

Twenty More Years in the WPA's Progress

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ABSTRACT

The study reported here, conducted in 2007, replicates Linda Peterson's 1986 survey of members of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) described in "The WPA's Progress." In addition to collecting demographic information about CWPA members, survey questions focused on three main areas: respondents' education and preparation for writing program administration; job configurations and responsibilities for writing program administration; and working conditions and prospects for tenure and promotion. Notable findings include several important changes in CWPA member demographics, increasing numbers of respondents with formal graduate preparation in both rhetoric and composition and writing program administration, and data on respondents' motivations for beginning WPA work. The authors' analysis discusses these and other changes in writing program administrators' work over the past twenty years and explores the implications of an emerging WPA identity that is grounded to a greater degree in WPA scholarship and expertise and to a lesser degree in on-the-job experience.

Who is a WPA? Several years ago, the popular WPA-L listserv carried a thread initiated by Sid Dobrin called "You might be a WPA if..." a riff on Jeff Foxworthy's signature joke, "You might be a redneck if..." Though the thread prompted a number of hilarious responses—"You might be a WPA if...you develop 'grocery store outcomes' instead of shopping lists"; "...you ever find yourself quoting Ed White in casual conversation with your neighbors"; "...you treat your family budget as if it will be cut in half any minute"¹—it also captured an important truth: WPA is not just a job title, but a way of being. A WPA's work is not defined only by the official or formal responsibilities of the role but also by how those responsibilities are car-

ried out. How does this WPA identity emerge? How does it develop? How has it changed over the years, and how might it change in the future?

In 1986, Linda Peterson conducted a national survey of Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) members for which she reported the results in a 1987 *WPA* article. She gave readers an empirical look at the work of fifty-nine WPAs at the time, a snapshot including simple demographics, information about her WPA respondents' responsibilities and workload, and an examination of tenure and evaluation. Peterson's title, "The WPA's Progress," alluded to Paul Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and she drew from her survey results to sketch a composite narrative of an individual scholar's career as a WPA. Though we borrow from her title, the "progress" narrative we hope to trace is a collective one for WPAs as a professional group and for writing program administration as a scholarly discipline. We replicate Peterson's survey as a place to begin our own inquiry, extending her original survey with questions of our own, born of our time, our experiences, and our curiosities.

Peterson's 1986 survey of Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) was just one of several mid-1980s research projects designed to gather empirical data about the institutionalization of writing studies and the professional circumstances of writing faculty. In the same year, Carol Hartzog's study of forty-four college writing programs, *Composition and the Academy: A Study of Writing Program Administration*, was published by the Modern Language Association. A year later, Donald Stewart began his survey of undergraduate writing curricula, which he reported in his 1989 article for *CCC*, "What is an English Major and What Should It Be?" And it was in 1987 that David Chapman and Gary Tate published "A Survey of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition," the first of four such surveys published in *Rhetoric Review*.² These empirical projects served to provide evidence for claims Maxine Hairston had made about the current status and emerging disciplinary identity of scholars of rhetoric and composition in her 1985 CCC Chair's address, "Breaking Our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections."

Two decades later, as teacher and student, mentor and mentee, colleagues, co-researchers and friends, the two of us have come together, in this project, to pursue our common questions about WPA identity and how it emerges, how it develops, and what it might become. We will not, in this article, suggest that there is any direct line that can be traced from Peterson's WPAs to today's WPAs, or that all of the changes in WPAs' circumstances over the last two decades add up to some positive ideal, or that we have somehow arrived at our Celestial City. Nor do we assume that all WPAs occupy the same disciplinary, institutional, or philosophical space.

As WPAs and co-authors, we were driven to this work because we embody, as our readers likely will, different paths of “the WPA’s progress.” Now, as then, there are many WPA “progresses.” We are particularly interested in knowing how many of the wonders and challenges encountered by pilgrim WPAs of the 1980s were still being encountered by our WPA respondents after twenty years had passed.

DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY

For distribution to current CWPA members, we developed a survey questionnaire with a total of 57³ items related to

- demographic data (age, gender, institutional type and size),
- WPA experience (whether or not participants were or ever had been in an official WPA position and, if so, for how many years and how many different positions),
- job responsibilities (based on the list in the Portland Resolution, including a question about whether they were responsible for scholarship and research in these areas),
- tenure status and prospects, and
- preparation for WPA work.

We hoped to be able to compare our findings with Peterson’s 1986 findings, and were aided in this by Dr. Peterson’s gracious sharing of a copy of her original survey with us. We asked some of the same questions she did, even using the same wording when possible, though we discovered that we had to make some refinements in wording for several questions because WPAs’ circumstances had clearly changed. We will discuss those changes in more detail in the relevant sections below. We also added a number of questions about WPA scholarship, job responsibilities, and preparation, which elicited a wealth of fascinating data. For the purposes of this article, however, we will focus only on the data we have which are directly comparable to Peterson’s⁴.

In 1986, Peterson surveyed 100 Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) members randomly selected from the 1981 membership list. She also distributed her survey at WPA-sponsored sessions at the CCCC and MLA conferences in 1986. Because she used a then-four-year-old membership list and extended her survey pool to conference participants, Peterson was able to elicit responses from both current and former writing program administrators, including people who might have moved on from WPA positions since 1981, but were still in academic jobs (18).

In January of 2007, after undergoing review and receiving approval from the IRBs of both of our institutions, we put our survey questionnaire online, emailing survey tokens to every current non-institutional CWPA member, 413 recipients total. Our survey software (PhPSurveyor) allowed us to track which survey tokens had been used without being able to link specific responses to particular respondents, so we were able to maintain the anonymity of the respondents. Thus we were able to re-send invitations to participate to recipients who had not yet used their tokens. Though we would have been able to reach a much larger population by soliciting participation through an open invitation on the WPA-L listserv, which reaches more than 1500 email addresses of persons with a purported interest in writing program administration issues, we chose to send invitations only to current dues-paying CWPA members.

We limited our inquiry to CWPA members for several reasons. First, we wanted to learn information specifically about those whom the CWPA was serving as an organization, and currency of membership was a critically important criterion that we could control for by sending survey invitations only to members in good standing. In addition, we were particularly interested in learning more about persons who were interested in WPA issues or had writing program administrative responsibilities but were not currently serving in official WPA positions, and we anticipated that some persons with that profile would self-select out of an open-invitation survey because they erroneously assumed that they did not fit the target population. Clearly, our survey did not reach everyone who does WPA work; our research is not designed to describe all WPAs.

Peterson asked survey respondents to sign their surveys, so she could ensure that she didn't send a survey to the office of someone who had already completed it at a conference. Though her survey was not anonymous, she did not use anyone's name without permission.

Our survey was available for completion online from January 2007 to February 2007, during which time 226 CWPA members completed the survey, a response rate of 55%. This response rate was strong enough to enable us to discuss the results with a degree of confidence that they represent the whole population. In the following discussion, we will refer to Linda Peterson's survey instrument, administration, and results as simply "Peterson" and to our own survey instrument, administration, and results as "Rose-Charlton."

DEMOGRAPHICS

Because we wanted to make comparisons between Peterson's data and our own, when possible, we asked the same questions that Peterson did. But, in

many cases, we found that we needed to make changes for our questions to elicit more specific kinds of information. For instance, Peterson asked what kinds of classes respondents taught and offered the following list of choices: freshman composition, advanced composition, literature, and graduate courses. Today, a wider range of options are likely so we expanded our menu of choices to fourteen, adding undergraduate composition theory / methods, undergraduate technical or professional writing, undergraduate linguistics, undergraduate creative writing, advanced or upper level composition, graduate counterparts in each of the disciplinary areas (creative writing, rhetoric / composition, literature, linguistics, and technical communication), an option for not teaching at all, and an “other” response where respondents could fill in additional courses⁵. Our hope was that, in these situations, we could cluster our responses, so we could continue to make meaningful comparisons with Peterson’s data.

Gender of Participants

In 1986, Peterson did not ask the gender of her respondents; nonetheless, she reported that almost two-thirds of them were men and just over one-third were women⁶ (11). Figure 1 illustrates the striking near-reversal of those demographics by 2007 in a side-by-side comparison:

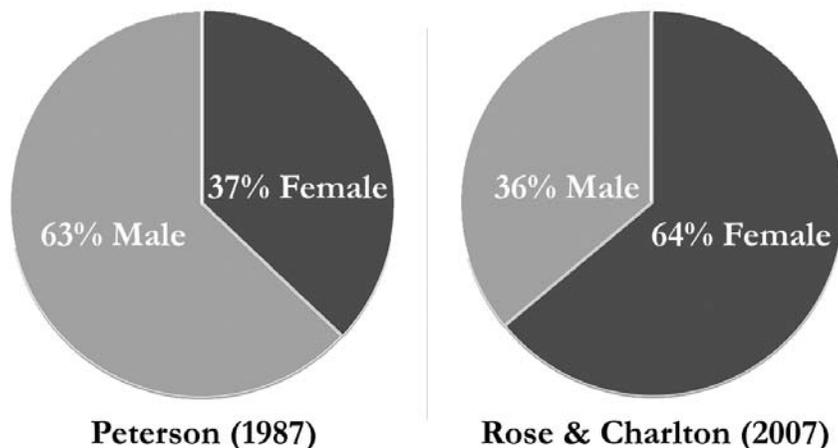


Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Respondents to Surveys

36% of our respondents were men, and 64% were women.⁷ Jillian Skeffington, Shane Borrowman, and Theresa Enos (2008) reported almost exactly the same gender breakdown in their recent web survey of WPAs (35% male, 65% female), a notable similarity given that their sample was drawn from *WPA* journal and WPA listserv subscribers, a much larger and potentially

more diverse population than our sample of then-current CWPA members (10). Likewise, Sally Barr-Ebest's survey population of 201 participants drawn from the 584 then current members of CWPA in 1992, was 64% women and 36% men (53). In terms of WPAs' progress toward women's increased participation in the organization, then, it appears that we have come a long way in the past two decades—a longer way than higher education faculty more generally. According to the data recently reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), women constituted only 27% of the full time faculty in all higher education institutions in the U.S. in 1987⁸ and only 41% in 2005.⁹ Figure 2 provides a fuller look at the gender breakdown of WPA respondents versus all faculty both in the mid-1980s when Peterson's survey was conducted and in the mid-2000s when we conducted our research. As these figures suggest, the gender balance shift among WPA survey respondents cannot be attributed to changes in the gender balance of all higher education faculty alone.

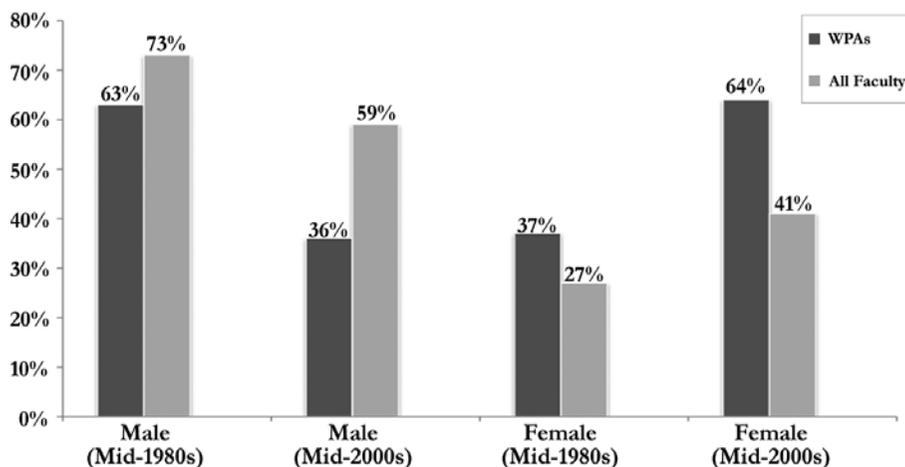


Figure 2. Gender in Context

Clearly, the story of female WPAs' progress is more complicated. The shift in gender balance for WPA respondents may be much more consistent with a gender shift among rhetoric and composition faculty, as rhetoric and composition has been, historically, a more feminized discipline.¹⁰ The development of sophisticated theoretical explorations of feminist writing program administration, such as those of Hildy Miller and Marcia Dickson¹¹, are further evidence that women WPAs have been an important presence in the CWPA membership. Yet, in her analysis of CWPA members' responses to her survey questionnaire gathered in 1992, when Barr-Ebest focused special attention on the question of whether female WPAs had had

the same professional opportunities and were as likely to be able to “move on” as male WPAs, she concluded that one of the chief factors influencing female WPAs’ careers was “institutionalized sexism” (65).

Participants’ Institutional Type

Since the early days of the organization, the CWPA leadership has been concerned about the inclusion and representation of WPAs working in diverse types of institutions among the membership. Likewise it has been generally assumed that differences in institutional type make a significant difference in work expectations for WPA positions. Shifts in the proportions of the membership representing different institutional types over the two decades from 1986 to 2007 are therefore of particular interest. Peterson used only three categories for institutional type for her survey—Associates or Two-year college, Four-year college, and University—and her respondents were distributed across those three at 3%, 31%, and 66% respectively (11). We chose to use the Carnegie classification system to identify our categories of institutional types as it is a familiar and widely used classification system, and we anticipated being able to compare some of our findings with other studies that use the same classification. Furthermore, we believed we could convert the Carnegie categories into the three groups Peterson used—that is, counts for our “Baccalaureate” could be converted into “Four-year,” and counts for our “Masters College or University” and “Doctorate-granting University” could be combined to compare with Peterson’s counts for “university.” The distribution of respondents to our survey for each of the Carnegie categories was as follows: Associates or Two-year college, 5%; Baccalaureate (four year) college, 12%; Master’s College or University, 23%; Doctorate-granting university, 58%; with master’s and doctorate-granting groups combined to constitute 81%.

Though the CWPA leadership has, over the years, made significant efforts to include more participation by two-year and community college faculty in the membership, their participation appears to have remained roughly the same, constituting 3% of Peterson’s sample and 5% of ours. Comparison of the two sample populations also suggests an increase in the proportion of CWPA members who teach at institutions offering graduate degrees and a decrease in the proportion at baccalaureate colleges since 1986. Perhaps this change reflects the number of baccalaureate schools that have added graduate programs in one or more specialized areas in the last 20 years, but there is no way to reliably relate these proportions in the CWPA membership to proportions among the institutional types more generally because one institution may have several WPA members among its faculty.

For the same reasons, it is not possible to compare the distribution of the CWPA membership population across institutional types to the national distribution of faculty population across institutional types. However, these differences in representations of institutional types continue to be of interest from the standpoint of organizational identity for the CWPA.

Public vs. Private Institutions. In 1986, Peterson found that 69% of the WPA members who responded to her survey worked at public institutions while 31% worked at private institutions (11); 20 years later, 72% of WPA members who responded to our survey work at public institutions and 28% at private schools.¹² Though the public vs. private distinction is becoming less clear as state funding for public colleges and universities remains flat or is cut and these institutions rely more heavily on private donors and tuition, and though we are seeing increasing numbers of for-profit institutions, the balance between public vs. private representation among the CWPA membership is not much changed over the last two decades, nor can we identify any reason we might expect it to be.

Education

With the professionalization of our field has come more recognition of WPAs as experts, as scholars engaged in the intellectual work of administration (see Hult; “Evaluating;” Rose and Weiser, *WPA as Theorist* and *WPA as Researcher*; Phelps, “Turtles”; McLeod)¹³. That expertise has developed from advanced graduate study, not only in rhetoric and composition, but also in the specialized study of writing program administration offered in a number of PhD programs today. In the WPA literature of the past ten years, we have seen a robust discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of the kind of WPA professionalization such coursework represents (see Enos, “Reflexive;” Phelps, “Turtles;” White, “Teaching;” Jackson, Leverenz, and Law; Rose and Weiser, “Beyond”). Enos noted that in 2000 there were 13 doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition that offered at least one credit-bearing course in writing program administration (“Reflexive” 62).¹⁴ Looking at some of the most basic differences in how WPAs were educated twenty years ago versus today offers us one way of understanding the evolution of WPA preparation.

Most Advanced Degree Held by Participants. In 1986, Peterson asked her respondents to identify the most advanced degree they held. 89% had earned PhDs, 3% DAs, 3% EdDs, and 5% MFAs (11). In our 2007 questionnaire, we gave a wider range of choices by including Master of Arts

(MA) and Master of Education (MEd) as options. 85% of our respondents indicated they had earned PhDs, 3% had earned DA's, 3% EdDs, 0.5% MFAs, 3% MAs, 2% MEds, and 3% indicated they had earned some other degree.¹⁵ Assuming that the MFA should be viewed as a terminal degree, it appears from the differences in these results that there has been an increase in the number of CWPA members whose most advanced degree is not a terminal degree.¹⁶ The entry of members with MA and MEd degrees into the CWPA organization in the last 20 years raises some interesting questions about the range of credentials typically required for various types of WPA positions and suggests a need for further research. Though it is beyond the scope of this analysis, we would be interested to learn, for example, whether CWPA members working in different kinds of writing programs (i.e., first-year composition, writing across the curriculum, writing centers) typically have different credentials.

Field / Focus of Coursework for Most Advanced Degree Held. One of the most important ways WPA education has changed is in respondents' fields / foci of their graduate coursework. In 1986, 80% of Peterson's respondents indicated, in response to an open-ended question, that their degrees were in the field of "English;" at the time, as Peterson wrote, "English" typically meant that WPAs had "specialize[d] in a traditional field of English or American literature," though she noted that 15% of that group listed rhetoric as a specialty (11–12). As for the remainder of Peterson's respondents, 8% indicated their field was English Education, 5% Comparative Literature, and 7% "other" (11). In our 2007 survey, we recognized that while many of our respondents might have a degree in "English," we wanted more specific information to get at what particular discipline(s) they studied as the focus of their coursework for their more advanced degree, so we included more categories. This is particularly important as the responses reflect the ways the discipline of "English" has changed since Peterson's time; the field is clearly more diversified.

This question about focus of degree was presented only to those respondents who answered "no" to the question: "Are you currently enrolled in a graduate program?" Of the 188 survey participants who answered this question, 53% chose Rhetoric and /or Composition; 6% chose English Education; 27% chose Literature; 0.5% chose Speech / Communications; 1% chose Linguistics; 2% chose Creative Writing; and 11% indicated some "other" focus in a free-text response box. The most striking change, here illustrated in Figure 3, may not be the most surprising, but it generally seems to confirm the commonplace understanding that as graduate coursework in rhetoric and composition has been offered more and more widely in

the last twenty years,¹⁷ those who are WPAs are more likely to have chosen this area of focus for coursework than literature.

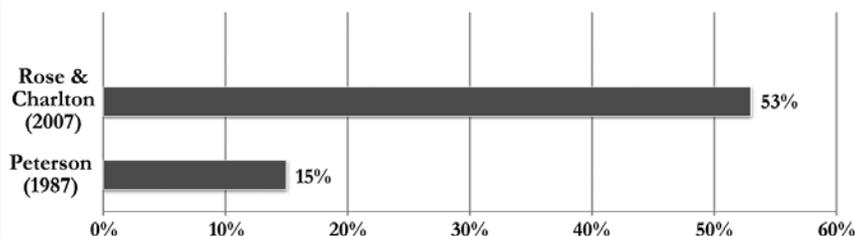


Figure 3. Rhet/Comp Focus in Coursework

Academic Rank / Job Classification

As a consequence of the professionalization of rhetoric and composition, as well as writing program administration, there are more ways for us to engage in the work of writing program administration. We hold tenured and tenure-track faculty positions, a range of secured and non-secured administrative appointments, and more of us have the opportunity to study writing program administration as graduate students. In the past twenty years, then, the ranks of our CWPA membership have diversified, and with that, our needs and interests have diversified as well, something our organization's membership has worked to address in many important ways, including WPA research grants, graduate student writing awards, and technology institutes.

In our 2007 survey, we found that a similar number—just over 20%—of our CWPA respondents were Professors, as was the case 20 years ago¹⁸. There has been, however, a noteworthy decline in Associate Professors, from 44% to 28%. The gains in share of the membership have been made by non-tenure-track and not-yet-tenured members, who were classified as either Assistant Professors or Administrative Appointments in Peterson's sample (30%), but comprised Assistant Professors, Graduate Students, Instructors, and Administrative Professionals in our sample (42%). Figure 4 represents a side-by-side comparison which highlights the almost-complete reversal of statistics among Associate Professors and those who are non-tenure track or not-yet-tenured.

The increase in the number of WPA members who are not-yet tenured or non-tenure track in these samples is of particular interest to us because this change in the makeup of the membership suggests there may be a similar evolution in the purpose the organization serves, a change reflected, for instance, in the new SIG devoted to jWPA¹⁹ issues at our annual conference

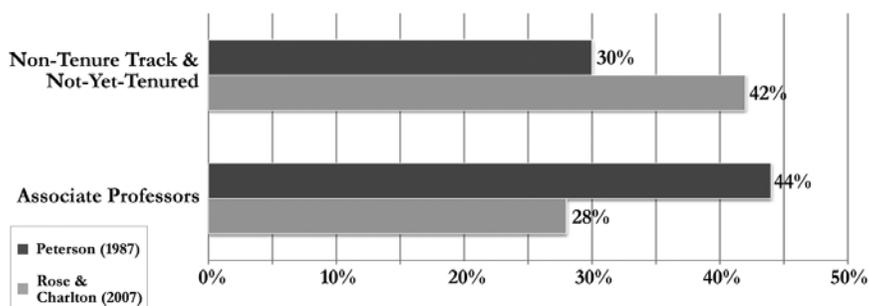


Figure 4. Notable Changes in Academic Rank / Classification

and the publication of several books about untenured WPAs such as Debra Frank Dew and Alice Horning's *Untenured Faculty as Writing Program Administrators: Institutional Practices and Politics* and Theresa Enos and Shane Borrowman's *The Promise and Perils of Writing Program Administration*. This increase in the proportion of survey respondents who are either non-tenure track or not-yet-tenured may reflect the increasing corporatization of the university and exploitation of faculty over the past twenty years, an issue we will address below in our discussion of survey respondents' descriptions of their working conditions.

WPA JOB CONFIGURATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

WPA positions are configured in many ways these days; though it is still the case that in many institutions, a single WPA is responsible for a variety of programs on his or her campus, it is also true that in other, often larger, universities, there are multiple WPAs serving a single program. How WPA positions are configured has been the subject of a number of queries on WPA-L and elsewhere, and even a brief survey of WPA literature confirms our collective interest in these issues and the ways in which this interest relates to WPA professionalization. One such example of this type of inquiry can be found in writing center administration scholarship. For the past twenty years or more, writing center administrators have been exploring the relationships between writing center and other writing program administrators, most recently in Melissa Ianetta, Linda Bergmann, Lauren Fitzgerald, Carol Peterson Haviland, Lisa Lebduska, and Mary Wislocki's "Polylog" in which they ask whether writing center administrators are really WPAs (see Olson and Ashton-Jones; Balester, and McDonald for earlier empirical work exploring WCD/WPA relationships). Responses to survey

questions about participants' areas of writing program administration allow us to further explore this discussion of WPA job configurations below.

Courses Taught

Because a WPA's own assignment to teach courses constitutes an important part of his or her professional identity, we were particularly interested in examining any changes in the kinds of courses survey respondents taught. In 1986, Peterson asked her respondents, "In addition to administration, how many classes do you teach? Of what sort?" and listed four choices: "freshman composition, advanced composition, literature, and graduate courses." Taking care to devise choices that would be convertible to equivalents of Peterson's choices, we elected to offer more choices to our respondents in 2007. Table 1 shows the differences in respondents' teaching assignments, highlighting in the final column the changes in the past twenty years.

Table 1. Courses WPAs Taught Regularly

Peterson (1987; p.12)		Rose & Charlton (2007)		Change
Course	%	Course	%	
Freshman Comp	86%	First-Year Comp	65%	-21%
Advanced Comp	46%	Advanced/Upper Division Comp	46%	0%
--	--	Undergrad Comp Theory/Methods	22%	N/A
Literature	70%	Undergrad Literature	21%	-49%
--	--	Undergrad Technical/Prof Writing	23%	N/A
--	--	Undergrad Linguistics	7%	N/A
--	--	Undergrad Creative Writing	5%	N/A
Grad Courses	52%	Grad Rhet/Comp	45%	59% +7%
		Grad Literature	3%	
		Grad Tech/Prof Writing	8%	
		Grad Linguistics	1%	
		Grad Creative Writing	2%	
--	--	"I do not teach courses."	4%	N/A
--	--	Other	21%	N/A

The substantial decrease in the number of WPAs teaching literature courses reflects, perhaps, an increasing degree of specialization among undergraduate English faculty between teaching either literature or composition in teaching undergraduate English courses. However, the same reasoning would not seem to apply to explain the decrease in the number of WPAs who teach First-Year Composition. To understand this change, it may be helpful to examine the changes in survey participants' areas of writing program administration, as we do in the following section.

Participants' Areas of Writing Program Administration

As the development of a number of professional organizations and scholarly journals over the past two decades indicates, rhetoric and composition scholarship is increasingly specialized²⁰. Thus, it is not surprising that there is considerable interest in knowing how WPAs' areas of administrative responsibility align with these sub-disciplines. Configurations of WPA positions, particularly responsibilities for more than one kind of writing program or curriculum, have been the subject of a number of queries on WPA-L and elsewhere. Valerie Balester and James C. MacDonald, for example, have investigated relationships between writing center work and administration of first-year composition, and more recently in their "polylog" for *Composition Studies*, Ianetta et al. have explored similar connections. Responses to survey questions about participants' areas of writing program administration allow us to explore these connections further.

Peterson asked her respondents: "What are your responsibilities as an administrators?" and offered them the following choices, among which they could select all that applied: freshman English, advanced composition, creative writing, writing center, peer tutoring program, writing across the curriculum, and "other." We asked our participants a similar, though not identical, question, "For which of the following kinds of writing programs do you CURRENTLY do writing program administrative work?"²¹ and added a variety of program types which either didn't exist twenty years ago or were less likely to be associated with official WPA positions. Table 2 summarizes the differences in the two survey populations' areas of administrative responsibility at the time of their participation in the survey.

While Table 2 does not reflect the frequencies of various combinations of areas of program responsibilities, it does suggest significant changes in the breadth and focus of WPA work. We can imagine several explanations for the changes in the areas of responsibility for writing program administration among participating CWPA members. First, the decrease in the proportion of respondents who are responsible for first-year composition,

Table 2. Areas of Current Administrative Responsibility

Peterson (1987; p.12)		Rose & Charlton (2007)		Change
Course	%	Course	%	
Freshman English	83%	First-Year Comp	41%	-42%
--	--	Basic Writing	23%	N/A
Writing Center	64%	Writing Center	22%	-42%
Peer Tutoring	4%	Peer Tutoring	15%	+11%
--	--	Professional/Tech Communication	13%	N/A
--	--	Creative Writing	4%	N/A
WAC	49%	WAC/WID	31%	-18%
Advanced Comp	46%	Advanced Comp	20%	-26%
--	--	Undergrad Writing Major/Minor	12%	N/A
--	--	Grad Rhet/Comp	10%	N/A
Other	54%	Other	4%	

writing center work, WAC programs, and Advanced Composition, without an equivalent increase in other areas of administration suggests that administrative responsibilities for respondents in 2007 were narrower in scope than those of respondents in 1986. That is, whereas in 1986, most of the individual respondents evidently had responsibilities for administrative work in several areas of writing instruction, respondents to the 2007 survey are less likely to have equivalent breadth of responsibility. We suspect this change may reflect the hiring of additional WPAs at a number of institutions with which we are familiar: where writing center, FYC, and WAC administrative duties might have once been carried out by a single individual, these responsibilities are now distributed among two or three WPAs. Likewise, this change is consistent with moves to a more collective or collaborative administrative structure heralded by WPA theorists such as Barbara Cambridge and Ben McClelland and contributors to the special issue of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* devoted to collaborative administration edited by Jeanne Gunner.

This increase in specialization, or narrowing of focus, has implications for WPA scholarship. Whereas, in 1986, work in any area of program administration, such as WAC or Advanced Composition, could be expected to be of interest to at least roughly half of the subscribers to the *WPA* journal, in 2007, this was no longer the case. This may in part explain an increasing interest in researching and theorizing issues that cross many types of programs, such as working conditions and preparation. At the

same time, there are now a considerable number of members administering programs which might well not have existed in 1986, such as graduate rhetoric and composition programs and undergraduate majors and minors.

Because we recognized that, over an entire career, a WPA is likely to move from one kind of program to another, we also asked our participants which kinds of programs they have EVER done administrative work for. Table 3 shows a quick comparison of those results for current areas of work:

Table 3. Areas of Administrative Responsibility

Areas of Responsibility	Currently Have	Ever Had
First-Year Composition	41%	66%
Basic Writing	23%	39%
Writing Center	22%	42%
Peer Tutoring	15%	28%
Professional/Technical Communication	13%	20%
Creative Writing	4%	6%
WAC/WID	31%	44%
Advanced Composition	20%	31%
Undergrad Writing Major/Minor	12%	14%
Graduate Rhet/Comp	10%	24%
Other	4%	4%

As can be seen by the greater percentages of participants in administration of every type of program, we can surmise that many of our survey participants have, at various points in their careers, been WPAs for several different types of programs. This suggests that though program specialization is increasingly a feature of WPA positions, it may be less the case with individual WPA's careers. Furthermore, our data suggest that more WPAs are choosing writing program administration as a career path, not just something they do for a few years and then leave behind.

WPAs' WORKING CONDITIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR TENURE AND PROMOTION

In his response to four jWPA stories in *The Promise and Perils of Writing Program Administration*, Ed White asks why we “put up with the loneliness, the isolation, the rejections, the frustrations that come along with our territory” as WPAs, and he recognizes the complexity of the answers, arguing that “we do it because writing, despite everything, is creative and

exhilarating; WPAing,” he adds, “is the same” (“Response” 130). He, like many other well-respected members of our field, struggles with the question of whether untenured faculty should hold WPA positions. And the “conventional wisdom that the jWPA position has far more peril than promise for young faculty” (White, “Response” 130) is advice worth listening to, though White himself acknowledges “times have changed and old truths may not hold under new conditions” (“Preface” *vii*); sometimes WPA positions offer more peril than promise for *any* WPA, regardless of rank and experience. Working conditions vary wildly from institution to institution, and even with documents like the Portland Resolution and “Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Program Administration” or even the NCTE statements on class size, we aren’t always able to negotiate the best working conditions for ourselves or our faculty and students. But, we continue to make things better. The past twenty years tell a story of progress certainly, but these years have also witnessed new controversies borne of different career trajectories. Some of us, like Stephanie Roach, decide early on that “WPA work” is, for us, “a kind of calling” (111), and we intend to do that work for many years. It is an integral component of our professional identities. And, no doubt, that’s true for more senior WPAs who have found themselves doing administrative work for twenty or more years. They may not have set out to be WPAs for life, but that’s the way it ended up. And there are others who are now able to rotate in and out of their WPA positions because there’s more than one qualified person in their department who can ably handle the job. We see all these stories emerge in our data.

Respondents’ Total Years in WPA Positions

Further evidence that CWPA members are increasingly likely to continue their administrative work as a career path in its own right is provided by comparisons of survey respondents’ total years in WPA positions. In 1986, Peterson asked her respondents how many years they had served as a WPA, and they reported an average of 5.97 years of work in a formal WPA position (11). In 2007, in response to the question: “How many years total have you served in official positions as a WPA?”²², our respondents reported an average of 8.52 years, an increase in CWPA members’ average number of years of experience of more than 2 ½ years. This difference indicates that, on the average, CWPA members tend to have more years of experience in formal WPA positions than in the past, which is consistent with our findings that survey respondents, over time, did administrative work for several types of programs.

Perceptions of Workload

Of course, most of us think that we're working harder than we would like to and harder than many of our faculty colleagues who don't hold administrative positions, but our data seem to suggest that even more of us feel that way now than did twenty years ago. In 1986, Peterson asked her survey participants how their workload compared with their teaching-only colleagues,' and 50% indicated that their workload was heavier than their colleagues' (Peterson 13).

Among our respondents who answered this question, 58% indicated that their workload was heavier than others'; 30% said it was the same as others,' and 2% believed their workload was lighter than others, all notable differences (10% gave an "Other" response). As the side-by-side comparison in Figure 5 makes clear, a larger proportion of CWPA members now feel they are working harder than their colleagues. Regardless of whether our participants' perceptions reflect the reality of their and their colleagues' workloads, the fact that they feel like their workloads are heavier is intriguing. We can only speculate about the reasons for this change in participants' self-reporting of comparative workload, which might reflect an increase in expectations of WPAs or increases in the administrative complexity of writing programs with a whole host of intellectual, scholarly, and practical demands.

In Peterson's discussion of her findings, she makes the point that "The issue of a WPA's workload involves not simply a time commitment, but the relation of that commitment to academic success," in this case, tenure (11). At the time, it was probably reasonable to expect, as one of Peterson's

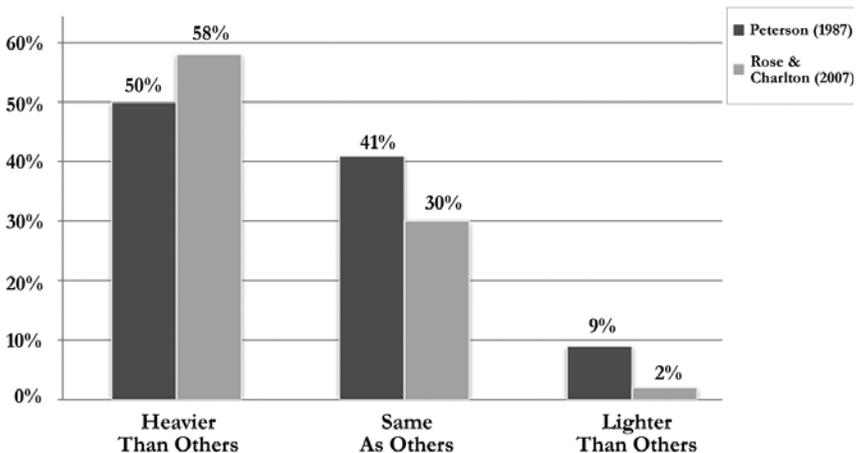


Figure 5. Workload Perceptions

respondent's noted, that the heavy administrative workload might not relate as directly to publication as that of someone whose workload is devoted solely to teaching. What we have found, however, is that the relationship between administrative work and likelihood of tenure looked very different in 2007 than it might have in 1986.

Participants' Employment Status (Tenure Status) and Tenure Possibility

Tenure has been such an important issue for WPAs, particularly since, with increasing professionalization of a discipline, one might expect an increasing number of tenured faculty holding administrative positions. Our data comparisons show that hasn't been the case for the CWPA members who responded to our survey. In 1986, 82% of Peterson's faculty respondents were tenured (14). When we designed our survey questions about tenure, we recognized that there were a couple of related lines of inquiry. First, we wanted to know how many of our respondents had *secure* employment, whether through a tenured or tenure-track appointment or another type of position which offered similar security. Figure 6 provides a breakdown of the full results on employment status and clearly indicates that a large proportion of our sample—83%—had some measure of security in their positions.

However, a smaller proportion of current CWPA members are *tenured* than was the case twenty years ago. If we isolate the tenured and tenure-track faculty in our sample, we find that 68% of those faculty respondents are tenured while 32% are on the tenure-track (designated as "N-Y-T" or

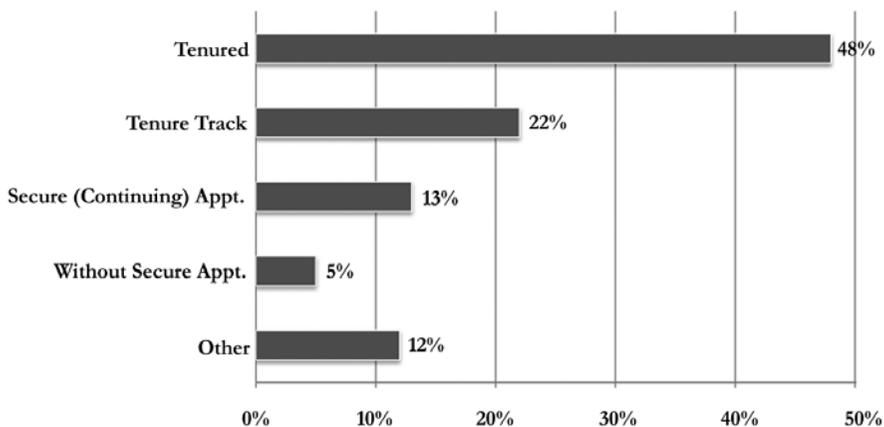


Figure 6. Employment Status (Rose & Charlton, 2007)

not-yet-tenured in Figure 7). As Figure 7 shows, the darker areas representing our tenured respondents has shrunk 14% since 1986.

This is an important change in the demographics of the organization, and it has generated a number of additional questions for us as we continue to analyze the data we have collected. For one, we wonder whether there is a relationship between tenure status and the increasing specialization in type of writing program that is the focus of WPA work. To give an example, an institution that had a single tenured faculty member serving as Director of Composition twenty years ago may now have an Assistant Director who

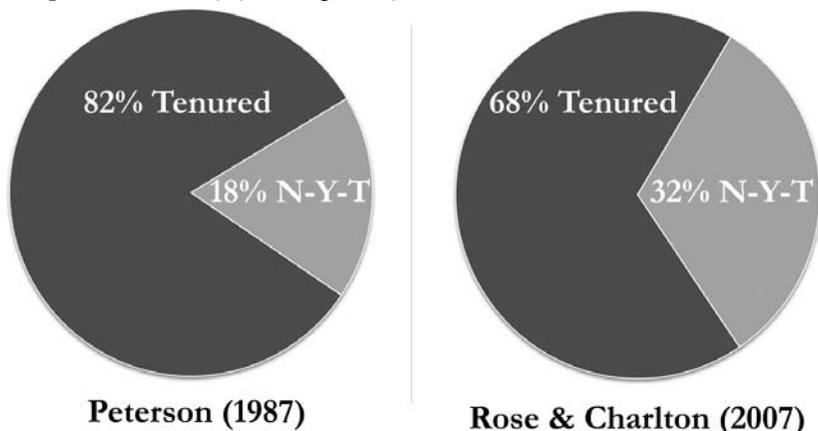


Figure 7. Tenure Track Faculty: Tenured vs. Not-Yet-Tenured

is a graduate student in a rhetoric and composition PhD program and has responsibility for mentoring teaching assistants assigned to basic writing classes, and the program may also now have an Associate Director who is on a continuing full-time non-tenure track faculty appointment who coordinates advanced composition offerings. This change in the administrative structure would suggest an increasing professionalization of the WPA position, rather than deterioration in working conditions for WPAs.

Tenure Before or After WPA. The question of whether or not assistant professors should take WPA positions is an ethical question our field has contended with since Carol Hartzog addressed it in 1986 in *Composition and the Academy* and longer. Not least of the issues is whether junior faculty are sabotaging their efforts to attain tenure with the added workload and responsibilities of administrative life. But the data we've collected suggests that even though we may have legitimate concerns about a given jWPA's ability to be tenured, our jWPAs *are* being tenured. Specifically, we asked our tenured respondents whether they had been tenured *before* or *after* tak-

ing on WPA work, and as the pie chart in Figure 8 shows, more than half said they were tenured *after*.

We believe it is very important to our understanding of the development of WPA identity in the 21st century that we learn the lessons of these tenured WPAs. It is quite evident that for a large proportion of the CWPA membership who responded to our survey, pre-tenure work as WPAs did not completely undermine members' ability to earn tenure. Granted that any who lost their bids for tenure are somewhat unlikely to be active members of the profession or members of CWPA; and granted that this statistic

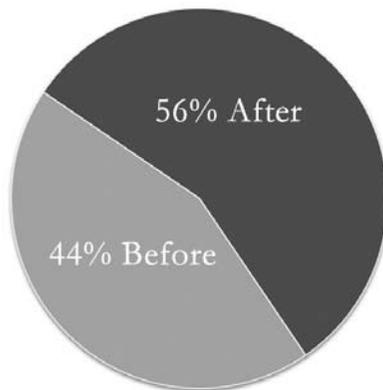


Figure 8. Tenure Before or After WPA Work (Rose & Charlton, 2007)

does not convey the twists and turns we may experience in our paths to tenure, with moves in and out of WPA positions and from one institution to another; nevertheless, we must recognize that not only are many WPAs pre-tenure, the record suggests that many of them are likely to earn tenure.

Untenured Participants' Assessment of Their Tenure Prospects. We also know that much of the tenure issue is about our pre-tenure psychological well-being. The anxiety we feel about tenure is closely related to how probable we think it is we will receive it, which is why we and Peterson asked a specific question to ascertain the anxiety level of our pre-tenure respondents. The side-by-side comparison of Figure 9 illustrates a notable increase in the number of respondents who believe tenure is a possibility for them: 94% of our respondents answered the question about likelihood of tenure in the affirmative²³, 14% more than twenty years ago when Peterson asked her untenured respondents whether tenure was "a possibility in the future" (14).

Despite the difference in terms and population sizes, we think it's worthwhile to provide a comparison between the 20% of untenured faculty

WPAs in 1986 who believed tenure was not a possibility (approximately 2 people from a total population of 51) and the 2% of pre-tenure respondents to our 2007 survey who chose “It is unlikely that I will receive tenure” (1 person from a total population of 223) (4% chose an “Other” response). Perhaps at least part of our confidence in our abilities to earn tenure while doing administrative work stems from the fact that more of us have prepared for this work in graduate school²⁴ and there are a vast array of sup-

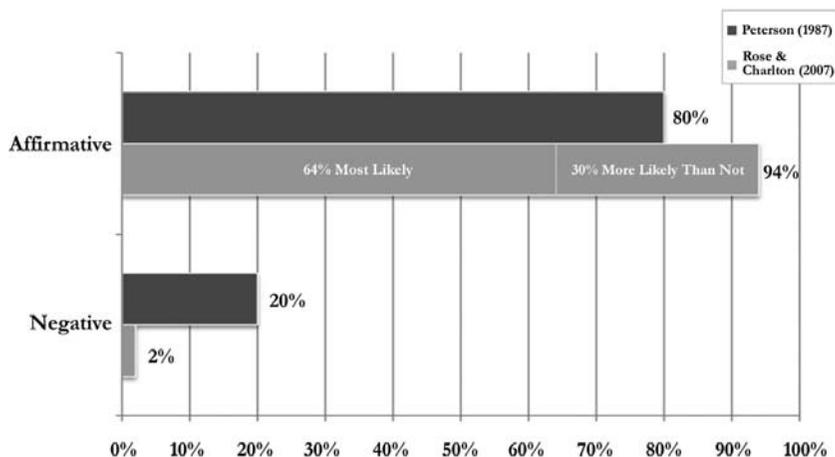


Figure 9. Likelihood of Receiving Tenure

port and professional development networks for us to tap. More often than before, we are taking these positions with our eyes wide open, as Dew and Horning envision in their collection.

WPA IDENTITY

As Marty Townsend writes in “Professionalization Requires Sharing Our Understandings More Broadly,” there are more and more of us who, like her, “have never *not* been a WPA” (265), or, at least we may have been one so long it *feels* like we’ve never not been a WPA. And there are others of us, earlier in our careers, who have “grown up” with WPA as a bona fide field of intellectual work; we, too, have never not been WPAs, even if our WPA identities are scholarly rather than rooted in a particular job. Many of us, junior or senior, struggle with figuring out who we are as academics *as* and *apart from* our WPA identities. Who are we as WPAs? Will we ever not be WPAs? Is that even possible? At the 2008 WPA conference, Joe Harris and Chuck Schuster presented on what it’s like to “grow older as a WPA” and negotiate new identities *after* administrative work. Later that afternoon, Jonikka Charlton, Colin Charlton, Tarez Graban, Kate Ryan, and Amy

Ferdinandt Stolley hosted a roundtable about their theorizing of identity for a new generation of writing program administrators. And, for WPA 2009, CWPA introduced a new institute, a day of WPA Renewal, where experienced WPAs could get together for continuing professional development targeted especially for WPAs who, mid-career, want to reflect on their administrative identities.

Our conversations about WPA identity over the past twenty years have been rich and increasingly diverse, and, in doing our survey, we wanted to explore who our CWPA members were, and how they saw their own administrative identities. What we found (obviously) is that there's more than one way of being a WPA, and our members have a variety of reasons for belonging to our organization. Because we recognized the complexity of WPA identity, we asked more questions about it than did Peterson.

For Peterson, WPA identity was linked to whether her respondents held a formal WPA position. 64% of her respondents were holding WPA positions at the time while just over one-third (36%) were former WPAs²⁵. Our survey offered respondents more choices as we wanted to acknowledge a variety of ways our respondents might be "WPAs." First we asked whether respondents had ever held a formal WPA position. Those who said "yes" (82% of the total population) were asked to indicate which of the responses listed in Table 4 best described their WPA status.

Table 4. Current WPA Status (Rose & Charlton, 2007)

Current WPA Status	%
Currently Hold a Formal WPA Position	73%
Former WPA	15%
On Hiatus from WPA Work, but Expect to Return	3%
Doing WPA Work, but Without Formal WPA Position	4%
Other	5%

We offered these alternatives because we wanted to recognize respondents who might be doing WPA work without holding a formal position, either because there was no such position at their institution—as is often the case, for instance, in two-year colleges—or because they did WPA work in the context of a committee activity, or for some other reason. And we wanted to recognize that many WPAs participate in a regular rotation through the position and would consider themselves "on hiatus" from the position, but not technically "former WPAs" because they anticipated returning to the position in time.

As these results demonstrate, there are a considerable number of Council of Writing Program Administrators members who have been WPAs at some point in their career, but are not currently holding a formal WPA position: 49 respondents. There are also a remarkable number of members who have never held one: 40 respondents. This sizable group of WPA members who have never held a formal WPA position yet have found a reason for belonging to the organization are a particularly fascinating group for us as we attempt to tease out whether it is possible to construct a “WPA identity” that is distinguishable from the formal, institutionalized WPA position and even, perhaps, distinguishable from the WPA role as defined by responsibilities.

A common conception of WPA work is that it is a job, a set of duties to be carried out. Our survey suggests that being a WPA is coming to mean much more than holding a particular title or performing specific tasks. We believe that the professionalization of our field has led to an increased awareness of WPA work as scholarly, intellectual work, and that this has meant that more graduate students have been taking WPA seminars and writing WPA-related dissertations, taking the scholarly aspects of our work seriously. Stuart C. Brown et al.’s “Portrait of the Profession: The 2007 Survey of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition” (2008) reported that their respondents (graduate program directors) had identified 8 dissertations on writing program administration completed between 1993 and 1997 and 12 completed between 2000 and 2007. We also conducted a brief search of *Dissertation Abstracts International* to see how many dissertations were indexed by or locatable using a few clearly-identifiable “WPA” search terms. Typing in “WPA” yielded 10 results from 1999 to 2009. “Writing program administration” gave us 18 hits while “writing program administrators” yielded 24 dissertations, all but one of which was published in 1995 or after (one was published in 1982). Again, we are not suggesting WPA-related dissertations weren’t written before that time; we are suggesting, however, that writing program administration as a distinct area of inquiry—marked by the use of these terms in dissertation abstracts as well as graduate program directors’ identification of writing program administration as a dissertation subject area—has become an increasingly namable and recognizable choice for dissertation writers since the mid-1990s. When students who write WPA dissertations graduate and begin their professional lives as faculty, it is likely that many of them see themselves as WPAs even if they are not officially WPAs. They bring a perspective to their work that is informed by WPA field-specific knowledge.

THE WPA'S PROGRESS: EMERGING PORTRAITS

When Linda Peterson wrote about “the WPA's Progress” a little over twenty years ago, she recognized that the portrait of the WPAs she painted was not only incomplete, but already changing. She highlighted the differences between the generations of “former” and then-current WPAs, noting that many of the “newest” WPAs at the time had “specialized in both a literary field and composition studies,” representing a composite of the field of “English” that E.D. Hirsch had supported in his “Remarks on Composition to the Yale English Department” in 1979 (qtd. in Peterson 17). But it's unmistakably clear that the narrative of “the WPA's Progress” is no longer as homogeneous as Peterson's survey data suggested twenty years ago. There are many stories to tell, and, through our survey work, we see much richer—and multiple—portraits of some of today's WPAs. Here are some brushstrokes contributing to that composite portrait:

- The gender balance among CWPA survey respondents since 1986 has shifted dramatically, with women in our survey outnumbering men almost 2 to 1.
- More CWPA members are working at institutions with graduate programs, teaching graduate courses in rhetoric and composition.
- More CWPA members come out of graduate programs in rhetoric and composition.
- A smaller percentage of CWPA members are tenured now than 20 years ago; more of us are Assistant Professors.
- For more CWPA members, tenure now comes after WPA work begins, not before.
- A higher percentage of untenured WPA members now expect to earn tenure than those who were on the tenure-track twenty years ago.

And, perhaps most importantly when thinking about the future of discussions of WPA identity:

- 18% of Council of Writing Program Administrators members have never held a formal WPA position, and
- 1 in 10 WPA members has written a dissertation related to writing program administration, while 5 in 10 have had WPA experience as graduate students.

In our data, most of us will see pieces of ourselves—the senior WPA “on hiatus,” faced with an identity crisis after being a WPA for most of her

academic career; the graduate student serving as an Assistant Director in a writing program or writing center; the jWPA who considers herself a WPA scholar; and even the faculty member who thinks and acts like a WPA, though he doesn't officially hold the position.

Much has changed in the rhetoric and composition studies profession over the past twenty years: as the *Rhetoric Review* surveys demonstrate, more and more students are able to take advantage of more and more opportunities for doctoral-level study of rhetoric and composition; development of the undergraduate writing major is attracting greater and greater interest among rhetoric and composition faculty²⁶; and freestanding writing programs are less and less unusual in the organizational structures of higher education institutions.²⁷ These developments mean changes in the role expectations for WPAs. A PhD in rhetoric and composition is more likely to be seen as a necessary credential for the work of writing program administration; curriculum development and faculty development for the undergraduate writing major and minor will require coordination by faculty whose administrative work may or may not be officially recognized; and freestanding writing programs, which often function administratively as academic units reporting directly to deans or provosts, will make the economics of writing instruction increasingly visible to campus constituencies. These developments have all taken place alongside the creation of a growing body of scholarship addressing the lived intellectual work of those WPAs who think and write about what it means to be a WPA and do WPA work.

We would argue these changes in our field have been mostly positive for writing program administrators and for the future of WPA work. In dean's offices, tenure review meetings, and professional journals all across the country, our work is being recognized as a legitimate area of scholarly specialization. Fewer of us, as a result, may look at being a WPA as something junior faculty do for a while until they've put in their time and can move on to more scholarly pursuits. Fewer of us may separate our administrative lives from our scholarly lives. More of us will probably study writing program administration in graduate school; more of us will actively choose WPA work, regardless of whether we are new faculty; and more of us will take on a WPA agenda as the focus of our scholarship.

Though a survey may not be the perfect instrument for collecting and sharing our stories, it does help us figure out where we might look for our new stories and it confirms that the "WPA's Progress" is not one narrative but many, some of which we began to capture in our survey. We should be listening to and sharing these narratives with the next generation of WPAs,

for it is from these stories and the portraits they construct that a composite of our futures might be drawn.

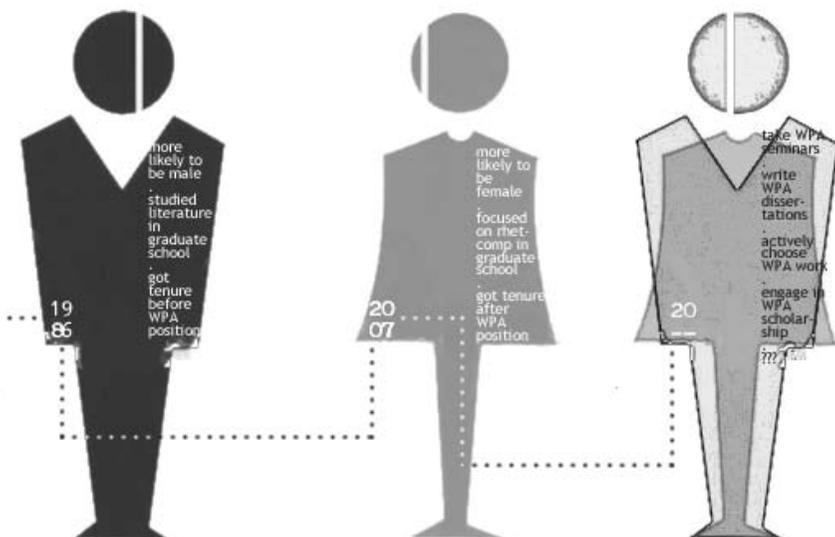


Figure 10. WPA Composite. (c) 2009 by Colin Charlton. Used by permission.

NOTES

1. The thread, which ran from March 2 through March 4, 2006, was introduced by Sid Dobrin in response to Rebecca Howard's response to a posting viewed in digest form; thus the subject heading for the thread is: "WPA=L Digest—Feb 2006 to 1 March 2006." The posting can be found by using the search string "you might be a WPA."

2. Subsequent surveys of doctoral programs in Rhetoric and Composition were published in *Rhetoric Review* in 1995, 2000, and 2008: see Brown, Meyer, and Enos (1994); Brown, Jackson, and Enos (2000), and Brown, Enos, Reamer, and Thompson (2008).

3. No one received all 57 of the questions, as they were branched. For example, only those who indicated they were currently graduate students were asked the focus of their current coursework. For a copy of the survey, please check the following URL:

<http://wpacouncil.org/files/Charlton-Rose-survey.pdf>

4. In this article, we have limited our analysis of our data to descriptive rather than inferential statistics, so we caution readers against generalizing from our survey results to all WPAs or making inferential leaps. Our aim here is to share some of the data we have gathered from an admittedly select group of WPAs (CWPA members), compare what our respondents said to what Peterson's said twenty years earlier, and tentatively suggest some possibilities for what our data

might mean for the future of the CWPA organization, WPA education, and WPA work.

5. We discuss results for this item in the section, “WPA Job Configurations and Responsibilities.”

6. We assume that Peterson used respondents’ names to identify gender.

7. We note that the gender breakdown of the CWPA membership list we used to distribute the survey appeared to be 40% male and 60% female, assuming that gendered naming conventions held true for the population.

8. See Table 2.5: “Percentage distribution of full-time and part-time faculty, by gender, type and control in institution, and department program area: Fall 1987,” Faculty in Higher Education Institutions, 1988. For these and other comparisons, NCES data from years closest to the time of Peterson’s and our surveys were used.

9. See Table 239: “Full-time instructional faculty in degree-granting institutions by race/ethnicity and residency status, sex, and academic rank: Fall 2003 and Fall 2005.” *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2007.

10. For an overview of some of this work, see Lauer’s 1995 *Rhetoric Review* essay, “The Feminization of Rhetoric and Composition Studies?”

11. See also Goodburn and Leverenz, Holdstein, and Phelps’ “Becoming.”

12. Nationally, according to data published by the National Center for Education Statistics, in 1987, 68.7% of all full time higher education faculty taught in public institutions, 19.5% taught in private institutions, and 8% taught at Liberal Arts institutions whose public vs. private control was not identified (*Faculty in Higher Education Institutions, 1988: 1988 National Survey of Post Secondary Faculty*). In 2006, the year of the most recent information they reported, NCES data indicated that 62.5% of all full-time higher education faculty taught in public institutions, while 27% taught in private not-for-profit institutions, and another 5.2% taught at private for-profit institutions (*Digest of Education Statistics, 2007*).

13. As Louise Phelps attests in “Turtles All the Way Down: Educating Academic Leaders,” writing program administration has “acquired the symbols and instruments of successful professionalization (a journal, professional organization, literature, professors hired and tenured for this work, and now graduate courses and specializations)” (14).

14. Michael Pemberton is currently researching the number and types of writing center administration courses being offered in graduate programs across the country as well, which will add to our understanding of the process by which this aspect of professional credentialing of writing program administrators has developed.

15. There were six “other” responses, as follows: one JD + MA, one Master’s of Science; one MFA who was working part-time on a PhD; one undergraduate student, one M.A.T. in English and Reading, and one “PhC,” a degree with which we are not familiar.

16. This question was not presented to respondents who had indicated in an earlier question that they were currently graduate students; thus, survey respondents who were graduate students do not account for the increase in number of members who have MAs.

17. Chapman and Tate's 1987 survey of 123 doctoral programs in English identified 53 universities that reported offering a specialization in rhetoric and composition with a cumulative total of 228 graduates since the oldest programs' establishment. Brown et al.'s 2007 survey examined information from 67 programs that reported a total of 1,732 rhetoric and composition dissertations between 1993 and 2007.

18. This number combines those who were Professors and Distinguished Professors.

19. The usage of "jWPA" to designate a junior faculty member in a writing program administrative role first occurs in published WPA literature in Dew and Horning; see their "Acknowledgements" for a more in-depth explanation of this term.

20. We note, for example, the Conference on Basic Writing's *Journal of Basic Writing*, the development of the WAC-focused *Journal of Language and Learning across the Disciplines*, and the International Writing Centers Association's *Writing Center Journal*.

21. We did not offer second language writing as a discrete program type, which we realize now was a mistake. If we were to do the survey again, we would offer this as an option.

22. The only people who were asked this question were the ones who indicated on an earlier question that they had held a WPA position at some point in their careers.

23. We asked our tenure-track respondents what the *likelihood* was of their receiving tenure, admittedly, a somewhat different question, as "likelihood" is not the same as "possibility," but we tried to account for that with our phrasing. We asked them to choose among the following responses: "Most likely, I will receive tenure" (64%); "More likely than not, I will receive tenure" (30%); "It is unlikely that I will receive tenure" (2%); and a free text "other" text box for open-ended responses.

24. Jillian Skeffington, Shane Borrowman and Theresa Enos' Web survey of writing program administrators supports the idea that more and more of us have been prepared for WPA work (19), as does our own survey data about WPA preparation. While this point is beyond the scope of this article, we will discuss WPA preparation data further in our book-length project.

25. By design, Peterson's survey was mailed to people on a five-year-old membership mailing list, so she could examine career trajectories, the "progress" of her title. Thus, it could be expected that a number of her respondents would be former WPAs who had "moved on" to other work.

26. The CCCC Committee on the Major in Rhetoric and Composition maintains a list of writing majors which was last updated in January 2009 (see “Writing Majors at a Glance”), and the Spring 2007 issue of *Composition Studies*, edited by Heidi Estrem was devoted to the topic (see her introduction, “Growing Pains: the Writing Major in Composition and Rhetoric”). See also the Chapman, Harris, and Hult survey of undergraduate writing programs published in *Rhetoric Review* in 1995.

27. One measure of the increasing interest in and incidence of freestanding writing programs is the 2002 publication of Peggy O’Neill, Angela Crow, and Larry Burton’s collection, *A Field of Dreams: Independent Writing Programs and the Future of Composition Studies*.

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