

Within the growing discourse of writing program administration, the work of Writing Program Administrators at small colleges and universities goes under-reported and generally unaddressed. Disciplinary efforts to piece together who and what the WPA is—ranging from recent statements of the WPA's intellectual work to more general descriptions of the health and wealth of the collective WPA enterprise—continually omit the material conditions of small-school WPAs, the nature of composition programs at small institutions, and the small-school contribution to the growing WPA culture. This gradual process of collective erasure may have started as early as the turn of the century when the universal first-year composition course became a common feature at large institutions (see Brereton). Certainly the invisibility of small-school WPA work grew with the rise of large composition programs at these institutions, their flowering in the 1960s, and the growth of organizations such as College Composition and Communication, established to provide a forum to discuss the needs of big-university programs. What has become known as the "period of professionalization" of our field, which began shortly thereafter and has continued into the present, seems to have eclipsed almost entirely the small-school composition scene.<sup>1</sup> I want to claim here that this erasure has proven detrimental to small- and large-institution WPAs alike.

*WPA Work  
at the Small  
College  
or University:  
Re-Imagining  
Power and  
Making  
the Small  
School Visible*

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Not only have small-school WPAs been thus under-served, through this erasure, by the discourse on WPA work; large-university WPAs have also lost out, missing ways to enlarge their vision of their work and strengthen their role within their institutions.

This is not to say that differences between small-and large-school writing programs have gone unnoticed. Some of the writing-program surveys that began appearing in the 1980s found that the type and size of the institution in which a writing program is situated can affect that program's fundamental nature. Generally, these studies find that campus environment—more than professional standards, graduate preparation, or other such external factors—determines to a surprising degree the effectiveness and content of writing programs. For example, in their 1981 report, Stephen P. Witte et al. conclude that, while programs differ dramatically from institution to institution, they “are each designed to address primarily the local needs of the institution, the department, and the student body” (120). Following up on this observation, Carol Hartzog, in her 1986 study of writing programs at diverse institutions, says that “the forces closest to home seem to be the strongest,” with each program “being tailored to or resulting from its particular circumstances” (9, 14). Among local forces exerting such definitive pressure on programs, Hartzog cites “a tradition of liberal education” at some campuses and quotes writing directors who claim that the fact that their institutions are “small” or “committed to a humanistic education” (a feature of most small institutions) affects their programs in a major way (9). Edward M. White is even more comprehensive about the small/big difference. Reviewing studies earlier than his own, White reports that “campus size” is a factor “in determining what takes place in classrooms and who is doing the teaching,” and that there exists “a relationship between campus size and staffing patterns,” with “small colleges” tending to hire differently than large ones (“Developing” 19, 20). Citing at one point the findings of Stephen P. Witte and Lester Faigley's *Evaluating College Writing Programs*, White states that disparities even in faculty development opportunities “are in part related to the size of the institution” (23). Finally, Linda G. Polin and Edward M. White's findings on institutional goals and faculty retraining indicate that “the smaller the size of the staff” of a writing program, “the more readily they can be affected by composition program decisions” (25). Moreover, Polin and White find that, as staff-size increases, “the role of the writing program administrator changes” (25). Difference in size, then, corresponds to a panoply of

qualitative differences in a writing program and its administrator's material conditions. To the extent that small programs are most often found at correspondingly small institutions, these and other differences from the practices common at large universities are most pronounced at the small school.

It is therefore all the more puzzling that such differences from the usual pattern of large-school WPA work go generally unreported in the WPA literature that has blossomed over the last decade or so. Although small-school WPAs do represent a portion of those who ought to be served by that literature, as we shall see in at least one crucial area of discussion, the literature may actually provide a disservice to the WPA at the small institution.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps more importantly, failure to include and examine in the literature the story of small-school writing programs may inadvertently imply that these programs have not participated in the progress that the emerging narrative of WPA work chronicles. Whatever the reason, the omission renders incomplete that narrative and prevents the WPA discourse community from seeing the small-school minority in its midst.

Since only one example of this unconscious omission and inadvertent disservice can be examined in the limited space of this essay, I will focus here on the way that the dominance of large-school culture within the more recent WPA record has resulted in the over-valorizing of power as a tool for the WPA. I will argue that this over-valuation has led to inexact description of the concept of WPA power in the record and, as importantly, has overshadowed other political instruments available to the program administrator. As it turns out, power, accurately described or not, proves of limited use to the WPA at the small college or university, while those political instruments neglected in the WPA record prove to be the essential tools of the small-school WPA. So, to the degree that these instruments are rendered invisible by an over-emphasis on power, small-school WPA work is rendered, in this crucial area at least, invisible also. Perhaps worse, the small-school WPA feels written out of the record, the growth of which ought to strengthen her purpose and role, not diminish it. Absent more articulate discussion of other political instruments than power, the WPA record is made that much less applicable, and useful, to the small-school WPA.

This is only one, though a critical, example of the discursive neglect of the small-school WPA in our profession, so I am using it "merely" as a window onto the small-school WPA's political culture, which is different from the majority WPA culture in countless other ways as well. In other

words, my purpose here is not to summarize all differences between these cultures in such short space but to crack open this covered-over dissonance. My hope is that this opening will urge others to investigate more fully the world of small-school programs and their differentness from the large-school programs whose presence dominates the WPA record. Movement is already underway to investigate this “smaller” culture and its unique features. Along with colleagues at other small institutions, I have created a CCC Special Interest Group on composition in the small college/university, which held its first meeting at the 1999 Atlanta conference. I have also created a listserv <smallcomp@spu.edu> to encourage small-school compositionists to support one another and begin gaining a larger voice in the profession. My intention in doing these things is not to be divisive. In fact, it is just the opposite: I wish to enlarge the record to include small-school programs and their WPAs not just to benefit small-school WPAs but to help their counterparts at large institutions as well. In the specific case at hand here, I hope to show that recording the small-school WPA’s use of political tools other than power will enlarge the repertoire of instruments available to all WPAs for addressing their political scene. All WPAs stand to gain any time the current excellent record on WPA work expands to reflect the diversity of WPA work, since with this diversity comes a multiplicity of new options for doing our work well, regardless of our institution’s size.

### **Power as Theme in WPA “Advice” Literature**

A dominant concern in the WPA record is the political marginalization and general diminution in status of the writing program administrator within the structure of institutions and in the teaching profession generally. Prime expressions of this concern are contained in the “statements” over the last decade or so, ranging from the Wyoming and Portland Resolutions to the CCC’s “Principles and Standards,” and, more specific to the case here, the WPA’s own “Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Program Administrators.” Developing alongside these statements and, in many respects, elucidating them, a body of literature has grown up to advise the writing administrator on how to claim and use power to offset threats and dangers to her program. Perhaps this emphasis on power has resulted from the hostile institutional climate that has historically faced WPAs at most colleges and universities, large and small, and the quite understandable need for this literature to show WPAs how to get hold of the biggest, heaviest weapon they can, just so they can survive. Or perhaps it

results from the development, within composition as a field, of a more valued and fully explicated identity of writing program administrator. (For example, Christine Hult finds scholarship on “power and the WPA” to be a good gauge of the healthy growth of the WPA status on campus and within the profession at large [“Scholarship” 126].) Whatever the reason, this emphasis is not particularly helpful for the small-school WPA, given the cultural conditions under which she works. Power is not the primary instrument of her political success, and exertion of power in the small-school setting may often be counter-productive, leading to the erosion of the WPA’s effectiveness. The problem is exacerbated by the way the “advice literature” uses the term power to mean influence and authority as well. Often, the three terms are used interchangeably, leading to inexactness and definitional confusion but, more problematically, to the overlooking of influence and authority as political instruments for WPAs.

This confusion of influence and authority with power may derive from the prominent status in composition studies of Michel Foucault’s claims about power’s broad reach, as evidenced in, among other texts, *The Archeology of Knowledge*. While not wishing to challenge these claims on a systemic level or their general value until now to WPAs, I find more helpful, for the issue at hand at least, David V. J. Bell’s articulation of the differences among power, influence, and authority, a differentiation which effectively allows for these terms’ more discriminating application to the political conditions of WPAs. We can therefore use Bell to build upon the work-to-date on WPA power. Although, as Bell indicates, “in everyday speech, their meanings overlap” and “the terms are sometimes used interchangeably,” power, influence and authority “each consists of a special, distinct form of communication” (15, 12). Power is based on “communications which involve either threats or promises” and “rests on the ability to manipulate positive or negative sanctions” (21, 26). It expresses itself as a hypothetical proposition: If you do (or don’t do) X, I will do (or won’t do) Y.

According to Bell, authority and influence operate quite differently from power. Authority relies not on threats and promises but on tradition and social institutions. Persons in authority, says Bell, resort (and need to resort) to power only when authority fails. Power, as understood in this distinction, may be direct and overt, but authority seems far “cleaner” and in some sense superior to power, especially when it rests not on the potential for violence or reward (“political authority”) but on expertise

“expert authority”) (Bell 40). In order to bolster its effectiveness, says Bell, authority “surrounds itself with symbols designed to inspire admiration and awe” (36). Further, authority relies on “credenda”—“things to be believed”—that stand behind and legitimize it (42). Authority’s ease of use (with it, one can sometimes simply decree what one wants to have happen), its basis in deeply held, pre-existent beliefs, and its ongoing support by symbols may make it a better instrument than power for establishing the legitimacy of a position, from which benefits (including power) can then flow.

Influence (here in Bell’s rendering at least) is, like power, propositional in nature, but the proposition is quite different: If you do (or don’t do) X, you—and not I—will (or won’t) experience Y. Influence, in other words, uses persuasion, in this case persuading people of the benefits that could accrue from their own acts. According to Bell, influence is the attempt to “affect the action” of someone “in the absence of sanctions (i.e., threats or promises)” —in other words, in the absence of power (24). It may take the form of advice, encouragement or even warning. Like authority, influence has the advantage of resting on pre-existent bases: prestige (either personal, positional, or a blend of the two) and obligation, a kind of debt (though not the threat of debt, which would be the effect of power) to which the influencer can appeal as she seeks to persuade. While none of this is to say that power lacks its uses, nuancing the discussion of WPA politics by including the subtler and perhaps more long-lasting tools of authority and influence can only enhance the repertoire of a writing administrator.

With these distinctions in hand, we can turn now to seeing how the advice literature, in its perhaps historically necessary emphasis on power, inadvertently may overlook or muddle the value to the WPA of authority and influence. Advice essays seem to fall into three categories. The first category contains essays that urge the WPA to seek power overtly. In doing so, however, they expand the definition of power until it engulfs the definitions of influence and authority. As a result, authors in this genre end up talking about influence or authority when they think they are describing power, or vice versa. For example, White, in urging WPAs to overcome their resistance to power and begin using it against the “enemies” laying “siege” to their writing programs, recommends what he says are “three basic weapons” of power: “good arguments, good data, and good allies” (“Use It” 6, 7). But where is the threat of punishment or promise of reward (Bell’s essentials for the exercise of power) in offering arguments or data? Aren’t these really the

tools of influence, and not weapons at all? Similarly, Gary A. Olson and Joseph M. Moxley advise WPAs to “remain sensitive to the subtle transactions of power [. . .] so that they can take actions to prevent the erosion of their authority” and “influence such things as budget allocations, commission reports, and legislation” (58-59). While we certainly could imagine taking separately any of these pieces of advice, the question that they together beg is how the terms relate to one another. When am I supposed to assert authority rather than power, power rather than influence? What’s the difference between the terms anyway? A similar muddling exists in Rebecca Moore Howard’s advice on how to exert “institution changing power” by developing the ability to communicate orally and in writing, and the knack for knowing when to use one or the other (37). But aren’t these in fact the tools of influence? Then Howard says that no one except the WPA will carry out responsibilities in the writing program “unless you hound her into doing so, but find polite, cheerful, even indirect ways of hounding” (41). This statement inadvertently combines power and influence by using a metaphor of power—hounds threatening a prey—to describe an act of influence: polite, cheerful and indirect urging.

The second category in this literature features articles advising the WPA to share her power with others in the program. But since these articles, like those in the first category, dwell on WPA power, they undervalue, misunderstand or ignore the authority and influence that, along with power, are available to the WPA. For instance, Barbara L. Cambridge and Ben W. McClelland argue for a WPA role that is the opposite of campus “icon,” to use David Bartholomae’s term (quoted in Cambridge and McClelland 157). In recommending that the WPA become a partner instead of an icon, Cambridge and McClelland would have the WPA share power with others under a “federalist model” and serve only as the “center” and the “cultural glue” of the program (155, 157). But will true “federalism” occur when power and only power is distributed, while program authority might still reside mainly with the WPA, whether she wants it or not? Or does renouncing the role of icon mean giving up authority as well as power? Might it be beneficial to remain the writing icon while sharing power with “partners,” since iconic status gives the WPA authority through supplying her with Bell’s “credenda” and symbols of expertise? Such authority might make the WPA a more effective “cultural glue.” Moreover, what is the role of influence—for rhetoricians like us, perhaps the most valuable political instrument—in the life of WPA-as-hub? As helpful as its idea of power-

sharing may be, the Cambridge/McClelland model, by encouraging the WPA to disperse her power without considering the potential role authority and influence can play in her effective leadership, might inadvertently leave the WPA without political tools. She could then end up being not the center of campus writing efforts but a peripheral functionary, her program vulnerable to political assaults from outside.

Other authors in this power-sharing category also help the WPA deal with the problematics of power but may prove less helpful in determining power's exact relationship to other political tools. Jeanne Gunner writes that, in a "truly professional program," "authority would come from a synthesis of informed instructors and the program they develop" and not from "a single person assigned [. . .] autocratic power" (13). A welcomed way of describing a good program, but some questions nevertheless arise. Does distribution of authority lead automatically to distribution of power? While the ideas of sharing authority and sharing power have real value for a program, how does this casual equation of authority and power help the WPA understand the precise natures and specific uses of these very different political instruments? Hult also recommends the dispersal of power as she argues, using political systems as analogy, that the best form of a writing program is a "constitutional democracy" populated by a staff of "well-trained, professional writing experts" for whom the WPA is a "representative" ("Politics" 48). This WPA seems neither "icon" nor "partner," so it is difficult to say exactly what relationship exists between distributed power and authority. Note also that, all matters of authority aside, neither Gunner nor Hult conceives of a role for influence and its relation to either power or authority. Once again, a quite natural pre-occupation with power (here casually blended with authority) muddles examination of all the political tools available to a WPA and how they might work together.

The final category of advice literature, characterized as feminist or "post-masculinist" by its authors, recommends giving power away entirely, with little if any reference to the benefits or drawbacks of authority and influence. It rejects the Olson/Moxley "patriarchal/bureaucratic model" because it [the model] emphasizes control rather than collaboration" and instead urges the feminist WPA to forego "the illusion of control" (Dickson 144, 148). In this construction of writing program administration, "faculties should collaboratively direct writing programs themselves," and "the concept of community in which leadership is shared can be substituted for

the notion of hierarchy” in a writing program (Dickson 140; Miller 55). Ironically, in its pre-occupation with power—if only to stand over against it—the feminist/post-masculinist political model provides helpful antidotes to the abuse of power but seemingly fails to imagine other political tools, and specifically the tool of influence, that might be more attractive than power to a non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical WPA. It also seems to overlook the possibilities inherent in the authority stemming from a WPA’s iconic status. Would a feminist WPA, by definition, need to renounce authority along with power, or could she develop a new and exciting kind of program authority, based on WPA as icon of post-masculinist administrative methods? Absent authority and influence and having renounced power, does the feminist WPA become, from an institutional standpoint at least, thoroughly de-politicized? The way out of this win-but-lose dilemma may reside in examining small-school political practices with reference to the political instruments under discussion here.

### **Small Campus Political Culture and the WPA’s Role**

In its assumption of general applicability, the advice literature has come to stand as totalizing statement of the WPA’s political condition. At this point, it is helpful to recall, however, that the earlier-cited program surveys from the 1980s noted how programs vary in dramatic ways according to their size and the size of their institution. This being the case, we should focus on the small campus and its WPA in order to enlarge the WPA record. In the process, we can offer a potential corrective to that record’s inscribing of power as the pre-dominant, if not sole political instrument available to the program administrator. Once we focus on the small-school milieu, we see that the importance of and availability to the small-school WPA of power, authority, and influence runs in reverse of this ordering. The three also relate to one another in complex ways. Of the three, influence is easily the most necessary to the small-school WPA, while authority may be the most available. The solo exertion of power when it is available, which isn’t often, can prove problematic and even dangerous. Understanding the political culture of small institutions can thus deepen and enrich general understanding of the WPA position.

### **Authority**

The first difference between small-school composition programs and those inscribed in the majority of WPA narratives relates to the political

status of the small-school WPA. As much as some small-school WPAs, like their large-school counterparts, might like to rid themselves of it, there seems no way for the small-school WPA to abjure the role of writing “icon” or composition’s symbolic authority on her campus. But, perhaps unlike the large-school WPA, the small-school program administrator can benefit enormously from willingly accepting this position rather than resisting it, as the advice literature recommends. For composition can be far less marginalized in the small institution—particularly if the institution is based in the liberal-arts tradition—than in the large research university because its image, its symbolic presence (if not its pedagogical reality) remains part of the way that smaller institutions continually discover how to mean and to affirm what they are. That is, writing instruction is often so enmeshed in the small school’s self-enacting discourse—from its marketing and admissions materials to its claims of “certifying” graduates as “writing-proficient”—that its sacredness as part of the institution’s mission is unquestioned. So to be an icon (the religious nature of the metaphor is appropriate here) of such an invested enterprise as the teaching of writing and administration of writing programs is also to become potentially a venerable symbol (but not merely a symbol) in and of oneself, if one wishes to be. This status can then secure the trappings that, as noted by Bell, support authority. In turn, the WPA can use this authority and its trappings to her advantage.

However, it is important to be clear about the WPA’s iconic authority on the small campus. Like the cherishing of writing instruction that underlies it, this authority may be primarily, or even exclusively, symbolic, which makes it different from the authority based in power discussed in the advice literature. At a recent CCCC panel on the small-campus compositionist, one small-school WPA introduced himself as his campus’s director of composition, only to add that his is largely a titular position, in that he does not actually “direct” anything. This status might seem ridiculous to someone used to WPA work at a large institution, but at a small one it indicates that composition is valued sufficiently that faculty and administration feel a need to personify it, to make composition the charge of a “keeper of the flame,” even if that charge brings with it little real power and diminished direct authority. But this case also reveals that the position carries with it significant moral authority (Bell’s authority based in expertise). This latter kind of authority gets exercised not in the hiring and training of TAs or adjuncts, the operating of an office solely dedicated to composition, or any of the other functions or arrangements that indicate

hierarchical authority, although many small-school WPAs may have some of these duties assigned them. Rather, this kind of authority gets exercised at those junctures in the cultural life of the institution where issues or plans essential to how the institution defines itself are being considered. Because small schools are, well, small and therefore smaller than the program type embodied in WPA literature, the WPA can play a larger role in this cultural life; it is a matter both of mission and of scale. Given her iconic status, the small-school WPA is more frequently asked to be involved—indeed, expected to be involved—in this bigger sphere than is her large-institution counterpart. For this reason, the moral authority possessed by the small-school WPA can be enormous compared to the direct authority of a large-school WPA, precisely because the small-school WPA operates not in a bureaucratic structure of offices and TAs, but at pivotal points in institutional life, remaining detached perhaps from significant, direct programmatic power (the desideratum of Olson/Moxley and the bane of Dickson/Miller) and therefore able to appeal to higher institutional values than “turf.” This also means that authority can be potentially long-lasting, the WPA less subject to the threat-and-promise marketplace of power.

## **Influence**

The influence—that term most neglected in the advice literature—the small-campus WPA possesses can also be long-lasting, and is the WPA’s most effective tool. The reasons that influence is so valuable to the small-school WPA range from the obvious to the complex. First, we should note that influence, if it is to be successful, relies on opportunities for persuading or convincing. The greater the number of occasions for persuading, the likelier the possibility of successful influence. A corollary to this observation also holds true: the more frequent the occasions for persuading, the greater the likelihood that influence—not power or authority—will be expected or required. So, on the simplest level, influence assumes a greater role than power or authority in the small-school WPA’s role because the campus’s size creates more occasions for interactions with colleagues and administrators than does the larger campus. Many small colleges or universities are located in small communities (e.g., college towns), and, even when this is not the case, many small schools become their own small communities. Colleagues from many disciplines may be neighbors, either literal or figurative, or close friends of the WPA, may belong to some of the same civic organizations, churches or temples, and perhaps share the same small locker room or

work-out class. Even moral authority can only go so far in these situations, where familiarity de-mystifies even the most cherished iconography. The small-school WPA is as likely to talk to his college's president as his large-university counterpart is to talk to her dean. The president may even be, as has been the case at one point in my career, a friend, precisely because (among other things) the small-campus climate allowed him to see my work in building a composition program. The opportunities for influence (within the bounds of friendship) were therefore enormous. The use of what little power I possessed—by making threats or promises—would have been shallow and ineffective, and certainly would have ended a productive relationship. Of course, the use and abuse of power is a daily occurrence on small as well as large campuses. But when, on a day-to-day, relational basis, one must face colleagues she has just threatened or to whom she has just promised reward, the stakes and risks of power plays grow exceedingly high. And institutional memory tends to be far more durable on small than on large college campuses, in part because small-school players tend to remain in place far longer than do their counterparts at larger institutions. To sum up: if we wanted to adapt White's article to the small-college WPA's situation, it would need to be re-titled, "Very Limited Power: Use It Often, and You'll Lose It." Influence, on the other hand, seems a near-limitless and longer-lasting political resource.

Perhaps influence's effectiveness at the small institution derives ultimately from the more uniform and more consolidated campus culture found there, a culture arising frequently from historical roots in, and the ongoing valuing of, liberal-arts education. This consolidation around core liberal-arts values leads to fewer struggles about the fundamentals than one might find on the larger, more mission-diverse campus. However, since nearly everyone on a small campus is invested in these values, there are likely to be more struggles around translating them into practices. The small-school WPA, the first-year composition program in particular, and the writing program in general can become either victim or beneficiary of this reversal of what might seem the typical large-school situation, depending upon how well the small-school WPA reads her scene and uses influence effectively. For example, the idea that teaching first-year writing is central to the small-school enterprise is generally not worth disputing on many small-college campuses because such teaching is regarded as embodying a fundamental campus value. If an abolitionist were to try to dismantle first-year writing at many of these institutions, she would likely find no one

interested even in struggling over such a (rightly or wrongly) uncontested good, and would get nowhere fast. But if the WPA seeks to make changes to the first-year program, then she may actually face a struggle because so many institutional players are invested in the program as an expression of deep institutional values. Paradoxically, the same campus-cultural investment in the first-year program that may provide the WPA with iconic authority also limits her power. (Note how the marginalization about which many large-institution WPAs might complain is not, for the small-school WPA, the source of powerlessness; it is the exact opposite, the centrality of her institutional role, that diminishes her power.) Perhaps this situation results from first-year composition's function, within the small school, as the place where students are expected to "invent the university" to a degree that Bartholomae probably did not imagine when he made this observation about the purpose of the first-year writing course (134). The situation shows how crucial it is for you, as the small-school WPA, to resist the advice literature's recommendations about seizing power and acknowledge that uniformity in institutional values renders you powerless in crucial areas. But you must also realize that all this attention to writing instruction as a fundamental good gives you a position from which you can influence all sorts of key players to assist and support you.

The same pattern applies to small-school WAC programs, which can seem both more feasible and more difficult to administer than their counterparts at larger institutions. Again, depending on how this administrative responsibility is played, a small-school WAC administrator can reap the benefits or inherit a perennial burden. Certainly, writing's centrality requires that the WAC administrator accept a greater level of campus exposure and perhaps higher personal expectations from others than her large-school counterpart is required to accept. This fact, coupled with two features of the small-school environment mentioned earlier—its relatively "flat" organization and smaller number of players, many of whom work in intimate settings with the WPA—makes the art of influence all the more important in WAC work. Calling on moral authority and citing the value of writing instruction is a start, but the success and survival of small-school WAC lies in the WPA's ability to accept "givens" about small-school writing programs and then shape, by using influence, the way colleagues and administrators invest in them.

## Why the Small-School Narrative Matters to Composition at Large

All of these observations about the political practices of small-campus writing programs and their differentness from their large-campus counterparts do more, however, than point out an area where the literature's advice proves inapplicable to small-college composition. They also point to the many potential benefits of incorporating small-school composition's ethos into WPA practices and the small-school narrative into the WPA record that inscribes those practices. As stated early in this essay, the most obvious benefit is that our literature will become more accurately representative of all WPAs and thereby reflect the diversity of practices that come under the heading of WPA work. The fuller the record, the greater its richness and utility. Besides aiding current WPAs, "large" and "small," this enlarged awareness of what constitutes the WPA role and milieu may in turn enlarge the scope of graduate preparation received by future WPAs (many of whom may get jobs as small-school WPAs).

An equally important benefit comes in the way this move toward greater inclusion can interrogate large-school assumptions about WPA work. Taking the above discussion of WPA power as example, the small-school narrative might deconstruct the discourse of power found in the majority record. Simply put, one comes to wonder what the over-emphasis on issues of power tells us about the professional culture of WPAs. Are we unempowered liberatory pedagogists trying to improve our programs (the attractive self-portrait we frequently invoke), or are we really "boss compositionists" fixated on the means for strengthening our positions (Sledd 5)? Or even when we recommend sharing/giving away power, do we really just want to get rid of it because the idea of being powerful goes against this liberatory self-image, and not because we genuinely want to empower others? Our own discursive pre-occupations may disguise our intentions superficially but reveal them on a profounder level. Tempering our power-talk with observations about authority and influence might instigate a profound cultural shift in our work. Greater attention, by all WPAs, to iconic "expert" authority and especially to influence could not only make us more effective in our positions by complementing our awareness of power's role; it could also make us potential agents in a larger political sea-change in our institutions. Instead of accumulating power or even distributing it among those we choose, we could try to transcend the marketplace of threats and promises altogether and rely on "expert" authority and influence to get our work done. Using these far more equitable and participatory political

instruments might help make the politics of our programs and institutions, in turn, more equitable and participatory. Moreover, discussion of the values related to the liberal-arts orientation frequently associated with small-school composition might counteract tendencies in composition/rhetoric to acquiesce in literacy education aimed merely at preparing students for the world of work. I have in mind here the approach to literacy training that assumes it is egalitarian because it helps students gain an employment skill which, in turn, supposedly enables them to participate more fully in the world at large. The underpinnings of this approach often go ideologically unexamined in the discipline (cf. Crowley). No doubt, to someone advocating this purpose for literacy training, a liberal-arts approach to teaching writing could feel the opposite of egalitarian: elitist and impractical, in the original sense of the word. What Gee, Hull and Lankshear show, however, is that students, whatever their preparation, are going to be entering a “new work order” that is hardly an egalitarian place to live or labor and looks more like a place where the possession of skills merely guarantees life-long exploitation (xi). Given this new “order,” literacy training that is de facto vocational may unwittingly cooperate in students’ oppression. In contrast, writing instruction with a liberal-arts orientation—which, like all liberal-arts practices, is founded in critique—could prepare students to offer resistance to newly emerging oppressive labor configurations and contribute strongly to a liberatory pedagogy. All these visions or re-visions of dominant assumptions in our work, then, might not just stop our profession from believing that large programs are the norm and their practices therefore normal; they also might aid the WPA, “large” or “small,” in creating institutional political cultures and pedagogical practices that model a truly just public sphere, one in which critique, influential persuasion, and appeals to reliable authority help all of us resist the raw exercise of power and avoid becoming inadvertent agents of the oppression we claim to despise.

Nor should we overlook the benefits to small-school WPAs and their programs that this newly enlarged disciplinary record might provide. Unlike many of their colleagues at research institutions, most small-college professionals receive only modest support for research and publication. Yet, increasingly, they are expected to undertake a full program of research and active engagement with the profession. Given the fact that most small-school WPAs must still carry heavy teaching loads, full committee assignments, and advising responsibilities—all on top of writing-program

duties—the material conditions of their employment often conflict with these increased research expectations, and small-school WPAs can feel pulled in too many directions at once—even more so than their large-school counterparts. The unfortunate result of this over-multiplication of tasks may be denial of tenure or promotion, and the compiling of a record of achievements in areas honored and valued at one’s home institution (e.g., “service”) but of diminished value on the job market, even when applying for openings at other small institutions. This situation needs public airing at professional meetings and in the profession’s journals; it may well be one of the greatest difficulties in material conditions extant in the field, yet it remains discursively unexamined. Needless to say, increased receptivity at those meetings and in those journals to scholarship based in the small-school setting would both inspire small-college WPAs and provide them with ready-made avenues of research to enter. Writing the small school into the WPA record will benefit both the profession and all its diverse members.

## Notes

1. I realize that “small school” is an easily contested term. I am using it here to identify four-year institutions that offer undergraduate education primarily, if not exclusively, and therefore rarely employ teaching assistants in large composition programs overseen by the WPA. Instead, small schools frequently use full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty (including literature faculty) to teach composition on the first-year as well as other levels, using only a small pool of adjuncts (though this practice is changing). These institutions often adhere to some ethos associated with being small or relatively small in size—e.g., a teaching (vs. research) orientation, a liberal-arts mission, individualized student attention. Typically, they enroll 2,000-3,000 students, though some “small” regional universities may have as many as 5,000 undergraduates. No single Carnegie Foundation category captures entirely the diverse small-college/university cohort as I and others conceive of it, however, and small schools range in ranking from “elite” to “non-competitive” in student selection. In any case, the institutions I am describing here all regard their smallness as a feature tied centrally to their identity. So, in essence, I am considering an institution “small” if it considers itself so, and acts according to practices it associates with its small size. A working definition only!

2. Determining just how many small-school writing programs exist is difficult if not impossible, given current data. In the Modern Language Association's most recent survey of English departments, 243 of the 524 departments responding to the survey, or 46%, were departments in institutions with enrollments under 5,000, which qualifies them as "small" as defined in Footnote 1. However, since 30% of respondents to the survey were departments in two-year institutions, it is impossible to determine how many of the 243 small institutions are four-year colleges/universities—the subject of this essay. The MLA survey goes on to report that over 95% of all four-year institutions offer courses in "English composition." For what it is worth, then, it is safe to assume that nearly all small colleges/universities have writing programs (and most of these a WPA?), whatever the actual number of those programs may be (Huber 37).

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