
Reconstituting Authority: Four Perspectives on a Team Approach to Writing Program Administration

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Introduction

The power of the administrator and the writing program's political situation have been explored in publications since the mid-eighties. A quick review of the literature reveals, in fact, how much has been written on this topic. Carol Hartzog candidly assessed WPAs as "not yet . . . good politicians" ("Freshman" 14). Linda Polin and Ed White surveyed WPAs in 1985, finding that they possessed relatively little power on significant matters of policy. Indeed, many WPAs were themselves in tenuous (i.e., untenured) positions. In 1989 Gary Olson and Joseph Moxley revisited WPAs' significantly-challenged authority, showing English department chairs' relatively low estimate of WPAs and fervently calling for "a reconceptualization of the role" of the WPA (58). Marcia Dickson wrote about the relative powerlessness of WPAs and the need to construct a feminist model. In 1991 White further explored some problematics of WPAs and campus power. While he found "much power inherent in the position," White also learned that "new WPAs at the WPA summer workshops" were not only unaware of the importance of using power, they were "resistant to it" ("Use It" 5). He concluded by advising that "Administrators, including WPAs, cannot afford the luxury of powerlessness. The only way to do the job of a WPA is to be aware of the power relationships we necessarily conduct, and to use the considerable power we have to the good of our program" (12).

Recently, colleagues have made calls for radical reform of governance models. Jeanne Gunner penned a critique of the "WPA-centric administrative model" (9) of one person as the program leader, calling for more sharing of authority, control, and power by "decentering the WPA and democratizing program administration" (14). Gunner earnestly called on WPAs "to cede to subordinates a share of whatever power they have attained" (15). Not to do so, Gunner contended, is to sustain an oppressive system. Christine Hult analyzed the conditions of administration from traditional political classifications of governance: monarchy, dictatorship, oligarchy, anarchy, and constitutional democracy. Hult, too, called for democracy in administration, though, she admitted, "there are several barriers that may prevent writing programs from becoming representative democracies" ("Politics Redux" 50). John Trimbur called on WPAs to resist traditional professionalization as a discipline; reading aspects of our work through Foucauldian and Marxian lenses, Trimbur suggested that

WPAs “grapple daily with the persistent conflicts between building individual careers and popularizing expertise for broader social purposes” (145). Hildy Miller proposed a “postmasculinist” approach, a combination of both feminist and masculinist orientations. To sustain a postmasculinist approach an administrator must adopt a “bi-epistemological stance . . . [which] is not just a matter of replacing masculinist with feminist, but rather of somehow doing both or creating a space for one to exist within the other” (58). Anne Gere reiterated innovative thinking about WPAs, especially the concepts of collaborative administration and administrative work as knowledge production.

In 1995 Joseph Janangelo and Kristine Hansen published *Resituating Writing: Constructing and Administering Writing Programs*, a collection of articles focusing on administration from scholarly or theoretical perspectives. In the lead article, Janangelo carried out a Derridean analysis of “the complex relations that simultaneously compose and constrain writing programs” (“Theorizing Difference” 3). He made numerous suggestions “intended to help writing programs continually reinvent ourselves through dialogue . . . so that we can avoid taking a self-destructive, adversarial stance toward our institutions” (18). Christine Hult provided an analysis of the innovative kind of scholarship produced by WPAs. Hult defined the scholarship of administration as “the systematic, theory-based production and oversight of a dynamic program (as opposed to traditional scholarship which is generally defined as the production of ‘texts’)” (“Scholarship” 126). Barbara Cambridge and Ben McClelland challenged traditional assumptions about WPA identity, suggesting “a more radical redefinition of the WPA, a redefinition that involves changing the basic architecture of leadership and the responsibilities of the WPA” (155). We argued for a partnership between the WPA and faculty members in joint responsibility, “shared administrative and organizational structure” (157). These various proposals, utopian in vision, lead us into the twenty-first century with reform very much at the heart of our thinking, if not yet our daily work. This article tells versions of a story of such reform as our daily work at one institution.

Re-positioning the Director of Freshman English at Ole Miss: Ben McClelland

At the University of Mississippi, an avatar of traditional academic hegemony and hierarchy in the public sphere, I determined to turn vision into reality—at least provisionally in my small corner of the academy, the Freshman English Program, which has a staff of fifty Graduate Instructors¹ who teach over a thousand first-year students. After a hiatus of several years, I resumed the position of Director of the Freshman English Program in the late spring of 1997. The holder of the Schillig Chair in English Composition, I also wear a couple of other administrative hats: Director of the University Writing Program and Director of the University Writing Project.² To prepare the way for a new programmatic operating system, I began in the fall of 1996 discussing a way of redistributing the position’s duties among members of the Freshman English Committee. Four of us were faculty; three were graduate students. We faculty included two tenured in the senior rank; of the two in the junior rank, one was

tenured; the other was in her third year of a tenure-track position. All of us were in rhetoric and composition; except for me, all the others were also literary teachers and scholars. The committee members proposed a flexible restructuring of the WPA position by loosely dividing the duties among us on a rotating basis from semester to semester, according to our interests and needs, allocating varying amounts of extra released-time from teaching duties to those committee members who picked up the greater shares of work in given semesters. The proposal never got off the paper, however. First, the department chair said he could not allocate that much funding (in released-time from teaching) for the position. Then the dean, jovially working through his seventeenth year in that position, said he wanted to be able to hold a single person accountable for the job and not have to deal with several people with ambiguous duties and relative power. Finally, two committee members learned that they had received sabbatical leaves for the next year. So much for attempting to design a "shared administrative and organizational structure" (Cambridge and McClelland 157) among faculty and the WPA. At least for now. Perhaps in another season. Perhaps during another dean's tenure. This year the committee would continue to serve a supportive, less foregrounded role.

Despite that setback in administrative re-working, the idea of differential leadership became increasingly attractive to me. I looked for another way to achieve a redefinition of the WPA position. Construing the concepts more loosely, I applied the idea to a different set of players, this time creating an administrative team with two Writing Program staff members and the graduate administrative assistant to Freshman English. This effort to re-form a top-down structure into a more egalitarian administrative staff involved these basic actions: 1) relying on the decision-making power of the Assistant to the Director of the Freshman English program, Jennie Lee, a graduate instructor, 2) creating the position of Assistant to the Director of the Writing Program and appointing to it Kitty Keller, a graduate student, and 3) inviting special program-linking activities from the Director of the Writing Center, Brenda Robertson, a full-time staff member who is also a graduate student. This group design had great flexibility and developed marvelous rapport and spontaneity, though it lacked the architectural configuration and institutional commitment that the faculty committee would have had.

The four of us began working together informally in the spring of 1997; thus, this role redefinition was an exercise in resituating ourselves as we played the game. There were no dress rehearsals. We reinvented ourselves as we grew to envision the short- and long-term issues and as we devised ways to work at them together. By the fall we were meeting regularly to decide collaboratively on program actions, allocate responsibilities, and carry out the tasks. Though we have never given our group a name, the work of our administrative collaborative has moved forward, continually facing tasks from a posture of integration, cohesion, inclusiveness. Moreover, within the teaching staff we empowered a group of seven teacher team leaders with collegial authority and responsibility to help us carry out our work. The Freshman English Committee serves as another collegial group with whom we confer on program activities, especially major

initiatives such as curriculum revision. The means of communication in these groups is generally conversational dialogue; we strive for consensus, generally taking no formal votes. In short order, the locus of power within the Director's position was decentered. Considering the mix of folks involved, the style of leadership that has evolved could be termed "postmasculinist administration," a combination of "feminist and masculinist orientations" (Miller 58).³

Of course, this activity did not occur in an institutional vacuum. Along with the "flattening" of administrative power, we were also triggering change on a number of other fronts: 1) establishing for the first time administrative offices in a new facility away from the English Department Offices and moving the entire instructional staff from several locations into a single facility; 2) establishing new methods of—and reasons for—staff communication, 3) modifying the curriculum, especially the terms and procedures for writing portfolio assessment, and 4) creating a challenging vision for the program. So, the administrative project was more than just one of the boiling kettles in a busy (oft-times hot) kitchen; it was the scene of the cooking and the means by which the cooking was carried out.

Collaborative administration was not just a theoretical playground for me. I set this new system in motion purposefully to achieve two goals: 1) to establish within the English graduate instructor staff a culture of composition studies, our graduate students being literature students and 2) to encourage the graduate instructors to take ownership of the Freshman English Program. The actions that I took to meet those goals were 1) to form a new administrative staff, 2) to establish residence in a new staff facility, 3) to reinvigorate the teacher team system 4) to enhance our intra-program communications, and 5) to improve our teaching by conducting a seven-day professional development workshop/conference with local and national presenters.⁴ I not only believe that we achieved these goals, but also that we created a powerful organizational dynamic.

Assistant to the Director of Freshman English: Jennie Lee

As of May 1997, I entered the administrative machinations of the Freshman English Program as the Assistant to the Director of Freshman English. I have been a Graduate Instructor in this program for the past six years but, despite my familiarity with the policies and people that make our department tick, I gradually began to realize that my experience in my current position, while building upon those five years in the classroom, would be qualitatively different from my experiences there. I applied for the Assistant's position in the spring of 1997, and before that school year was even over, I had already assisted in the assignment of class schedules, assumed some responsibilities in the program's relocation process, and contributed to ongoing conversations about policy decisions and the upcoming fall teacher workshop. The reality of Joseph Janangelo's description of the university writing program as a "site where many different voices (student, staff, and administration) converge and conflict in constant conversation" immediately asserted itself (4).

The Freshman English Program is composed on a relatively traditional, hierarchical administrative model: a division of the English Department, it is led by a Director who is responsible for orienting and supervising fifty Graduate Instructors at various stages in their respective degree programs. Organizationally speaking, the situation of our writing program within the auspices of a larger department recalls Hildy Miller's description of the writing program's ambiguous academic and administrative location within blurred "lines of responsibility and . . . boundaries of territory" (51). When the boundaries of responsibility between department and writing program do occasionally overlap, in the hiring of new graduate students/writing program instructors every year, for example, "writing administrator concerns are often outweighed by those of department or institution" (51). One of my primary responsibilities as the Assistant to the Director has been to function as a liaison across these boundaries and territories, by serving as a mediator between the English Department and the Freshman English Program, and by helping to navigate a course for the program and its instructors amidst the contests of two administrators who find themselves occasionally at cross-purposes. My past familiarity with the personalities and policies of the department has served me well in this capacity.

Traditionally, the Freshman English Program administration has consisted of three people: a director, an assistant to the director, and a program secretary. This triumvirate was responsible for establishing program philosophy and policies, initiating changes to those policies, organizing the annual week-long fall teaching workshop for Graduate Instructors, as well as carrying out the day-to-day business of the program. And while the department leadership has never been exactly autocratic, neither has it been authentically democratic. Graduate Instructors especially complained of a programmatic "illusion of democracy" whereby the administration solicited and encouraged their input to Freshman English policy and summarily made its own decisions.

Between May 1997 and the present, this triumvirate has slowly and deliberately expanded to include a much wider range of people, collaboratively engaged in the construction of a more serviceable Freshman English Program. We should be frank: our efforts at collaborative administration have not enacted any permanent changes in the administrative structure of the university, the department, or the Freshman English Program. As a subsidiary program within the English Department, Freshman English remains a numerically large but institutionally neglected subdepartment within the School of Liberal Arts. With the exception of the Director, who is tenured, the program is implemented by graduate students and university staff members who collaborate because he has invited us to do so. Within this institutionally conservative and disenfranchised context, however, we have attempted to demonstrate the viability of a system based on cooperation and honest interchange among its various elements. That our ambiguous administrative and academic status might prove an asset, as Janangelo suggests, has been part of the collaborative agenda from the beginning (14-15).

As the introductory section of this article indicates, the professional literature on writing program administration has begun to suggest ways in which writing programs can more constructively channel their (sometimes limited) administrative resources. Specifically, each person contributing to a collaborative effort assumes responsibility for defining and enacting vision; for voicing opinions despite different levels of authority; for outcomes of the unit; and for individual honesty (Cambridge and McClelland 156). In our case, Ben as the WPA had the authority to put collaborative theory into practice and initiated the effort "not to dominate but rather to facilitate, to share power, and to enable both self and others to contribute" (Miller 52). But what has gradually become apparent in our own experience is that one cannot reposition WPAs without inevitably repositioning those people who work with them. One thing in particular that has struck me this year is the enormous personal effort it takes to sustain a collaboration without deferring to conventional administrative standards of authority and hierarchy—which is, after all, how we have been trained by the academy to perform. Sometimes, it has been difficult (for me, anyway) to articulate grievances or to disagree with colleagues who exceed me in age, or in experience, or in political clout; but my failure to do so would have indicated a failure of my commitment to the group.

On occasion, in fact, the collaborative delegation of responsibility has made for alliances across hierarchies. Confronted all too often with disappointed or disgruntled Graduate Instructors (GIs) too little time to balance administrative duties and the demands of teaching, and the sometimes disparaging attitudes of professors or administrators outside the program who feign no sympathy for the teaching of freshman writing, I often find myself face to face with a sensation Miller suggests is typical of the WPA, that of "having enormous responsibilities without accompanying power" (51). And when it comes to facing down the university's central administration, I, a female graduate student, and the tenured male director of the Freshman English program share a vulnerability. However, we are also participating together in a new active agency. In the meetings with the administrators we are defining who we are, articulating our differences, and listening to their perspectives, techniques Janangelo suggests as a means of "strategizing difference and resisting the dynamics of haste" (16). This avenue of dialogue is new. So far, it has been fruitless in achieving our short-term goals (namely a significant budget increase), but we have created a space for ourselves on the university's administrative agendas, and we have defined ourselves as a program in terms that did not exist heretofore.

Through this experience, I have realized that Miller's concept of the bi-epistemological administrative stance does not follow naturally or organically. It has happened in our program only through a consciously determined sequence of choices. Given the not always favorable reaction of the GI community to suggestions for change and the opposition of the perennially entrenched university hierarchy, to enact such a role is at times personally and academically equivalent to paddling upstream against a strong current.

The inauguration of a pro-collaborative stance in this writing program

has met some of its greatest challenges and rewards in developing the link between administrative policy and the classroom. Miller suggests that there are two ways of beginning to implement a post-masculinist administration—modification of existing structures and supplementation—and we have found ourselves making use of both of these strategies in our efforts to put theory into practice (55). For example, when Ben assumed the Director's position and I stepped in as Assistant, there were two significant problems facing the program from the perspective of the GIs. Our team scoring-based system of portfolio assessment, initiated several years ago in the effort to curb grade inflation within the program as well as a way of maintaining consistent community standards, had begun to require an enormous amount of time and energy from GIs, and this was understandably causing some resentment. In addition, the standards for assessment we were using as evaluative measures required continual calibration and maintenance, requiring further time commitments from teachers. The portfolio system as it was implemented several years ago was not working effectively or efficiently and was making the teaching responsibilities of the GIs more rather than less demanding. Thus, one of our primary goals for the 1997-98 school year was to design and implement a more effective portfolio assessment system tailored to fit the needs of our program.

Towards this end, Ben and I met regularly throughout the summer with the leaders of program teaching teams to formulate agendas and policies for the year ahead. We spent the summer hard at work with team leaders so that by August, we found that we had inadvertently re-invented the concept of teacher teams within our program. Team leaders were now integrally involved in the planning and implementation of program policies. On the positive side, this meant that GIs had a more representative voice in the theorizing of the program they were expected to carry into the classroom every day; on the negative side, the program's success was now depending heavily on the voluntary service of seven or eight GIs who were already teaching two classes each semester and trying to complete their degrees. Though one of our first goals last spring had been to secure funding to compensate these instructors for their hard work over the summer months, we failed to achieve this objective; commendably, they carried on. Becoming a team leader (a yearly appointment for which GIs must apply and interview) has thus come over the last year to represent a significant commitment of time and energy but provides participants with practical experience and a role in shared leadership.

The first real test of this larger collaborative enterprise came with the annual Graduate Instructor Teaching Workshop held in August 1997, an event designed to orient new GIs to the program and to offer veteran teachers the opportunity to share ideas, observations, and classroom experiences both with one another and with the new instructors. Ben solicited presentations from outside consultants to help us address GI complaints about the curriculum and portfolio assessment, and team leaders worked with me over the summer to plan and present almost 30 concurrent workshop sessions. Kitty attended in an administrative capacity, enabling us to accomplish the enormous task of summa-

rizing and recording the content of every session of the teaching workshop and posting them on the department listserv. The University Writing Center staff, under Brenda's direction, played a vital role in the workshop by sponsoring hands-on seminars to familiarize GIs with the Writing Center facilities, by providing those who were interested with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop listservs and webpages for their classes, and by scheduling Writing Center orientations for each section of Freshman English.

We used the fall workshop as a community of teachers to generate an enormous amount of information pertaining to our program's portfolio system and assessment. We devoted several workshop sessions during the week to re-conceiving our team scoring system with Kathleen Yancey. By reacting toward and against some alternative scoring scales, we generated the raw material that would become our new system of assessment. The following Saturday, team leaders spent five hours hard at work with Dr. Yancey to hammer the mass of information we had generated in workshop into more workable concepts. Ben purposefully did not attend this session during which we GIs clearly defined for the program as a whole exactly what a writing portfolio would be. To follow up, I met with team leaders several more times over the rest of the semester; by November, we had worked out the fine details of our assessment process. Program leadership adapted a willingness "to promote discussion, listen to divergent views, and look for common interests" (Miller 53), and, as a direct result, we accomplished some extremely valuable programmatic goals in a matter of months. This exercise in broadened leadership was a defining moment through which we established a new entity, one that, once it realized its value and jelled into an organizational *modus operandi*, would not have countenanced a WPA exercising power autocratically.

Another aim of this Freshman English administration has been that of raising morale within its ranks; we wanted to ensure that the freshman composition classroom proved a consistently valuable and positive experience for both teachers and students. One problem in particular which had been facing our program for many years was the geographic separation of its constituents. GI offices have been located in as many as four different buildings around the campus, with the department offices located in yet another. Years of this kind of separation served to suppress the program's sense of community (both academic and social), a situation which had the potential to make the maintenance of consistent program goals and methodologies increasingly difficult. In the last year, office space for GIs has been consolidated into one building with offices for the program secretary, the Director, and the Assistant to the Director. We have had the opportunity to get to know one another more closely, personally and professionally, and this acquaintance has a tremendous impact on our ability to orchestrate and implement new policies that affect the community as a whole.

One further challenge to the collaborative functioning of the program has been the issue of a program-wide curriculum revision. Ben initiated this process by circulating written curriculum revision proposals to the GI community as a whole and followed up by meeting with teacher team leaders to gauge responses.

When feedback from team leaders suggested a reluctance to accept mandated changes to the curriculum, Ben changed his initial intention to re-direct the program toward a reading-based English Studies series. After exploring pros and cons with team leaders, we called a staff meeting to introduce GIs to the theory base for such a curriculum, to offer an explanation of how such a curriculum might work, and to open the floor for discussion. The communication channels will remain open through a series of optional follow-up workshop sessions for those instructors interested in learning more about the curriculum. This route empowers those who wish to pursue the possibility of exploring a reading-based writing pedagogy with full programmatic support and leaves those instructors close to the end of their degree programs or comfortably settled into a pedagogical model of their own free to remain there.

While some of the long-term benefits (and problems) of a collaboratively oriented writing program administration remain to be seen, the short-term impact—at least at this point—seems undeniably positive. And as for me, I have had the uncanny, illuminating, validating, challenging, and, at times, disconcerting opportunity to see—as a graduate student—the possibilities that the academic game might admit within the perimeters of an administratively leveled playing field.

Assistant to the Director of the Writing Program: Kitty Keller

I was a Graduate Instructor for eight years before becoming the Assistant to the Director of the Writing Program, a new position at the university; as such, my job is constantly evolving. I am involved with the University of Mississippi Writing Project. I work closely with the Director of Freshman English/Director of the Writing Program. I am also involved with the Freshman English Program, specifically through the ESL mentoring program and the Freshman English Workshops. “Schizophrenic” is sometimes the best way to describe my mindset in this new job, as I move back and forth between programs, projects, and people, but my position allows me an interestingly holistic vantage point from which to view this newly collaborative administration.

What is most striking to me, from an administrative standpoint, are the ways in which power and authority have shifted within our Freshman English Program over the past nine years. Within that time, we have had no less than five departmental secretaries and four changes in the position of the Director of Freshman English, with three different faculty members filling the latter role. The number of GIs has increased steadily, from roughly thirty-five when I first began teaching, to fifty in my last year. In many ways, these changes within the program are reflected in the questions being asked throughout the field of rhetoric and composition as a whole: how do we best facilitate and administer a program that has moved from being the “bastard stepchild” to an enormous teaching/training force for graduate students?

Our work this year as a collaborative administration is one solution, one which has proven to be empowering as well as illuminating. We are an attempt in “democratizing program administration” (Gunner 14), spreading the power

base horizontally among the four of us and beyond into the GI community, yet I have realized that the parameters for such an endeavor are somewhat limited when an empowering of graduate students is involved. Ben remains an authority figure and remains in control of the program and the way in which it is run. By opening the Freshman English Program to collaboration, however, he has enabled us as graduate students to have a strong and clear voice in decisions made and policies implemented; we bring our own issues and ideas to the discussions of programmatic concerns. Though we will never achieve an egalitarian vision within a hierarchical system such as that in our university's table of organization, we can take some ownership of our own teaching and the system through which it functions.

When I began my Graduate Instructorship, my first Director of Freshman English was an untenured assistant professor, a new Ph.D. who was quite sympathetic and supportive of the GIs, and who found herself in the position of juggling her responsibilities as an administrator of GIs with her role as a faculty member. As a new, junior member of the university community, her powers of leverage were limited when fighting for increased salaries, benefits, and reduced course loads for the GIs. The department chair was, during this time, very much involved with the daily affairs of the Program. He was a part of the hiring, firing, and scheduling of the GIs, and he was involved in student grade grievances as well. During this time, graduate student involvement in the running of the program was growing somewhat, with one student serving as the Assistant to the Director and two more serving as members of the Freshman English Committee. There were also several of us who served in very traditional positions on departmental committees, representing the graduate student voice but often without a vote in the decisions made. Thus, the power structure in these first few years was quite typical.

When the untenured professor's three-year term as Director ended, she chose not to take on another term in that position, preferring to put her energies into the work necessary to gain tenure. That year, I served as the Assistant to the Director of Freshman English under an Acting Director, a tenured professor who was not a rhetoric and composition specialist; this experience was my first real foray into collaborative administration. We were truly partners in many respects, moreso than in previous Director/Assistant to the Director working relationships. He often turned to me for advice/information/assistance with the daily running of the department, and I relished being able to have such input into the workings of Freshman English; I knew he respected my opinions, and that was of enormous importance to my (often fragile) GI ego. During this time, I was also able to see the ways in which administrators work, gaining insight into the politics of academia and the running of a department. I realized that it was not the fault of the department, per se, that the instructors were among the lowest paid at the university and among the hardest working; the machinations of the university administration as well as the field as a whole had much to do with their peon status.

This was also a time in which I found myself set apart from my fellow instructors, due to the nature of my job as Assistant to the Director. I was a

graduate student, yet because I was privy to information that I could not divulge to my colleagues, their confiding in me about the underground of the department abated somewhat during this year. It was an awkward position for me, in certain respects, as I straddled some invisible line between being one of them (administration) and one of us (graduate student). While the Director and I worked well collaboratively, Freshman English was still run by the standard mode of university governance; for the most part, the rules came down from on high and, other than myself and the graduate students involved in committee work, the GIs had little input into the running of the program.

Two more changes in the administration of the program over the following four years ensued, until the 1997-98 academic year when a tenured professor again took on the role of Freshman English Director. As an endowed chair and a seasoned administrator, Ben was able to be much more aggressive in asserting the program's needs to the central administration. The change to a proactive director is a difficult one for some of the members of the university community to make; we now have a person in the position of authority who is a force to be reckoned with throughout the university. He is a Director who is in a position to lobby for the needs of the instructors and the needs of the program, and he is a Director with enough power and control to create an administration such as ours. Ben works toward a "postmasculinist" theory of administration, supporting the ideals of collaboration, listening to graduate student voices, and cooperating within the GI community, yet allowing for the "bi-epistemological" tendency of college administration by showing himself to be very much a masculinist in nature when dealing with the powers that be.

With the move toward a de-centering of authority in this program, there has been an increase in GI cohesiveness this year. The lines of communication within the Freshman English Program have never been more open and honest. This openness has brought to the surface dissension within the ranks of instructors which had heretofore been grumbled about in private, and it has allowed all of us a better, more realistic view of the totality of the program, so that we can assess and deal with the problems of this large program realistically. For example, the graduate teachers are the instructors-of-record for at least two courses per semester, yet many still seek outside employment to be able to make ends meet. The graduate students also realize that they are Graduate Instructors (responsible for between fifty and ninety students per semester) rather than Teaching Assistants, a point also noted in Miller's essay: as teachers, they "actually are assisting no one" (58), yet the moniker of "TA" still persists. In addition, our department is not graduating many Ph.D.s, and the GIs are concerned about their assistantships running out before their degrees are finished; then, once finished, they are worried that there will be no jobs out there for them. Thus, morale is a big issue for the administration of this program, as it is for most every department. Though these are not new concerns by any means, within this new administrative context, the graduate students are finding themselves in an empowered position to take some control, to work together to find creative solutions to these and other issues.

One way in which the GIs have begun to assert some authority over teaching and professional development is through curriculum development, the building of their own writing and literature courses (theme-based or other), which has often led to conference paper presentations, publications, and textbook projects. Also, the 1997 Fall Graduate Instructor Workshop was predominantly student-led, drawing on the years of experience contained within the instructor corps, allowing them to showcase their creative ideas and maintain a dialogue about programmatic issues. Students recently created an English Graduate Student organization, which is taking on some of the responsibility for community-building, professional development, and mentoring. Graduate students are often the most eager members of the professional community, and this collaborative administration has enabled them to build on their own interests and enthusiasm, to take their excitement from the classroom into their own professional lives. They are working together, helping to govern the program and its policies, gaining valuable administrative experience as well as innovative teaching experience which will contribute to their marketability once they graduate.

Our administrative team this year is a study in collaborative effort as well in that there is no power struggle and very little bickering. The only new position in this foursome is my own, the Assistant to the Director of the Writing Program, but this is the first time in my tenure at the university that we have had such constant interaction within the different aspects of the Writing Program, interaction which has been beneficial. The four of us have been longtime associates in this program; we are supportive and encouraging. It is a delight to have this sustenance in a working environment, and the division of labor is such that we are able to give and take, depending upon the specific demands of our respective jobs. We have truly established ourselves as a staff; though we may all be working in different aspects of the writing program, our weekly meetings allow us to touch base, reallocating work as needed. These meetings are the moments of enacting the collaboration; they replenish our ability to function as a cohesive whole, and they are often the only chance that we all have to come together as one body, to vent frustration or share excitement over something in our week.

Among the four of us, we are learning the quirks of each of the other members of the team, a necessity with regard to collaborative work: Ben delegates easily and listens well, and he assumes that once he gives out a task, it will be done; Jennie is a hard-working team player, who brings forth the most wonderful insights when we most need them; Brenda is an ideas woman who is not hesitant to go toe-to-toe with Ben; I am the realist who tries to keep us grounded, who is sometimes a tough sell in our brainstorming sessions. Perhaps our respective genders play a part in our ability to work the way we do, but I also attribute much to the personalities involved. We all care a great deal about the success of this program, and as such, those of us who are graduate students face one of the drawbacks to the involvement of students in an effort such as this: we give all we can to enabling the program to thrive, yet we will have graduated by the time the long-term results of much of our work is evident.

Thus, this collaborative administration made up of the four of us and, by extension, the team leaders and the other GIs and the composition faculty of the department, is a study in playing well together. The undergraduates whom we teach can only benefit from the clear lines of communication now open in this department, by instructors who have a vested interest in the program and the way in which it is run. For the first time since I've been a member of this department, I can see all of the parts slowly coming together to form a cohesive whole, and I feel very much a part of it. In addition, I am facing the job market with years of real service and administrative experience in our department, and I'm ready for the broad variety of demands and responsibilities that come with moving out of this apprentice phase of my academic career.

Director of the Writing Center: Brenda Robertson

In the fall of 1996 I was hired to direct the University Writing Center, a full time staff position. My job description requires that I hire, train, and supervise student writing consultants, budget the hours of operation for Writing Center, prepare payroll sheets and keep time records, keep accounts of funds, purchase and maintain computers, keep and report usage statistics, write proposals for additional funding, and also work with the Freshman English Program and academic degree programs to develop program-specific support to student writers in those programs. In reality, I do more.

When I made the decision to accept this position, I was, and remain, a Ph.D. student with more administrative experience than the average student, partially due to my length of tenure—nine years in M.A. and Ph.D. programs. Delays in progress toward my degree have been first due to extenuating circumstances often encountered by middle-aged female students. I chose to accept the staff position of Writing Center Director prior to completion of work toward my degree because it offered me the financial benefits of full-time employment. This higher profile job has also provided me the opportunity to accommodate my personal life while I complete my studies and meet professional development goals I set for myself.

During my graduate studies, I have served as Assistant to the Director of Freshman English, Administrative Assistant to the Writing Program Administrator, Teaching Team Leader, Freshman English Committee member, graduate student representative on assorted departmental committees, and Assistant to the Writing Center Director. Now, as Director of the Writing Center, I learn to maneuver my way through academic administration, and my perspective broadens. I know first-hand how to appeal for funding. I know how to manage a budget. I now know how to "make connections" all across the campus. I also know how to accommodate specialized student and faculty needs. These and many other experiences prepare me to face an increasingly competitive job market with professional experience and self-confidence few other new graduates possess. My commitment of service has also exacted a price: although I have gained valuable administrative experience, I am not yet able to market this experience because I have not yet completed my degree.

When I began directing the Writing Center, I proceeded to overhaul a facility which had been neglected for some time due to lack of both financial support and administrative attention. I quickly claimed surplus furnishings for the Writing Center when the University library was renovated. Among those, I recognized furnishings that would be useful to the Freshman English Graduate Instructors, whose offices were sparsely supplied with ancient typing and cafeteria tables. My stint as a Graduate Instructor had provided me with first-hand experience in midnight requisitioning of property, so I suggested to the English Department that they might acquire some of the library's furnishings for the GIs that summer. A few weeks later when surplus offerings were dwindling, I turned to Ben, as Freshman English Director-elect, to borrow his pickup truck to assist the GIs in procuring some of the excess for themselves. At about the same time Ben visited Somerville Hall, a vacated residence hall, and returned enthusiastic about further possibilities for change in the GIs' working conditions—if the instructors could be relocated from their various locations across campus (Ben's enthusiasm would later prove useful when he would heave desks and bookcases up the three flights of stairs at the new location). GIs commented that they would believe the changes when they saw them. After much finagling and some carefully worded e-mail correspondence with a central administrator, Ben called me to his office to read the administrator's affirmative response to his request that all of the GIs be assigned offices in the vacated hall. We high-fived one another.

During the shuffling of the furnishings, the English Department chair observed that I must have a very strange job description; he was unaware that moving furniture for Freshman English was a part of the Writing Center Director's job. As Miller has pointed out, "[w]hen boundaries of administrative responsibility blur, cooperative approaches to resolving conflicts may be mistaken for encroachment into territory" (54). My predecessors had not been so actively involved in the Freshman English Program and, admittedly, mine was a slightly uncomfortable position: I was at once an English graduate student and also a full-time staff member. Fortunately, Ben and I shared the vision of developing the relationship between the Freshman English Program and the Writing Center. We were just beginning in a fundamental way—logistical support first, collaborative curriculum-building later. He and I also began to formulate ways to share with others the decision-making responsibility in the Freshman English Program. By late spring I had supervised the final move of furnishings and the fifty GIs were settled into new offices. Ben also moved his office to the new site and began individually interviewing each of the GIs to learn of their perspectives on the program and their needs as graduate students—a feat in and of itself.

By then the new 1997-98 Assistant to the Director of Freshman English, Jennie, had been selected, so she assumed responsibility for the various physical concerns at Somerville Hall thereafter and came onboard as one of the major players in our collaborative effort. Jennie and I conferred with and without Ben about the logistics of general management matters. Later Kitty came on board as Assistant to the Director of the Writing Program. Jennie, Kitty, and I have

previously worked together on several projects and committees. We know we can trust and rely on one another to meet immediate needs when one or the other cannot be present. Since Kitty's office is adjacent to my own, we often share our writing and our duties. Both Kitty and Jennie have, at times, each contributed their services to the Writing Center. This blurring exchange of job responsibilities has offered us each a perspective we might not otherwise have gained. In addition, we have developed cooperative arrangements for the departmental social events which are inevitably part of an administrative program.

The renewed relationship between Freshman English and the Writing Center has brought benefits to both programs. For example, when I participated in organizing and then attended the Fall teachers' workshop, where the majority of the GIs scheduled Freshman English class orientation sessions in the Center, more than 1000 students learned of the Writing Center's services, and more than 550 new e-mail accounts were activated. As a result of these orientation sessions, the Writing Center has experienced a record number of student contacts this year in both the computer center and the writing consultation areas. In addition, the GIs are in the Writing Center more often, using the Internet services and visiting/consulting with me. They have grown to know our student staff and have gained more confidence in their abilities. As more GIs better understand what we "do" in the Writing Center, they encourage more students to seek our assistance.

I have gained from the informal presence of the GIs in the Writing Center, too. Structural relationships did not provide for my maintenance of a position in the Freshman English Program, but the individual and small group relationships with GIs have provided me a place adjacent to the program and allowed me to maintain my status within the community.

Although I had served on a variety of committees as a Graduate Instructor representative, I never felt that I had a real voice in the administration of the program, since graduate students had no vote in matters of policy. This fall that feeling changed when I joined the informal Freshman English leadership committee of four—a committee without a name but with great purpose and possibilities. Each Wednesday at noon in Somerville Hall we discuss teacher workshop plans, staff or student problems, rookie issues, departmental financial woes, Writing Center/Graduate Instructor issues, communications with the English Department, teacher team news, and a multitude of other administrative issues. Though we sometimes have a specific agenda, these luncheon meetings are informal and everyone speaks; we chat socially as well as conducting hard business. We are able to generate ideas together and to share the work to be done. The team or committee works well because all members have a strong commitment to the teaching of Freshman English and respect one another as colleagues. I also feel that Ben attempts to settle himself into the least authoritarian position he can locate in our predominantly female group. (Although at times he has told us hunting stories, Ben has also sung for us the "Good Morning" song with which he greets his two-year-old daughter.) Occasionally, he and I vigorously debate issues while the two younger team members glance side-long

at one another. Through it all, our personal bonds have grown stronger; our commitment to the collaborative effort is sustained.

I have brought my share of Writing Center problems to the Un-committee meetings, and the others often offer useful advice. We three graduate students have shared our experiences as Assistants to the Directors of Freshman English. Jennie is also able to share her prior work experiences as an English Department part-time assistant. Ben describes the wondrous world of academic bureaucracy in the central administration as the three of us sit astonished. Ben is also able to help us understand creative ways to resolve issues. But I think the lesson I best learn from Ben is one of internal fortitude in the face of lack of administrative support for upgrading the Freshman English Program, and I believe that the GI staff has seen this in his stance as well.

They now have a common location, a vested interest in their community, and a well-led program in which they have stronger voices. Through the Fall teacher's workshop they have learned how to work smarter. They function much as a departmental faculty but without nearly so much in-fighting. I am confident that their enfranchisement in the Freshman English Program will produce an even greater confidence in collaborative classroom methods. I think, too, that there is a change in perception of the administration. Although at first there seemed to be confusion from the grad students concerning Jennie's, Kitty's, and my jobs, especially what each "does," they now know they can rely on any of us to see that their needs and issues are addressed. Because there are three graduate students working so closely with Ben, there seems to be less of the "us against them" attitude, and I feel that the grad students better trust the administration. We may, as Miller cautions, "look weak and the delivery system chaotic" (57); we have in reality a much more fortified base of support because our foundation is flexible and constituted of our individual strengths working together.

For me this year has been instrumental in my gaining greater confidence as an administrator and expanding my sphere of activity in the university. It's been an exciting ride from scavenging abandoned furniture to blazing new horizons in academic support services for our students.

Conclusion: The Four of Us

We have attempted to show multiple, though limited, perspectives on several dynamic changes in the architecture of power in one university's writing program. While the problems that we face daily are no less vexing than those the program faced last year, we each feel more empowered to act on those problems and, working together, we multiply our individual power into a communal power. Because three of us were or had very recently been graduate instructors, our peers trusted us as leaders; therefore, the roots of our power relations spread quickly and deeply into the graduate instructor community. Plus, we believe that we have developed a better, more communally humane way of addressing issues. We can report better staff morale, more communication between ourselves and the staff, more efficient work routines, a more consistent implementation of the curriculum staff-wide, and a feeling of belonging to something

special, a place in the academy that is ours. The way we went about achieving all of these things was of paramount importance, dependent on transforming the power of the WPA into a participatory activity in which several staff members became enfranchised.

While some would view this form of administration as ephemeral, lacking deep structural positioning, we view it as more subversive and more pervasive programmatically. We view our work as history-in-the-making, feeling that we are involved in an exciting journey.⁵ Five years from now our work may be viewed as transitional, leading to an agency that is constituted by more tenured faculty and that demands more institutional commitment. But, whatever the form of leadership in the near future, one thing is for certain: the legacy of our group will define much of its nature and constitution. Graduate instructors will figure prominently, if not predominantly, in the leadership team. And the linking relationship between the Writing Center and the Freshman English Program will continue vigorously.

In this new enterprise we graduate students have gained invaluable and unique administrative experience; Ben has gained associates who share in the leadership role. Together we produce a number of viable options and foster an atmosphere of good will. While some players in this game will change in the next season, the infrastructure for a collaborative administrative agency has been established. Our two other composition faculty colleagues will return from their sabbaticals next year. And the dean has announced his retirement at the end of this semester. The playing field is being readied for another administrative team to carry on this new tradition.

Notes

1. "Graduate Instructors" is a term preferred by our graduate students who are the sole teachers of record for freshman and sophomore English courses. Previously they were called graduate teaching assistants, the profession's more commonly-used term. Throughout this article, the terms "Graduate Instructor" and "GI" are used interchangeably.
2. The Writing Program is a university-wide agency that involves several offices and departments in various formal and informal arrangements. It receives funding from various state, federal, and private sources. Admittedly, my holding the Schillig Chair and the Writing Program Director's position as well as being Director of Freshman English has provided me with administrative flexibility, funding, and, thus, powers that were not available to my predecessors in the Freshman English Director's position.
3. Perhaps not so ironically, my administrative stance outside the program—when dealing with other administrative agencies on campus—must be one of a strong authority, empowered by my status as a full professor holding an endowed chair and by my several years' experience as an administrator of other programs. While holding collegial conversations within our leadership group meetings, I write argumentative memos and engage in tough negotiations with

central administrators, competing with other program heads in trying to gain badly-needed resources.

4. John Bean, co-author of *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing*, worked with us for two days, concentrating on classroom practices in the teaching writing; over a three-day period, Kathleen Yancey helped us rethink how we taught and assessed writing portfolios.

5. Indeed, so self-aware have we been that we have devoted several of our weekly meetings to the collaborative planning of a conference presentation on this topic at CCCC this spring and the collaborative writing of this article—even to the point of us being frequently seated around a conference table (and even a breakfast table!) composing on laptop computers. Composing this article has been a major challenge for us, because our routine means of communicating is a roundtable discussion, very much a free-flowing give-and-take. Presenting our stories on paper has required that we shift from conversation to separate speeches, working through revisions to respond to each other's section within our own.

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Website

WPA maintains a Website of organizational information, as well as information and resources for those involved in writing program administration.

The URL is

<http://www.cas.ilstu.edu/English/Hesse/wpawelcome.htm>