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# Bloom's Laws

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Long ago and far away, in a moment of weakness (I was actually close to meltdown and didn't know it) I accepted a new administrative post. Some have greatness thrust upon them, I thought in my delirium, and this was a rare opportunity. So I decided, as any self-respecting (read desperate) academic would, to prepare for this status nouveau by reading up on how to do it. Book after book, article after article on administration passed under my keen eye, written by the reputable and the revered—efficiency experts; analysts of academic politics and procedures; department chairs who had been there, done that and that and that. At the time, in the dark days before WPA (imagine!), writing program administrators had no public forum and no identifiable voices, so I could glean no wisdom from that corner. I confess that from this blitz reading no authors and no titles linger. In fact, only one nugget remains in memory, the metaphor that epitomizes this exalted status: "An administrator"—not the author's exact words—"is to a department as a fire hydrant is to a dog."

Would that canines possessed opposable digits, I would write the following observations from the dog's point of view, my personal favorite, the border collie. The border collie's marginal stance embedded in its politically correct name makes it the ideal metaphorical equivalent of an administrator—a life on the boundary between institutional structure and the locus of great change, poised on the border to bring order, even structure, out of potential chaos in the combat zone. For border collies are smart, energetic, and let's face it, bossy, born to round up strays and laggards and keep them on a course predetermined by others which they have adopted as their own. But alas, I am fated to write from the human perspective that has dogged me from that day to this, as administrative duties have adhered to my various jobs, irrespective of official title, as lint to velcro. Thus I offer here Bloom's Laws, developed over the years in an attempt to interpret low situations—crises, confrontations, conflagrations—according to principles that I wish were higher than they are.

## Love in the Time of Cholera

1. Anything that can be administered will be. Including many things that can't.
2. No one was born wanting to be a writing program administrator. Or a department chair. Or a dean. No one ever entered college—or even graduate school—wanting to be a writing program administrator. Where did we go wrong?
3. WPAs don't think something is fun unless it requires three hundred (not enough? five hundred? a thousand?) hours of community service.
4. The grungier and more time-consuming a job is, the more eager the WPA is to tackle it. "Let's go out to the old barn and read placement exams, organize a conference, start a journal. . . ."

## The Long Day's Journey into Night

5. Anything that looks simple isn't. A ten minute job will take two hours. A two hour job will take eight hours. Nothing takes ten minutes.
6. Whenever you, the administrator, are in your office, someone else will be in there with you.
7. Work is whatever goes on in your office. Therefore, when you leave at (fill in the number—5, 6, 7, 8 . . . ) p.m., you will have done a full day's work.
8. High drama at (fill in the number—5, 6, 7, 8 . . . ) p.m. is low comedy at 8 a.m.

## The Signifying Monkey and the Language of Signifyin(g)

9. What isn't written down will be:
  - a) Used against someone—maybe you.
  - b) All screwed up.
  - c) Soon forgotten.
  - d) Misremembered, and reinterpreted to suit the (mis)rememberer.
  - e) Therefore, write everything down.
10. Whatever gets written down will be:
  - a) Used against someone—maybe you.
  - b) Lost.
  - c) Soon forgotten.
  - d) Misfiled.
  - e) Therefore, write nothing down.
11. If a meeting's agenda can disintegrate, it will. Therefore, write everything down in advance (see Laws #9, 10).

## Civil Disobedience

12. Doing a study precludes—not precedes—taking action.
13. Procedure preempts principle.
14. Procedure preempts policy.
15. Procedure preempts substance.
16. Complexity kills. Substituting extraordinary procedures for ordinary ones really screws things up. Adding more administrators to fix things really fixes things.

## Pride and Prejudice

17. Computers are a black hole for money. We can't live without them.
18. Email is a black hole for time. We can't live without it.

## The Beautiful and the Damned

19. People who threaten to quit if you don't appease them won't.
20. People who will leave will leave.
21. You, we may assume, are expendable.

## Culture and Anarchy

22. A new paradigm for teaching writing is, as Sam Johnson has said of a second marriage, a triumph of hope over experience.
23. A new administrative job is, likewise, the triumph of hope over experience.

Nevertheless, we soldier on. When I succumbed to the lure of yet another administrative job I taped the insight *du jour* into the center drawer of my desk. "You are expendable" (Law #21), I read every time I reached for a pen, a paper clip, or more and more often as the job—dare I say—progressed, one aspirin, and then another and another. . . .

The moment of truth came, as the truth often does, in bed—one dawn at 5 a.m., my usual time for an hour of creative drowsiness before I had to get up. This time I awoke, bolt upright. Instead of rejoicing because I had solved yesterday's problem—I had finally found offices for the adjuncts, converted music practice rooms, their soundproof quality significantly intact—I was fretting because I couldn't get doorknobs for those very rooms. In a flash I leapt out of bed, "I didn't get a research PhD to worry about doorknobs! I'm going to quit this job" (see Law #19). And so I did. My successor did just fine.

But I couldn't stay away (see Laws #4, 23). Indeed, I feel another Law coming on: "Solving one problem only leads to another problem to be solved." After all, the new millenium is coming, and with it as the night follows the day will come changes, crises, problems to be solved. Once a WPA, always a WPA, born to set things right (Laws #22, 23). I would like to come back as a border collie.