

Judging WPAs by What They Say They Do: An Argument for Revising “Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration”

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“Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration” (EIWWA) gives expression to the aspirations and experiences of writing administrators who have struggled to earn tenure and promotion while their primary work as administrators falls outside traditionally defined categories of scholarship and teaching to land in the least valued and least rewarded category of service. Writing administrators know from experience that their work is much more than service, that it is made up of elements of both teaching and scholarship. EIWWA gives expression to these experiences, an expression providing evaluative criteria for writing administrators and tenure and promotion committees struggling to make sense of intellectual work that does not fit neatly into the three categories most widely used for evaluating academic work. The strength of EIWWA lies in the constraints it puts on the reduction of writing administration to service within the evaluation process, providing terms and criteria to curtail inaccurate, even dismissive, assessments of writing administration. In this way, evaluation guidelines drawn out of EIWWA can be useful, are perhaps even necessary, to making the work of writing administrators intelligible to colleagues accustomed to separating out scholarship and teaching from service.

We propose, however, that as it now stands, EIWWA does not provide criteria adequate for accurately evaluating the work of writing administrators. We further propose that EIWWA does not provide sufficient guidance for institutions to define the role of future writing administrators in ways that avoid relegating their intellectual work to evaluation within the category of service. As a guide for evaluating the work of current writing administrators, the statement falls short in its description—as evidenced by the multiple stories we consider later in this essay—inadequately characterizing

that work as arising out of an opposition between management and scholarship. Within this dichotomy, the intellectual work of administration is valued in proportion to its proximity to scholarship. But writing administration is not scholarship in the traditional sense and so will always appear lacking to tenure and promotion committees where this appeal is used. Opposing management to scholarship hinders EIWWA's usefulness as a heuristic for redefining administrative roles and evaluative criteria by failing to define the intellectual work of writing administration as productive of new knowledge in terms sufficiently distinct from terms describing traditional scholarship.

In this article, we concentrate our efforts on developing an argument for revising EIWWA. We believe revision of EIWWA is necessary because it fails in its current form to resolve the dilemma inherent in crafting criteria appropriate for and adequate to the task of evaluating writing administration: either the work of writing administrators has intellectual merit not discernible within the categories of teaching, scholarship, and service or those categories are inadequate to the task of evaluating the merit of that work. We also believe that, with revision, EIWWA can live up to its implicit promise of revising institutional practices of tenure and promotion review so as to better recognize and reward the intellectual work of writing administrators. In what follows, we draw out the implications of the dilemma and pursue the promise.

We begin by considering how the language of EIWWA constructs writing administration as an activity that is both administrative and scholarly while being neither merely administrative nor simply scholarly. When it is described as simultaneously both and neither, writing administration eludes accurate description and evades appropriate evaluative criteria. We agree that representing the intellectual work of the writing administrator through the opposition of administration and scholarship enables evaluation of writing administration as something more than service by constructing that work as scholarship. Unfortunately, within the evaluative category of scholarship as it is most widely used, writing administration fails to fit. EIWWA joins the intellectual work of writing administration to scholarship by emphasizing the application of research in composition to administrative decision making. Better decisions are those that better enact or better reflect current composition research. Taken to the extreme, emphasis on fit between administration and scholarship leads to the conclusion that writing administration is easy to evaluate: It is good work when it enacts what scholarship tells us. In contrast to this description, writing administrators typically characterize their own work as an exercise of judgment not reducible to scholarship in composition studies: There is more to it than just enacting what the scholarship tells us.

That there is more to writing administration is most recently captured by Christine Ross. In her review of the annual collaborative revision of the University of California at Irvine composition program textbook, Ross characterizes the institutional activities through which theory gets translated into practice as “messy,” the interactions of multiple agents with multiple purposes and understandings. Such interactions do not lead directly from talk of theory to curricular reform and into classroom practice; instead, as Ross concludes,

the effect of any reform discourse may have less to do with its ideal or pragmatic coherence per se, or with the “understanding” of individual teachers and students, and more to do with the general conditions of possibility and the local, specific conditions of the pedagogical culture through which it is appropriated in the world of volatile contingencies that gives it life. (325)

We believe Ross’s experience is quite typical. Appropriating composition theory within any pedagogical culture always requires more from the writing administrator than doing what the research says and more often than not results in something other than the research describes. While local contingencies cannot be eliminated from writing administration, the gap between what scholarship tells us and how that scholarship gets enacted does provide an opening for reflection on, and elaboration of, EIWWA. Working within the gap between “what” and “how,” we argue that the intellectual work of writing administration is best evaluated not as bureaucratic functionalism (or service), nor as ideal reform discourse (or scholarship), but rather as guided institutional action, as introduction of a critical discourse that makes knowledge in, for, and about a writing program.

We illustrate our argument for evaluating writing administration as guided institutional action by reviewing the accounts of writing administrators in three current collections: *The Writing Program Administrator’s Resource*, edited by Stuart Brown and Theresa Enos; *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers, and Troubadours*, edited by Diana George; and *The Writing Program Administrator as Theorist*, edited by Shirley K Rose and Irwin Weiser. We have selected these three volumes out of the wealth of scholarship available because in each of these collections the authors characterize the “how” of writing administration by appeal to insights and intuitions gathered from outside knowledge in composition studies, a move that runs counter to the emphasis in EIWWA on “what” becomes available for evaluation, a move that preserves a certain kind of extra-disciplinary, judgment-making discretion as the real work of the writing administrator. Taking seriously the place writing administrators assign to judgment-making discretion, we conclude

by suggesting revisions to EIWWA that extend our talk about the character of writing administration, refine our understanding of the work we do, and bring better understanding to the preparation and evaluation of writing administrators.

CHARACTERIZING THE WORK

The primary purpose of EIWWA is to define the work of the writing administrator and to render it measurable by performance review committees. EIWWA crafts measures of performance by shifting the definition of writing administration from a management activity to “scholarly and intellectual work” (preamble). As a mere management activity, writing administration requires bureaucratic functionalism, a kind of following of rules where the hardest decisions involve interpreting and implementing institutional requirements. Little is required in the ways of intellectual work and decision making in this formulation. Conversely, when it is understood as intellectual work, writing administration requires a great deal more. It requires a grasp of current research in composition and an ability to make knowledge of that research visible in the structures and operations of a writing program.

Reconceptualizing writing administration as intellectual work, as opposed to a management activity, certainly better reflects the work writing administrators already do. We make decisions every day that involve judging a situation against our knowledge of composition theory and research. But describing this decision-making activity as intellectual work does not adequately characterize that work, work that involves more than just applying knowledge, work that often involves making knowledge through action, a making that requires a kind of acumen or flair, a creative ability that is more than either bureaucratic functionalism or scholarly productivity. Taking seriously the unique abilities needed to bring research to light through institutional decision making means accepting writing administration as a kind of hybrid activity, one that is neither simply a managerial application of research nor wholly an intellectual pursuit of scholarship. Writing administration is clearly more than service and something other than scholarship. James Porter et al., use the term “zone of ambiguity” to describe the hybrid nature of such institutional roles as writing administration. A zone of ambiguity is the product of decision making processes, of “people acting through institutions,” participating through their actions in the overlap, conflict, and mix among boundaries (625). These zones are locations where rhetorical reinterpretation of the structure of institutions is possible. They are the zones where the intellectual work of writing administration takes place.

If we understand writing administration as an action, as a doing that is neither merely managerial nor wholly scholarly, we have raised important questions about EIWWA and its current representation of writing administration. If writing administration is an institutional activity fraught with contingency—as Ross describes—and fundamentally a “pragmatic effort”—as Porter et al. might call it—then we must ask whether the work of the writing administrator is best evaluated by how well she or he puts research in composition into practice. How in our evaluation of the intellectual work of writing administrators do we account for bureaucratic or institutional obstacles to enacting composition research? For example, should we penalize a writing administrator for failing to implement a research-guided program revision when the failure was due largely to budgetary constraints or bureaucratic inertia? Is successfully enacting change in the face of difficult circumstances what we really mean by intellectual work? And exactly what kind of intellectual work is that? We raise these questions here because they have not yet been adequately answered. EIWWA may provide clearer criteria for characterizing and evaluating the intellectual integrity of a writing program, but as we document in this essay, writing administrators sensitive to these types of questions prefer a greater ambiguity as they characterize the intellectual work they do to implement program changes. The conflict between objectified standards in EIWWA and the self-characterization of writing administrators puts into relief difficulties we still have making convincing claims for the intellectual work of writing administrators in tenure and promotion committees.

WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AS DISCIPLINED ACTIVITY

In its attempt to provide convincing criteria to tenure and promotion committees, EIWWA describes five areas of intellectual work and provides four guidelines for evaluating administration as intellectual work. We summarize the guidelines here to characterize the ways in which our talk about the intellectual work of writing administration is and is not made a tangible disciplined activity in the language of the statement. Guideline one names the five areas of administrative activity acceptable as intellectual work: program creation, curricular design, faculty development, program assessment and evaluation, and program-related textual production. Guideline two describes the activities and products of intellectual work as application of research, possession of expert knowledge and discipline-specific problem solving skills, and the production of publications and presentations that can be evaluated by peers. These first two guidelines, then, serve as useful characterizations of administrative activity and its intellectual character. In both, the criteria, if not easy and straightforward, are at least familiar.

The third guideline provides criteria for evaluating the quality of writing administration by introducing language for discerning the scholarly merit of administration, identifying the key categories for evaluating quality as “innovation,” “improvement/refinement,” “dissemination,” and “empirical results.” The fourth guideline calls for peer evaluation as the most appropriate method for judging the quality of a writing administrator’s scholarly contribution to an institution and to the field. It makes sense that peer evaluation be used to provide testimony to the merits of a writing administrator’s work. Standards of “innovation,” “improvement/refinement,” “dissemination,” and “empirical results” appear to ground evaluation of writing administrators in relation to scholarship in composition. Here, intellectual work responds to and extends research in composition, improving, refining, disseminating that research within specific institutional contexts.

However, evaluating such things as improvement or refinement in terms of research raises important questions: Is every change in curriculum or pedagogy an innovation? When do revisions become improvements or refinements instead of inconsequential changes? What results are the best measures of innovations and by what methods should such results be measured? Such questions can be asked of any important intellectual activity and the authors of EIWWA have reasonable general answers. For example, a revision to a writing program becomes an improvement or refinement when it can be shown to “distinctly and concretely lead to better teaching,” with better teaching and positive and productive results measured in accomplishments evidenced by “pre- and post-evaluative measures, written testimonials from students and staff, teaching evaluations, etc.” Here, the intellectual work of producing better teaching through administration requires more from the writing administrator than doing what composition scholarship says to do. Whatever better teaching is, it is measured intersubjectively, discerned as much from analysis of student writing as from the perceptions students and teachers have of curriculum, of pedagogy, and of each other.

Yet, EIWWA discusses outcomes and their measures only, avoiding mention of the kind of interpersonal and institutional work required to change perceptions among students and teachers. Silence on the interpersonal becomes in EIWWA a misrepresentation of the intellectual work of writing administration. An example from the guidelines illustrates the point:

Let us presume that the director of a first-year writing course 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. She will need to decide whether to use direct or indirect measures of writing ability; will need to assess the implications that the placement proce-

ture will have on high school curriculum; will want to consult research on such things as the nature of writing prompts, whether an objective test and a writing test should be used together, and the optimal amount of time for the exam. Thus what some see as a simple decision (place students according to an ACT score) is, in reality, complex intellectual work involving disciplinary knowledge, empirical research, and histories of practice.

Granting that this characterization of the intellectual work of the writing administrator is accurate as far as it goes, it does not go far enough as a characterization of the work involved in implementing an in-house placement procedure. Experienced writing administrators know that whether an objective and a writing test are used in conjunction to make placement decisions depends on compromising among such things as admissions practices, testing procedures, and staffing constraints. Negotiating these compromises by meeting with people and working out the details occupies the greatest part of a writing administrator's work day. The results of such compromises are more often than not less than, or different from, the ideal placement procedure suggested in composition scholarship. To characterize the intellectual work of writing administration as conceptualizing a placement procedure out of an assessment of disciplinary knowledge, empirical research, and histories of practice is to ignore the interpersonal work required to implement any institutional change and it is a mischaracterization of the intellectual work of the writing administrator. The most appropriate placement procedure we might develop through a careful weighing of our disciplinary knowledge, empirical research, and survey of histories of practice will rarely, if at all, be the placement procedure we will end up using. The weight we give to knowledge, research, and practice, separately and together, will depend on specific institutional contexts and constraints, a contingency that is, to recall Ross here, "messy" and unpredictable. We would not want to say that such compromise makes the work of the writing administrator any less intellectual; yet, the product of that work, the new placement procedure, could appear less innovative or less of an improvement as a result. EIWWA gives us no way to represent such circumstances to tenure and review committees. We have no way to say, "It was a good placement procedure in theory . . ."

As products of intellectual work available for evaluation, such things as placement procedures simply stand or fall independent of both the institutional realities and decision making that give them final form. But, because institutional realities and decision-making capacities contribute so much to the final form of things such as placement procedures, more appropriate and accurate evaluation of the intellectual work of writing administration must

take account of activity and contingency. We must have some vocabulary with which we can describe a writing administrator's persuasive facility with composition scholarship. It is only through their ability to persuade in specific contexts, to make decisions about how to draw on research in response to institutional realities, that writing administrators can make programmatic changes. In the next section, we review efforts of writing administrators to put into words the persuasive abilities they consider most important. As we describe it, these efforts, in and of themselves, fail to provide a regular and reliable account of the intellectual work of writing administration.

WRITING ADMINISTRATION AS IMPROVISATION

Where EIWWA sets the terms for assessing the intellectual work of writing administrators so far in the direction of scholarship as to slight the importance of interpersonal interactions in writing administration, writing administrators time and again reach beyond scholarship for vocabularies to describe the interactional work they do. In reaching outside the boundaries of composition studies to describe the situations they encounter and the compromises they make, a pattern of talk emerges among writing administrators, a pattern of which we should make ourselves aware if we want to accurately describe and evaluate the intellectual work of writing administration. That pattern is hinted at in the title of Diana George's collection, *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers, and Troubadours*. Kitchen cooks, plate twirlers, and troubadours are practiced at their craft, self-taught, guided more by instinct than by intellect. George's title captures the general sense writing administrators have of their work, and the essays in the collection reflect on the interrelations between personal and professional lives, moments of disjuncture in professional settings that call up personal rather than disciplinary expertise and interludes that allow insight to arise from performance rather than scholarship. Lynn Bloom develops this sense of it in her forward to *The Writing Program Administrator's Resource* by drawing parallels to the well-known parenting book written by Dr. Benjamin Spock. Through her reference to *Baby and Childcare*, Bloom makes the point that the best advice writing administrators can follow is the advice with which Dr. Spock introduces several hundred pages of information and expert insight: "Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do" (ix). Such advice makes a great deal of sense. For writing administrators, understandings of writing instruction gained through graduate seminars, knowledge about teaching gained from experience, and insight into administration gained from interaction with other writing administrators all provide a wealth of awareness and insight that should be trusted. Trusting ourselves is a good start, but it does little to describe, guide, or evaluate the quality of our administrative work.

Bloom's comparison of an advice book for parents and a resource book for writing administrators is clearly more suggestive than descriptive. Its very suggestiveness derives from the extent to which we have already fashioned the intellectual work of writing administration as somehow the kind of activity one should trust oneself to do. Here, trust is not confidence in the scholarship as much as it is comfort with creative use of scholarship. Faced daily with unanticipated demands for decision making, for problem solving, for interpersonal conflict resolution, we draw on the theories and judgments for which our disciplinary training in composition studies provides us, but we also often find ourselves in territories not charted by that disciplinary knowledge and so we draw as well on whatever background knowledge we may have to get us through crisis moments. Unscripted and unrehearsed, we improvise. Characterizing writing administration as primarily improvisation leaves the work largely up to chance or talent. We need to be able to say more if we want to characterize writing administration as intellectual work. Unfortunately, general emphasis on improvisation across the collections discussed here limits our vocabularies even as it introduces useful terms.

In his contribution to *The Writing Program Administrator's Resource*, Douglas D. Hesse describes the work of the writing administrators in terms of a need for political expertise. Hesse justifies the need for political savvy as a consequence of the writing administrator's limited authority and the need for collective action. As Hesse puts it, "Because the quality of a writing program depends largely on the conditions in which the program exists, and because the WPA has limited control of those conditions, political action is vital" (41-42). Hesse's proposal for writing administrators to acquire political expertise makes sense as a proposal developed out of his extensive experience. The political acumen Hesse describes is clearly something more than administrative work. Political savvy is also, however, something more than intellectual work as that is traditionally defined. Knowing how to lobby for a cause, knowing which causes to pursue and which to let go, and knowing how to acquire authority through social encounters are more than knowing which classroom practices best teach students to write. The work of administration Hesse describes as political work is really the work of encouraging and engaging people in institutions. The combination of political theory and composition theory required to effectively administer a writing program within a complex institutional system requires, in Hesse's formulation, raising administrative activity to the level of engaging the work of intellectuals. At the same time, Hesse's formulation denies that administrative activity can rise to the level of intellectual work because it is, in the end, a kind of work that is more intuitive than deliberative. Significantly, it is precisely deliberation that Hesse and others are claiming to value and attempting to introduce to the execution and evaluation of writing administration.

Here, every argument can require reaching outside the discipline to find the available means of persuasion, so that improvisation becomes, in a curious way, routinized, but routinized without being systematically useful. The solution, in a sense, is therefore no solution. While we are more than willing to accept that the perspectives already discussed can make us much more adept at meeting our daily crises, it does so by encouraging what we urge writing administrators to avoid—the ongoing demand for improvisation.

In another example of the tendency of characterizing writing administration as improvisation, Stuart C. Brown, in *The Writing Program Administrator's Resource*, turns directly to ethics. Brown grounds his discussion in the decision-making challenges posed by several scenarios writing administrators typically face, such as confronting a creative and experienced teacher who discards a standardized syllabus, or weighing raising course enrollments against hiring additional adjunct faculty. The scenarios chosen by Brown provide the kinds of hard cases that challenge us to stretch our understanding of the decision-making work of writing administration. For Brown, “a useful mode for constructing these ‘interventions’ is to cast them within an ethical frame” (157). The ethical frame introduced by Brown allows him to extend the distinction between administrative work as managerial and as intellectual. “Moral dilemmas often arise when conflict occurs between what seems the ‘right’ thing to do and what seems the ‘easiest’ thing to do” (157). In this passage, Brown has anticipated our view that the opposition between managerial work—the easiest thing to do—and intellectual work—the right thing to do—does more to introduce a different criteria for making and evaluating decisions than it does to characterize decision making.

At the same time Brown introduces an ethical dimension to writing administration by linking managerial work with intellectual work, he does not otherwise provide a vocabulary for articulating work in the ethical dimension. As Brown tries to put it, “matters of fact, which involve identifying what can be known about the participants and the issues at hand; and matters of consequence, which are more speculative” (159). The speculation here does not rise above the level of weighing benefits and costs, it does not rise to the level of the intellectual work of critique that can enact structural change. It does not rise fully to the level of scholarship.

In her contribution to *The Writing Program Administrator as Theorist*, Carrie Shively Leverenz also makes a case for theorizing ethics as a writing administrator. She argues that the work becomes ethically complex because the performance of multiple roles—teacher, scholar, administrator—raises conflicts among those roles and dilemmas among their respective responsibilities. She proposes that we give up the search for the one best way to adjudicate between competing demands and instead begin to foster

ethical theorizing by writing administrators. She proposes that in the wake of the effort to construct a universal theory, we begin theorizing through these three forms: “(1) ethical awareness, (2) ethical action, and (3) ethical inquiry” (111). She defines ethical awareness as “a habit of mind in which one consciously reflects on the contingent nature of the ethical problems one faces” (111), asking always what is ethically at stake in our decision making. Ethical action in her scheme takes on a common-sense meaning of “doing the right thing,” but she points out that ethical action is different than applying disciplinary theory to the problem at hand. Ethical action requires instead foregrounding the interests of the local community and addressing the power relationships at play. The third form Leverenz proposes is ethical inquiry, not, she argues, with an eye for the applicable, but instead “with a goal of making knowledge about how moral reasoning operates, how ethics are applied within the field” (112). Leverenz provides a stronger vocabulary for ethical theorizing and an opening for the making of new knowledge, but she foreshortens that opportunity when she returns the discussion to applications in the field. As we have seen before, the effort becomes not how to contribute to the making of knowledge about moral reasoning itself, but how to make knowledge about disciplined practice. This, we argue, is one of the central problems in both our evaluative criteria and in our talk about our work as intellectual activity.

If the guidelines provided in EIWWA are insufficient because they are limited to the current state of disciplinary knowledge and so cannot move beyond disciplinary bounds to explain the hybrid nature of writing administration, the improvisations that writing administrators regularly perform are inadequate because they are not pursued as knowledge-making opportunities. Improvisations arise in the face of a crisis. Because we cannot anticipate every demand that will be made of us, every change in institutional structure that will impinge upon us from sources beyond our control, improvisations are unavoidable and frequently necessary. We improvise in order to stabilize an unstable situation, and our improvised performances frequently do just that. They re-establish order. But the order they reestablish is the old order. They do nothing to produce structural change.

In their contribution to *The Writing Program Administrator as Theorist*, Ruth Mirtz and Roxanne Cullen turn to leadership theories to describe a prominent aspect of writing administration that extends beyond the boundaries of composition theory and education. Mirtz and Cullen open their essay by noting that many of us draw on the disciplinary expertise we have developed as rhetoricians and teachers, because, “[l]ike most WPAs, we’ve had no training as leaders, although we’ve done our share of leading (both poorly and successfully)” (91). After reviewing various models of leadership

drawn from experience, business, and educational psychology, Mirtz and Cullen discard them: those based on teaching experience are too dependent on the willingness of an audience to learn, those drawn from business are not applicable in a situation where the purpose of leadership is something other than producing greater profits, and those drawn from educational psychology offer ways of understanding relationships between leaders and followers but no agendas for producing action. Mirtz and Cullen propose that writing administrators return to their discipline of rhetoric and composition studies and develop a model of leadership based on Rogerian rhetoric. Describing scenarios such as proposals for programmatic portfolio assessment or the recurring staffing crises that comprise the daily work of administering a large writing program, Mirtz and Cullen bring Rogerian procedures for audience analysis and negotiation to the production of viable solutions.

Their proposal goes further than most in the direction of drawing directly from disciplinary knowledge in composition studies to theorize resolution of recurring problems. In the end, Mirtz and Cullen discount disciplinary knowledge, acknowledging that the model they produce is too indeterminate and so requires ongoing improvisation:

While we may wish for a strong unified theory of leadership to guide us, we find, in reality, that our power and situation as WPAs are too random, too unpredictable, to allow one theory to fit all situations. Yet our work is too important to leave to randomness. [...] Rogerian leadership offers us a practical skill, building on interests and skills we already possess, to find and use the available means of persuasion to create a relationship with our audiences, both faculty and administration, that leads parties to change. (100-101)

Here, the attempt to bring knowledge to bear on the intellectual work of administration fails because the models are developed in structures too incommensurate with academic administration to be applicable. Mirtz and Cullen provide here a striking instance of the ways in which academic administration and academic disciplines repeatedly misrecognize each other, and in misrecognizing each other, fail to productively engage each other.

Louise Wetherbee Phelps enhances her appeal to leadership theory with a turn to activity theory in an effort to both describe and address the inter-, intra-, and extra-disciplinary demands of writing administration. Phelps makes provocative use of activity theory, conceptualizing authority as “conceptual affordances” drawn from an understanding of administrative agency as power dispersed throughout the faculty and administration. The title of her chapter, “Turtles All the Way Down,” reflects her claim that patterns of power are repeated throughout, a product more of institutional

structures than of persons. Phelps provides a valuable perspective on the nature of writing administration by describing the ways our capacities for getting things done are determined by the roles and relationships people occupy in institutions. A product of institutionally derived roles and relationships, Phelps explains that the “authority of an administrator is not a personal attribute or possession, despite those who improperly personalize it” (25). Instead, Phelps proposes a merging of the person with the power of the position to afford a perspective on institutional action, “A leader constitutes a node in a multi-dimensional network of power and information flowing in many directions. As leaders, WPAs catalyze, generate, align, and transmit power as it streams through systems of activity” (27-28).

While it may be far more accurate to characterize writing administrators as leaders who mobilize commitments rather than command resources, such a characterization can falter as a claim for the intellectual work of writing administration. If administration is a matter of coordination, it can be viewed as personal persuasiveness. Phelps attempts to avoid reducing administration to the personal by describing leadership as already fundamental to disciplinary knowledge in composition studies and as essential to the future of academic work, “To become equal partners in reform rather than futile resisters or passive objects of it, faculty themselves must develop thoughtful programs to foster the development of leaders from their own ranks—programs designed to operate seamlessly throughout a faculty career from graduate school to senior leadership roles in higher education” (4). As an integral part of any scholarship, leadership development of administrative authority produces roles and relationships that further the conditions for all intellectual work. Responsibility for nurturing the structures enabling scholarship disperses through all relationships to all the roles in an institution. In a certain sense, everyone is responsible.

But in the end, Phelps does not avoid reducing leadership ability to a capacity for improvisation. She concludes, “The principles that emerge from this analysis call educators to invent from the conditions and relationships of local situations ad hoc, flexible ways of achieving the matrix I have described” (35). Cultivating leadership as the ability to improvise, “like the composing of identity, is dynamic, lifelong, inseparable from [. . .] scholarly work, teaching, administrative practice, and personal lives, and an intrinsic aspect of the activity, genesis, and reformation of professional culture itself” (35). It becomes the capacity to act in the contingency of crisis.

REVISING OUR EVALUATION

As recounted in the essays discussed, crisis is considered a regular feature of our daily work. We know a system is in dire need of revision when crisis becomes chronic. The regular eruption of crisis in our work and the inad-

equacy of our descriptive criteria for evaluating our responses to it suggest that there are at least three things we might do to enrich our evaluative criteria, expand the domain of knowledge in writing administration, and begin to foster structural change to our systems so that they sustain viable programs instead of regularly throwing them into crisis. We suggest we begin by first grounding our evaluative criteria in empirical studies of tenure review cases; second, expanding our descriptive and evaluative vocabulary so that it begins to take account of the how we do our work as well as what our work produces; and third, taking the moment of evaluation as an opportunity, as Porter et al. put it, to rhetorically reinterpret the institution and so shift the system.

Grounding evaluative criteria in studies of successful and unsuccessful tenure and promotion cases will require gathering and analyzing the documents produced for such occasions, including the self-evaluations submitted by the candidates, the evidence of scholarship, teaching, and service submitted, the comments of outside evaluators when they are part of the process, and the internal criteria against which the tenure case is weighed. But this analysis must also include reflections by decision-makers on which pieces of evidence or which arguments proved to them to be most persuasive or, alternately, least persuasive of the merit of the scholarship submitted for review. Working inductively from a thorough review of these cases, both as they have been submitted to institutional committees and as they are reflected on by writing administrators making the cases, we would learn a great deal about institutional decision making and effective participation in it.

We must also recognize as a field that silence on the interpersonal in our evaluative criteria leads to a misrepresentation of the work that we do, a misrepresentation thrown into relief by the multiple accounts of improvisation recounted earlier. It is precisely the interpersonal work we do to shift perceptions of students, teachers, and administrators that calls up our improvisations and draws us outside our field. Douglas D. Hesse calls the work of encouraging and engaging people in institutions political savvy, Carrie Shively Leverenz turns to ethical reasoning to guide the interpersonal and intrapersonal work required of writing program administrators, and Louise Wetherbee Phelps turns to activity theory to propose ways to understand how we lead people to take actions that accomplish the work of teaching students to write. It is the interpersonal that occupies our days and calls upon our knowledge and imagination to perform the work we do.

In order to develop the vocabulary and overcome the silence on the interpersonal in our evaluative criteria, we must do more than provide anecdotes of improvisations. We must more rigorously represent that work and reframe our improvisations as knowledge-making activity that we reflect upon to

produce richer descriptions and theories explaining, predicting, and guiding our decision making. We must reframe the self-descriptions of writing administrators as activities making knowledge to meet specific institutional demands as well as making knowledge of the structures of the institutions themselves. Understanding our improvisations as activity producing knowledge about the structures of our institutions asks us to expand knowledge-making activity to provide a vision not only of what is, but also of what should be. By asking what should be, of course, we are returned to the arena of ethics. And so it is here, we suggest, that we extend our intellectual activity to include making knowledge about ethics and making ethical reasoning the structuring principle guiding our work.

Our third proposal is that writing administrators take these moments of evaluation to foster the kind of structural change that will reduce the eruption of crisis in our work and sustain ethical decision making at all levels of our institutions. If we are convinced that the work of writing administration is a kind of intellectual work, but not the kind easily represented through the traditional categories used in our institutions, then we must consider not only what is evaluated but how it is evaluated. At present, most traditional scholarship offered for review by tenure and promotion committees consists of essays published in refereed journals and books published by scholarly presses. These publications are taken as evidence of scholarly achievement precisely because they are rigorously reviewed and adjudicated by scholars outside our local institutions who are experts in the field and who deem the works worthy of publication on their merits as intellectual work. If the intellectual work we do as writing administrators is not easily represented through traditional categories because none of those categories fully captures the relationships constructed and maintained between the categories, among the institutional systems, and through the networks that conduct the scholarship, then what counts as evidence of intellectual work is a writing program taken as a whole. And if writing programs are our intellectual work, then perhaps they are better evaluated as intellectual work by the same kind of outside review and adjudication to which other kinds of scholarship are subjected. Perhaps what should become the most prominent document in a tenure and promotion review of a writing administrator is a WPA Council review. If, however, we are to advocate making outside WPA reviews a necessary feature of a tenure and promotion case, we must also work to ensure that those reviews are conducted not as moments of advocacy for writing administrators, but as carefully deliberated adjudications of the writing program as a manifestation of intellectual work in the complex context of its local institution.

Even after all this, however, we may finally conclude that the work of writing administrators cannot be adequately characterized and evaluated through the categories of scholarship, teaching, and service. We may find that the very hybrid nature of the work makes it work not different in degree, but different in kind, and so finally too different to fit within those categories. Such a conclusion, however, would not mean that we must simply throw our hands up in the air in the face of a recalcitrant system. Concluding that writing administration baffles current evaluative criteria could become exactly one of those moments when we recognize a zone of institutional ambiguity and identify a place where a structural change in categories will reform institutions to better accommodate the emergence of a different kind of intellectual work.

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