
  29. How is writing program administration regarded?
    - a) application of theory and research—a scholarly position
    - b) managerial
    - c) supervisory
    - d) public relations
    - e) other?
  30. Given these ratings—1) highly respected, 2) well regarded, 3) accepted, 4) service courses, 5) remedial—how does the English department regard the Writing Program?  
 How would your institution rate it?
  31. If you have tenure,
    - a) did you have problems getting tenure, or promotion?
    - b) did you have tenure before assuming administrative responsibilities?
    - c) would you have chosen to become a WPA without having tenure?
    - d) did your administrative duties
      - 1) enhance your tenure case?
      - 2) impede or imperil your tenure case?
  32. If you don't have tenure
    - a) will writing program administration enhance or be counted in your tenure case?
    - b) has the workload imperiled or impeded your progress?

### Effects of Writing Program Administration

33. What have you published? (please list numbers)
 

_____ articles	_____ chapters	_____ textbooks
_____ scholarly books	_____ reports	_____ other (please list)
34. What have you published as a result of your WPA experience?
  - a) articles
  - b) chapters
  - c) textbooks
  - d) reports
  - e) software
  - f) scholarly books
  - g) other (please list)
35. At what point of your career did you begin to publish?
  - a) pre-WPA
  - b) during WPA
  - c) post-WPA
36. As a scholar, have the duties of writing program administration made you:
  - a) more productive
  - b) less productive
  - c) had no effect
37. Have your combined duties (academic and administrative) affected your personal life? Please feel free to explain your answer if you feel that your response will provide useful caveats for upcoming WPAs.
38. What do you like about being a WPA?
39. What do you dislike about your position?
40. Have you been in a department where other people have served as WPA? If you answered yes, how many male WPAs have there been? How many females?

41. Have you felt or observed any gender differences between male and female WPAs? Some areas to consider are responsibility vs. authority, workload, delegation and completion of tasks, respect, etc.
42. What advice would you give students pursuing a graduate degree in Composition/Rhetoric? Some areas to consider are the appropriate academic preparation, the type of experience they should seek, and the amount of responsibility they should expect and be willing to assume. Would your advice differ according to the students' gender?
43. Do you agree with Janet Emig? Is there "a lack of status both for rhetoric and for women" in English departments? Is this particularly true for women WPAs? Are women able to "move on"? If there is a lack of status, how does this affect the careers of male WPAs?

*Please feel free to add any other comments you feel would be useful.*

### E-Mail Directory for WPAs

The fall issue of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* will publish an e-mail directory of Writing Program Administrators. If you would like to be included in such a directory, please send your e-mail address before 15 August 1995 to Doug Hesse: [ddhesse@ilstu.edu](mailto:ddhesse@ilstu.edu)