

Review of *Radiant Figures: Visual Rhetorics in Everyday Administrative Contexts*

Skyler Meeks

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In the evolving landscape of writing program administration, the art of storytelling holds a place of central importance. WPAs are often cast in the role of narrators, tasked with weaving compelling narratives about their programs to various stakeholders within the university landscape. These stories, however, extend beyond mere recounting of events or achievements; they embody a strategic communication that can either engage or disengage, inform swiftly or muddle in complexity. *Radiant Figures: Visual Rhetorics in Everyday Administrative Contexts*, edited by Rachel Gramer, Logan Bearden, and Derek Mueller, dives into this narrative core of WPA work, proposing a transformative shift in how these stories are told.

The text posits that the traditional avenues of storytelling in administrative contexts, which “tend toward a kind of tabular grammar that enables us to tell certain stories,” do not always capture the immediacy or engage the audience as effectively as needed. In a realm where engagement and clear communication are paramount, the authors argue for the integration of visual rhetoric, specifically through the lens of visual administration, or “VizAdmin,” that represents “a philosophical orientation to the work . . . that understands, accounts for, and embraces the rhetorical potential in the creation and circulation of everyday visuals.” This approach, as the text suggests, isn’t just about incorporating visuals into administrative work but is about embracing a new philosophy in WPA work, one that aligns with the conceptual shift that “GenAdmin” brought to the field (Charlton et al., 2011).

Radiant Figures emerges as a pioneering text in this domain, highlighting the untapped potential of visual artifacts in telling the stories of writing programs. It does not merely advocate for the use of visuals but delves into the ‘how’ and ‘why’—exploring the intricate ways in which visual rhetoric can enhance, clarify, and revolutionize the narrative capabilities of WPAs. By integrating visual elements into the narrative fabric of administrative communication, the text argues, WPAs can create more engaging, succinct, and impactful stories about their programs.

In essence, *Radiant Figures* is a clarion call to WPAs to rethink and reframe their storytelling approaches. It offers a novel perspective in the field of writing program administration, encouraging a shift towards a more visually oriented narrative style by illuminating “an underrepresented area of intellectual inquiry in WPA scholarship.” This approach, as Gramer, Bearden, and Mueller illustrate, is not just an aesthetic choice but a strategic tool in making administrative communication more vibrant, effective, and resonant with its intended audiences.

OVERVIEW OF CONTENT

Radiant Figures is segmented into various chapters, each focusing on a unique aspect of visual rhetoric within administrative contexts. Throughout the text, various essays and case studies illustrate the power of visual artifacts in writing program administration. The authors delve into how visual representations, such as infographics, visual syllabi, and other graphic elements can simplify complex information, foster engagement, and provide a clearer understanding of administrative narratives. These visual tools are not just aesthetic enhancements but are strategically employed to improve the clarity and impact of communication within and outside the university setting.

One of the text’s key contributions is its discussion on the practical application of visual rhetoric in WPA work, where “60% of the WPA scholarship examined has no graphical figures present at all.” It provides real-world examples and theoretical underpinnings of how visuals can be effectively integrated into administrative tasks, such as program reporting, curriculum development, and faculty communication. By doing so, *Radiant Figures* bridges the gap between theory and practice, offering WPAs a toolkit for incorporating visual rhetoric into their daily administrative responsibilities.

The initial chapters lay the foundation, emphasizing the importance of visual elements in administrative documents. The authors argue that these visuals are not mere embellishments, but vital tools that reflect and communicate the values and objectives of writing programs. This sets the stage for the text’s central argument: the indispensability of visual rhetoric in administrative communication.

The text’s opening chapter, “Thinking through Data Visualization” by Julia Voss and Heather Noel Turner, positions visual elements as fundamental in WPA work, harnessing the revealing power of figures to establish knowledge within writing programs. The chapter argues for a preemptive posture toward data visualization, not just to illustrate programmatic data, but also to render the complex relationality and dynamism of this data.

This, the authors argue, is a mode of communication with stakeholders but it also functions as a strategic practice, as WPAs negotiate and advocate in their administrative roles; this is the productive friction of quantitative data in conversation with disciplinary knowledge in writing studies.

Subsequent chapters delve into practical applications, examining how visual aids like graphs and diagrams enhance curriculum design and improve the clarity of program guides and assignment sheets. These sections underscore the functionality of visual rhetoric as a means to convey complex information effectively and engagingly.

One such chapter is Kate Pantelides, Jacie Castle, and Katherine Thach Musick's "WPA Responsive Genre Change," where the authors apply visual representation to student writing events to demonstrate how such events "map" student participation, while also exposing the shortcomings of traditional visual modes, like printed maps, to that task. They propose "holographic thinking" as a way to conceptualize multi-dimensional representations in writing program work. They chronicle their transformation of a Celebration of Student Writing map to a more interactive and inclusive form, culminating in an embodied tabletop diorama format that makes the visualization of event participation active and as personal as participation in the events it represents.

Chapters 5 ("Diagram as Boundary Object" by David Swiencicki Martins) and 6 ("Designing to See, Mean, and Act" by Laurence José) mark a move to investigate the practical implementation of visual rhetoric within WPA contexts. Martins considers the strategic use of visual diagrams as "boundary objects," which allows for unmediated communication and understanding between constituents and stakeholders in the administrative process. José, meanwhile, explores the critical role of visual design in program administration, particularly in making academic programs tangible and comprehensible. Together, these chapters champion a shift from traditional methodologies to more multidimensional and visually dynamic strategies, enhancing both administrative and pedagogical practices in writing program administration.

The concluding chapters project into the future of visual rhetoric in writing program administration, highlighting emerging trends and advocating for ongoing research in this evolving field. Those interested in these innovations will find chapters like "Networks of Discourse" by Jacob W. Craig and Chris Warnick and "Graphic Re-Imaginings" by Logan Bearden of particular interest, as they demonstrate sophisticated approaches to addressing the complexities of WPA work. Craig and Warnick use network mapping to unveil the rich interplay of institutional histories and program missions, while Bearden offers a profound look into curricular

revision through transformative visual representations. These chapters both showcase advanced applications of visual rhetoric, but they also encourage a broader set of possibilities for WPAs to captivate stakeholders through rich visual narratives, often stepping well outside the lines of the traditional administrative memo.

In summary, *Radiant Figures* makes a compelling case for the integration of visual rhetoric in writing program administration. It argues that the adoption of a VizAdmin approach can revolutionize the way WPAs communicate and tell the stories of their programs. Through a combination of theoretical insights and practical applications, the text provides a comprehensive guide for WPAs looking to enhance their storytelling capabilities and overall administrative effectiveness.

ANALYSIS AND SIGNIFICANCE

The text notably pivots from the conventional reliance on textual and numerical data, advocating instead for visual rhetoric as a dynamic tool to articulate complex administrative data and program narratives. This shift not only bridges a recognized gap in the literature but also enriches the discourse by integrating theory with practical, real-world applications.

Through its chapters, the book presents a nuanced exploration of how visual elements—when strategically employed—can significantly enhance the clarity, engagement, and comprehension of administrative documents and processes. This practical orientation, firmly rooted in the multimodality of current rhetoric and composition research, underscores the text's relevance and timeliness, especially given the evolving complexity and interdisciplinary nature of writing programs.

While not introducing radically new theoretical frameworks, *Radiant Figures* distinguishes itself by delving into the specifics of visual rhetoric's application in administrative settings. It extends the conversation surrounding program assessment and narrative construction, demonstrating how visual tools can effectively communicate multifaceted program aspects. The text's contribution lies in its detailed portrayal of how these visual strategies can not only diversify but also refine program assessment and communication strategies, thereby fitting well within—and expanding—the current framework of rhetoric and composition research. In essence, *Radiant Figures* is both a reflection of and a response to the increasing demand for innovative and effective narrative techniques in the realm of writing program administration.

RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Radiant Figures fills a crucial gap by focusing on the creation, circulation, and reception of visual–rhetorical artifacts within WPA work, highlighting the intellectual practices surrounding their distribution and uptake. The text’s focus on visual artifact creation, circulation, and reception addresses the modern WPA’s data-driven demands, presenting key metrics like enrollment and performance visually. Its practical orientation, demonstrated through examples like alluvial diagrams, infographics, and program banners, provides readers with actionable insights. This unique approach not only distinguishes the text but also invites practitioners to adapt these strategies in their contexts, making it an invaluable addition to WPA scholarship and practice. While immensely beneficial to seasoned WPAs, newcomers may need a foundational understanding of WPA assessment to fully leverage the book’s offerings.

Embracing its role as a dynamic, evolving text, *Radiant Figures* introduces itself as “work in progress” through its innovative, open access webtext format. This digital approach offers a unique, interconnected journey that proposes seven “paths,” each designed to guide WPAs through various themes, ranging from “Mapping in/as Administration” to “Program Visibility.” This structure is particularly beneficial for those new to the field of VizAdmin, providing a less intimidating entry point into a comprehensive exploration of the subject. The paths are interconnected, indicating the multidisciplinary nature of the work and the rich tapestry of ideas woven throughout the chapters.

While the text’s format and its multidisciplinary approach enhance readers’ comprehension of visual rhetoric’s role in program administration, *Radiant Figures* is not devoid of challenges. Some readers might find the digital format less familiar, and the thematic interconnectivity, though enriching, might lead to occasional content overlap. Nonetheless, the text stands as a seminal resource, especially for WPAs and scholars eager to navigate the complex landscape of program administration through the lens of visual rhetoric. Its approach to content organization, coupled with a rich blend of perspectives and practical insights exemplifies the potency of visual narratives in the contemporary, data-driven academic world.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Radiant Figures* emerges not just as a textual resource but as a beacon guiding WPAs through the nuanced terrain of program storytelling. Gramer, Bearden, and Mueller’s work does more than illuminate the

path; it redefines it, inviting WPAs to embrace visual rhetoric as a primary narrative tool in their administrative arsenal.

This text's significance lies in its ability to transform the narrative techniques within WPA work, shifting from the traditional text-heavy approach to a more dynamic, visually-oriented methodology. By doing so, it equips WPAs with the tools to tell more effective, engaging, and memorable stories about their programs. These stories, woven with visual elements, become more than just accounts of administrative tasks or achievements; they evolve into compelling narratives that resonate with a diverse range of stakeholders, from students to faculty, and from university administrators to external evaluators.

Radiant Figures establishes itself as a critical text, predominantly engaging seasoned WPAs and scholars dedicated to writing program administration as a field of study. It insightfully navigates the complex terrain of visual rhetorics within administrative contexts, proving indispensable for those already versed in the nuances of WPA work. While it serves as a foundational guide, its presumption of prior assessment knowledge in WPA might present an initial challenge to the uninitiated, thereby delineating its audience between the experienced and the aspirants keen on deepening their WPA expertise.

The integration of visual rhetoric as proposed in *Radiant Figures* is not merely a cosmetic enhancement; it is a strategic move towards clearer, more impactful communication. In an academic world increasingly driven by data and metrics, the ability to present complex information in an accessible, visually appealing manner is invaluable. This text, therefore, is not just a guide but a catalyst for change, encouraging WPAs to rethink how they present their programs' stories, outcomes, and visions.

For WPAs looking to refine their storytelling abilities and elevate their program's narrative, *Radiant Figures* is an essential read. It offers a fresh perspective on the power of visuals in administrative communication, providing practical insights and tools that can be immediately applied. In essence, it's a handbook for the modern WPA, one that acknowledges and leverages the rich possibilities of visual rhetorics in an ever-evolving educational landscape. By endorsing this innovative approach, *Radiant Figures* doesn't just offer a new way to tell the stories of writing programs; it encourages WPAs to create stories that are as radiant and impactful as the programs themselves.

REFERENCES

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Skyler Meeks is a PhD student in North Carolina State University's communication, rhetoric, and digital media program. He has always had a soft spot for student support, holding various administrative roles in learning centers prior to starting at NCSU. Often approaching his studies with a collector's mindset, Skyler seeks to uncover and assemble diverse perspectives and methodologies that enrich the dialogues surrounding educational practices and student learning experiences.

