

Consortia as Sites of Inquiry: Steps Toward a National Portrait of Writing Program Administration

Jill Gladstein, Lisa Lebduska, and Dara Rossman Regaignon

There can be a default assumption in conversations about writing program administration that it is synonymous with the work of administering a first-year composition program at a large and quite possibly public institution. Susan McLeod addresses this problem in her introduction to *Writing Program Administration*, explaining that she focuses on “the administration of first-year writing programs” because “this is still the most common kind of WPA work” (3–4). While McLeod’s book is a valuable resource, we would argue that there are many assumptions about relationships with faculty and with upper administration that do not translate neatly from a large to a small school.¹ In this article, we describe how and why we created a consortium of small selective private colleges—Small Liberal Arts College Writing Program Administrators, or SLAC-WPA—and what we learned about WPA work and WPA positions from an initial survey completed by 55 schools (see Appendix). In offering our resultant sketch of the small college WPA to the field as a whole, we hope that we will contribute to the larger project of building a more complete picture of WPA work and positions nationally and internationally. As a field, we need to demystify the work of WPAs, both to make such positions more accessible to graduate students and others new to this particular type of intellectual labor, and to provide a more transparent picture for those involved in evaluating the work of WPAs on campuses nationwide. Developing a more nuanced and diverse sense of how institutional context necessarily frames the work of the WPA is a crucial step in this process. While national pictures of writing instruction and writing program administration may be painted with a global brush—think of the work of Dan Melzer; the Writing Centers Research Project; McLeod and Shirley; and Thaiss—they may also be assembled from a collection of smaller images, cohorts that allow a multiplicity of perspectives.

Our understanding of writing program administration in the twenty-first century might then consist of such assemblages—data from the local in light of the global.

GETTING STARTED: LOCAL CONDITIONS

This project began, as many do, as a series of informal conversations (in our case, during the WPA conference in Arizona in 2007). Although we had known each other from our involvement in local and national organizations prior to the conference, the 2007 conference was the first time we seriously had discussed organizing a group of peer WPAs to engage SLAC-specific needs that did not seem addressed by national conversations. We realized that in order to advocate for our positions and our respective programs, we had to have a more complete understanding—a thick description, to use Geertz's term—of exactly who “we” are. We needed to establish a research context of peer institutions where we could gather data to inform ourselves and our institutions of the portrait of writing at SLAC schools, since this was something that we were unable to garner from other groups or our individual institutions.

While historians of the field discuss the role of small colleges as pioneers of writing-across-the curriculum and even as deeply influential forbears of major trends in writing pedagogy and program structure (Berthoff; Varnum), writing programs at small colleges can be marginalized from current conversations about WPA work.² Indeed, Carol Rutz notes in a 2006 article describing the development of the portfolio assessment program at Carleton College that “it is fair to ask why anyone should care how composition instruction is delivered at liberal arts colleges” (60), a question that both reflects and contributes to the isolation experienced by a small-college WPA. The small college Special Interest Group affiliated with CCCC and a small college writing e-list have helped to mitigate this isolation, and have also made it easier for us to develop and maintain conversations about the particular challenges and possibilities of writing instruction and program administration at small schools. As a result, small-college and -university writing specialists have begun to write our kind of institution “back into the institutional history of composition” (Delli Carpini 42).

In their introduction to the 2004 special issue of *Composition Studies* dedicated to “Composition in the Small College,” guest editors Paul Hanstedt and Tom Amorose contemplate the advantages of the small school environment, arguing that “the small number of students is seen as one of the school's strengths rather than as a weakness” (21). The ideal of “community,” so “nearly impossible at larger institutions” (Hanstedt and Amorose

22), is far more readily apparent on the small campus, creating a context that complements the values of rhetoric and composition in many ways. With a focus on undergraduates—who most likely reside on campus—and a faculty dedicated to teaching, the small liberal arts college creates an intimate learning environment. Faculty believe that “the way of knowing is grounded in the development of critical and analytical thinking, effective and persuasive communication, and active and ethical engagement” (Annapolis Group). This atmosphere enhances the opportunities for innovations to emerge in a grassroots fashion and to spread throughout the curriculum (see Jones 77).

Faculty from across the curriculum at small selective liberal arts colleges are frequently involved in teaching writing; in addition, these colleges routinely rely heavily on undergraduate writing tutors, who may function as peers supporting struggling writers or as co-learners engaged as writers or as designated writing fellows. This model of shared responsibility for writing instruction allows the small-school WPA to collaborate with many constituencies across campus. A small-school WPA will work closely with faculty in many departments—frequently faculty who may be her senior in terms of rank and years at the institution—as well as with the upper administration. Libby Falk Jones points out that “our smaller size makes it easier for us to understand the organizational structure—the players at all levels and their roles—and thus to effect visible change” (77). This access and understanding often means, as Amorose observes, that a small-school WPA is frequently if not routinely involved in “those junctures in the cultural life of the institution where issues or plans essential to how the institution defines itself are being considered” (95). The stories about writing and writing instruction that a WPA tells at such junctures can be deeply influential, re-framing curricular emphases and classroom practices for years to come (see Adler-Kassner 4). Our goal, with this project, was to discover the stories we needed to tell.

The challenge of identification and self-identification was unsurprisingly central to our project. Defining the “small” school, as Hanstedt and Amorose argue, is a vexing task because it encompasses a diversity of institutions. Rather than focusing exclusively on the size of the institution we defined ourselves according to two variables: size and selectivity. The tensions and contradictions embedded within both of these notions inform our programs and our work as WPAs.

“Selectivity” is as challenging a term to define as “small.” Michael Reder’s doctoral dissertation “Writing at the Small Liberal Arts College: Implications for Teaching and Learning” suggests one definition for “selectivity” by assembling a data set from 54 schools ranked in the top 50 of

the liberal arts colleges ranked by *US News and World Report* 2003–2005. However, because there are well-stated concerns about the methodology of those rankings (see Farkas), we decided against basing our cohort group exclusively on them. Recognizing that we would use our data to educate our individual administrations, we decided to build our SLAC-WPA consortium by drawing on the consortia to which our colleges already belonged (such as the Mellon 23, and the Consortium on High Achievement and Success). Our own administrations had, therefore, already defined our spheres of influence for us; we simply needed to tap the WPAs in those spheres. After conferring with our institutional researchers and other colleagues on our campuses, we created a preliminary list of 67 schools.³ “Selectivity” for each of these schools is a complicated term. On the one hand, each of our SLAC institutions is an organization gilded with affluence; many of our students come from families of economic means and privilege; many of the schools readily use the word “elite” to describe themselves; and endowments at some of these institutions are sizable. On the other hand, those endowments, however generous, are not necessarily devoted to composition, and *composition* as a scholarly field does not necessarily share the same status as other scholarly fields. Additionally, within the field of composition and rhetoric, SLAC schools do not have the same cultural capital as larger universities. Finally, while some of the SLAC schools (such as Amherst and Williams Colleges) have national reputations, others are less known outside of their geographic regions.

Jill Gladstein took the lead with our initial list and used websites to identify and contact the WPA/Writing Center Director (WCD) at each school. In many instances, web information about schools’ writing programs was surprisingly difficult to find—a casualty, perhaps, of a small-school tendency to look inward, as well as a lack of pressure to make private worlds public. Jill invited each WPA to join a small-school conversation by attending an inaugural meeting at Swarthmore College in January, 2008. The goal of the meeting was to initiate dialogues among selective small school WPAs and writing center directors around issues that were relevant to them. Using a grounded theory approach (see Strauss and Corbin), we did not assemble this group or the subsequent research with specific questions in mind; we sought simply to get a clearer picture of who we were and what our programs looked like.

These website searches led us to conclude that having a fuller understanding of who *we* were before the meeting would help us to shape the meeting itself, so we designed a survey in preparation for the gathering that asked questions about writing requirements; support for multi-lingual writers; support for underprepared writers; structure and staffing for the writ-

ing program and writing center; and job title and administrative responsibilities of the WPA.⁴ We also asked respondents to describe any elements of their writing programs that they wished to emphasize. The profiles that emerged from the survey data have allowed us to identify trends in how writing is taught and supported at this small group of peer institutions.⁵ Our sampling method is admittedly somewhat self-selective in that schools that did not respond to our call or did not seem to have a publically identifiable WPA were not surveyed. Our sample, then, consists of SLACs that have in some way begun to identify with composition, even if it is only to name a position or designate someone who is responsible for writing-related matters.

These data are far from exhaustive, but from the picture that emerges we can identify areas and issues for future discussion and research. For the purposes of this article we have focused on three areas: the nature of the WPA/WCD position itself, the existence and structure of writing requirements, and staffing and administration of the writing program. It is important to note that we have focused exclusively on “academic writing,” and have not included creative writing (typically an emphasis within the English department at SLACs) or the less common journalism or professional/technical writing.

SLAC WPAs: DEFINITION AND STATUS

Although the position of writing program administrator needs continuous defining, articulating, and, some would argue, shepherding at any institution, at the small selective college the position may be especially amorphous. Small colleges typically eschew complex administrative structures; often there is a great deal of pride in a relatively flattened hierarchy. Faculty tend to participate extensively in curricular issues, and administration may be associated with structures or individuals that threaten to distance faculty from that curriculum. Within this context, it is easy to imagine that the notion of a writing program administrator—both as a term and as a defined position—has not gained easy acceptance. Additionally, at a small school, many of the responsibilities associated with the work of a WPA may be shared among several individuals, rendering the work itself less visible and more difficult to codify than work that is formalized under a named position.

The precise configuration of the full-time WPA workforce varies widely across and within the SLACs we surveyed. Fifty-one of the 55 schools have (or soon will have) at least one full-time person overseeing the “writing program,” and 28 out of 55 have multiple full-time positions related directly to

the administering of the writing program. Four of the schools have multiple tenure-line positions that have responsibility over a segment of the writing program, whereas four schools have only a part-time faculty or staff person assigned as the WPA.

Table 1 illustrates the job classification of the WPA position at different schools. Of the 28 schools with multiple positions, 13 schools have at least one WPA/WCD on a tenure line. For the sake of clarity, the data point for each school represents the WPA/WCD with the highest academic rank. For example, at one school, the director of the writing and rhetoric program is on a tenure line, but her colleague who directs the writing center is classified as staff. Table 1 captures the existence of that tenure-line position and recognizes that this individual does not work alone by placing the school in the category of schools with programs administered by more than one individual. It is worth noting that several SLACs are in the process of converting WPA positions into tenure lines or creating new tenure-line WPA positions, and that there is a trend toward formalizing the responsibilities in one or more positions.

Table 1: Classification of SLAC WPAs

	WPA position is classified as tenure-line faculty	WPA position is classified as non-tenure-line faculty	WPA position is classified as <i>both</i> faculty and staff	WPA position is classified as staff only	Total
More than one full-time person administers program	13	5*	5*	5	28
One full-time person administers program	8	3* (FT) 1 (PT)	8 (FT)* 2 (PT)	4 (FT) 1 (PT)	27
Total	21	9	15	10	55

*At least one school was negotiating a change to a tenure-line position as of August, 2008.

As we expand our data set and continue our analysis, we plan to look more closely at the different academic ranks of the WPA position both within and across institutions in order to gain a better understanding of

how SLACs define the WPA position. What does it mean for a writing program director to be on a tenure line? Do tenure lines somewhat depend on the ability to situate a position within a department? If the program has multiple facets, who administers each one and what is the academic rank of each WPA? Does a higher academic rank lead to more or different responsibilities? What is the relationship between the job classification of the WPA and the institutional home of the writing program?

Because there has not yet been a comprehensive study of how WPA positions are configured nationwide, we do not yet know how the data in Table 1 compare nationally and across institutional types; however, if consortia conduct similar research projects as we have with SLAC-WPA, we will begin to develop a national picture of the WPA position.

SLAC WPAs: RESPONSIBILITIES

Many SLACs initiated first-year writing or writing-across-the-curriculum programs through the efforts of individual faculty in the 1970s or '80s (see Reder 27–28). Supervision of those programs then either became a rotating institutional service responsibility or (less frequently) the *de facto* domain of a single individual. As these individuals retire, the schools face major transitions that coincide with the growth and recognition of rhetoric and composition as a scholarly field. In many cases, these transitions are therefore becoming moments of true reinvention, where the implicit centrality of writing to a liberal arts education is being made explicit through the reallocation of resources. (As we note above, several institutions are currently considering the conversion of non-tenure-line faculty or staff WPA positions to tenure-line positions.) This change is happening not only because of internal transitions, such as retirements, but also because, nationwide, selective institutions are now under increased pressure to provide continuity and coherence in their required courses, to demonstrate thoughtful, nuanced mechanisms for writing placement and support, and to demonstrate the “value added” by a private education.⁶ By creating a well-supported, formal WPA position, a college can simultaneously demonstrate its commitment to writing to its stakeholders and can offer itself the promise of an expert in the field to support and guide its faculty.

This history, as well as these current conditions, make it unsurprising that SLAC WPAs wear many hats and that their work is unusually difficult to codify. As Table 2 shows, 22 individuals described themselves as primarily responsible for the writing center, but the responsibilities of 17 respondents are impossible to compartmentalize; they, themselves, are “all things writing” on their campuses.

Table 2: Primary Job Responsibilities for SLAC WPAs

Writing Center Only	22
All Things Writing	17
Writing Program Only	7
Other	5
Writing Center + Writing Fellows	3
Writing Fellows Only	1

The data for this table posed particular challenges; we extrapolated this information from the responses to the questions about job title and responsibilities, but there is some indication that the respondents interpret their positions and responsibilities in somewhat different terms. As we delved into related questions at the 2008 January meeting, it became increasingly clear that WPA positions are strikingly amorphous. Positioned at critical junctures of the institution, and as stewards of one of the foundations of a liberal arts education, SLAC WPAs can find their responsibilities constantly increasing. This challenge is exacerbated by the high value SLACs place on faculty service, and the high expectation that all faculty and staff are deeply involved in the college community. At our meeting in January, 2009, the SLAC-WPA Steering Committee will devote one workshop session to discussing job responsibilities and job descriptions in more detail; this is one area where face-to-face conversation provides a richer picture than survey data can. We also feel that sharing this kind of information can help us work for better support and working conditions for SLAC WPAs.

A ROSE BY MANY NAMES

The simple designation of a WPA, then, can be an important step for a SLAC toward formalizing the importance it (implicitly) places on writing. A writing requirement is a similar moment. Required courses, to a certain extent, seem antithetical to the liberal arts mission, which is predicated on encouraging students to sample knowledge broadly in their explorations of self and the world at large. Additionally, many of these colleges emphasize a commitment to lifelong learning, whereas complex systems of general education and universal requirements can suggest a check box approach—implying, for example, that students’ education in writing has ended once they complete a designated course. Moreover, institutions that identify themselves as selective can believe that a *required* writing course suggests that the school accepts students who are in some way underprepared. If, for

example, the first-year writing requirement identifies its mission as preparing students to write for their other college courses, does that imply that the school admits students who are in some way not prepared to write in their other classes?

Writing requirements, as researchers have long pointed out, also bring with them a host of challenges, not the least of which are resource-related (see, for example, Moghtader et al.; Trimbur). While some research institutions are more likely to have dedicated writing positions and/or graduate students, SLACs instead typically rely on a combination of non-composition tenure-line faculty, adjuncts, and other non-tenure-line faculty labor (such as lecturers). Given that SLACs pride themselves on small student-faculty ratios and direct faculty involvement with students, the staffing challenges posed by required courses are particularly vexing. Without a freestanding writing program, the SLAC reliance on and preference for full-time faculty means that required writing courses take faculty away from their teaching in the major. Simply put, every required writing class that is taught means one less that is taught in an institutionally recognized department. And, while writing requirements at many large institutions might provide revenue in the form of graduate students, the writing requirements at SLACs do not offer any additional monies. Incentives to departments that participate in such requirements may be far less direct and may include added tenure lines (in instances in which every member of a particular department teaches the required course) or greater influence on the requirements themselves and/or resources such as writing centers. Many departments or individual faculty members participate in the writing program to be good citizens of the college.

These structural obstacles to creating writing requirements at SLACs actually underscore the importance of writing to the SLAC educational mission: despite the challenges, 43 of the 55 respondents (approximately 78 percent) reported that their colleges do indeed have a writing requirement in some form. From there, however, approaches diverged significantly, as did terminology. "First-Year Seminar" was the term most frequently used to designate a required writing or writing-intensive course. The choice of "seminar" may be a way to distance that curriculum from the traditional associations with "composition" or even "writing"; it is equally plausible that the preference for "seminar" offers more opportunity for locating a course across the curriculum and within the discussion/reading emphasis on which the liberal arts have traditionally been centered.

Courses involving writing included "writing-intensive," "writing-attentive," "writing-enhanced," "writing-centered," "writing-designated," and "writing-rich." Because our survey did not ask respondents to define their

terms (a place for future study), it is not clear precisely what these courses entail—whether they include explicit writing instruction, whether they use writing mainly as a way to enhance learning, or whether they simply require a specific amount of writing and/or revision. What is clear, however, is that the majority of these schools have some sort of writing requirement in the first year and at least two additional writing courses at later points in students' careers.

Table 3 shows the writing requirements at the different schools. The three most common models are: 1) writing-intensive first-year seminar (FYWS); 2) writing-intensive courses across the curriculum; or 3) a combination of a FYWS or first-year composition (FYC) with writing-intensive courses. The majority of schools emphasize writing in the first year: 31 of the 43 schools focus at least part of their writing requirement on the first year and of the 12 schools that reported no requirement, 7 mentioned having a required first-year seminar or first-year experience course where a focus on writing is strongly encouraged if not explicitly required. Even with an apparent focus on the first year, however, it is clear that many schools view writing development as more than a one-semester event.

Table 3: Writing Requirements at SLAC Schools

Writing-Intensive First-Year Seminar (FYWS)	11 schools
Writing-Intensive Courses [only]	7 schools
FYWS/FYC + Writing-Intensive Courses	14 schools
First-Year Composition (FYC)	7 schools
Portfolio	3 schools
Other	1 school
No Requirement	12 schools

The specific responses ranged from one institution that requires two foundational WAC courses, an additional five WAC-designated courses, and a senior writing experience to an institution that does not have a writing requirement but does require students with lower SATs to take a course. Three of the schools did not have a required writing course but instead had established a certain level of proficiency that students had to demonstrate through the submission of a writing portfolio.

Across all of these models is the attempt to have students focus on their writing development over the course of four years and to provide courses and support systems such as writing centers to support this development.

(Of the 55 respondents, only one school has little more than a writing center run by a part-time director.) The data suggest that SLACs feel strongly enough about the development of their students' writing to have a writing requirement, but there is less consensus as to how a school might help students fulfill that requirement and, as a result, who has stewardship of writing. Indeed, the simple fact of a requirement's presence or absence is not necessarily a straightforward indicator of the institution's relationship to writing. A culture of writing can be seen through other aspects of the curriculum: 40 schools reported having a WAC program,⁷ all 55 schools have a writing center or a learning center with writing tutors,⁸ and 25 schools have a course-based peer tutor or "writing fellows" program. Some schools have recently begun to require that students take a specified number of writing-intensive courses throughout the curriculum and over the course of four years. At several institutions, the very informality of their WAC programs is part of what ties writing to the school's mission; the absence of formally-designated writing courses, it can be argued, means that writing is a core piece of the liberal arts education that these schools proudly and rigorously offer throughout the curriculum.

WHO "OWNS" WRITING?

The very informality that characterizes SLACs can pose considerable challenges for the WPA. In several questions on the survey, individual respondents expressed frustration with the ways in which the implicit nature of their programs makes their job more difficult: in one case, the WPA described what she perceived to be their writing program, only to add that "WAC isn't really called WAC"; another respondent noted, "we'd benefit from a unified vision and plan that would bring together disparate elements/players offering writing support across campus"; and a third observed wryly, "We haven't had an official writing program for over ten years." These tensions are those that WPAs at small liberal arts colleges face: while institutional ethos and scale may make it easy for them to bring writing to the center of many conversations, to advocate for best practices, and to serve as a translator of our field to the local context (see Delli Carpini 42), the preference for implicit rather than explicit values, procedures, and norms can make it challenging to build and maintain *structures* that will foster a true college-wide culture of writing.

One of the promises SLACs make to prospective students is that they will be taught almost exclusively by tenure-line faculty, including very senior faculty, from their first semester onward. This commitment carries over to writing instruction and marks one of the most dramatic differences

between how writing instruction is delivered at SLACs and how it is delivered at larger institutions. Rather than traditional first-year composition programs, staffed by dedicated (non-tenure-line) lecturers, graduate student T.A.s, or adjuncts, SLACs typically disperse responsibility for writing instruction across the institution. As Table 4 shows, 36 of the 55 schools use tenure-line faculty to deliver first-year writing instruction. It is rare for either dedicated writing faculty or English department faculty to be solely responsible for delivering writing instruction. Only one school reported using adjunct faculty exclusively to teach writing. Overall, writing instruction is typically provided by a combination of writing and/or English faculty, faculty from across the college, and a handful of adjuncts. (Our current data do not provide specific information about the percentage of each group at each school. In follow-up surveys we plan to pursue this question, as well as to acquire more information about the departmental distribution of the tenured and tenure-track faculty who regularly teach FYWS or writing-intensive courses.)

Table 4: Staff Teaching First-Year Writing

Full-Time Departmental Faculty	36 schools
Adjuncts	27 schools
Full-Time Writing Faculty	11 schools
Other	1 school

In addition to the commitment to undergraduate education and the resources to make sure that that education is provided, for the most part, by tenure-line faculty, SLACs are deeply committed to the notion that undergraduate students are already junior or apprentice scholars. Recognizing this assumption further explains the integration of writing into the curriculum broadly through WAC programs. Because undergraduates are involved in faculty research and faculty (particularly in the natural and social sciences) routinely co-author papers with undergraduates, there is a deep commitment to helping students learn the specific expectations of the different genres of academic writing. The dispersed nature of this responsibility for writing instruction is both an advantage and a challenge. While it can make for a sense of institution-wide enterprise around the teaching of writing, facilitating interdisciplinary conversations about pedagogy, writing, and academic work more generally, it can also be difficult to administer and assess such a diffuse structure. What does faculty development look like when the faculty come from seventeen different departments and all ranks? What does program assessment look like when students don't all ful-

fill the requirement in the same way? In many ways, SLAC WPAs have the strongest affinities with WAC administrators and writing center directors, but the nature of our requirements and our programs mean that we are—*de facto* but also often *de jure*—the writing program administrators, the individuals responsible for creating and maintaining programmatic coherence within the structure of a loose and ever-shifting confederacy.

FROM SKETCHES TO STORIES

Our purpose here has been to provide a preliminary sketch of the WPA position at a set of small selective private liberal arts colleges. As we've noted, there are numerous questions that remain, and as we expand the membership of SLAC-WPA we plan not only to ask our questions of a larger group of comparably-sized schools but also to refine and augment our initial questions to fill in some of the gaps we have noted here. This larger and more heterogeneous data set also will allow us to ask more wide-ranging questions: does selectivity make a difference in how schools structure writing requirements, writing instruction, and WPA jobs? Are these considerations imagined differently at schools of fewer than three thousand students and those with more than that? Because SLAC-WPA is a national group, we will also be able to explore possible affinities between schools with a historical sense of connection (Pomona's founder expressly modeled it on Amherst and Williams; the so-called "Seven Sisters" may well have a historically-rooted habit of sharing information), and schools that are clustered geographically and, as a result, find themselves in closer and more regular conversation. In addition, as we proceed in using the data from this group on our home campuses, we will be able to describe in more detail the ways that this consortium can help WPAs work for change. (For example, one of the authors of this article was able to use early SLAC-WPA data to advocate successfully for the creation of a WCD position.)

We also hope that this is a first step in building a layered portrait of WPA positions nationwide. As we have noted, surveys of WPA positions have tended to be large-scale research projects conducted by one or two people. While such projects are invaluable, research conducted by cohort groups of institutions may provide for greater detail and more complex understanding. It will also help cultivate the notion, *pace* Rose and Weiser, of the WPA as inquirer. Brought into dialogue with others, the WPA is perhaps more likely to engage in the reflective practice so crucial to the creation of fresh, responsive and responsible writing program administration.

By combining our process of inquiry with the process of building a consortium of similar institutions, we are advocating for change on two

fronts: at the local level of our own institutions, we are connecting administration to larger conversations about the diversity of ways in which writing instruction is and can be delivered; at the national level, we are building a more diverse and comprehensive picture of writing programs in the scholarly record. In an analysis of a passage from Robert Coles' *The Call of Stories* early in *Activist WPA*, Linda Adler-Kassner discusses how Coles "moves between explanations of the power of personally grounded stories for individuals (himself, his patients) and the ways in which those stories, when seen as a collective body, testified and gave witness to a larger one that had gone relatively unexplored" (4). "Stories," she points out in conclusion, "build cumulatively to form larger narratives" (4). It is our hope that the sketch we provide in this essay will help stories about writing instruction at small colleges accumulate and that, as a result, this picture will help to change—to re-frame—how we understand WPA work at small schools and how, as a consequence, we understand the diversity of WPA work. We also hope that our story about the usefulness of such research in re-framing local conversations about writing, writing instruction, and writing program administration will inspire others to undertake similar projects so that we can build the stories from individual consortia into a national self-portrait of writing program administration.

NOTES

Our thanks to Mary deBoer, the 2007–2008 intern for Swarthmore's Writing Associates Program, for her efforts tracking down various SLAC WPAs, as well as for her extensive work at making the initial meeting of SLAC-WPA a success; our audience at the 2008 WPA conference in Denver, CO; and Carol Rutz, Jessica Swienkowski, and our anonymous WPA readers, for their feedback on earlier drafts.

1. Amorose addresses the related assumption that because "large programs are the norm . . . their practices are therefore normal" (99); he argues that the exclusion of small schools from the national conversations about writing instruction and program administration has "resulted in the over-valorizing of power as a tool for the WPA" and, as a consequence, has installed an "inexact description of the concept of WPA power in the record" (87); see also Ianetta et al., and Jones. Fremo argues that graduate courses in writing program administration fail to prepare their students for work in a small school context.

2. On the origin of WAC at small schools, see Reder 26–27 and Rutz et al. 8–9. Robin Varnum develops the argument that the pedagogy and programmatic structure of English 1–2 (a required first-year writing course at Amherst College from 1947 through 1969) foreshadowed many of the "innovations" in composition in the 1970s. Varnum, Ann Berthoff, and John Brereton ("Symposium")

all contend that the “Amherst Mafia” (Berthoff 72) significantly influenced the development of our field; see also Horner. For more general studies of writing programs in the first half of the twentieth century and the role of elite small colleges in the development of the field, see also Breerton, *Origins*; Donahue and Moon; and Kitzhaber. There has also been significant scholarly work on writing programs at institutions such as Mount Holyoke, Smith, Vassar, Wellesley, and Bryn Mawr Colleges as part of larger projects to identify women’s contributions to the history of rhetoric and composition; see, for example, Bordelon; Campbell (“Freshman” and “Women’s Work”); George; Mastrangelo; Mastrangelo and L’Eplattenier; and Spring. Mastrangelo and L’Eplattenier provide a fascinating glimpse into the workings of an early consortium of writing program administrators from small colleges in their discussion of the meetings of “writing faculty from Mount Holyoke College, Wellesley College, Vassar College, and Smith College” from 1919 to 1922 (118). While these archival projects restore small schools to their place in the historical record, they do not address the comparative absence of such institutions from conversations about writing instruction and writing program administration since the 1970s. Rutz’s work is a notable exception to this; see also Gladstein; Lebduska’s section in Ianetta et al., and Simpson and Carroll.

3. Twelve schools were dropped from the original list of 67 because we couldn’t identify a WPA or because the apparent WPA didn’t respond to repeated inquiries. Initially we wanted to keep the project manageable so we shied away from larger consortia such as The Annapolis Group (see <http://www.collegenews.org/theannapolisgroup.xml>) or all of the baccalaureate institutions participating in The Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (see <http://www.e-heds.org/>). In August 2008, we redefined our membership through these two groups since our presidents and institutional researchers use these two consortia for comparable data on other campus matters. The total number of invited institutions was brought to 134.

4. It is worth noting the difficulty and importance of delineating writing program administrator/writing center director positions, and also to underscore—as do Ianetta et al.—that local context is essential to understanding the programmatic and personnel structure best suited to foster a college-wide culture of writing. At SLACs, writing center directors often *are* WPAs.

5. All participants have full access to the results of the survey once they have completed it. Although the members of SLAC-WPA have given one another permission to share school-specific information with their home institutions for purposes of comparison and advocacy, we do not have permission to identify individual schools here.

6. By and large, SLACs are learning about assessment much later than public institutions have. Historically, SLACs have relied on rankings by private organizations (such as *US News*) and reaccreditation by the regional accrediting agencies (such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges [WASC] and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges [NEASC]) and have had a

minimal culture of assessment. Leading institutions of higher education have now made this difficult, to put it mildly. Pressure comes not just from the Spellings Commission and the Department of Education but also from organizations such as the American Association of Colleges and Universities, Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Teagle Foundation; there is a general call for a reform in liberal education that includes, among other things, “a culture of evidence based on assessment and accountability” (American Association of Colleges and Universities). See Rutz and Lauer-Glebov for the challenges and possibilities in building a culture of assessment at a liberal arts college. Although we included assessment in our survey, that issue lies beyond the scope of this article.

7. Many respondents mentioned that *they* believed they had a WAC program but that others on their campus did not recognize this terminology.

8. The one school without a center has a curriculum based on the tutorial model of instruction, so the writing coordinator herself serves as the writing center by offering one-on-one tutorials for those students requesting extra assistance with their writing.

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APPENDIX

List of schools in the SLAC-WPA consortium as of 8/1/08

Agnes Scott College
Amherst College
Bard College
Barnard College
Bates College
Beloit College
Bowdoin College
Bryn Mawr College
Bucknell University
Carleton College
Colgate University
College of Holy Cross
College of Wooster
Colorado College
Connecticut College
Davidson College
Denison University
Dickinson College
Earlham College
Franklin & Marshall College
Grinnell College
Gustavus Adolphus College
Hamilton College
Hampshire College
Harvey Mudd College
Haverford College
Hobart and William Smith Colleges
Illinois Wesleyan University
Kenyon College
Lafayette College
Mount Holyoke College
Oberlin College
Occidental College
Pitzer College
Pomona College
Rhodes College
St. Lawrence University

St. Olaf College
Sarah Lawrence College
Scripps College
Skidmore College
Smith College
Southwestern University
Spelman College
Swarthmore College
Trinity College
Union College
University of the South
Vassar College
Washington and Lee University
Wellesley College
Wesleyan University
Wheaton College
Willamette University
Williams College

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Demographics

1. Please tell us the name of your home institution:
2. Please tell us:
 Your name
 Your position title
3. Your preferred email address:
4. Your program's website:

Your Position

5. To whom is your Writing Program accountable? Under what department/which individual's purview?
 The Dean of:
 The Department of:
 The Administrator of:
 Other:
6. Is your position classified as faculty and/or staff?
7. Is your position a tenure-line position?
8. Do you work:
 Full-time

Full-time but only part-time as a WPA
Part-time

9. What are your job's responsibilities?

Program Staffing

10. Do you have any staff or faculty members to assist you in running your program?

11. How many?

12. What responsibilities does each staff member have?

13. Are your staff/faculty assistants full-time positions?

14. Are the duties of your staff/faculty assistants exclusive to the Writing Program?

Composition of your Writing Program

15. Does your institution have a writing requirement? Please Explain.

16. Does your writing program consist of: (Please check all that apply.)

WAC

First year writing

Writing Center

Writing Fellows

Other (please specify)

First year writing

17. If you have a first year writing program, please briefly describe it. Is it a traditional first year composition program, interdisciplinary, topic-based, etc.?

18. Are sections of FYC staffed by: (Please check all that apply.)

Full-time writing program faculty?

Full-time departmental faculty?

Adjuncts?

Other (please specify)

19. What is the enrollment cap for sections?

12

15

18

Other (please specify)

Writing Center

20. Does your institution have a writing center or a learning center with writing tutors?

21. Is the writing center free-standing or part of a larger institutional unit?
22. Where is the writing or learning center located?
 - Academic building
 - Library
 - Own building
 - Dorm
 - Other (please specify)
23. How large is your staff of WC tutors?
24. Are your tutors:
 - Undergraduates
 - Graduate students
 - Professionals
 - Other (please specify)
25. What are they called?
26. How are they paid?
 - Semester stipend
 - Hourly wage
 - Other (please specify)
27. How are they trained?
28. Do they receive course credit or money for training?
29. How frequently do they have meetings?
 - Once per year
 - Once per semester
 - Twice per semester
 - Monthly
 - Twice-per-month
 - Weekly
 - Other (please specify)
30. What kind of reports do tutors file about their sessions with students?
31. What kind of data about WC appointments do you collect? (Please check all that apply.)
 - Appointments made
 - Appointments kept
 - Appointments canceled
 - By discipline
 - By course
32. Does your WC provide online tutoring?

Writing Fellows

33. Does your program have a writing fellows program?
34. Do your writing fellows work both as fellows and in the writing center or are fellows and writing center employees two separate groups?
35. What kinds of courses do WFs typically work with at your institution? (Please check all that apply.)
- First year composition
 - First year seminars
 - Introductory courses
 - Courses throughout the curriculum
36. Where do you place most of your WFs?
- First year composition
 - First year seminars
 - Introductory courses
 - Courses throughout the curriculum
37. Do you hire fellows to work with a particular course? Do you require the fellow to have specific, disciplinary knowledge?
38. How are your writing fellows trained?

Faculty Development

39. Are you responsible for faculty development?
40. Please describe your faculty development program.

Assessment

41. Are you responsible for the assessment of any aspect of the writing program?
42. What efforts around writing assessment are taking place at your institution?

Working with Diverse Writers

43. How do you identify underprepared writers? (Check all that apply)
- SAT scores
 - Placement exam
 - Faculty recommendation
 - Student advisor
 - Student self identifies
 - Other (please specify)
44. Are they required to take a first semester writing course?

45. How does your program support underprepared students? (check all that apply)

- required course
- summer bridge program
- self selection into a writing course
- peer mentor
- professional mentor
- workshops
- Other (please specify)

46. Do you have resources for students whose primary language is not English? Please explain.

47. How do you address the needs of students with disabilities?

Overall

48. What do you consider the highlights of your writing program?

49. Are you satisfied with the current state of your institution's writing program? What would you change/keep the same?

