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# A Co-Mentoring Model of Administration

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It's the first day of the new quarter, 7:30 a.m., and it's snowing heavily. There is *untypical* chaos in the English Department. The power is out in all the administrative offices; the registrar has sent no class lists; the copier is broken yet again; the senior secretary is out with a broken leg; instructors who teach first-year, on-line English are panicking because, inadvertently, too many classes have been scheduled for the computer labs each hour, and the instructors who planned on taking their students to the computer labs have no place to hold class. Since it's 7:30 a.m., there are no staff assistants or Writing Program Administrators around to handle the problem. What happens?

Out of the winter gloom the savior appears: she is a graduate instructor. Making a chart on the white board, she quickly divides the on-line instructors, assigning computer labs to each; the overflow class she assigns to a room with a computer hook-up. Other graduate instructors bustle about setting up a computer and LCD so the on-line instructors can orient their classes. Another graduate instructor volunteers to print class lists from a computer that has power. By the time the administrators arrive at 8:00 a.m., the immediate problems are solved, and everyone is calmly going about the business of teaching and learning.

Is this some kind of miracle? We don't think so. We feel that because of the administrative style that we use in the Writing Program, the graduate instructors felt empowered to "make it work" just as if they were in charge of the program. We believe that the instructors were willing to take responsibility for the program because as administrators, we consciously try to share our administrative power with them.

## Co-Mentoring

In "Postmasculinist Direction in Writing Program Administration" Hildy Miller discusses writing program administration in terms of power sharing. Citing Lamb and Gunner, Miller compares and contrasts what she calls "feminist" and "masculinist" styles of administration. Miller defines a "feminist" style of administration as one in which the leader does not dominate, but rather "facilitate(s) . . . share(s) power, and enable(s) both self and others to contribute" (52). Miller defines a "masculinist" style as a hierarchical system, a finite entity in which "increasing one person's power necessarily diminishes another's" (52).

Rejecting both the above as too "either/or" (59), Miller advocates what she calls a "both/and" (59) or "postmasculinist style" of administration in which power, rather than being centered on the WPA, is "decentered" (Gunner 10), is shared and "mutually-enables" (Lamb 21) those who are in the program. This is what Gunner<sup>1</sup> describes as a decentered "group, or collaborative, (an) entity in

need of a spokesperson or liaison . . . but not a single position assigned total curricular responsibility or autocratic power" (13).

We agree with Miller and Gunner that the position of WPA should be decentered and that power should be shared. However, we prefer the term "co-mentoring" to Miller's term, "postmasculinist," to describe what we do.<sup>2</sup> We have discovered that there is too much resistance to a gendered term such as "postmasculinist"; it also requires too much explanation, whereas "co-mentoring" needs little explanation. Most people are familiar with the concept of "mentoring" and can easily understand "co-mentoring" as an administrative concept without having to deal with the additional baggage that a term such as "postmasculinist" brings with it.

This technique of co-mentoring was originally developed for the classroom, but can apply to an administrative setting in which people work together (Bona, Rinehart, and Volbrecht 119). For us, co-mentoring describes a collaborative relationship in which all parties contribute equally to the relationship. Each mentors the other in light of the strengths each brings to the relationship. The back-and-forth-ness of the relationship avoids the more hierarchical mentoring relationship in which one person imparts knowledge and wisdom to the other. For example, a legitimate mentoring relationship may exist between a graduate student and her thesis chair. The Chair is probably the more knowledgeable person in the relationship and can advise the graduate student on a variety of topics relating to the thesis, such as where to go for more sources, what questions yet need to be considered, or how to conduct herself in the thesis defense. For the most part, the knowledge flows in one direction: from the mentor to the mentee.

Contrast this to a relationship between co-authors in which both contribute equally to the article, but each contributes according to her interests and expertise. For example, in writing this article, Christine and Lynn each brought an area of interest and expertise to the collaborations: Christine's current interest is how electronic media supports collaboration; Lynn's current interest is in a feminist theory of administration. We have been able to combine both areas of interest and our growing expertise to write this article. Our collaboration on this article could be considered a sort of co-mentoring relationship because both of us give knowledge and expertise to the other for our mutual benefit.

However, co-mentoring is more than just working together to accomplish a common goal. In a co-mentoring situation, roles may shift over time. The mentor becomes the mentee and vice versa, depending on the level of expertise each has. Bona et al point out that co-mentoring "invites the participants to act as teachers, demonstrators, and counselors for each other. These practices may include more than two because co-mentoring allows for the sharing of the mentor/mentee responsibilities by several individuals" (119).

The opening scenario is a case in point. The graduate instructors who took charge of the untypical first-day-of-the-quarter chaos in our English Department acted as teachers, demonstrators, and counselors to the others and solved difficult scheduling problems. The other graduate instructors followed their leadership even though the leaders weren't "official" administrators. When the

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official administrators arrived, they were glad to follow the graduate instructors' lead. When thanked profusely by the administrators for stepping into and dealing with a difficult situation, one of the graduate instructors said, "I saw a problem that needed fixing. So I fixed it." Her attitude describes the administrative design of our writing program administration to a tee. Rather than wasting energy "protecting turf," we work together to fix what needs fixing.

## Co-Mentoring in Our Writing Program

There are eight of us who officially share responsibilities for administering the Writing Program at Utah State University, and we all co-mentor each other. Four of us are tenure-track faculty (the Director of Graduate Studies, the Associate Department Head, the WPA, and the Director of the Writing Center), three of us are graduate instructors (with responsibility for administering first- and second-year English), and the eighth (and arguably the most important) is the Computer Lab Supervisor. We would certainly agree with Shrewsbury (11) that our administrative powers are not diluted but are instead transformed through our co-mentoring administrative style. When we see something that needs fixing, we fix it. However, we rarely act alone.

Instead of individuals functioning separately from each other, we work as a unit, but a flexible unit, meeting face to face and on-line in various permutations and combinations as the needs of the situation dictate. As Shrewsbury points out, the person with the greatest knowledge and experience in a given situation is recognized, and his or her knowledge and experience is used "... to increase the legitimate power of all" (11). What might be looked at as the power to dominate becomes the power of creative energy. Because we all share the same goal (a writing program that is a smoothly-running, efficient community of learners in which both the graduate instructors and their undergraduate students flourish and grow), as administrators we group and regroup to work toward that goal.

For example, when office space and computer shortages became an issue with the on-line graduate instructors, Christine and Lynn met with the Computer Lab Supervisor to figure out a solution. Ultimately, we decided that we should only suggest a plan and give the graduate instructors themselves an opportunity to help us solve the problem. We called a meeting to outline possible solutions to the problem of not having enough computers to provide each instructor with one on his or her desk. Not all instructors were teaching in the on-line environment in a given term. We thought it would be unwieldy to change offices every term to ensure that on-line instructors had their own computers on their desks. So, we suggested a neutral location for a mini-computer lab that could be shared by all instructors. To our surprise, the instructors were adamant about all on-line instructors having computers on their desks during the term they were teaching in that environment. As they pointed out to us, and rightly so, when teaching an on-line class, the computer itself becomes both your classroom and your office. You need immediate access to both on your own desk. We official administrators would never have had the nerve to make the graduate instructors with computers change offices and give up their computers. We felt it would cause too much ill will and too much confusion each quarter.

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This example illustrates what Shrewsbury and Miller call "feminist" administration, but what we call co-mentoring. Shrewsbury explains, "There is a dynamic between leadership and followership, and effective leaders under the more modern sense of leadership are also effective followers. . . . Individuals are responsible for their acts within the context in which they have freedom to act" (14). In this situation, our co-mentoring style of administration included the graduate instructors. We gave them an opportunity to understand the facts of the situation, detailed the lack of office space and computers, and gave them the responsibility for solving the problem. They gave us advice and we took it.

Had we not adopted this form of collaborative administration for ourselves, we doubt that we would have thought of including the graduate instructors in problem solving, nor would we have trusted them to take responsibility for the program. But because this style of administration works so well for us, we naturally think to include as many of the stakeholders as possible in the decision-making process. We are convinced that our co-mentoring administrative style serves as a model for the graduate instructors. Because we willingly share power with each other and with them, they are willing to take responsibility for the success of the Writing Program and the instructors who teach in it. We agree with Curtis and Rasool who claim, "Nothing motivates quite like a sense of power over one's personal and professional life" (312). What follows is another example of the way in which the official administrators are co-mentored by the graduate instructors.

This incident occurred during an on-line instruction transition period. When new instructors are assigned to teach on-line classes, their most difficult task is learning how to transfer the interactive, student-centered pedagogy of their composition classrooms to the on-line environment. Usually the on-line instructors work informally with a veteran on-line instructor and learn by "lurking" in other on-line classes. However, when one of our second-year graduate instructors observed that the new on-line instructors' concerns had reached the panic stage, he wrote a proposal to establish the position of Assistant Director of Writing in Charge of On-line Instruction. He argued that the new on-line instructors needed official one-to-one instruction and support as they learned the tricks of on-line teaching. He also argued that the informal method of instruction that we had been using took up too much of the veteran on-line instructors' time.

The Writing Program administrators met with the graduate instructor to talk over his proposal. Not only were his arguments persuasive, he alerted us to a potentially serious personnel issue. We agreed that new on-line instructors needed more formal instruction. An Assistant Director of Writing volunteered to train new on-line instructors. He met with each one individually and held weekly meetings until panic subsided. Because of the graduate instructor's willingness to identify a problem and suggest a solution, we were able to address the problem before it got out of hand. Furthermore, we agreed that we needed to provide ongoing, formal instruction for new on-line instructors each quarter.

We feel that giving instructors a sense of power over their professional lives not only helps them take responsibility for the Writing Program, it helps the

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Writing Program run more smoothly. To this end, the graduate instructors co-mentor the official Writing Program administrators in a variety of professional ways. Specifically, they develop the curriculum for the first- and second-year writing courses and publish the accompanying curriculum handbooks. In addition, they are in charge of textbook selection for first- and second-year composition courses. The graduate instructors run the committees, work with the textbook representatives, pilot the texts, and make a final selection. We official administrators follow their advice because 1) we want to give them power over their own working conditions and teaching materials; and 2) we believe working on committees, making textbook selections, and taking other kinds of responsibility for the Writing Program teaches the graduate instructors the tools of leadership in our profession. We give the graduate instructors as much professional responsibility as they will take, and they respond by co-mentoring us on the Writing Program in general. We contrast this “professional” co-mentoring to what might be called “systemic” co-mentoring, that which occurs by virtue of one’s position.

### Systemic Co-mentoring

Certainly we are not saying that no official administrators are in control of the Writing Program. We acknowledge Luke’s argument that “. . . we do need to take authority—or at least, make explicit that we already embody and exercise authority even in its camouflage of pastoral nurturance” (302). Furthermore, it would be dishonest to pretend that we were running the Writing Program as a democracy. The Writing Program administrators have all sorts of authority that comes with having terminal degrees, tenured positions, and titles after our names. In addition, we are the graduate instructors’ employers and teachers, plus we are the ones who write crucial letters of recommendation. We have plenty of power and authority, and high expectations. It is only fair that we acknowledge our power and make clear to the graduate instructors (and to others) who has authority for the particular aspects of our program’s administration. Here is a brief outline of our respective roles.

The Director of Graduate Studies oversees the second-year graduate instructors and observes their teaching. He is assisted in this by an Assistant Director of Writing who is a second-year graduate instructor. The Associate Department Head (Christine) budgets the Writing Program, hires and helps to supervise the graduate instructors and lecturers, schedules their classes, and administers certain aspects of on-line instruction. The Director of Writing (Lynn) oversees the first-year graduate instructors, teaches the “Practicum in Teaching Writing” class, makes classroom observations of the first-year graduate instructors, and oversees certain aspects of on-line instruction. She is assisted by two Assistant Directors of Writing who are second-year graduate instructors. In addition Lynn handles student complaints, organizes text selection committees, oversees the publications of course handbooks, and enforces Writing Program policies and procedures. She also directly supervises all three Assistant Directors of Writing and advises the various committees they chair to review goals and objectives, revise handbooks, and select textbooks.

The Director of the Writing Center does just that; she trains and supervises the writing center tutors, many of whom are graduate instructors who also teach in the Writing Program, and administers and evaluates the "challenge exams" for first- and second-year courses. She also supervises the on-line tutorial that originates from the Writing Center. The Computer Lab Supervisor is responsible for the running of the computer lab, especially the development and upkeep of the on-line classes's web environments. Together we make up an "octopartate" WPA. In this respect our collaboration is more like the masculinist model that Miller describes: each of us exercises authority for certain areas of the Writing Program. Ultimately what Miller advocates is a combination of feminist and masculinist models, and so do we.

We also know—because they have told us in many different ways—that the graduate instructors perceive all of our Writing Program Administrators to be as Miller describes them: "... receptive, cooperative, willing to promote discussion, listen to divergent views, and look for common interests" (53). So in that respect our collaboration is more like the "feminist" model that Miller describes, even though our model of administration does include a "masculinist" hierarchy of sorts. But within that hierarchy we willingly listen to each other, even "take orders" from each other to ensure the success of the Writing Program.

As an example, one committee that meets weekly is the On-line Instruction Committee. It is made up of the Assistant Director of Writing in charge of on-line instruction, first-time on-line instructors and instructors who will be teaching on-line the next quarter, the Computer Lab Supervisor, and the Director of Writing. The purpose of the committee is to share information on on-line teaching techniques and to "trouble shoot." The meeting has a regular format: the Computer Lab Supervisor reviews the previous week's problems (if any) and asks for suggestions or proposes solutions. The on-line instructors respond, ask questions, make suggestions, and share information. Most problems are resolved in the meeting; concerns are addressed, and then the Assistant Director of Writing presents a specific teaching technique. In this case, the Director of Writing mainly listens and takes notes. The Assistant Director of Writing is in charge of conducting the meeting and making sure recommendations are carried out. The committee meets to ensure the effectiveness of the on-line classes. In order to do this, the administrators must listen to the concerns of the instructors and the Computer Lab Supervisor.

We think it is this willingness to listen to each other that promotes the sense of co-mentoring and solidarity that pervades our Writing Program. Co-mentoring makes it possible for all voices to be heard, because each person's voice is equal. We believe that each of us has specific talents (on-line instruction, scheduling, personnel issues, rapport with students, budgeting, classroom expertise, curriculum design, text selection, etc.), which makes each of us an expert; therefore, our voices will be heard and respected. We believe that this acknowledgment of equality of voice empowers both graduate instructors and administrators. Everyone knows: It is OK to speak out; your voice will be heard; your concerns will be acted upon within the limits of our program's finances and

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resources. Miller points out that “in feminist directing . . . communicative functions appear as a significant source of power” (53). We mine these communicative functions—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—to discover who among us is the leader whose voice we follow in any particular situation. That person—*whether graduate instructor or official administrator*—has the power because he or she has the expertise to solve a particular problem and control of the communicative functions with which to do it.

## Communicating

It is to the communicative functions of administration that we would now like to turn. We feel that our co-mentoring administration is not only made possible but enhanced through communication, and in particular, through various electronic media. As TWIG Writing Group maintains, “One way to facilitate empowerment—and thereby reciprocity—is through the sharing of information. Because information often is closely linked to power, having information can increase an individual’s feeling of control . . .” (20). In other words, through our co-mentoring writing program administration, we try to share power with—rather than having power over (21)—the instructors in our program. However, we have arrived at this co-mentoring, power-sharing administrative style over a number of years—we did not just dream it up one day while we were standing around the copy machine. And it has taken us some time even to describe and name it.

Our struggle to describe our administrative style echoes the difficulty that Lunsford and Ede had trying to name and describe their collaboration:

Along the highways and byways of our research and reading roads, however, we began to catch glimpses, perceive traces, of another mode of collaboration, one we came to call dialogic and one which, we ultimately realized, succeeded in naming our own mode of collaboration. . . . This dialogic mode is loosely structured and the roles enacted within it are fluid: one person may occupy multiple and shifting roles as a project progresses. In this mode, the process of articulating goals is often as important as the goals themselves and sometimes even more important. Furthermore, those participating in the dialogic collaborative generally value the creative tension inherent in multivoice and multivalent ventures. . . . In dialogic collaboration, this group effort is seen as an essential part of the production—rather than the recovery—of knowledge and as a means of individual satisfaction within the group. (133)

As we considered more directly the administrative style that we have been developing over several years as administrators, we were struck by how important those communicative functions have become for us in our program. We would like to look back briefly at our own careers in an effort to better understand this evolution.

When Christine first began as an administrator more than sixteen years ago, she felt it to be a very isolating experience. She found herself in situations in which she, as WPA, had a great deal of responsibility for running an effective

writing program, but very little authority within the departmental hierarchy to do her job well. She had difficulty articulating the parameters of her job. Like the informant in Theresa Enos' book *Gender Roles and Faculty Lives* who wrote under the pseudonym of the "battered wife," Christine also didn't know how difficult her administrative situation was until after she'd left it behind for a new job: "Leaving the English Department at State was like getting out of a bad marriage—I did not realize how dysfunctional the department was until I got into one that was, by comparison, a model of collegiality" (18). In part because of the move to a different departmental culture, Christine needed to define more clearly for herself and her department the role of WPA. This led to the Portland Resolution initiative, in which she started an effort by the WPA organization to describe in more realistic terms the work that we do.

As we have talked to other WPAs at annual conferences and on the WPA listserv, we have been struck that Christine's experience of initial isolation seems to have been widely felt. Perhaps this is due to the fact that many times in years past, the WPA was the lone "writing person" in a department—an extremely isolating feeling. To complicate things further, if the departmental structure were hierarchical, the WPA probably found it very difficult to introduce any collaborative or co-mentoring efforts which might involve power-sharing with those perceived in the departmental scheme to be of "lower" status, such as Graduate Instructors or Lecturers.

In contrast, when Lynn first became a WPA in 1995, she had a number of support systems in place to mitigate the isolation that Christine felt. First, having Christine as her Associate Department Head made a huge difference. Christine was literally "next door," available to answer questions and give advice. But more importantly, because Christine was the primary author of the Portland Resolution, Lynn knew that she understood the issues and concerns involved in administering a writing program, and if need be, could act as an advocate for Writing Program policies with the English Department Head. Because Lynn also knew that Christine subscribed to the same principles in writing program administration, Lynn never felt that she had to "watch her back," a common complaint of WPAs who work with unsympathetic administrators. In addition, the Associate Dean of our College (Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences), Joyce Kinkead, is also a former WPA. When Lynn became WPA, she found herself in the enviable situation of working within an administrative structure that understood and valued what she did.

Both these former WPAs were able to mentor Lynn in a number of ways. Lynn could ask for and receive almost instant advice through both e-mail and voice mail. This made it easier for Lynn to ask for help, even on "trivial" matters ("Is it O.K. for me to sign a change of grade form for an instructor who has left the University?"), and simple for the former WPAs to respond ("Yes") without either party having to leave her office or interrupt the rhythm of her work. Both administrators were able to give her substantive suggestions on Writing Program documents she created (again sent and received through e-mail). And underlying all these exchanges was the common language of the Portland Resolution. Lynn



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knew that both Christine and Joyce understood and supported the Portland Resolution, so in a sense had another “voice” supporting her—the voice of the WPA organization itself. Lynn also found support through the WPA Workshop and Conference held each summer.

In 1995 Lynn participated in the WPA Summer Workshop for new WPAs led by Charles Schuster and Kathleen Yancey. The “Class of ‘95” established its own listserv which supported the new WPAs through their first year. In addition, many new WPAs lurked on the established WPA listserv and sometimes participated in the conversations. Lynn was daily, if not hourly, able to ask questions, receive advice and support, and stay in contact with other WPAs, a major factor in reducing the sense of isolation and aloneness which Christine had described.

Both of us find that now our administrative lives are quite fulfilling. What has changed over the years? What have we done, together and independently, consciously or intuitively, that has made a difference? Through various maneuvers, job changes, role shifts, changes in administration, funding initiatives, and so on, we have positioned ourselves in ways that were effective and also that fit with our emerging, co-mentoring administrative style. Miller urges us to “communicate attempts to reinvent the game. Explain the philosophy that undergirds new methods” (57). Co-authoring this article has given us the opportunity to articulate for ourselves our evolving sense of a co-mentoring administrative style. Although we have not entirely sorted the complex weave of our administrative lives, we will attempt to describe one of the things that has made a difference for us—communication.

Perhaps because communication allows us to escape isolationism, this makes it all the more important. In the early years of both our administrative lives, it was communicating with others, particularly at the annual WPA conference, that gave us a sense of community and power. We left each of those conferences armed with ideas and strategies that allowed us to make headway on our own campuses. Talking and listening to other WPAs at conferences has become a significant source of power for us.

A second and equally important communicative source came with reading and writing—in particular the WPA journal. In Christine’s early years as an administrator, she would eagerly await each issue and read it from cover to cover: for insights, ideas, understanding—power. When the opportunity came to become the journal’s editor, she accepted the challenge gratefully and continued to gain a tremendous amount from talking and working with authors, editorial board members, outside reviewers, the WPA Executive Committee, and journal readers, for the seven years of her editorship. Gaining information, from speaking and listening to others in the field and from reading and writing professional literature, has definitely helped both of us feel more in control as administrators.

In recent years, as Lynn and Christine have been collaborating on the administration of the Writing Program at Utah State, the communicative functions have seemed to become easier. Maybe practice makes perfect—but also, perhaps the changing tools, and in particular electronic media, are making a difference as well. As we reflect on earlier administrative times, we remember

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the truism that Lynn Bloom coined: "If a WPA is in her office, there is someone in there with her." So why did we feel so isolated? We were constantly surrounded by other people—usually people with problems that they wanted us to sort out: students with complaints about grades, instructors with complaints about schedules, and so on. But those meetings, although necessary, were seldom productive times for us in our own quest for professional growth. Much of our time was taken up with the constant bombardment of interruptions in our office.

But, these days, Lynn Bloom's truism has changed for us: "If a WPA is in her office, she is staring at her computer." Many of the face-to-face communicative functions of times past now take place over computer networks. We are most likely to learn of that student or instructor complaint first via an e-mail message. Often simple problems can be sorted out over e-mail without the necessity of a face-to-face encounter. In fact, we find that communicating with each other, with instructors and students in our program, with administrators across our campus, and even with other WPAs using the WPA listserv, has given a different organizational shape to our days. As co-mentoring administrators, Lynn and Christine joke about the time they spend "talking" over e-mail—doubly ironic given the fact that their offices are adjacent to each other! But the truth is that we prefer the e-mail medium because its communicative function, though fairly immediate, tends to be less interruptive than a face-to-face encounter.

Using e-mail is also more expedient for disseminating information and receiving information from a number of people—an essential feature of a co-mentored program. Creating your own lists of correspondents and using your e-mail client's ability to group lists of people into "nicknames," provides you with an ability to communicate simultaneously to many correspondents using only a single message. For example, when we are working together on necessary program documents, such as course goals or common syllabuses, we can easily and quickly work together by e-mailing drafts to the working group.

In fact, in many ways co-mentoring means co-authoring. As we think back to the times before the advent of computers, we remember struggling to produce documents in endless streams of typed drafts or purple mimeos. It was very difficult for a WPA in those days to co-author the many documents that are necessary to keep a program running smoothly. Now, however, co-authoring is not only possible but expedient. It is a way to bring many diverse voices into the administrative stream. Documents such as our Freshman English Handbook and our Guide for Instructors are now truly collaborative enterprises. Disks are swapped, attachments are sent via e-mail, and documents are "constructed" by many authors, each able to contribute in their particular area of expertise. Because many of the constituents of the program are also the authors of the governing documents, they gain an important sense of ownership and power.

We mentioned earlier in this article an incident with our on-line instructors sharing in the decision-making about their office computers. This incident also points out that the teaching environment on our campus has been radically changed by recent technologies—in particular the advent of Internet teaching via

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the World Wide Web. We are actively exploring on-line education in our writing program and we offer our students a choice of traditional instruction or computer-assisted instruction. The amount and type of computer assistance varies among classes and instructors, but there are many opportunities for instructors to innovate in this arena.

There has been much written in the literature about the democratization of the writing classroom through the introduction of computers. Handa expressed this thought succinctly in her Introduction to the collection *Computer and Community*: "In fact, we have found that the computer may be a democratic tool" (xix). She goes on to describe the ways in which the hierarchical community typically found in classrooms, with a teacher on the stage and the students in the audience, changes in a networked classroom:

Even in a democracy, society nonetheless provides a multitude of hierarchies, not all of them economic, that cause some people to devalue self, others to privilege self . . . the computer is a powerful tool that, if used in certain ways, can not only enhance but create a strong sense of community among both the students and their instructors." (xx)

The democratizing impetus created by computer classrooms—and now even extended to Web-based teaching in which the classrooms only exist virtually—has had an important spill-over effect on both our teaching and our co-mentoring administration.

At the same time as we've experimented with computerized instruction and on-line teaching, we have discovered another important communication tool—the department's Website. Our instructors are now sharing curricular ideas and information in ways that were very rudimentary before the advent of computer networks. In years past, we used to share assignments and course ideas through a wire "basket" in the office workroom, instructors were encouraged to deposit photocopies of their best teaching ideas into the basket. However, this method of disseminating information was hit or miss, at best. Loose papers were easily lost or misplaced. Often the handouts were without important contextual information that explained their justification or implementation. Now, the department's Website has become an important repository for teaching information and help—analogue to the workroom's wire basket. We keep on the Website model student work for both instructors and students to review; there are writing helps and evaluation helps, model assignments and teaching ideas. The possibilities are endless. We see this communication tool as yet another way for us to encourage instructors and administrators to "co-mentor."

In addition to departmental efforts to co-mentor through a Website, there are national efforts as well. We, along with many other WPAs and WAC directors across the country, have been collaborating with the WPA at Colorado State University, Mike Palmquist, to build a Writing Across the Curriculum Website that would serve as a resource for everyone who is either teaching or administering a WAC program. Such a site can serve not only as an archive of information for WAC programs and instructors, but also a site for co-authoring documents and sharing programmatic insights at the cutting edge of the discipline. Similarly,

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we have participated in campus and Utah listservs to work on general education and state-wide articulation issues. This kind of work provides the opportunity for co-mentoring on a grand scale.

### Concluding Thoughts

This is not to say that everything always runs smoothly in our Writing Program. Sometimes our “communicative functions” break down and we are back to a hierarchical “I’m in charge here” model. A good case in point is a misunderstanding among Christine and Lynn and two graduate instructors who had been hired to oversee our fledgling on-line program. These two instructors (both males) did not understand at all the collaborative nature of our administrative structure. They assumed that, by virtue of being appointed as team-leaders, they were given authority and power over all the other instructors teaching in the on-line environment. They did not understand the concept articulated so eloquently by Lunsford and Ede: “Those participating in dialogic collaboration generally value the creative tension inherent in multivoiced and multivalent ventures” (133). Our two graduate instructors never would allow any other voices but their own to be heard. The meetings that they conducted were lectures where they performed as the “sage on the stage” and the other instructors had to sit passively and listen. Finally, both had to be removed from their posts—after they had managed to thoroughly alienate everyone else in the program, including us.

At first when the situation described above was unfolding, Lynn and Christine were baffled by how difficult communicating with these two graduate instructors seemed to be. Upon later reflection and reading, however, we have gained a better understanding of their (and our) behavior. Luke quoting Bagilhole (18) explains it well:

And yet the unmistakably engendered dynamics of student/teacher relations and the gendered ideological foundation of authority also mean that women often encounter “problems with male students who do not accept their [women’s] status or authority as academics. . . . Some male students find it hard to do what a woman tells them and they don’t like it. They have difficulty with authority.” (289)

Although Luke and Bagilhole are discussing student/teacher relationships, a similar problem had occurred between our two male graduate instructors and us, their two female “bosses.” The graduate instructors were operating under a hierarchical, masculinist model of administration and simply didn’t understand (or were hostile toward) our feminist style. Had we better understood the dynamics at the time, perhaps we could have resolved the stalemate more gracefully. But, it may also be the case that we were all destined to talk at cross-purposes to each other and thus were better off just ending the relationships before more permanent damage was done. As Qualley puts it, “While I believe that we must always strive for a ‘both/and’ conception of gender and gender-linked traits, I don’t think our students can easily embrace such a perspective if they have only experienced one side of the either/or binary” (33). It could very well be that our two male graduate instructors had only experienced

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a masculinist model of teaching and administering and therefore had trouble functioning within a different model. And, for our part, we had a difficult time recognizing the root causes for their behavior. Consequently, we had trouble establishing a “co-mentoring” relationship with these instructors.

The above example notwithstanding, the boundaries of our program are surely changing for the better; that old sense of isolation is being broken down and the walls of the castle breached. The Writing Czar is becoming (or has become) the writing team-leader or co-mentor, who “dances always between authority that leads and authority that coerces” (LaDuc 163). She works with diverse constituencies and colleagues in a mutually-enabling administrative network, enhanced and empowered by communication.

## Notes

1. Gunner’s article instigated an important corrective to an ongoing discussion in the WPA journal about power and the WPA. After several articles which described power in very masculine terms, Gunner’s article suggested that there might be another way to look at power—as collaborative or shared.
2. Theresa Enos coined a similar term to our “co-mentoring” in her essay “Mentoring—and (Wo)mentoring—in Composition Studies.” Enos discusses in that essay a feminist version of mentoring, which she calls “womentoring.”

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