

Reviewing a Career of Scholarly Innovation, Mentorship, and Service: An Interview with Duane H. Roen

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In 1978, the Council of Writing Program Administration published Kenneth Bruffee's 1977 plenary address to the MLA Teaching of Writing Division. In his address, Bruffee argues that writing program administrators are emissaries who are responsible for creating an "enlightened, sympathetic context" for the teaching and learning of writing. In the last forty years, scholars and researchers in writing program administration have used much more nuanced and dynamic metaphors to define our work, asking important questions about whose body is recognized or ignored, whose identity is celebrated or denigrated, whose language is validated or marginalized when we choose metaphors or metonymy uncritically, but Bruffee's belief that WPAs have the potential to construct learning contexts (with others beyond the writing program) with empathy that allows students to engage in writing in meaningful, less fearful, and more relevant ways is still apropos of writing program administrators in the 21st century. Therefore, as we celebrate forty years of the *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, we are honored to bring you this interview with Duane H. Roen, a scholar, mentor, and leader who critically embodies the idea of WPA as emissary.

As part of writing this article, we interviewed Duane twice in late 2018. At the beginning of each interview, we engaged formally with Duane, adhering to interview protocols, asking if he consented to the interview being recorded, transcribed, and used for publication. Given our history with Duane, these moments were stilted and awkward, but like so many times before, he lightened the mood with humor. Duane gave us permission to use the recording any way we wanted, including embarrassing him on national television, which we fully intend to do. We all laughed and were reminded that this was a conversation between colleagues and friends. This is his way: to ease others' journeys, to reassure, to guide.

Duane carries the demeanor and attire of Mr. Rogers, in his maroon sweater with navy tie. His outward kindness, attentive listening, and desire to support and accept others are unparalleled. During our interviews with Duane, we were able to reflect on our deep connections, respect for one another, and memories of the too-many-to-count moments of mentoring that we've received; as Win Horner writes about her encounters with her own students in "On Mentoring," he extended to us what she describes as "open[ing] doors for my students that were hard for them to open themselves" (17). Based on our questions, Duane discussed with us the process of publishing in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, about his experience serving the journal and the Council of Writing Program Administration in multiple roles, and about how profoundly lucky he feels to have been given the chance to do this work with colleagues, with students, and with the public. The prominent theme that emerges from his responses and a review of his exemplary career is that Duane's scholarship, administrative work, service, and teaching advance a larger sense of purpose, reflect a commitment to the best interests of a community, and demonstrate democratic dispositions and values, such as inclusivity, respectful dialogue, and collaboration.

Growing up on a dairy farm near Hammond, Wisconsin, Duane learned the importance of hard work, discipline, community, and family, foundational values that reverberate throughout his scholarship, mentorship, and service to the field. Referencing Dewey, Duane stated, "education is life itself," and nowhere is this more evident in his life than when he discusses how influential his childhood on a dairy farm is to his work as a teacher, scholar, and administrator. At one point in our interview, after demonstrating to us how to teach a three-day old calf to drink milk, an analogy he uses often when leading writing workshops in the community, he said, "I feel so fortunate to have grown up on a farm. Every day, I think, how lucky I was." He discusses the value of collaboration—a privilege each of us has experienced. On the farm, whether baling hay or picking up rocks from the fields, all tasks were accomplished collaboratively; being part of a team was integral to life. Collaboration enhances our ability to problem-solve, to write, to imagine the impossible. For Duane, collaboration is critical for an intellectual life.

After more than four decades of teaching students, mentoring colleagues, publishing innovative scholarship, and serving various communities, Duane still enacts this collaborative mindset with compassion, valuing equity, difference, and respect. Moreover, although his research interests have evolved throughout his career, a central thread to his body of work has been collaboratively empowering marginalized voices, promoting disciplin-

ary documents and guidelines, and establishing best practices for writing program administrators, for mentorship, and for professional development. Duane has authored, co-authored, edited, and co-edited 11 books and more than 300 chapters, journal articles, and conference papers. His co-edited collection *The Outcomes Statement: A Decade Later* received CWPA's Best Book Award in 2015. He has contributed several articles to the *WPA* journal spanning a variety of topics, including public intellectualism (2015), facilitating learning (2012), the CWPA mentoring project (2010), research on academic life (2007), administering writing programs (1996), and graduate assistant training (1986). These articles continue to inform disciplinary conversations.

With Greg Glau and Barry Maid, Duane served as co-editor of *WPA* from 2004 to 2007. Dominant themes that emerge from their tenure as co-editors of the journal include writing assessment, curriculum design and revision, and innovations in writing program administration. Particularly influential was a 2006 special issue discussing scholarship on English Language Learner research and pedagogy. We asked Duane several questions regarding what processes and policies he and his co-editors established as part of their editorship of *WPA*. Three aspects stand out. First, Duane and his co-editors increased the number of referees in an effort to distribute the workload more evenly and more importantly to provide a broader range of scholarly expertise and experience, which connects to the importance of valuing different types of scholarship. Second, they understood the blind review of manuscripts as an opportunity for mentorship, serving as “mentor-editors” and using the process to help scholars develop. As Duane articulated, “we tried to be mentors to the people submitting manuscripts to the journal. That is, we wanted to have an active role in helping [an author] develop as a researcher, as a scholar, as a writer, and so we tried to give feedback that would help to do that.” For Duane, serving as a mentor-editor was particularly critical when reviewing submissions from graduate and early-career colleagues because it provided an opportunity for the editors not only to teach early-career academics the ropes of publishing but also model the process of providing appropriate and constructive criticism and praise; he said, “our thinking was, if this is someone relatively new to this game, then we need to step up our efforts to help nurture this person as a publishing scholar. I mean, everybody needs that and I think everybody deserves that.” Duane has continued to value this practice beyond his editorship; it's his way of engaging *with*, of playing what Elbow calls “the believing game.” As our dissertation chair, teacher, co-author, and colleague, we can attest to this commitment of mentorship through supportive, helpful feedback.

Duane's focus on mentoring scholars has also informed his practices when providing feedback as a referee for *WPA*. When reviewing manuscripts for journals, Duane always writes to the author(s), using second-person pronouns, because doing so not only conveys that he is thinking about the authors but also forces the referee to "think more carefully about the things" that one wants to say. For Duane, a referee should prioritize positive feedback and frame constructive criticism as opportunities for improvement: "reviewers should never, ever, ever offer negative feedback. Yes, there is room for improvement, but if you want to suggest improvement, there are positive ways to do that." For instance, Duane mentions that a referee should refrain from writing, "don't do this" or "this is awful" in favor of something more temperate, like "you might try this approach."

Third, for Duane and his co-editors, an important aspect of serving as mentor-editors was to value highly and to publish a broad array of scholarship. In his interviews with us, Duane applauded Ernest Boyer's delineation of the different types of scholarship as outlined in *Scholarship Reconsidered*: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of application, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and the scholarship of engagement. Duane asserted all of these types of scholarship should be valued equally by journal editors and by academic disciplines more broadly because they are critical to maintaining intellectual vitality, rigor, and innovation. What is more, valuing and enacting these different types of scholarship provides academics with opportunities to influence, positively and productively, the communities and constituencies they serve and allow them to communicate their scholarship and its concomitant results in intelligible ways to the public.

For Duane, as his recent publications noting the importance of public intellectuals aver, an academic should prioritize positively affecting students, colleagues, and communities (Roen, "Writing Program Faculty"; Behm and Roen; Behm, Rankins-Robertson, and Roen). Academics possess a deep and enduring responsibility to engage the public in meaningful ways, informing communities about what academics do and applying scholarship to effect positive outcomes for the public. Roen states, "I believe that all of us who call ourselves academics have opportunities and responsibilities to serve as publicly engaged intellectuals. In particular, each of us can share with the public the work that we do as teachers, researchers, and administrators" ("Writing Program Faculty" 166). Duane engages as a public intellect through offering workshops in the community, engaging in orientation talks on the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, and writing articles and editorials for the general public (167–68). Duane believes his work in the community, such as the family history writing

workshops he leads, is his greatest commitment as a public intellectual. He loves to help people learn about the histories of their families.

And it is Duane's commitment to supporting others that has become a hallmark of his identity in his civic, personal, academic, and professional life. This commitment—his advocacy for others—is also visible in his sustained scholarship and exemplary leadership in writing program administration. For example, he published articles and chapters beyond the *WPA* journal that emphasize the work and evaluation of writing program administrators. Of particular note is his chapter “Writing Administration as Scholarship and Teaching,” a foundational piece that argues for the intellectual work of WPAs during promotion and tenure review. When asked which of his WPA-related contributions he believes to be most significant, Duane stated his co-edited collection on the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, with a particular focus on the 8 Habits of Mind, because the more he has worked with students who have struggled the more he believes it is because they have not developed habits of mind; he asserts “habits of mind can be developed.” He hopes to see longitudinal studies in the field that look closely at how people are engaging students in the 8 Habits of Mind.

Duane has advocated for writing program administrators by assuming several roles for the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), generously serving on or chairing every high-level committee for the organization and completing a six-year commitment as vice president, president, and past president. Mindful of his positions within infrastructures of power and privilege, his approach in disciplinary leadership positions has been to engage in conversation with audiences, listening to and inviting all voices to be heard. He is a quiet facilitator and seeks to understand perspectives that he does not live or cannot experience. This is illustrated in his active engagement through presenting at CWPA for twenty years; addressing the 2014 CWPA attendees with his keynote plenary “Writing Program Faculty and Administrators as Public Intellectuals: Opportunities and Challenges”; hosting the 2008 CWPA conference; and leading the CWPA workshop in 2003. He reflected on the importance of the community of CWPA and the annual conference that feels like a family reunion to him: “I love that conference because it's a gathering of people who care about their work, who care about students, who care about their institutions.”

Although many of these activities are more visible roles in the CWPA, it has been the invisible work of his diligent and invaluable mentorship to countless students and colleagues throughout his career that creates the full circle of leaders and scholars in the field of writing program administration (from those who mentored him to those he now mentors). Duane believes

in the potential and possibility of others and bridges differences, nurtures relationships, and cultivates a variety of knowledges and experiences. He humbly shared with us how his academic training and scholarship informs his core values as a teacher, scholar, and administrator: “it’s never about me, never about us as faculty, it’s never about us employed at the university; it’s about the people we serve. We’re here to make sure the people whom we serve are successful in college and beyond. We are also here to make sure we are contributing to the community—and we need to communicate that to the community so they value what we do.”

Duane’s overarching philosophy, beyond the academy, is this: “What we need to do is meet each individual, each student, each member of the community wherever she or he is, and then figure out what we can do to help that person achieve his or her dreams based on what each individual values. That’s what we should all be doing.” Duane’s lifeline is the value inherent in the work of our field; its potential to support and serve others; its ability to provide a platform for those who might not otherwise have access. He embodies the foundational values of the CWPA and models the life of scholar, administrator, and mentor.

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