

Graduate Students, Writing Programs, and Consensus-Based Management: Collaboration in the Face of Disciplinary Ideology

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In his preface to Olson and Taylor's new collection on publishing in rhetoric and composition, J. Hillis Miller notes the importance of changing our beliefs about the preparation of future faculty. Himself an eminent literary critic, Miller writes that while literary studies are in a "state of decline," the field of composition and rhetoric has become "brilliantly professionalized," responding to "major social forces such as the redefinition of the university's mission from cold war research and indoctrination in a single set of national values to 'preparing a skilled workforce for competition in the global marketplace'" (xiv).

Arguing that graduate students need at least some administrative preparation if they intend to pursue careers in composition, some composition programs are now creating graduate courses that focus partly or wholly on the difficult, complex, and knowledge-based work of administration. A few programs have gone even further, creating new approaches to collaborative administration that increasingly involve graduate students who may have little experience in higher education leadership. These trends, however, are not without their strong detractors, especially those who argue that graduate students have no business doing the work of faculty and ought to be spending most of their time on their studies.

While debates about the involvement of graduate students in writing program administration may seem to invoke mostly superficial issues, we believe that the future of such collaborations depends largely on the underlying ideology of our allied professions—on tacit beliefs about the relationship between knowledge and work in higher education. In this essay, we explore this relationship by considering the values that led to the creation of a consensus-based management system in our own composition program at a major university. By surveying faculty members who once participated in this system as graduate students, we also 1) gauge the effectiveness of this system in helping them to secure positions as faculty and in providing them with skills and perspectives essential for their success; and 2) try to understand the ideological and disciplinary reasons why the new administrators of this same program, who do not have backgrounds or experience in composition, would resist and largely abandon the administrative model on which the program was founded.

Consensus-Based Management: A Brief Local History

The management system on which the University of Minnesota's independent Composition Program was founded in 1981 reflected, in both structure and spirit, an attitude toward graduate students as developing professionals rather than as novices who are unable to participate in departmental governance until they can boast a Ph.D. This consensus-based system, which created a community of workers united in the delivery and administration of effective, cross-curricular writing courses, often deliberately tried to ignore differences in the institutional status of its members, giving everyone equal voice in key decisions and seeking the advice and reflections of all members.

From 1981 to the fall of 1996, the Composition Program operated in a separate instructional unit in the College of Liberal Arts. Four faculty members transferred some of their effort, through course release, into the Program in capacities relating to administration and the training of teachers, but their tenure homes were in the English department. The six thousand undergraduates served annually by the Composition Program were taught primarily by graduate students—over 100 of them—whose interests as teachers, graduate students, and employees the Program tried to serve in its various missions.

A graduate teaching appointment in the Composition Program was competitive, requiring a formal application procedure and interview. The Program staff, consisting of faculty, civil service employees, and appointed graduate student assistants, identified and recruited qualified candidates from a broad range of disciplines. All applicants were advised that the appointment required a two-year commitment, intensive pre-fall training, ongoing participation in teacher-development programs (including cross-observations of classes), and relatively autonomous but supervised teaching of lower and upper division courses. To recognize the professionalism stemming from extended training and the length of the teaching commitment, the Program provided centralized office space; office supplies and services; teaching assignments for a full academic year; seniority as a factor in choice of courses and office space; travel funds to attend professional conferences; an annual teaching award; and participation in program management.

Graduate students played a significant and at times indispensable role in Program management through several part-time administrative appointments. Composition TAs were eligible to apply for these designated administrative jobs within the Program. Every year, several graduate students helped design and deliver training, worked closely with the faculty directors of lower and upper division curricula, directed the writing lab, and assisted the director with administrative projects. These positions were awarded after a competitive application procedure that included assembly of a dossier and a formal interview with a panel of faculty and peers. The jobs were compensated by replacing part of a teaching assignment with course-equivalent administrative duties. For example, each of the two graduate students who assisted the upper division

director received payment equal to the stipend for one course. Those who served in administrative jobs did so for fixed terms and were prohibited from succeeding themselves, which ensured that the positions would routinely be available to other graduate students as they moved through their degree programs.

Graduate students typically worked in clusters in close collaboration with one of the faculty members, who each had responsibility for one or more domains of the Program. Graduate students with administrative jobs also served on the Core Staff, the governing body of the Program. During regular meetings, faculty, staff, and graduate students addressed curriculum, training, professional development, and day-to-day management. Graduate students participated in all of these discussions, with the exception of the rare disciplinary matter that involved peers, or confidential and high-level issues ethically and legally best taken up by the tenured faculty. Minutes from Core Staff meetings were published for the entire Program, and important recommendations could lead to a formal vote of the group. Specific initiatives or proposals that would affect teachers were usually described in mailings or at open forums, and the entire staff was asked to offer reactions and suggestions. Graduate student representation on the Core Staff also allowed for more direct communication between the administration and the teaching staff.

Fifteen years after the foundation of this independent program, its administrative control was given back to the English Department through the actions of a temporary dean who held the Program accountable for several hearsay complaints that undergraduate students at the University were not writing well. The English Department, in need of tuition revenue and the many TA lines held by the Program, eagerly complied. On the heels of this abrupt move, a faculty administrator in English remarked that it was the department's intent to burst the "bubble" that had surrounded the Program when it had independent status. He was referring specifically to the Program's system of management—a system based on the administrative participation of faculty, graduate students, and support staff. In characterizing the Program as a "bubble," the professor was referring to a perceived aura of unreality encircling—in his words, "protecting"—graduate students who participated in the Program. This bubble apparently did not exist in other departments, which maintained a strict personnel hierarchy and strong limits on the extent to which graduate students could participate in administrative and curricular work.

Within a few months, much of the old system had disappeared. Where the previous model emphasized mentoring by faculty and among peers, there were now fewer opportunities to explore and reflect on the daily teaching situations that help a new teacher become a faculty member. Graduate students' professional needs were minimally represented—three of twelve seats—on a Writing Advisory Committee that replaced the Core Staff. (The Core Staff, a group of about the same size, was about half graduate students, half faculty and support staff.) The new governance provided for advisory input only. Policy was determined by the director in consultation with the English Department's executive committee, a group that included some faculty who had not taught composition in more than two decades.

From the perspective of the compositionists who created and ran the Program, its system of management provided excellent preparation for future WPAs, gave voice to all members of the staff, and led to effective problem-solving and strong, democratic leadership. In fact, similar systems were in place at other universities with strong graduate programs in composition—and over the years several WPAs had visited Minnesota's composition program to study its model and adapt or replicate it on their own campuses. The system, in other words, worked well. Why, then, would the new administration of composition within the English Department look upon this management system as suspect and, having taken control, dismantle its basic structure?

In puzzling through this question, we are led to speculate on the ideological clashes often experienced between disciplines and subdisciplines—in this case, English literary studies and composition studies. The English Department's change in the managerial structure of Composition does not seem to have been precipitated for structural or logistical reasons: it would have been less difficult to continue the old system in its new home. Instead, we believe the reasons have a disciplinary foundation. As we discovered, breaking down hierarchies can directly challenge the leading assumptions of higher education institutions, which are inevitably caught in their own management structures and in their own, often tacit beliefs about work duties, educational and degree status, earned rights of speech or involvement, seniority, accountability, and chains of command. Scholar-teachers in composition and those in literary studies do not always share the same views of work, position, and rewards, and the differences in their values about the purpose of graduate training strongly influence the roles they establish for their students. In critiquing our colleagues' views, of course, we also recognize that their positions and actions necessarily emerge from and are deeply rooted in tacit sets of beliefs and social practices that constitute their own cycles of production, credit, and self-replication.

From this perspective, we wondered whether the particular kind of collaborative management system that characterized the "old" composition program was effective in preparing future faculty. We wondered, in other words, whether there was a relationship between the values that structured our program and the realities facing our graduates. Although we knew about the fate of most of our past administrative assistants, we had never asked them to assess their experience in light of their post-graduate employment. Does it serve graduate students well to distract them from their scholarly studies by involving them in programmatic work? Is there a strong match between the disciplinary ideology of many literary departments, which urge total immersion into one's studies, and success on the job? Intrigued by these questions, we turned to our own former administrative assistants, most of whom now hold tenured positions in English departments at colleges and universities around the country, some as literature experts, some as compositionists and WPAs. In surveying these faculty, we wanted to know whether the specific kind of experience they had in our program as administrative collaborators prepared them in any way for their work in higher education—or if they had any misgivings about the time and effort they put into collaborating with us as "novice" WPAs.

We sent an e-mail questionnaire to two dozen people who had held administrative appointments in the Program in Composition as graduate students sometime between 1983 and 1996. Providing them a way to remain anonymous—though none chose to—we asked them to tell us about their current position and the position they held while here. We asked them to tell us whether they thought their administrative work as graduate students helped them in any way in their current position or any other position they have held since leaving our campus. We urged them to be candid in describing any problems they experienced in their administrative roles as graduate students. And we asked them to comment on the pros and cons of an administrative model in which graduate students collaborate with faculty as they did during the life of the Program. We hoped that their reflections could help us to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our model in terms of its relationship to the work and roles of faculty in the area of English studies.

Knowledge, Preparation, and "Work" in Composition

From the perspective of our colleagues in literary studies, our graduate students gain admission into challenging academic programs in order to earn a Ph.D. degree so they can produce high-quality scholarly work in tenure-track positions at comparable or next-tier institutions. Preparing them for success, some of their mentors even look upon teaching as a set of intrusions—the annoyances and distractions of students, office hours, papers to grade, and classes to meet. More than a few literature faculty will concede, however, that at least some teaching, perhaps a course per semester or year, and perhaps as late as possible in the candidate's degree program, can be useful for securing a job and preparing for life at another institution where teaching will be required.

But expecting a new Ph.D. in medieval literature or the British novel to move directly into the management of an English Department strikes most literature faculty as unthinkable. Assisting the chair of an English department, helping to coordinate faculty-development efforts, being the departmental admissions officer or curricular overseer—these positions fall to those with some years of experience in departments, and most often to those who have earned tenure after considerable research and teaching experience. What good could possibly accrue to a graduate student from involvement in the usually hidden elements of departmental governance? Graduate students who wish to express themselves within many literature departments do so by participating in whatever grass-roots forums, committees, or other bodies are organized by the graduate students themselves.

The realities for students preparing for lives as compositionists, however, appear quite different. By its very nature, composition unites teaching, research, administration, and service into an integrated whole. The most challenging intellectual questions in much of the field have their genesis in the complex processes of literacy development—itself at the heart of curricular design and delivery. In composition, "administration" includes attending to teacher development; discussing matters of course design; considering the ethics and condi-

tions of employment for writing teachers; informing and persuading those beyond the writing program; working on outreach; grappling with questions of placement, developmental education, and fair-minded testing; and managing large amounts of more routine work such as staffing, scheduling, and budgeting.

In spite of these underlying differences in the expected roles of graduate students in literature or composition, every one of our survey respondents held their experience up as a highlight of their graduate education, whether they now work mainly in literature or composition (or both). For one respondent who had worked on curriculum in the Composition Program but written a dissertation in literature, it was the first time he saw the direct connection between his own research and the world of teaching. "How am I supposed to be an effectively contributing member of an English Department," he wrote, "if I don't know how the administration works? At what point does administrative experience magically spring into existence in the mind of a doctoral student? Is it when s/he flips the tassel on the mortarboard?" A tenured professor at a small college in the Midwest wrote that her administrative role "is what got me hired into my current job." Another person who chose to develop a career in higher education administration wrote that her experience on the Core Staff was "invaluable," and that it was the feature of her background that got her "foot in the door" in her current position. Others pointed out how "tremendously helpful" their experience was to their own abilities as teachers, and how it provided them with "collaborative models of leadership" as well as the "nuts and bolts of running a program." A respondent who is a tenure-track professor at a two-year college in the Midwest said that the administrative experience in composition provided "confidence and practice working with educators and other administrators" before she ever started her career.

At some institutions, new Ph.D.s in Composition find themselves quickly given administrative responsibilities—problematically, if the criteria for promotion and tenure do not reward such responsibilities; more often positively, as their expertise is solicited in many capacities relating to the coordination of undergraduate writing curriculums and writing centers, or the oversight of instructional staff. Most of the compositionists who responded to our survey told us that they were expected to participate in such administrative work—and they were eager to do it. The administrative credentials that helped them secure their positions also served them well as they quickly moved into positions of administrative authority on their campuses.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the benefits of administrative experience clearly play out for many graduate students in the form of impressive credentialing. Even if someone has been involved in some kind of administration before graduate school, the demonstrated application of administrative ability to a university writing program shows a professional sophistication that is often lacking in new Ph.D.s. Many former administrative TAs reported that their experience on the Core Staff set them apart from other candidates, getting them interviews and eventually jobs. In most cases, teaching is at least as important as administrative experience, but the combination seems to be particularly attrac-

tive to hiring committees. One veteran, who now has a permanent, tenured position at a community college, wrote:

I believe that my administrative experience in the old Program in Composition and Communication is the reason that I am currently employed in higher education. I restricted my job search to local institutions of higher learning, and the job market was depressingly tight in 1994-95. In spite of these constraints, I became a finalist for three different positions that spring (one land-grant research institution, one small liberal arts four-year college, and one community college), and I was able to procure the position at [the community college]. In each case, during the interviewing process, it was evident that my work in the Program [as an administrator] was a primary attraction.

Another respondent at a similar institution wrote that the administrative background was the deciding factor in her getting seven on-campus interviews during her job search. A tenured associate professor of English at a state university in the South tells a similar story from a time when the market was less depressed:

When I went on the job market in 1987, I had invitations for 28 MLA interviews, of which I accepted 24. From six campus visits, I received five job offers. I am convinced that the administrative experience on my c.v. 1) set me apart from other candidates; 2) gave me confidence in initial meetings; 3) prepared me to discuss a wide range of issues (curriculum development, program administration, issues related to computers and composition, collaboration, WAC); 4) qualified me for the curriculum development/administrative work that seems, directly or indirectly, to be a part of almost any full-time composition job; 5) allowed me to assess other programs quickly and make a good decision; and 6) prepared me for the transition to a tenure track role where I would have to juggle teaching, research, service, and administration.

The way in which her administrative work helped her to connect the multiple roles of work in higher education also affected a former graduate student administrator who now holds a tenure-track job at a liberal arts college in the East. Claiming that her administrative work in the Composition Program was invaluable "in a number of ways," she pointed out that "It was the first time that I had been asked to think about higher education from an organizational perspective rather than a strictly academic or intellectual viewpoint." This professor found the administrative experience to be a useful laboratory for team-building that contrasted significantly with the emphasis on individual learning and achievement that was her experience as a student. Administrative work, she wrote, "teaches skills and perspectives to graduate students that are not fostered (in most cases) by their own academic preparation. Serving in the Composition administration was the single best career decision I made in my nine years of graduate study." Echoing these sentiments, another graduate student administrator who hailed from the Theater Department and was hired into a tenure-track position at a state university in Ohio wrote that his work with the Program was

"perhaps the single most important factor" in his preparation and job search, placing him "in a better position (in terms of knowing how things work and why things happen as they do at a major university) than most of my senior, let alone junior colleagues."

If these graduates' experiences in a range of institutions and departments are representative, their collaboration with the faculty in administrative and quasi-administrative capacities has helped them to develop skills and knowledge that bring together the often fragmented pieces of faculty work in higher education. Yet such experience remains relatively rare at most research-oriented universities. The gulf between "pure" scholarly preparation and new graduates' work roles on campuses around the country continues to widen in the absence of much attention to students' preparation for tenure-track jobs. However, as English graduate programs struggle to place their new Ph.D.s in a tight market, the profession is reevaluating its traditional assumptions about adequate preparation. Some members of the English profession are beginning to realize that graduate students need an introduction to the business side of academia as well as the scholarly side. In a recent *MLA Newsletter*, MLA President Elaine Showalter argues that those who train graduate students in the humanities (not just English literature) should change their expectations to include a new emphasis not only on writing and teaching but "most radically" on organizational leadership. Doctoral programs, she writes, should "require all graduate students to take a seminar on educational organization, management, and negotiation. Academia's condescension toward such corporate skills is notorious; although professors spend large parts of their careers running committees, serving as chairs, or acting as deans, we are expected to pick up the business of administration on our own" (3).

Acknowledging the complexity of academic work in higher education, Showalter is pointing to an ideological and disciplinary gap between the preparation of the future professoriate in English studies and the obvious needs on many campuses for new hires who are savvy in the areas of campus administration, governance, and politics. Interestingly, however, she advocates an approach that reifies the discipline's vision of the relationship between knowledge, preparation, and work. Knowledge is seen from the perspective of course-related accrual, rather than direct experience. Additional credit hours of preparation in the abstract principles of administration provide students with a sense of being certified, from a mostly informational perspective.

As our respondents made abundantly clear, however, it was the *activity* of their work, the direct experience of shared governance, that served them well as they began their new roles as faculty members. For example, a faculty member describes how her administrative experience prepared her for the demands of outreach and service in her tenured position as a WPA at another small liberal arts college: "I'm convinced that [the administrative] role is what got me hired into my current job. Going straight from grad school to a faculty position in which I'm expected to run WAC, offer faculty workshops, advise faculty across the college about student writing issues, and supervise College Writing (1st-yr.

Comp course) faculty would never have happened if I hadn't had similar responsibilities and experience [in graduate school]." This professor's experience as an administrator in the mid- to late-1980's is shared by another tenured professor and WPA of the same vintage, who teaches at a liberal arts college in Illinois; he writes that "the work in the Comp Program was terrifically important in my getting this job and was immensely helpful in my learning how to teach. It was easily one of the most professionally significant experiences of my career." He is so certain of the worth of this experience that he looks for evidence of similar preparation as he serves on hiring committees himself. "When I'm involved in hiring, I take a candidate much more seriously if I see he or she has held a position comparable to what I held." For this person and many others who responded to our query, acculturation into the administrative side of the profession has had a profound effect.

Complex roles and social adjustments associated with the administrative experience also seem to have made a lasting impression on many former TA administrators. One, who now teaches in a tenure-track history position at a state university in the Midwest (and has recently acquired responsibilities for faculty development on her campus), returned to her home department of history while still at the University and was able to work with faculty and graduate students to implement a similar team approach there based on the Composition Program's administrative model. She wrote that this move "radically shifted the social patterns in the department for the better. . . . The department's graduate student population developed a much stronger cohort emphasis that crossed the former boundaries of period, place, and methodology." In her experience, the strengths of the interdisciplinary, inclusive Composition model transferred fortuitously to another disciplinary site. Improved communication and a broader sense of disciplinary community were the most obvious benefits. But she also described her experience in terms of the relationship between her personal and professional goals—between who she was as a student and who she saw herself becoming as a faculty member. "Most of the Comp professors and many of the teaching assistants lived as if what they did for a living was connected to how they wanted to live." She saw the consensus model of management as one way to provide congruence among work, citizenship, and personal life. Like the history professor, the associate professor from the southern state university remembered the Composition administrative experience as one of "community and commitment" within a huge institution:

It seems to me that when an administrative model for teaching and training involves graduate students, that model gains the energy, innovations, and commitment of people new to the field. The result: a collective, a community. Shared goals are what keep this model on track, in balance, coherent and collaborative. Such a model demands more of faculty who provide the continuity as the graduate students constantly change: they have to remain flexible, the program has to be open to changes, the graduate student voices have to be acknowledged.

This sense of "coherence," wedding personal and professional roles and aspirations, seemed critically important to several other respondents.

To tease out the negative experiences of our past colleagues, we also asked about problems they had experienced—problems associated with the competing roles of student, teacher, and administrator. Did they sense tension between permanent staff and themselves? Were they ever caught in the middle as faculty and support staff brought them into curricular, policy, and other discussions? Did their scholarly work suffer or prosper while they served as administrators? Would their graduate careers have been stronger and more unified if they had not collaborated with the tenured faculty in helping to run the Program?

The answers to these questions varied. The perceptive reader has probably correctly concluded that administrative appointments tended to be sought and filled by energetic, high-achieving people. Some people who were used to juggling many responsibilities easily accommodated a few more. Some others, however, found themselves distracted from their teaching or writing. A community college professor reported on two "negatives": feeling caught between faculty members who had "strained relationships," and being drawn into the administrative work of the Program at his own peril. About the latter problem, he described the path that led to his Ph.D.:

I will finish my doctorate thesis this spring (1998). I started my graduate studies in 1988. There are many, many factors that have contributed to this delay, but part of the delay was the amount of work I willingly and eagerly took on, first in the Core Staff of the Program, and then later as a research fellow. . . . There is no one to blame in this except myself, but it is worth noting.

The experience of a professor teaching in the East was somewhat different:

I can see now that there must have been situations where the faculty needed to discuss issues privately to which I was not privy. However, I was made to feel at all times like a full player in the administration of the Program, and I greatly appreciated the sense I had that my perspective was valued and heard. Also, the faculty was careful to delineate the responsibilities of my position such that I never felt that I was asked to go beyond what was appropriate (e.g., disciplining, grade disputes). My recollection is that the position was no more time-consuming than teaching was—less so, at many times of the quarter—and so it did no more to distract me from my studies than any form of supporting myself.

A professor in a local liberal arts college also noted the potential hazards of becoming involved too fully in administrative responsibilities. Administration that includes graduate students, she wrote, provides a

particularly big advantage for a grad student considering a career path that may include some administrative responsibilities, such as a Director of Comp job. Being treated like a peer—in teaching, administration, and scholarship—was energizing and affirming. It was also such a change

from many other aspects of my experience as a grad student. The two biggest disadvantages are the potential for administrative tasks to "take over," leaving studies on a back burner, and getting caught in the middle of faculty-faculty disagreements to a greater extent than might otherwise occur.

A WPA at a private liberal arts college in the Midwest agreed that the workload can be onerous. In her role in several administrative capacities, she found the work increasingly absorbing and time-consuming, but at the same time it seems to have connected with and energized the other aspects of her growing professionalism:

During my four years as a Composition Program administrator, I was able to make more than adequate progress toward my degree, present papers regularly at professional venues, run workshops, win a teaching award, and conduct my dissertation research while performing well in administrative roles.

The potential of new responsibilities to infuse enthusiasm and perspective into other work was also noted by a tenured associate professor who was part of the Program in the 1980s. She found that after working in a supportive community of teacher-administrators, the fragmentation in her tenured position resulted in a loss of cohesion and inspiration:

Since I was lucky enough to experience the sense of support and community that grew out of this model, I miss it. While I know that I have picked up new roles, I know I don't write as much as I did when I felt a central part of an intellectual and teaching community. But that disadvantage is mine—not a disadvantage of an inclusive model.

Another respondent also experienced this "reverse" workload effect, in which the demands for time in a collective administrative model actually inspire productivity instead of draining it. Her current WPA job at a liberal arts college lacks the disciplinary support provided by the Composition Program. "Having been a scholar in a community, becoming a solitary seeker of truth seems perverse, especially when rhetorical research and activity require community by definition."

Motivation to give time to the work of literacy development in its programmatic and curricular dimensions comes from feeling membership in a supportive community of workers. Their experiences in such a community seem to have influenced several past administrative TAs to create a similar context on their campuses; one alumna, who is now a WPA at a technical college in the East, consciously works to establish the same sense of community that motivated her during her graduate years:

The collaborative model [of leadership] has become particularly important for me as I work to develop a cohesive writing program at a college with a high percentage of adjunct faculty. Having learned that graduate students can be a productive part of a writing program's leadership (and should be, if we truly believe in student-centered learning), I've ap-

proached adjunct faculty with the same perspective. Within the writing program, for example, adjuncts and full-time faculty participate equally in curricular and faculty development assessment, and they have equal votes.

Conflicts between collaborative models of administration and institutional norms can also have occasional interpersonal or psychological effects. The history professor, for example, noted that faculty lose some privacy and perhaps some perceived status when graduate students are present at occasions when faculty may not be on their best behavior:

A disadvantage [of including graduate students in decision-making roles] for faculty might be the loss of mystery that comes when grad student administrators see who is late to meetings habitually, who is unorganized, who argues with whom over what issues and with what language, and so forth. Faculty of quality can deal with this loss of privacy—I've seen it done. The major advantage of graduate student administrators is that the practice legitimizes the teaching work performed by academic apprentices. To be outside the decision-making process means to be disconnected from the program and encourages people merely to put in their hours at the job—the deadening kind of work that would indeed detract from a graduate student's professionalization. To be connected, on the other hand, means there is potential for coherence between one's livelihood, one's academic work, and one's life.

The effects of what this respondent calls "disconnection"—of classroom teaching emerging from decision-making processes in which graduate students do not participate—are beginning to be felt as the Program has been absorbed into the English department. Because several of our respondents have either finished their degrees very recently or will do so within the next year or two, they brought a unique perspective to our survey. Most have experienced first-hand the changes in the administrative structure following the takeover of the Composition Program by the English Department; a few have even worked in both administrations. One doctoral candidate wrote that she "was hired as Assistant Director of Lower Division [Composition] under the old regime, but carried out my duties under the new one." Expecting to join a community of program administrators, she felt instead that she was given "all of the duties, [and] none of the administrative voice." This lack of full participation led to difficulties "when we had to run the training seminar in the midst of the total dismantling of the program's administrative structure." Yet while the job did not develop as she had hoped, she still found it useful, helping her to secure an adjunct position at a nearby college while she finishes her degree.

Amplifying these points, a past assistant who is highly networked within the staff of graduate student instructors reflected on her cynicism (out of which she sees a hopeful pragmatism) watching the change in administrations. One example, she wrote, can be found in the "confusion and real anger" experienced by teachers in the new composition wing of the English Department:

The training and practicum requirements have been unclear at best and

while experienced teachers have welcomed the freedom that results from a lack of direction, new teachers feel abandoned—as if their classrooms are not sufficiently important to require departmental attention. . . . Fact is, for now the classroom instructors are not working very closely with full faculty and the network of advanced Comp TAs has all but disintegrated. Those of us “oldies” still lingering are daily cornered for help—the brush fire model has never been very effective, but it can appear to work.

If this observer is correct, the sense of community noted by former TA administrators has vanished—from the teaching cohort as well as from those who remain in nominal administrative roles. Isolation from training, decision-making, and other collegial activities tends to breed defensiveness and insecurity about teaching. Thus, what starts ideologically as a concern for students’ professionalization (defined as the speed and success of their degree programs and their total immersion in the knowledge of their specialized areas) may end up keeping these students from understanding the full range of the work they will be asked to do; denying them opportunities to see higher education in all of its dimensions; and compromising their ability—all, that is, but the most brilliant students in the most prestigious universities—to secure tenure-track jobs.

Conclusion: Governance and Disciplinary Ideology

The reflections of our past graduate-student administrators, most of whom are now well-positioned in academic and professional careers, are clear. In celebrating their full inclusion in the management of a large writing program, most of these past colleagues tell us that they would not be where they now are without that participation. There is much more, of course, in their testimonials: the benefits of exposure to the underside of academic life; the chance to put to use, in concretely administrative ways, their developing skills and talents; the opportunity to learn how to manage smaller domains of a writing program; and the advantages of working in a context where they could develop a collegial self, experience participation in difficult administrative decisions, or understand the complicated relationship between a writing program and its institutional culture.

Graduate students are denied opportunities to engage in such work not from maliciousness or even fear of their ineptitude. Rather, many caring administrators and faculty in English departments continue to act upon inherited beliefs about the proper roles and work of professors. Students come to a university to learn, and faculty to teach. Each has a socially inscribed status and set of goals. To blend their roles is to blur important notions of expertise, control, and earned privileges of rank. More simply, students run the risk of straying from their real purpose: to earn an advanced degree. Drawn into the vast administrative landscape of a large writing program, graduate students can flounder. The heavy public demands of writing programs and the typical barrage of paperwork can distract them from their research, stalling their degree programs and even ruining their careers.

These concerns, however, must begin to give way to new expectations of

the professoriate of the twenty-first century. Without a strong understanding of employment practices, young faculty may be vulnerable to major shifts in university policies on tenure, promotion, and job security. Lacking knowledge of how curriculum is invented, refined, put in place, and managed, new hires may not understand how or whether to deviate from the standard design of a course they have been assigned. Without insight into the organizational structures and systems of our institutions, the newly appointed assistant professor may be clueless about how to mediate a dispute, where to go for help in a faculty conflict, or how to look out for his or her rights in a review for merit, reappointment, or tenure.

If they are to be fully included in governance, few graduate students who serve in administrative roles can be "protected" from a fuller understanding of faculty life in a college or university setting. Where their professional responsibilities once covered the writing class they taught and the work they were doing for their graduate courses or research, now these same students have to meet new deadlines and participate in outreach that extends their institutional role. In many cases, graduate students have to seek answers on behalf of their instructional unit, either from sources inside or outside of the university. Learning to present themselves as representatives of a larger entity can be a new and demanding experience for many.

We return, then, to the metaphor of the bubble, within which the graduate-student collaborators in the old Composition Program were thought to be floating. Far from protecting graduate students in a sphere of unreality by elevating their status to something approaching a WPA, involvement in the work of administration actually exposes graduate students to the most challenging aspects of university life, in all its political, structural, and interpersonal complexity. New theories of work in higher education (e.g. Boyer; Brookfield) argue that the faculty member of the next century will be working at the intersections of teaching, scholarship, and service. Campuses around the country are already exploring ways to unite teaching and scholarship, bringing together areas hitherto bifurcated and often unevenly supported. Such initiatives are often a response to increased public accountability, and a concern that, unlike pilots, surgeons, and tax consultants, most faculty are not formally credentialed to practice a major part of their work: teaching students. Collaboratively participating in the governance and oversight of a curricular unit not only offers students experience in the more mundane "skills" of administration, but gives them a unique vantage point for making the connections between the work of their fields and the work of teaching, at the very nexus of these two activities: the organizational entity of the department.

For many years, the field of composition studies has endorsed a model of classroom instruction that celebrates a collective identity, practices collaboration in its developmental forms, and represents the inclusion and participation of all its members. We believe that these ideological underpinnings, which often define compositionists and place them in cultural opposition to their institutions, should also characterize the administration of writing programs. As higher

education develops new hierarchies and top-down management structures, as participation in faculty governance dwindles and the ideals of academic freedom represented by tenure are almost daily challenged, perhaps faculty members across our institutions will begin to recognize the importance of practicing with their own developing professionals those principles they hold most important to their sense of inclusion in the work of governance and in the decision-making processes on their own campuses.

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