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# Who's the Boss?: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Collaborative Administration for Untenured WPAs

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When you are offered a position of power, there are many ways you can take it up—ways of being and acting that we must learn to choose, not just fall into, unthinking. Leadership “style” expresses how you conceive yourself in relation to the system that authorizes your position (legitimated, subversive, reformist, conflicted, co-opted...?) and how you envision your responsibilities to and relationships with the people whose work and energies you direct, as distinct from the people, entities, and purposes this work serves. (Phelps 292)

The growing body of scholarship on writing program administration leadership styles offers assistance to those who are searching for productive models and tactics for organizing their work. While this scholarship offers useful advice and strategies, it often fails to account for the ways in which a WPA's age, gender, race, rank, status, reputation, and the administrative and professional culture already present in an academic department contribute to the success or failure of a given leadership style. In this essay, I examine the ways in which the scholarship on leadership styles and administrative authority addresses the unusual and often perilous position of the untenured WPA. I argue that what we need when we discuss leadership styles is not a list of blanket directives about power, authority, and administrative structures, but a series of local narratives and case studies that show us how writing program administrators negotiate viable models of administrative leadership.<sup>1</sup>

Using the scholarship on administrative leadership styles as a critical juncture for discussion, I analyze the writing program co-directorship my former colleague Paul Heilker and I implemented at a large state university between 1993-96. By offering a critical analysis of my experiences with collaborative administration, I join the ranks of scholars who call for collaborative administrative structures (Cambridge and McClelland; Dickson; Gunner; Howard; Phelps); however, my goal is not to extol the theoretical virtues of such arrangements. My goal is to represent the potential for partnership and sharing of power that resides in collaborative administrative structures while simultaneously portraying the difficulties untenured WPAs may face as they attempt to implement such structures. I begin with an analysis of the scholarship on administrative leadership styles, describe the co-directorship model my colleague and I developed at a Southern public university, and conclude by reflecting on the possibilities and

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problems such a structure may provide and the need for future scholarship on this issue.

## Leadership as Might and Right or as Collaborative Action

One of the chief ways to differentiate the scholarship on administrative leadership styles is to study where its theorists locate the power, authority, and responsibility for writing program leadership. In whom is the authority for the writing program invested? Is the WPA position conceived of as a directorship through which an authoritative individual exercises or wields power *over* others in a hierarchical structure? Or is the leadership of the program shared by an individual or a group who has power *with* others to make decisions about writing program policy? Given these questions, the scholarship on leadership styles and administrative authority might be productively understood as having two dominant strands: the scholarship of might and right and the scholarship of collaborative action.

In the scholarship on might and right, the WPA's power and authority emerges from his or her position as a powerful director with tenure in a hierarchical administrative framework that can be likened to the Great Chain of Being (with the University President at the top and a descending scale of Vice Presidents, Deans, Department Chairs, and internal department administrators). In other words, a leadership style based on might and right does not question traditional lines of administrative authority; rather, it advises WPAs about how to succeed within conventional administrative structures. A classic text of WPA authority as might and right is Edward M. White's "Use It or Lose It: Power and the WPA," a piece that reads like the campaign diary of a sage and seasoned general. White admonishes WPAs to "recognize the fact that all administration deals in power; power games demand aggressive players; assert that you have power (even if you don't) and you can often wield it" (3).

Conversely, a leadership style based on collaborative action constructs administrative power as a capillary, not individualistic, practice (see Cambridge and McClelland; Dickson; Gunner; Howard; Miller; Phelps). According to the collaborative model, administrative power circulates among and between administrators, teaching assistants, and instructors. A collaborative administrative model might be organized as a modified single directorship or coordinatorship where the writing program leader coordinates, consults, and collaborates extensively with various writing program constituencies; as a co-directorship or a triumvirate; or as a committee or administrative cabinet composed of elected or appointed members. Such a rethinking of the single directorship model, contend Barbara Cambridge and Ben McClelland, is "particularly needed for WPA positions, many of which are readily described as dysfunctional for those who hold them" (156).

By separating the scholarship on leadership styles into two strands, I do not mean to create a neat binary between the two or to elevate one over the other. Most WPAs employ a mixture of leadership styles to fit a given economic, political, institutional, and historical context. What, however, are the particular

challenges faced by untenured WPAs who try to implement such leadership styles? A closer look at the two administrative styles will reveal the challenges each poses to untenured WPAs.

### Administrative Authority as Might and Right: Use it and You Might Lose It—That is, Your Job

Although White claims that *any* WPA can apply his power principles—wielding power successfully by strategizing against writing program “enemies” and deploying “three basic weapons of bureaucracy”: “good arguments, good data, and good allies, and caution mixed with cunning” (7)—he acknowledges that untenured faculty are in a relatively weak position as leaders since they have “large, unmanageable responsibilities but very little authority (read Power)” (8). He counsels untenured faculty to “avoid becoming WPAs until their positions become more secure” (8). Yet White’s exhortation to avoid administrative responsibilities seems unrealistic given the large number of advertised positions for Assistant Professors who will also serve as WPAs (see Janangelo; Pemberton; Thomas). While I agree in principle that placing new Assistant Professors into administrative positions is problematic and that this practice should be discouraged, many of us entering the field would be unemployed or would remain teaching assistants forever if we did not accept such positions. Instead of being warned repeatedly about our powerlessness and exploitation (something we live with and work against on a daily basis), those of us who are untenured WPAs need strategies and tactics for managing our often untenable positions. Moreover, we need leadership models that address our competing responsibilities and troubled political status, since few of us who are untenured WPAs can lay claim to White’s bold leadership style and tough-talking trench warfare tactics. His “use it or lose it” leadership style reinforces what Christine Hult calls the “Dictatorship model,” in which a single and often “charismatic leader” leads the program (45)—a situation that may be destructive rather than productive for the untenured faculty member who is juggling multiple and often competing roles and responsibilities. In addition, a single directorship model is at odds with the democratic principles of collaboration and shared authority inherent in liberatory composition pedagogy (Gunner 9).

White’s theory of power, which is predicated on masculinist metaphors of aggression and ritualized displays of might, also poses an interesting dilemma for untenured women WPAs. I cite my own WPA experience as a case in point. As a twenty-nine-year-old woman faculty member hired into a hierarchical and patriarchal Southern English department with a history of not tenuring its untenured WPAs, I would have been ill-advised to employ an agonistic “use or it lose it” approach. Instead, a more successful strategy for me was to spend my first year on the job “researching” the writing program, learning as much as I could about the program’s complex history and curricular goals. I began my research by listening to and sorting through the competing narratives of the writing program offered by its teachers, former administrators, and the Department Chair. I also studied program documents and correspondence and began to

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formulate a viable administrative leadership style and structure tailored to meet the specific demands of the immediate context. If I had asserted a model of leadership without first understanding the program's history and curricular goals, I would have jeopardized my job as well as my credibility as a leader. Thus, White's model, although it contains some useful advice, seems ineffective for those who do not have the benefit of his previous leadership experience, national reputation, publication record, and authoritative presence.

A more qualified account of administrative authority as might and right is offered by Gary Olson and Joseph Moxley. Although they endorse a single directorship model similar to White's, they base their decision less on might and more on right. It is the WPA's *professional right* to claim authority; after all, the WPA is the department's trained specialist and therefore should "be responsible for major decisions concerning the program" (56). But Olson and Moxley's "autonomous" authority model, like White's model, places the untenured WPA in a double bind. On the one hand, they argue that new WPAs need direct and full administrative authority to carry out programmatic projects. On the other hand, they warn that untenured WPAs should not be placed in the "no-win" situation of supervising senior colleagues who will judge them at tenure time, nor should they be in the position where they must make "unpopular albeit programmatically and pedagogically sound decisions when professional survival is at stake" (57). Their solution to this authority dilemma is for WPAs to be granted tenure or for senior compositionists to step in and administer writing programs. This is a noteworthy ideal and one I heartily endorse, but, again, untenured WPAs are left with few concrete suggestions about how to manage their work loads and competing responsibilities.

My chief problem with the models offered by White and Olson and Moxley is that they construct untenured WPAs as disempowered subjects, not as active agents. Their theories of administrative leadership, while perspicacious in many respects, do not help untenured WPAs find a viable or ethical model of administrative leadership. Moreover, such theories presume that the most effective way to administer a writing program is through a single directorship model, a structure that may prove too burdensome for an untenured WPA who must meet traditional tenure criteria. Because of their heavy administrative duties in addition to teaching, research, and service responsibilities, untenured WPAs may be compelled to operate out of a "dialogic" model of authority based on "dialogue, connectedness, and contextual rules" (Mortenson and Kirsch 557) rather than an "autonomous" model of authority. Enter the scholarship on writing program leadership as collaborative action.

## Writing Program Administration as Collaborative Action

Among, although not necessarily limited to, the leading advocates of collaborative leadership styles are a number of feminists who argue that such styles share some of the common tenets of feminist theory and practice: collaboration, shared power and authority, and the creation of non-hierarchical or, at least, less hierarchical programmatic structures. Moreover, the feminist scholarship

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on collaborative administration represents a growing sensitivity to the interrelationship between gender, power, and authority. By pointing out the synergies between collaborative administration and feminist practice, I am not making the essentialist claim that collaborative approaches to writing program administration are limited to women WPAs or self-professed feminists or that the theories espoused by these writers offer the definitive word on feminist practices. An emerging strand of feminist scholarship on collaborative administration is only one of the multiple strands of emerging scholarship on collaborative leadership styles, but an important one, nevertheless.

A common element in the scholarship on collaborative administration—feminist or otherwise—is a reconception of the single directorship model. For example, Marcia Dickson proposes a feminist model of administration where the concept of administrative authority is transformed from “control to collaboration”; the “administrator becomes one of a group of instructors (not the leader of a group of instructors)” (148). Dickson’s theory of ideal administrative practice is premised on the idea that writing faculty (whether they are non-tenure-track faculty or teaching assistants, or tenured faculty) will be willing to work together to form and enact program policy and make curricular decisions. This is an admirable egalitarian assumption, but a writing program—like any other institutional structure—is not a level playing field where all faculty members have equal time, energy, expertise, or the material incentive to participate fully in shared leadership. Thus the key issue is not should writing faculty participate in collaboratively administering a writing program, but *how* can such a collaboration be structured equitably? In what ways will collaborative structures possibly overextend and exploit already overburdened teaching assistants and non-tenure-track faculty? In what ways will non-tenure-track faculty members be compensated for their administrative work? Moreover, how will tenure-track writing faculty be evaluated and rewarded for their roles as collaborative administrators? By dismantling the traditional administrative hierarchy and dispersing authority, is the writing program administrator—especially if untenured—at a disadvantage in the tenure or promotion process if he or she gives up the traditional authority role?

I ask these questions not to disqualify the importance of collaborative administration but to interrogate the material conditions of its practice. Of course, many will argue that the only way to transform the faculty reward system is to redefine intellectual work and to diffuse hierarchical administrative practices, and I support efforts to do so. Implementing a collaborative model of administration, however, is fraught with conflicts, contradictions, and costs that anyone experimenting with collaborative structures should be aware of, as my own experiences with collaborative administration will demonstrate. As Phelps points out, a theory of writing program administration based on “culturally ‘feminine’ principles like cooperation, dialogue, nonhierarchical structures and ‘caring’” practiced in a hierarchical environment often fails to “provide a vision realistic enough to guide us [WPAs] through the minefield of ambiguities, complexities, and pain entailed in wielding power responsibly” (293).

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My analysis of the efficacy of these two leadership styles—might and right and collaborative action—calls attention to the key contradictions and problems that are likely to arise when untenured WPAs try to implement them. My critique, however, is not meant to suggest that there are no viable leadership styles for untenured WPAs and that they should resign from their posts or avoid them altogether. Some might argue that a leadership style that occupies a middle ground between the “might and right” and “collaborative” approaches would work best. Hildy Miller has referred to a mixed leadership style (she identifies the two styles as masculinist or feminist in contrast to my categories of might and right and collaborative action) as a “bi-epistemological stance” or “postmasculinist” administrative style whereby the WPA adjusts his or her persona and authority relations to fit the demands of a given rhetorical situation (58). In other words, Miller advocates that WPAs construct themselves as postmodern subjects who are able to adapt to conflicting, often schizophrenic roles, as the need may be. Miller’s “bi-epistemological” leadership style, however, does not address the issue of workload and the untenured status of so many new WPAs. Therefore an adjustment in leadership style may be insufficient unless it is accompanied by a material reconfiguration and possible redistribution of the position itself. As Miller puts it, “. . . just as feminist directors must alternate feminist and masculinist personas to cope with double ideologies, we also need to design collaborative administrative structures that can be translated hierarchically” (56). What is it like, then, to implement a “bi-epistemological stance” and a collaborative administrative structure “that can be translated hierarchically” (56)? What follows is a narrative of one writing program’s attempt to create a co-directorship model based on the principles of collaborative leadership. This account, however, is not meant to serve as a success story, but as a critical analysis of both the possibilities and pitfalls of collaborative administration for untenured WPAs.

### Co-Directing Writing Programs: A Critical Case-Study

My experiences with collaborative administration began in 1992-93 when I applied for and eventually accepted a tenure-track position in the English department at a Southern public university. In 1992-93, as is still the case today, over half of the Rhetoric and Composition positions listed in the MLA Job List included administrative responsibilities. Assistant professors were wanted to direct Writing Programs, Writing Centers, Writing Across the Curriculum Programs, National Writing Project Sites, sometimes all four at once. In my job interviews and campus visits, I quickly discovered that many English departments were not looking for an assistant professor; they were looking for a “miracle worker,” a composition evangelist who would single-handedly and miraculously transform the writing curriculum, improve instruction, start programmatic initiatives, and provide departmental and possibly university-wide leadership in writing (Pemberton 158). The question I faced repeatedly during my interview process was not “Would I become a writing program administrator?,” but “*How soon* would I become a writing program administrator?”

The job I was eventually offered, however, promised to exempt me from administrative duties during my first four years in the position. At the Southern

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public university where I was hired, I was to serve as one of two composition faculty members in a large English department (40 tenure-track faculty, 27 teaching assistants, and approximately 50 part-time and non-tenure-track instructors) with a new cultural-studies-based writing curriculum serving approximately 4,000 students. The only other compositionist on the faculty was coming up for review in a year, and I was assured that she would be granted tenure and would direct the writing program, which was currently administered by a Full Professor in literary theory who planned to step down in a year.

Because I would be spared administrative responsibilities until later in my career, I felt fortunate to be offered the position; however, the ground shifted under my feet shortly after I signed my contract. My colleague in composition, a single parent, suddenly accepted a job at another university where she would be closer to her extended family. Suddenly, I was the only composition faculty member—the so-called senior, but untenured compositionist—at the ripe old age of twenty-nine. Overnight, my dream job turned into the WPA position my graduate school mentors had warned me not to accept.

I became the WPA-in-training the minute I arrived on campus in August of 1993, two scant weeks after I defended my dissertation. Fortunately, I was not unprepared for the duties that lay before me. Like many new Ph.D.s entering the job market, I had conscientiously followed the advice found in the literature on writing program administration (see Pemberton; Thomas). While in graduate school, I became an assistant WPA in a large writing program. I helped orient, mentor, and evaluate new teaching assistants and adjunct faculty; I ran monthly staff meetings and administered a large scale portfolio program. I was well-versed in the scholarship on writing program administration and took a graduate course on assessment theory. My preparatory efforts obviously paid off, perhaps too well. As one of my new colleagues wryly remarked, “You seem unusually qualified to take on an overwhelming number of administrative tasks.”

My goal, however, was not to allow those “unusual qualifications” to become my downfall. I spent my first year on the job teaching graduate courses, writing a book prospectus, and strategizing about how I would administer the writing program without becoming like the beleaguered faculty members described in Olson and Moxley’s survey (53). My first strategy was to begin immediately (even before I arrived on campus in August) lobbying the Department Chair to mount a national search for another tenure-line person in composition to replace my former colleague. The second strategy, one I mentioned earlier, was to make myself into a “researcher” of the program by studying the program’s history, structure, and lines of power and authority. What I learned was rather disheartening and mythically familiar: no one in composition had been granted tenure in the English Department; the structure of the WPA position I was to occupy resembled the classic configuration described in Olson and Moxley’s article: many responsibilities, little power, and too heavy a workload for an untenured professor who must meet traditional tenure requirements (a single authored book and six refereed articles) at a research university.

Fortunately, however, the curricular structures in the department were in

flux, which created an opening for change. A review of the Writing Program by the WPA Consultant-Evaluator Service had sparked a two-year curricular revision and the formulation and installation of the new cultural-studies-based writing curriculum. In consultation with the Department Head and with senior WPAs from other institutions, I began to consider alternative administrative structures that might allow for a sharing of writing program leadership duties. Put into place a number of years ago were three administrative positions: the position of Assistant Director, a post capably occupied by a non-tenured writing instructor who coordinated the department's placement program and other matters; a Writing Center Directorship, also occupied by a non-tenure-track instructor; and a teaching assistant mentoring program and practicum staffed by six faculty members (mostly non-tenure-track instructors and an occasional full-time faculty member). In this sense, the administrative structure resembled the "flattened hierarchy" Gunner describes. To this existing structure, which was already quite successful, we added a new component: a co-directorship, which replaced the single directorship model that had created a revolving door for my untenured predecessors. The co-directorship was to be occupied by me and by our newly hired compositionist, Paul Heilker. Before joining our co-administrative team, he had spent two years as an Assistant Professor at a private urban university where he had distinguished himself by establishing a strong publication and teaching record.<sup>2</sup>

In the first month of the co-directorship—in between writing memos, dealing with first-week crises, and training new teaching assistants—Paul and I wrote a clear job description that outlined the distribution of our duties and a rotation schedule. Although we were to share our administrative responsibilities, we did so through a system of rotation that allowed us to alternate semesters in which we carried the weight of the program. While one of us served as the active co-director, the other wrote, taught, and carried a lighter meeting schedule. We also established better and more frequent communication between all members of the administrative team. We held monthly meetings with our staff of six teaching assistant advisors and established a listserv for weekly e-mail discussions. We worked closely with our departmental Composition Committee to author administrative reports, conduct program assessments, select new textbooks, and update the program's writing guide.

In addition, we focused the majority of our administrative efforts on professional and curricular development. As co-administrators, we initiated a variety of inclusive intellectual activities designed to meet the needs of different groups of faculty: monthly faculty development workshops where a panel of instructors presented assessment methods, new assignments, or classroom activities; syllabus groups for TAs, instructors, and professors that met to discuss the formation and implementation of the new curriculum; a composition theory and pedagogy reading group for all writing faculty that met monthly to discuss a core set of readings; and a Speaker Series (for which we received both internal and external funding) that brought in nationally recognized composition scholars to speak on topics relevant to the new curriculum, such as portfolios, the role of reflection, and the cultural studies approach to writing instruction. Our

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intellectual agenda was met with a degree of enthusiasm and support from some of the faculty and departmental administrators. It would be disingenuous, however, to represent the co-directorship model as an unqualified success; there were many conflicts that deserve mention.

## Conflicts and Contradictions in Collaborative Administration

Even with the co-administrative model in place, we often felt overwhelmed by political pressures, criticism of the new curriculum, competing responsibilities, and the pressure to “publish or perish.” While such ever-present conflicts do not faze seasoned WPAs, they were new and troublesome to us, nonetheless. In addition, we were daily confronted with the historical legacy of devaluation of composition courses and the political resentments left over from previous administrations. Often we felt the “ghosts of administrations past” in our conversations with colleagues who warned us about making the same mistakes as our predecessors. As Paul wrote in his account of his first and second years as a new WPA: “I find myself performing as a new, bit player in long-running soap operas, my fortunes tossed about by previous plotlines which I didn’t help write, didn’t act in, and don’t know” (27).

Because we had inherited a complex and controversial curriculum that we had not designed, we found ourselves frequently bucking the “aftershocks” of post-curricular change. Many of the senior non-tenure-track instructors had built up grievances against the former administration and felt that the curricular change process had been thrust upon them despite the former administration’s attempts to include them in the deliberations. Thus, some did not believe in the “new curriculum” and longed to go back to the “old one,” although it had been incoherent and often unsuccessful. Others supported the new curriculum but had little time or material incentive to attend our monthly faculty development workshops, reading groups, or lecture series. Without a system of internal promotion or merit-tier pay system and with teaching loads of four writing classes per semester, many of the non-tenure-track instructors understandably felt that they could not “afford” the time to attend our workshops, a situation I was familiar with, having been a non-tenure-track faculty member myself. As a result, attendance at the faculty development workshops, reading groups, and lectures waxed and waned, sometimes ranging from six to twelve to twenty-five writing faculty members at any given event. We realized, as we implemented our professional development agenda, that the reward system for non-tenure-track faculty must be changed if we were to encourage and reward growth and professionalism, but we knew that this was not a battle we could fight until we established ourselves, gained allies, and learned more about the political obstacles before us. Meanwhile, we continued to grapple with our own material conditions. As is so often the case, our administrative release time was insufficient even with the co-directorship model in place. In the reorganization of our positions and with budget cuts coming down from state, the writing program administrative team lost release time in spite of our repeated arguments against such cuts. This loss of administrative release time made our jobs more labor-intensive despite our attempts to disperse our duties.

Around these common material conflicts, we also experienced dissimilar ones that were more individualized and institutionalized according to our different conceptions of administrative work, our different preparatory backgrounds, our different ways of coping with the pressures of the position, and our gender identities. Surprising in many ways, although in retrospect we should have anticipated this, were the ways in which gender factored into our different conceptions of our administrative roles and our interactions as co-directors. In many ways, we carried with us different and often gendered conceptions of what our roles were, and we were also constructed in gendered ways by those around us.

Paul's entrance into administration—and collaborative administration at that—came as a jolt. In "On Not Teaching; or, True Confessions of New Writing Program Administrator," he contrasts his experiences as a writing teacher with his experiences as a new writing program administrator:

I realize that as a teacher, I dwell amid the safe and the familiar: I know my courses, my goals, my audience, my techniques, and my roles intimately. As a new administrator, I lived in a threatening and unfamiliar landscape: I do not know what all my duties entail, nor what my objectives should be, nor what multiple, hidden, and overlapping audiences I am addressing, nor what skills I should bring to bear, nor what my place is (or places are) or should be. As a teacher, I work within self-contained ahistorical contexts. Decisions can be made neatly. But in my work as an administrator, every decision must be informed by and weighed against both local and general institutional histories about which I know not nearly enough. (27)

In addition, Paul, until months later, was not entirely convinced of the importance of his administrative work and often perceived it as "hole-plugging and disaster management as that of bouncing from one crisis to the next, putting out fires" (32), a stance he began to reconsider as he gained experience and knowledge of the program and became a more proactive as opposed to reactive administrator: "I have, furthermore, come to see the value in the work I do as an administrator, a value which has escaped me until recently. The new value I find is undoubtedly related to my moving from a reactive to a proactive stance" (32). Paul's transition from teacher to administrator, however, was difficult and often painful—a transition, undoubtedly, that many new WPAs experience.

My immediate transition into the administrative role was less conflicted, in some respects, although not in others. Since I had worked as part of an administrative team in graduate school, I felt more comfortable in the WPA role and knew that our work had an immediate impact on the curriculum and the writing faculty. What troubled me most about being an untenured WPA, however, was the insufficient release time, the pressure to publish while juggling heavy administrative responsibilities, and the ways in which I was singled out as the member of the co-directorship who was more "approachable" and "accessible" (see Olson and Moxley). When the department head or other administrators across campus needed a faculty member to serve on a writing-related

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committee, I was often the first to be approached. When there was a problem with the writing program, the Department Chair often came to me first. When an instructor felt upset about his or her teaching evaluations or when a teaching assistant had endured a bad class, I was often the first person they approached for advice and solace. Perceived as being more caring, understanding, and "available," I often found myself spending extra hours and sometimes days on my administrative work when I needed to be writing or preparing for my classes.

There are a number of probable explanations for why I was characterized as the "caretaker" in the co-directorship. For one, I had been employed at the university a year longer than Paul, and, perhaps, some faculty approached me because of my "seniority." Another explanation is that gender stereotyping played a role in the perception that I was more nurturing and approachable and that I participated in reinforcing that stereotype with my attentive, caretaking behaviors. Feminist educational theorists and sociologists (Aisenberg and Harrington; Bernard; Simeone) have argued that such gendered responses and role constructions often place academic women (especially untenured women) in the "double bind" of taking on disproportionate service and mentoring obligations when they most need to be engaged in developing their own scholarship and teaching. In her survey "Gender Differences in Writing Program Administration," Sally Barr-Ebest documents the ways in which sexism and socialization factor into women WPAs' professional lives. As one participant in her survey acknowledged, "It's not so much our lack of status as our female conditioning to be very service-oriented, placating, and caring. These qualities cause us to attract responsibility, not rewards" (66).

Due in part to our different backgrounds, work experiences, personalities, and gender-role socialization, Paul and I also fell into gendered interactions and communication styles in our administrative relationship. While I pushed for planning meetings and tended to postpone decisions until I had conferred with members of the administrative team or the department's Composition Committee, Paul preferred to act autonomously. While I would mull over decisions and get multiple opinions, Paul would quickly make decisions and dispatch correspondence—sometimes with problematic political consequences. As a teacher used to acting in an autonomous and highly individualized paradigm of instruction, he appeared to feel overwhelmed and often oppressed by the need to collaborate and to tie his fortunes to an administrative team and a program instead of a classroom. Of these difficulties, he wrote: "As a new administrator, I'm having to learn how to collaborate, how to negotiate, how to be inclusive and deliberative in decision-making processes, how to be more cautious and slower to act" (24). Gradually, however, we began to work together to address these gendered constructions and conflicts. Paul became more comfortable with collaborative decision-making: "I thus find it far easier these days to be more inclusive in decision-making and slower to act, two tasks that clearly vexed me as a new administrator" (33). Conversely, I began to understand the ways in which I had fallen into the role of the administrative "caretaker" who was

accessible and responsive to others' needs (a problematic role both male and female WPAs face, as Olson and Moxley point out). I began to say "no" to extra service obligations and began to be more successful at delegating tasks and sharing the workload. However, I continued to struggle with the balance between my administrative and scholarly work. For over two years, I held a book contract for my dissertation and was engaged in revising it for publication, but I was unable to complete it despite my efforts to delegate extra administrative responsibilities and to spend days at home with my writing. The crush of everyday administrative responsibilities depleted my energy and cut too deeply into my time for sustained scholarly work. The continuing war between the time I spent on administration and the time I spent on my scholarship led me to begin to question whether or not I would produce enough scholarship to meet the department's tenure requirements.

Meanwhile, Paul and I were also concerned about the future of the writing program and the English Department, given repeated budget cuts and a plan hatched by the Dean of Arts and Sciences in 1996 to create a joint master's degree program in English and Communication Studies Sciences and to create a freshman writing course with a public speaking element. Our Department Chair asked us to "explore" with senior faculty in the Communication Department a plan to "pilot" such a course. Not surprisingly, we did not have the authority or institutional clout necessary to effectively negotiate a successful "pilot project" with the senior Communication Studies faculty members (nor did we truly believe the Dean's plan was intellectually viable)—another situation which brought home to us, once again, our lessened authority role both inside and outside the department.

This situation, coupled with the earlier conflicts I experienced, encouraged me to seek the "safety valve" option frequently discussed in the literature on WPA work. I began to search for another job that would not involve administrative responsibilities until after tenure. Eventually I was offered a job at a university where I would not be required to be a pre-tenure WPA. After much soul-searching, I decided to take the position, although I knew I would be giving up the program structure and mentoring relations Paul and I had painstakingly built. What guided this decision was not a dislike of my colleagues or the co-directorship, but a sense that, despite our efforts to redistribute the administrative workload via the co-directorship, I was losing the battle to complete my book—a fact that would jeopardize my ability to earn tenure and promotion at the university where I was employed. It was with some reluctance that I left the co-directorship, for it was an alliance forged with great effort and under great duress. Paul stayed on to direct the program alone.

Some might see my resignation and move to another position as the ultimate power play, as a cop-out, or as a sign that the co-directorship had failed. Some might argue that I should not have accepted the job in the first place. Such interpretations are limited. The co-directorship, in many ways, was a success and a transformative experience. Both Paul and I benefited from our collaboration and were able to accomplish more than a single director could have done; we

learned a great deal from each other and gained insight and administrative and intellectual skills. We also mentored a number of teaching assistants and instructors who have gone on to pursue successful careers both inside and outside of academe. Part of the difficulty in telling this story, then, lies in interpreting its significance. What was gained? What was lost? How does one make meaning out of the fragmented and conflicted circumstances that so often plague untenured WPAs?

## Conclusion

In "How to Tell the Story of Stopping: The Complexities of Narrating a WPA's Experience," Wendy Bishop and Gay Lynn Crossley foreground the narrative difficulties of recounting Bishop's resignation from her WPA post. One reviewer saw in an earlier draft of the essay a trail of missed opportunities and naiveté, while another complained that Bishop and Crossley were telling yet another WPA "victim narrative" (73-74). Like Bishop and Crossley, I do not tell this story to portray myself as the untenured female WPA whom senior WPAs should pity or label "naive," nor do I wish to portray myself as the self-aggrandizing heroine who overcame the odds by fleeing my first job in a fit of pique; rather I relate my experiences and Paul's experiences with collaborative administration to point out the ways in which collaborative administrative structures do not necessarily circumvent problems of authority, gender, and workload. I must admit, though, this is not the essay I planned to write when I began co-directing the program. That essay, as I had originally envisioned it, was a straightforward argument advocating co-administration as a viable strategy for untenured WPAs. As often happens, the realities of implementing a collaborative theory of administrative leadership proved to be more complex and multilayered; thus my experience does not conform to the familiar rhetorical form of the "success narrative." Nevertheless, I believe there are important insights to be drawn from the experiences Paul and I had with co-administration.

The first is that it is worth experimenting with new leadership styles such as co-administration; however, those who set out on this path (especially untenured WPAs) need to be attentive to the ways in which the WPA's identity politics, status, reputation, and the departmental and university context contribute to the success of the collaborative structures. The scholarship on collaborative writing program administration, however, has, for the most part, remained strangely silent about the tensions and conflicts that accompany collaborative leadership efforts, often painting collaborative administration as a utopian or progressive, non-hierarchical practice.<sup>3</sup> Instead of extolling the virtues of collaborative administration, I urge those experimenting with it to write realistic case studies that address the conflicts as well as the possibilities inherent in collaborative leadership.

Finally, I do not have the space here to adequately address the arguments that have been made in the "The Portland Resolution" (Hult et al) and elsewhere that WPAs should be hired with tenure or that administrative work should count as a form of scholarship. Such ethical claims, unless they can be enforced or

strongly encouraged through specific practices, do little at present to help untenured WPAs who are hired into departments with traditional tenure criteria. For this reason, I wish to end this essay with a call for further scholarship on the problematics of establishing viable models of leadership for writing program administrators—especially untenured ones. Those of us who subscribe to the WPA listserv and who regularly attend the CCCC and WPA Conferences (including the workshops at both conferences expressly designed for new WPAs) benefit greatly from the mentorship of our experienced WPA colleagues. It is my hope, however, that such informal mentoring relationships can be duplicated in a more formal way via the scholarship on writing program leadership styles and collaborative administration. In particular, untenured faculty like myself need to hear from WPAs who have successfully weathered the tenure process while holding down administrative appointments. The questions such scholarship might address are: How did the WPA arrive at a viable model of administrative leadership and administrative authority? How did he or she negotiate the main challenges of the administrative appointment? How did the WPA pick winnable battles, practice strategic planning, handle failure and defeat, and learn from trial and error? How did he or she cope with the competing claims of administrative work, research, and teaching? How did the WPA handle mundane matters such as time management, delegating authority, and establishing and holding to a research schedule in the midst of an administrative appointment? While further scholarship cannot solve the problems I name in this essay—overwork, powerlessness, inexperience, and sexism—it can, perhaps, help us envision new strategies for dealing with those chronic problems.

## Notes

1. I wish to thank Charles Schuster and Rebecca Greenberg Taylor for reading and responding to earlier drafts of this essay. Also, I would like to thank WPA reviewers Christopher Brunham, Rebecca Howard, WPA Editor Douglas Hesse, and Guest Editor Jeanne Gunner for their comments and suggestions.
2. I thank Paul Heilker for reading and commenting on the draft of this essay and for allowing me to tell our story. Throughout my account, I have endeavored to let Paul speak for himself by citing his article "On Not Teaching; or, Confessions of a New Writing Program Administrator."
3. An exception to this trend is Louise Phelp's "Becoming a Warrior: Lessons of the Feminist Workplace" where she describes the complexities of initiating a collaborative leadership model in the Syracuse University Writing Program.

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