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# Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Program Administrators: A Draft

*The WPA Executive Committee  
with primary contributions from  
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This is the long-awaited draft of the "Intellectual Work Document" that the Executive Committee of the Council of Writing Program Administrators has been working on for several years. The primary authors are Robert Schwegler, Gail Stygall, Judy Pearce, and Charles Schuster. Charles Schuster has written the draft published below and takes full responsibility for this version. The document is intended for departments of English and is written with that audience in mind.

The Executive Committee encourages members to read the draft carefully and send comments, concerns, suggestions for revision, corrections, etc. to: Charles Schuster, Department of English, U. Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 53201. Email: cis@csd.uwm.edu.

In addition, the Editor of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* invites brief responses (no longer than 750 words) for possible publication in the spring, 1997 issue of the journal. Because of production deadlines, responses must be received no later than February 15, 1997 for consideration. For submission information, please see the guidelines for authors at the front of this issue.



It is clear within departments of English that research and teaching are generally regarded as intellectual, professional activities worthy of tenure and promotion. Administration, particularly writing program administration, however, has for the most part been treated as a management activity that does not produce new knowledge and that neither requires nor demonstrates scholarly expertise and disciplinary knowledge. While there are certainly arguments to be made for academic administration, in general, as intellectual work, that is not our aim here. Instead, our concern in this document is to present a framework by which writing program administration can be seen as scholarly work and therefore subject to the same kinds of evaluation as other forms of disciplinary production, such as books, articles, and reviews. More significantly, by refiguring writing program administration as scholarly and intellectual work, we argue that it is worthy of tenure and promotion when it both produces and enacts disciplinary knowledge within the field of Rhetoric and Composition.

## Introduction: Three Cases

### The Literary Scholar: Rewarding the Production of Knowledge

In her fourth year as a tenure-track assistant professor at a land-grant university, Mary C. came to her current position after teaching for two years at a private university where she had established a good reputation for both her scholarship and her teaching. Her present department places considerable emphasis on teaching, at least for a research university, and her colleagues have taken special note of her pedagogical skills in their annual evaluations, recognizing that teaching quality will play some role for both the dean and the provost in decisions on tenure and promotion. Nonetheless, Mary has wisely concentrated on publishing refereed articles, poems in magazines with good literary reputations, and a book with a major university press. After all, the format for promotion and tenure at her university identifies these as “categories of effort” that weigh heavily in the awarding of tenure and in promotion to higher rank. The guidelines also emphasize the importance of quality in scholarly efforts as measured not just by the judgment of her departmental colleagues, but also by outside evaluators who provide an estimate of the currency and value of her scholarship as well as the prestige and visibility of the outlets in which her work appears.

By describing Mary’s achievements in this familiar manner, we may be able readily to understand why she is likely to be promoted—and why her chances for advancement differ markedly from other instructors within the broad field of English literature and composition, particularly those who work as writing program administrators. To do this, we need to view her work, despite its undeniably humanistic content, as the production of specific commodities, albeit scholarly commodities, with a clear exchange value, perhaps not on the general market but certainly in academic institutions. While Mary’s colleagues and others who read her work can appreciate it for its uses—for the personal value of her insights into literary works or as poetry worth sharing with friends and students—the institution assigns it positive importance because the work assumes recognizable and conventional forms to which value can be readily assigned. The valuations are likely to be recognized and accepted by most colleagues and academic departments. Because Mary’s work takes conventional forms and has a recognized exchange value, her institution uses it as a basis for justifying its decision to award her with tenure and promotion—a justification it owes to the university community, to the board of regents, and to the academic community in general.

### The Composition Teacher/Scholar:

#### Rewarding Pedagogy and Pedagogical Knowledge

Twenty years ago Doug R. might have been an uncertain candidate for tenure and promotion. An assistant professor at a regional state university with a large composition program, Doug has published a number of articles in highly

regarded journals in rhetoric and composition studies, though his publication record is by no means extensive. Doug's institution, however, has a well-developed system for student and departmental teaching evaluations, and Doug scores especially high on his classroom performance in both student questionnaires and on the frequent faculty observations filed by a variety of senior colleagues within the department, including the chairperson and the writing program director. Moreover, both by contract and by informal agreement, both the department and the administration at Doug's institution are required to take into account demonstrated excellence in teaching when evaluating faculty for tenure and promotion. It helps as well that Doug's specialty is composition, an academic specialty that is viewed by the administration as central to the university's undergraduate mission.

Doug's academic achievements, especially as a classroom teacher, have made it likely that he will be tenured and promoted. His pedagogical efforts take forms recognized by his colleagues and his institution, and they are assigned value by accepted procedures. In combination with his published scholarship (and typical departmental committee service), Doug's teaching—which has been evaluated and quantified and made visible—becomes a strong factor in his promotion. Doug is also an innovative teacher who has shared his contributions to curricular design and pedagogy through workshops at his own institution and through presentations at national conferences. Besides having value for his colleagues and for students, these efforts appear on his vita; they constitute an important part of his reputation as a professional.

### The Writing Program Administrator: A Problematic Case

Cheryl W. has been working hard as an assistant professor and writing program administrator at a medium-sized university, a position for which she was hired after taking a Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition and teaching for two years (ABD) at a college with a nationally known WAC program. Cheryl's teaching load is only 1-2, but her responsibilities are overwhelming: supervision and curriculum design for a large first-year composition program, TA training, design and administration of an emerging WAC program (with faculty workshops and publicity), many hours in the office dealing with student issues and writing reports, and an occasional graduate course in composition theory. In addition, Cheryl has guided development of five upper-level writing courses for both English majors and students in other fields, in the process greatly expanding the writing program. Cheryl's department and her institution support the growth of her program, perhaps because she has carried it out both diplomatically and professionally.

Unfortunately, Cheryl has published only a handful of refereed articles, far below the expected level for candidates for tenure and promotion at her

institution. Moreover, because she has a relatively light teaching load, she has not been able to develop as thorough and far-reaching a reputation as a teacher as have most of her colleagues, and she has to face the expectation, held by her university faculty generally, that anyone with such a light teaching load should have published much more. This expectation is not the result of any hostility towards rhetoric and composition as a field; indeed, two of her colleagues, one of whom works in rhetoric and technical communication and the other of whom specializes in composition research and teacher training, have published a good deal and are considered prime candidates for tenure and promotion. Cheryl and her supporters suspect, in fact, that the productivity of these other two writing specialists may become an argument for denying her tenure and hiring someone who will be productive in ways that the department and the institution can readily recognize and value.

While many members of Cheryl's department agree that she has been working hard, they are not sure that she has been doing "real work." Others, who think her efforts have been valuable to the department, have difficulty specifying her accomplishments other than stating that "she has done an excellent job running the writing program." The problem is particularly clear to one of Cheryl's colleagues, the former director of the writing program, who recognizes the specific tasks involved in activities like supervising teaching assistants and who also recognizes that Cheryl has accomplished these tasks with energy, vision, and expertise. This colleague sums up the problem facing Cheryl and her supporters this way:

First you have to be able to specify exactly what it is that you do as a WPA; then you have to convince people that your work is intellectual work, grounded in disciplinary knowledge, demanding expertise, and producing knowledge or other valued ends—not simply busy work or "administrivia" that anyone with a reasonable intelligence could do; and finally you have to demonstrate that your work has been both professional and creative—worthy of recognition and reward.

Unless Cheryl can do these things, her efforts will not have value within her own institution, nor will they have exchange value when she applies for another position, unless, of course, that institution has already developed a clear definition of the intellectual work of a writing program administrator and can evaluate Cheryl's work within these terms. Right now, however, Cheryl will have to list her administrative categories in the small box labeled "Service" on her institution's tenure/promotion form, a category distinguished by its lack of clear definition in contrast to the detailed subcategories under "Research" (books, articles, chapters, reviews, presentations, and grants) and "Teaching" (student evaluations, supervisory reports, curriculum development, presentations, and publications). Unless there is a way to demonstrate the intellectual value of her work, Cheryl is unlikely to be rewarded for her administrative work—and will be denied tenure and promotion.

## The Production of Knowledge and the Problem of Assigning Value in Academe

Terms like “exchange value” and “use value” and the concepts they embody help lay bare the system of academic judgments and rewards we are all familiar with, a system that lies behind the three cases described above. Academic institutions grant tenure and promotion (and hire) because they share the same understandings and values. Although departments of English (and institutions of higher education generally) may differ substantially as to the particularities of what they value—teaching, book publication, scholarly articles, local publishing, community outreach, etc.—there is considerable congruence among them concerning the ways they quantify academic work.

We use the term “quantify” advisedly. Tenure and promotion is granted on the basis of criteria that might be said to be objectified. They are too familiar to rehearse here, but they might be generally described with the phrase “professional accomplishment” as measured and indicated by books, articles, conference presentations, teaching evaluations, etc. These accomplishments are concrete and can be evaluated; they can be counted, weighed, analyzed, and held forward for public review. In most departments of English, for example, to have a book accepted by Oxford, Yale, or Harvard University Press is to be assured of tenure and promotion. In colleges that place a primary value on undergraduate instruction, a faculty member whose teaching evaluations place her in the top three percent, is similarly likely to be tenured and promoted. Perhaps more important than their quantifiable nature, these accomplishments are largely familiar to faculty and administrators; they are exactly the kinds of accomplishments that have been considered by universities for years in cases of tenure and promotion. Familiarity breeds ease of use; university machinery works most smoothly and efficiently when there is little or no quarrel about the means by which decisions are made. Indeed, in the case of scholarship, many of us might agree that the all-too-prevalent tendency to prefer quantity over quality is a clear sign of intellectual work turned into a quantifiable commodity. What this tells us, however, is that academic systems of evaluation and reward have for a long time assigned clear exchange values to scholarship and are now on the way to doing so with teaching.

Activities other than research and teaching, however, have little exchange value, no matter how highly they might be valued on an individual basis by fellow faculty, by administrators, or society. Only when such activities lead to a move outside faculty ranks, to a deanship, perhaps, do they take on exchange value. Otherwise, they generally appear under the ill-defined and seldom-rewarded category of “service” in promotion and tenure evaluations, a category to which the work of WPAs is too often relegated.

In academe, work that is categorized as “service” occupies a wide spectrum and has proven extremely difficult to describe and evaluate. The recently approved Report of the MLA Commission on Professional Service “Making Faculty Work Visible: Reinterpreting Professional Service, Teaching,

and Research in the Fields of Language and Literature" (1996) states the problem clearly:

Service has functioned in the past as a kind of grab-bag for all professional work that was not clearly classroom teaching, research, or scholarship. As a result, recent efforts to define it more precisely (as "professional service") have tended to select out one subset of these activities and fail to account for all the clearly professional work previously lumped together under this rubric. . . . Yet it is hard to come up with a principled definition based on common features or family resemblances among all these activities and to avoid confusions with the concept of citizenship. (September 1995 Final Draft, pp. 19-20)

We do not expect to resolve the problem for all time in this document. The MLA document provides useful information with its distinctions between applied work and institutional service, but we find a more helpful perspective from Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered*.

Boyer argues that scholarship is not a separate category but is rather distributed over four somewhat distinguishable categories: Discovery, Integration, Application, and Teaching. The one that concerns us here is Application. Boyer makes clear that "Colleges and universities have recently rejected service as serious scholarship, partly because its meaning is so vague and often disconnected from serious intellectual work" (22). More importantly, Boyer argues that:

a sharp distinction must be drawn between citizenship activities and projects that relate to scholarship itself. To be sure, there are meritorious social and civic functions to be performed, and faculty should be appropriately recognized for such work. But all too frequently, service means not doing scholarship but doing good. To be considered scholarship, service activities must be tied directly to one's special field of knowledge and relate to, and flow directly out of, this professional activity. Such service is serious, demanding work, requiring the rigor- and the accountability-traditionally associated with research activities. (22)

Let us emphasize the main point here: "To be considered scholarship, service activities must be tied directly to one's special field of knowledge and relate to, and flow directly out of, this professional activity. Such service is serious, demanding work, requiring the rigor—and the accountability—traditionally associated with research activities." What Boyer is arguing is not that all service should count; rather, service can be considered as part of scholarship if it derives from and is reinforced by scholarly knowledge and disciplinary understanding. As Boyer makes clear, in work of this sort, "theory and practice vitally interact, and one renews the other" (23).

Clearly there are many service activities that support and enhance departmental and university structures. Service on departmental and college-level committees is one of the clearest examples. Serving as the director or coordinator of an academic program may be another. Such service is considered a form of scholarship, however, only if it flows from and contributes to the

scholarship of the field. In our terms, such work is intellectual: it requires specific expertise, training, and an understanding of disciplinary knowledge.

An example may be in order. Let us presume that a WPA is designing an in-house placement procedure so that students new to the college can be placed into the appropriate course in the first-year composition sequence. The WPA will need to decide whether to use direct or indirect measures of writing ability; will need to assess the implications that the placement procedure will have on high school curriculum; will want to consult the research on the nature of writing prompts, on whether to use both an objective test and a writing test together, on the amount of time for the exam, on the nature of assessment and evaluation, etc. Thus what on the face of it may seem like a simple decision (place students according to an ACT score) becomes much more complex when considered in the context of disciplinary knowledge, empirical research, and histories of practice.

An additional dimension of this kind of intellectual work is that it does not either derive from or produce simplistic products or services. Rather, it draws upon historical and contemporary knowledge, and it contributes to the formation of new knowledge and improved decision making. These kinds of practices produce new knowledge, innovative educational programs, and contribute to thoughtful and invigorated teaching. What we are arguing, therefore, is that a definition of writing program administration as intellectual work in colleges and universities must take into account the paradigm established by research and scholarship: the production of knowledge. Research and scholarship consists of acts of inquiry that identify new ideas, data, or processes and share them in specific forms (e.g. articles, books, presentations) subject to peer review. In order to be regarded as intellectual work, therefore, writing program administration must be viewed as a form of inquiry and knowledge-making, that has formalized outcomes that are subject to peer review and disciplinary evaluation. Just as the articles, stories, poems, books, committee work, classroom performance and other evidence of tenure and promotion can be critiqued and evaluated by internal and external reviewers, so can the accomplishments, products, innovations, and contributions of writing program administrators. Indeed, such review must be central to the evaluation of writing program administration as scholarly and intellectual work.

## Evaluating the Work of Writing Program Administration

Defining and evaluating the work of WPAs is a process that needs to be made explicit so that those who do this work—and they are often beginning faculty who are over-worked, over-stressed, and untenured—stand a real chance of succeeding professionally within departmental and institutional contexts. On a national level, this process can not only provide guidelines to help institutions and faculty understand and properly evaluate the work of WPAs, it can also produce some degree of empirical data that can create an exchange value for

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administrative accomplishments parallel to that already in place for research and teaching.

In the remainder of this report, we will propose five descriptive categories within which the intellectual work of the WPA can be best considered. We will then suggest evaluative criteria by which merit pay increases as well as tenure and promotion decisions can be made fairly and thoughtfully in terms of the quality and the quantity of intellectual work achieved by the WPA. We will then close by offering several brief case studies which will illustrate how this rubric might work within a variety of institutional settings.

## The Five Categories

Although the work of writing program administration, like that of any other administrative figure on campus, is subject to a variety of different interpretations, we would propose that much of it can be understood as falling within one of five categories. The five categories that we propose are:

- Program Creation
- Curricular Design
- Faculty Development
- Textual Production
- Program Assessment and Evaluation

### Program Creation

One of the primary scholarly accomplishments of WPAs is the creation of a writing program. By creation, we mean those specific activities that reconceive the philosophy, goals, purposes, and institutional definition of the specific writing program. Program creation is not something that every WPA does or should do; if the WPA inherits a well-designed program that is generally viewed positively by students, faculty, and campus administrators, then it is likely that the program will be maintained. Even in such cases, however, a WPA engaged in the intellectual work of writing program administration can add, modify, or otherwise develop a significant new emphasis or supplementary support system. For example, a WPA might create a Writing Center to support and enhance undergraduate instruction; or the WPA might revise the emphasis of second-semester composition by altering the programmatic goals from a traditional research paper to shorter essays emphasizing academic discourse or cultural studies.

Our point here is that program creation is a strong indication of intellectual work, since successful programs are grounded in significant disciplinary knowledge, a national perspective that takes into account the successes and failures of other composition programs, and a combined practical and theoretical

understanding of learning theory, the composing process, the philosophy of composition, rhetorical theory, etc. An obvious corollary is that writing programs that fail, other than when attacked on the basis of budget and ideology, often do so because they lack this scholarly foundation.

## Curricular Design

Although closely related to program creation, curricular design is a somewhat differentiated use of scholarly knowledge but is still strongly representative of intellectual work. Indeed, although we separate the two of them here for the sake of elaboration, they greatly overlap. Curricular design is the overall articulation of the administrative unit; the establishment of a programmatic architecture that structures and maintains the various components of the composition program being evaluated. Curricular design does not inevitably depend on or illustrate scholarly knowledge; in combination with program creation, however, it is strongly indicative of intellectual work.

Once a WPA has engaged in program creation by developing an innovative curricular emphasis for English 101, for example, the next step is to integrate that new course within the entire curriculum. That is likely to mean reconfiguring course requirements, altering curricular emphases, choosing new textbooks that more fully endorse the new vision, etc. Another example can be drawn from Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), a program that is often independent of any specific department but whose director must often be promoted and tenured within English. Program design for a WAC director might include the articulation of requirements and standards by which the program includes some courses and excludes others, the development of criteria for evaluating the success of specific courses, the creation of well-articulated expectations so that faculty across the disciplines include writing in their courses with some degree of commonality. Curricular design is not a purely technical matter; it requires an understanding of the conceptual, a grounding in composition history, theory, and pedagogy. This is inevitably the case since its chief goal is to lead the writing program toward a coherent and explicit philosophy.

## Faculty Development

Whether working with faculty, teaching assistants, lecturers, adjunct faculty, or undergraduate peer tutors, it is clear that no writing program can succeed unless its staff is well trained and generally in accord with the overall programmatic goals and methodologies. Thus one of a WPA's chief responsibilities is to maintain a strong staff development program. The chief responsibilities of this program are to: develop and implement training programs for new and experienced staff; communicate current pedagogical approaches and current research in rhetoric and composition; provide logistical, intellectual, and financial support for staff activities in course design, pedagogical development, and research; maintain an atmosphere of openness and support for the development

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and sharing of effective teaching ideas and curricular emphases; maintain open lines of communication among administrators, support staff, and faculty; etc.

Although it is often overlooked, faculty and staff development depends primarily on one factor: the degree to which those being administered value and respect the WPA. Staff development cannot be accomplished by fiat. Instructors cannot simply be ordered and coerced, no matter how subordinate their position within the university. Thus faculty development, when it truly accomplishes its purpose of improving teaching and maintaining the highest classroom standards, is one of the most salient examples of intellectual work carried out within an administrative sphere. To be an effective administrative leader, a WPA must be able to incorporate current research and theory into the training and must demonstrate that knowledge through both word and deed.

## Textual Production

By this category, we mean the production of written materials in addition to the usual categories of university press books, articles in refereed journals, conference papers, etc. These genres represent established indices of scholarly knowledge and would be evaluated the same as those by any other departmental faculty. WPAs, however, author a variety of other scholarly texts that generally do not receive adequate recognition.

One clear example would be a textbook. One of the primary ways that compositionists demonstrate their scholarly knowledge is by authoring textbooks. Clearly not every text offers evidence of intellectual work; a grammar workbook that asks students to fill in the blanks or a reading anthology that is highly derivative and lacking in substantive pedagogical apparatus may not meet national and departmental definitions of intellectual work. Many textbooks, however, represent significant advances in instruction, both locally and nationally, and are therefore expressions of scholarly expertise.

Numerous other texts must also be considered as part of the WPA's resume of scholarly production. These include: innovative course syllabi which articulate the WPA's curricular design; local, state, and national funding proposals for the enhancement of instruction; statements of teaching philosophy for the composition curriculum; original materials for instructional workshops; evaluations of teaching that explicitly articulate and promote overall programmatic goals; resource materials for the training of staff as well as for the use of students in classrooms, writing centers, and other programs; etc. Clearly boundaries must be set; not every memo, descriptive comment, or teaching evaluation embodies the concept of intellectual work that we are describing here. What we are stating is that WPAs engaged in the intellectual work of administration concretize their knowledge through the authorship of a body of textual materials that too often are entirely ignored.

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## Program Assessment and Evaluation

Accountability is one of the over-riding concepts in higher education generally, and in writing program administration specifically. No single method or paradigm exists that is appropriate for all composition programs; on the contrary, each WPA must develop site-specific measures for the assessment and evaluation of the goals, pedagogy, and overall effectiveness of the composition program. In a composition program, that assessment may take the form of portfolios; in that case, the scholarly expertise of the WPA takes the form of designing the portfolios, creating a rigorous and meaningful assessment procedures by which the portfolios can be evaluated, etc. In a WAC program, the WPA would likely need to develop assessment measures in order to demonstrate that writing-enhanced classes are indeed consolidating the knowledge of majors across campus and producing undergraduate students that have achieved a genuine measure of compositional ability.

In order to achieve meaningful assessment (by which we mean overall determination of programmatic effectiveness) and meaningful evaluation (that is, specific determination of students and instructors), WPAs must bring to bear scholarly knowledge concerning holistic scoring, primary trait scoring, descriptive analysis, scoring rubrics, and other information that spans various disciplines. This knowledge and its application are essential if the program is to demonstrate its value and be assured of continuing funding.

### Evaluative Criteria

The work of a WPA is intellectual work when it either produces new knowledge or enacts professional (disciplinary) knowledge and expertise. A particular activity should be considered intellectual work when it meets one or more of these criteria:

1. It generates new knowledge based on research, theory, and sound pedagogical practice;
2. It requires disciplinary knowledge available only to an expert trained in or conversant with a particular field;
3. It requires highly developed analytical or problem solving skills derived from specific expertise, training, or research derived from scholarly knowledge;
4. It generates or implements knowledge in ways that can be recognized and evaluated by peers (e.g., publication, internal and outside evaluation, participant responses), and is recognized as the contribution of the individual's insight, research, and disciplinary knowledge.

Because WPAs work in a wide variety of institutional settings, from two-year and private four-year colleges to law programs, WAC programs, and large state universities with an array of doctoral offerings, it is impossible to establish a fixed set of criteria by which their work can be evaluated. What we can offer,

however, are some general guidelines and suggestions, but we emphasize that they must be carefully defined in terms of institutional context. The criteria we suggest are as follows:

*Innovation.* The WPA creates one or more new programs, curricular emphases, assessment measures, etc.

*Improvement/Refinement.* The WPA makes changes and alterations that distinctly and concretely lead to better teaching, sounder classroom practices, etc.

*Dissemination.* The WPA, through workshops, colloquia, staff meetings, and other forums is able to communicate curricular goals, methodologies, and overall programmatic philosophy in such a way as to lead to positive and productive results for students, instructors, and school.

*Empirical Results.* The WPA is able to present concrete evidence of accomplishments; that evidence may take the form of pre- and post-evaluative measures, written testimonials from students and staff, teaching evaluations, etc.

*Peer Evaluation.* The WPA is considered to have performed significant programmatic work as evaluated by his or her peers. The peer review model for scholarship is so well established that it acts as a paradigm for the evaluation of academic effort. Its potential for the evaluation of teaching and service has yet to be reached, however. The Council of Writing Program Administrators encourages the use of peer review in evaluating the intellectual work of WPAs. This review will likely require the WPA to create a portfolio of work that reflects her or his scholarly and intellectual accomplishments as an administrator; this portfolio would then be reviewed by outside evaluators selected by the department in consultation with the candidate to be reviewed.

The Council of Writing Program Administrators is convinced that WPAs can be evaluated on the basis of their administrative work and the degree to which that work meets or exceeds the criteria as explained above. To illustrate how this might work, we offer three different case studies. By providing clear categories to organize the work of the WPA and by providing meaningful criteria by which to review that work, we believe we can offer a framework that organizes the work and accomplishments of an individual devoted to writing program administration. This framework parallels the treatment given to other currently more privileged areas of academic effort, especially research with its sub-categories of books, articles, essays, etc. Additionally, the framework can act as a heuristic for WPAs, both as a way of recognizing what they have done and as a way of establishing new goals and directives.

[The last section of the proposed document will consist of illustrative case studies:

Case Study One: A WPA in a doctoral program (to follow)

Case Study Two: A WPA in a two-year college (to follow)

Case Study Three: A WPA in a four-year college (to follow)]