Crisis, Change, and Opportunity: A Resituated WPA Reviews Resituating Writing


In the Foreword to Resituating Writing: Constructing and Administering Writing Programs, Charles Schuster emphasizes what he sees as the book’s theme: depicting the writing program administrator as “change agent,” one who uses crises to produce needed change instead of being complacent and thus maintaining the status quo (xi). He argues that the key concepts in the text are crisis, change, and opportunity (xiv).

When I first encountered this book, I was one year out of graduate school in rhetoric and composition and the administrator of a brand-new writing program at a small, public, undergraduate four-year institution. The “crisis” motivating the new program was the lack of theoretical articulation and quality control of the “special-topics” freshman and sophomore composition seminars that had been in place at the school for about 20 years. The “change” was to a freshman-level course that was to serve as an introduction to the academic discourse community, with follow-up writing-intensive courses in each major. My “opportunity” was to implement this new program, with the formal approval of the faculty assembly already secured before my arrival. Parts of Resituating Writing served as invaluable resources as I worked to develop the newly-approved curriculum, attend to the needs of our instructors (mostly part-time, and not all of whom were in favor

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Composition Studies, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 1999
of the new program), articulate the theoretical foundations of the program to others in the institution, begin dialogues about assessment, publicize the program, perform other administrative duties (both the enormous and the minute), and—most important—teach. I turned to its pages to help buttress my arguments about what kind of administrator I felt I should be.

Janangelo and Hansen, in their Preface, identify as the book’s main principle the notion that strength as a writing program administrator arises from differences; they articulate that principle among their purposes, which include increasing the understanding of and dialogue about writing programs and their administrators, physically and conceptually resituating writing programs within the academy, and helping WPAs recognize their work as being both ethical and intellectual (xvi). However helpful the book was in my career self-definition, after just two years as a writing program administrator I found myself resigning in the midst of what seemed to me irreconcilable differences with others concerning theoretical, pedagogical, and personnel management philosophies. My differences, far from being construed as strengths, had been my downfall. In the year and a half since my resignation (I have continued to teach in the program), I’ve tried to explore the reasons why. What advice did I take that I shouldn’t have? What did I take too far? What did I foolishly ignore? What about my personal and institutional contexts differed from those detailed in this book? I intend to re-view each section of Resituation Writing through the lenses at both ends of my brief WPA career; accordingly, some of the eleven chapters—and issues within them—will receive more attention than others.

Philosophical Issues and Institutional Identities

The first section of the text begins with Janangelo’s “Theorizing Difference and Negotiating Differends: (Un)naming Writing Programs’ Many Complexities and Strengths,” which “attempt[s] to name and theorize several animating differences of intentions, opinions, and epistemologies that may constrain, compel, or enable writing programs” (4). [Janangelo applies Jacques Derrida’s difference and Jean-Francois Lyotard’s differend to a discussion of those differences (4-8)—writing programs’ alternative recruiting and appointment methods, the differences among writing teachers and their pedagogical alliances, the WPA’s existence as a “personnel anomaly” (7), and (especially in the context of writing across the curriculum) institutional disagreements about “which literacy practices to protect and which to punish” (8), disputes which often result in writing programs’ simultaneously serving and subverting institutional missions and goals.] Whereas faculty in other disciplines often look to writing courses to provide field-specific indoctrination, political activists in WAC often see the same courses as potential “site[s] for dismantling particularly troublesome
versions of hegemonic discursive ‘common sense’” (Susan Miller, qtd. in Janangelo 10).

For several reasons, I was initially constrained from strongly influencing the development and implementation of our writing-intensive courses (except at the various departments’ initiatives), which have, I believe, tended toward assimilation models. Thus, I felt that our first-year course, Composition 150, ought to go perhaps beyond simple introduction to and training in “typical” academic discourse and provide students with an opportunity to also make knowledge by critiquing that discourse and the institutional assumptions from which it stems, in the interest of developing what Patricia Bizzell calls students’ “civic virtue” (271). This goal differs somewhat from part of my school’s Mission Statement, which asserts that knowledge is “instilled,” “acquired,” and “pursued” rather than made (10), and from part of our writing program reform proposal, which delineates the scope of the first-year course as “teach[ing] students to write within an academic context . . . [and] engag[ing] them in the fundamental intellectual project of understanding existing knowledge” (“Proposal” 6). However, the course could also be construed as support for those documents—the Mission Statement because it goes on to emphasize the need for students to “understand the values and assumptions implicit in the major fields of study” and the proposal because the course was also meant to help students “develop their own perspective of [existing knowledge]” (6). To balance the traditional writing intensive courses, over which I had less influence, with a more politicized first-year course, seemed to represent a reasonable compromise in which everyone got at least some of what she or he wanted—students’ introduction to professional discourses combined with the ability to question the assumptions of those discourse communities and how those assumptions are played out in language.

I felt this compromise kept our program from becoming what Janangelo calls a “renegade unit” (11). Instead, the program attempted to nurture the institution in ways Janangelo suggests—by providing “versatility of knowledge,” new teaching strategies, a unifying ethos (writing being shared among disciplines), and “empathy and socially transformative strategies to groups who feel [it] different and unwelcome” in the academy (13). The social and institutional critique embedded in Composition 150 also positioned the writing program to agitate about “social . . . and professional inequities” (14), such as the gatekeeping nature of academic discourse and the sometimes less-than-desirable working conditions of part-time teachers. However, I believe Janangelo would say that these activities, concentrated as they were in the first-year course and in personnel issues affecting those teaching that course, defined me too soon and too narrowly—that is, I differed instead of deferring, instead of being deferential. My own impatience for change elicited equal
impatience from those with whom I disagreed regarding the purposes of writing instruction, and, as a result, I did not give myself sufficient time to prove the worth of what I felt was a justified and articulated position.

My subsequent resignation felt, in part, like an abandonment of the part-time cadre of our writing faculty, who wished for better working conditions and more autonomy in their classrooms, and for whom I had tried to be an advocate. On that subject, Kristine Hansen considers the WPA’s relationship with adjuncts in her chapter, “Face to Face with Part-Timers: Ethics and the Professionalization of Writing Faculties.” In order to both raise the prestige of composition studies and create more equitable relationships between WPAs and part-time teachers, Hansen favors professionalization of instructors—even as she acknowledges Richard Ohmann’s definition of professionalization as an exclusive, gatekeeping practice that supports the maintenance of the status quo (28)—because such professionalization is something the institution can usually understand and approve (29), and because she feels it would be better if all composition teachers, not just those working full-time or on the tenure track, “could be immersed in the profession, having access to and helping create a body of knowledge” (29).

Hansen acknowledges that the financial burden of professionalization would be prohibitive, and that professionalization can serve to recreate the academy’s “hegemonic superstructure” (Susan Miller, qtd. on 30). She draws on Robert Hariman and Michel Foucault in noting that professionalization fragments and bounds knowledge, disciplines it “to create expertise, from which comes power,” which can then be used to both shape and subjugate knowledge by demanding conformity to accepted procedures for creating and accumulating it (31). However, she seems to feel that actively valuing lore as a knowledge-making activity, celebrating and using it by “bringing it into the center of professional dialogue” (33) will mitigate professionalism’s anti-democratic characteristics and boost morale by fostering a feeling of collaboration among writing instructors (35).

In my view, this suggestion does not adequately address the problems Hansen identifies with the professionalization of part-time teachers. Her optimism about all writing teachers being able to help create the knowledge valued in composition studies is contradicted by Peter Vandenbark, who asserts that most composition instructors have become the clients of the field’s theorists and researchers:

Writing teachers are not incapable of questioning or theorizing their practices, they lack the privilege—and the institutionalized leisure time that accompanies it—to reflect upon their practices . . . . [W]riting teachers themselves often occupy positions that do not allow them to propagate change through writing. A writing
teacher simply cannot teach her way out of institutional ineffectiveness. (5-9)

While local celebration of lore can provide a sense of dignity and morale to writing faculty (and has done so in our program), it cannot fully substitute for research-oriented scholarly work that is generally privileged in composition studies, and putting lore under the "panoptic gaze" of the institution (Patricia Harkin, qtd. on 33) can pose a genuine risk to those who espouse discourse(s) alternative to a writing program's "official" vision. Further, while I found inspiring Hansen's personal case study of motivating more ethical treatment of part-time faculty by establishing face-to-face relations among them and higher administrators (35-41), her assumption that professionalization of adjunct writing faculty should be undertaken because it is already embedded in the culture of the academy is irreconcilable with Susan Miller's claim that "[a]n actually improved status [for composition] . . . depends on openly consolidating the field's resistances to the cultural superstructure that first defined it" (qtd. on 42). Hansen seems to feel that no one in our discipline is capable of motivating the kind of tangible protest that can expose the oppressive moves of the academy, so therefore WPAs must do the best they can to better the conditions of part-timers by largely buying into the existing system of professionalization.

That system, according to Lester Faigley and Susan Romano's "Going Electronic: Creating Multiple Sites for Innovation in a Writing Program," includes the assumption that writing instructors, working within the "convenient fiction" of a "unified and coherent" writing program, must teach essayist literacy (46-47). This kind of literacy defines "good writing" as that which tries to mirror the fiction of scientific objectivity—by incorporating, for example, linear structure, painstaking documentation, and rational language (47). Faigley and Romano assert that, although we in composition studies often acknowledge the multiplicity of academic discourse and critique essayist literacy, it is still taught because it is expected across most of the other academic disciplines we supposedly serve and because of our usual focus on "process" instructional methods that can devolve into formulaic prescriptions for effective writing (47).

Faigley and Romano go on to argue that teaching writing on networked computers, since it forces us to broaden our conceptions of literacy and successful communication to include students' electronic experiences, can eliminate our "privileging of the essay . . . because teaching practices that we advocate and that have gone largely unquestioned are exposed as unsuited to the task" (48). Their examples of Multi-User Domain (MUD) and Internet use as ways for students to participate in public, even global, conversations show how the traditional academic essay can be made to yield ground to alternative discourses: with its sanction of immediacy and pathos, the 'net
“subverts the model of reasoned public discourse” (56). As well, “computerspace writing resists the revision common to process pedagogy” and “‘discourse community’ and ‘audience’ lose explanatory power . . . when identities are masked, multiple, and unstable” (56).

The point here is that thoughtful electronic innovations in the writing classroom can give teachers a tangible way to subvert the traditional academic discourse that is usually expected of students. While I was not a writing program administrator long enough to address the opportunities offered by “electronic” writing courses, with time and patience, perhaps this is a concept that could be implemented at my institution as one alternative to prevailing models of writing instruction. As Faigley and Romano argue in their conclusion, “If teachers believe that students are disempowered only because they cannot write proficient academic essays, then essayist literacy serves as a Berlin Wall between teacher and student literacies. . . . [M]any routes now exist around it” (57).

A similar wall seems to exist between teachers at four-year schools and those at two-year colleges, according to Elizabeth Nist and Helon Raines in “Two-Year Colleges: Explaining and Claiming our Majority.” While their stated purpose is to “explain the centrality of composition in two-year college English departments and point out ways in which these programs challenge the field of composition to demonstrate its often-proclaimed commitment to empower students” (59), I found their argument much more an attempt to lobby for two-year colleges’ increased representation in the WPA and increased recognition from their four-year colleagues, both of which are deserved.

Nist and Raines provide a brief history of the development of community colleges; descriptions of the students served by these institutions, the English faculty who teach them, and the goals of the composition curricula being taught; and an exploration of two-year college faculties’ relation to the profession as a whole (60-66). They argue that community colleges’ relative lack of hierarchy—for example, no designated writing program administrator, the use of the title of “instructor” for all teachers regardless of status—and focus on teaching over research reveal differences in values between two- and four-year institutions, differences which often result in what they call “university elitism” (64).

The authors conclude by suggesting several ways the WPA can create a larger role for two-year college representatives, and ways in which four-year college faculty can forge connections with two-year colleagues, in order that we may all better address shared difficulties—such as the improvement of writing instruction at all levels of education (which includes curriculum articulation and assessment as well as avoidance of faculty “burnout”) and the resolving of conflicts among writing programs’ various constituencies (65-
I included a representative from a nearby community college in one of our week-long faculty workshops, which resulted in the exchange of useful curriculum planning and assessment information; I have to agree with Nist and Raines concerning the value of creating and maintaining this kind of connection.

**The WPA Within and Across Departments**

Due to the brevity of my administrative appointment, I felt unable to make much of a difference in my larger institution concerning attitudes about writing—the goal on which Lynn Bloom focuses in "Making a Difference: Writing Program Administration as a Creative Process." Bloom lists four ways in which WPAs can realize their "creative potential" (73). The first is teacher training, whereby a WPA increases writing instructors' "familiarity" with rhetorical history and theory, literary theory, research methods, etc., which in turn raises the writing program's credibility within its institution (74-75). I have to ask here, though, when most writing teachers (especially part-time faculty), even having gained this initial familiarity, will have either the time or incentive to regularly peruse the scholarly publications devoted to these topics. Secondly, Bloom suggests WPAs can creatively influence graduate education by introducing more rhetorical theory and composition research into the graduate curriculum and encouraging more graduate students to participate in composition studies' scholarly activities (76-78)—something I could not do at a four-year institution, but which my graduate program did, to my good fortune on the job market.

Third, Bloom suggests influencing undergraduate education by helping to determine, articulate, and publicize a program's agendas for serving students, institutions, and sponsors (78). Bloom asserts that "[a]n up-to-date WPA can ensure a state-of-the-art curriculum" (78), but strangely, the only programmatic agendas listed here are students' socialization, initiation, and indoctrination into academic and professional discourse, none of which seem to leave room for the institutional critique and dissent as several writers in composition studies have lately been advocating (see Trimbur, Bizzell, Harris, France, and Clark). The final area in which Bloom feels WPAs can work creatively is the establishment and/or enhancement of an institution's reputation in the field(s) of rhetoric and composition, through research, publication, conference participation, and other networking activities (80), which, I think, implicitly assumes that no WPA would want to publicly disagree with his or her own institution's programs and goals.

Although Bloom concludes by asserting that "it is appropriate, realistic, and necessary to conceive of WPAs as initiators of change, rather than merely as reactors to the dark, straight slashes of either the status quo or regression" (81), I feel that her focus on assimilationist models of writing...
instruction actually represents the status quo and discourages challenges to it. (Readers may also find this agenda reinforced toward the end of Bloom’s “Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise.”) Whether they are change agents or defenders of the status quo, Ellen Strenske notes in “Recruiting and Retraining Experienced Teachers: Balancing Game Plans in an Entrepreneurial Force-Field” that WPAs must still manage the “unstable, dynamic force-field of conflict and opportunity” that is any writing program, in which individual teachers’ goals and plans may differ from those of other instructors, the WPA, and the institution; and in which “the writing program often clashes with the institution’s sense of itself, its mission and priorities” (82-83). Her purpose is to show how savvy recruitment, and training that offers professional development worth the investment of a teacher’s time and energy (an “entrepreneurial model”), can help a WPA to “reconcile and advance individual, programmatic, and institutional game plans” (84-85).

Strenske illustrates conflict within writing programs with the hypothetical cases of two instructors (Adam and Eve) who are polar opposites in age, gender, life situation, and pedagogical philosophy (85-88). She then lists several incentives which might motivate them, and teachers like them, to compete for non-tenure-track jobs in often-contentious environments, one of which I feel is fully relevant in the context of my institution—the constant honing of expertise that comes with ongoing changes in writing programs’ curricula. To a lesser extent we can offer the “professional stimulus” that teachers can derive from working with diverse groups of students and faculty, and (within limits) the opportunity to do “imaginative and creative teaching” (89). A key difference between the kind of large university writing program on which Strenske bases her discussion and the one that is currently in place on my campus is that in Strenske’s example, teachers compete for positions by championing their chosen theoretical and pedagogical views; here, teachers compete by showing how well they identify with and adhere to the program’s common vision, which has, to an extent, been chosen for them. Strenske does, however, note in her subsequent discussion of recruiting that a WPA should try to match candidates’ pedagogical approaches with the program’s aims—while still trying to recognize the strengths in instructors’ differences and finding “institutional ways to protect and enhance these strengths” (92). The goal here seems to be a very general consensus about the program’s mission with considerable latitude regarding just how that mission is achieved in the classroom.

Strenske seems to contradict herself on the issue of pedagogical diversity, though, in her treatment of faculty training (and retraining)—during which, she argues, teachers are to learn to “respect and accommodate each other’s pedagogical differences” while simultaneously having their “beliefs . . . materialize for inspection and assessment outside of class” (95). While
the activities she suggests—group reading and discussion of theoretical texts, decision-making meetings, committee work, group grading, and performance reviews (96)—could all be valid opportunities for WPAs and faculty members to share ideas (and have all been used in our local program), the language used (“training,” “inspection and assessment”) suggests that such sharing may be encouraged less to appreciate differences than to evaluate the level of conformity to predetermined criteria. Certainly this suspicion loomed large in the minds of those teaching in our program upon its initial implementation.

Of course, WPAs, their programs, and the teachers in them can’t escape the “panoptic gaze” completely, nor should they seek to if they want to remain informed about developments on their campuses that might affect their work. In “The Politics of Collaboration: Writing Centers Within Their Institutions,” Molly Wingate asserts that within the specific context of writing centers, some collaboration with the institution is necessary. She begins, “In our zeal to design and create programs that sometimes oppose the prevailing paradigms, we may intentionally stay a bit outside of the institution . . . . [W]e are a little confused about our relationship with our larger institution” (101). Mitigating that confusion, for writing center directors specifically, is Wingate’s purpose. One key is to network, something she acknowledges she failed to do (103) and in an area in which I was also lacking. Wingate applies C. Wright Mills’ questions about “sociological imagination” in her argument that directors of writing centers and programs need to know what changes are occurring in their institutions, how they are taking place, who is causing them, and who is being liberated and repressed by the changes—so that they can understand how their programs fit into the workings of the institution and why their programs either do or do not have power (103).

Wingate then goes on to describe different kinds of collaboration that can occur between writing centers/programs and the campuses in which they are situated, relying on Andrea Lunsford’s distinction between “dialogic” collaboration (in which each party has equal power) and “hierarchical” collaboration (in which some parties have considerably more power than others—the situation on most campuses) (102). Hierarchical collaboration, in Wingate’s view, makes Werner Rings’ categories of negative collaboration likely to occur. Neutral collaborators face seemingly “insurmountable circumstances” (104) and survive however they can, working for those in power while trying not to profess any particular principle. WPAs seeking to establish Faigley and Romano’s “convenient fiction” of a smooth and unified program might conceivably hope for unconditional collaborators, who admire and are loyal to the ideas of those in power (104). Conditional collaborators cooperate with those in power, even if they only
agree with some of the leadership's ideas—a confusing, contradictory, and thus often dangerous position (104). Finally, tactical collaborators subtly disguise their resistance in order to reach a higher ideal (104), with the stage beyond this involving open disagreement and resistance. Wingate reiterates that the kind of collaborator a person chooses to be will depend on one's ethical concerns, integrity, and personal circumstances (106). As a new hire, I began at the unconditional level with the new program at my institution, until I found my feet and more closely investigated its assumptions and goals, at which point I became a partial, conditional collaborator and then quickly skipped to the level of open disagreement. Neglecting to engage first in tactical collaboration probably hastened the date of my resignation, illustrating the Chinese proverb with which Wingate begins and ends her essay: "If we do not change our direction, we are likely to end up where we are headed" (100, 107).

In my reformist zeal, I identified with some of the roles described by Susan McLeod, "The Foreigner: WAC Directors as Agents of Change." McLeod offers several metaphors to illustrate the ethos options available to WAC directors specifically, but which can be applied to WPAs more generally as well. The first is the Conqueror, who wishes to impose program reform from above, stirring up "us/them" resistance and "sullen or nonexistent" compliance (109). Next comes the Diplomat, an English department emissary who at best will perpetuate the notion that writing instruction belongs to that department alone, and at worst will be perceived as a "CIA agent, a language spook" bent on finding and punishing bad writing instruction (110). Third is the Peace Corps Volunteer, the director who does his or her job with little or no support in the way of release time, funding, etc. and who is inevitably prone to early burnout (111). Fourth is the Missionary, who, unaware of the worth of the existing local culture, appears to have a superiority complex and is determined to "convert the heathen" through preaching likely to elicit indifference and/or hostility (111).

McLeod would like directors to avoid the preceding four metaphors in favor of the Change Agent. Through workshops and the support of campus-wide bodies concerned with the teaching of writing, this person encourages reflection about and subsequent change in instructional techniques and theoretical assumptions on the part of faculty, as well as innovations in curricula such as writing-intensive courses (112-14). The mistaken assumption here is, I think, McLeod's assertion that the Change Agent is successful because of his or her distance from departmental power structures, lack of a stake in disciplinary arguments, and because she or he does not represent any identifiable constituency (112). No individuals in academe can position themselves above or beyond such contexts, and I doubt many academics today would perceive anyone in such an apolitical way.
During my term as WPA, I identified with several of McLeod’s metaphors. I began as something of a secondhand conqueror, definitely perceived as a “tool” of the reform committee and the administration, bringing the already-decided writing program to those who had little or no say in its development (109). I did believe in the theoretical basis for the program, particularly as I was able to continue to refine it for myself, and so probably became more of a missionary, with mixed results. In WAC efforts, I was a diplomat by virtue of my hire as part of the English department, and a change agent in my invited discussions with some departments about their writing intensive courses—but not, I think, because I was distanced from disciplinary arguments, but rather because I firmly located myself within them. Thank goodness, I was not asked to be much of a Peace Corps volunteer. Though I believe I was a thoughtful administrator, and do not believe I was guilty of what Louise Phelps calls “pedagogical imperialism” (the assumption that one’s program can solve all the problems on everyone’s political and intellectual agenda, qtd. in McLeod 114), I confess to eschewing “quiet revolutions” and “moving slowly,” instead adopting a full-steam-ahead approach. In my local context, this largely did not succeed.

Professional and Scholarly Identities

Considering my mixed-metaphor identity and resultant abdication of the WPA position, Christine Hult’s question, “Is the position of WPA a career death sentence for its occupant?” (119) resonates. In “The Scholarship of Administration,” she hopes to help WPAs ethically shape their personnel reviews so as to answer that provocative question in the negative. Hult insists that institutions need to “acknowledge the changing definitions of scholarship and to legitimize and reward WPAs for the scholarship of administration” and that “WPAs need to do a better job of persuading others in the academy of the scholarly merit of [their] work” through conference presentations, publications, and documentation (120).

Hult notes that, although WPA work has gotten more professionalized (through the development of the Council and the publication of *WPA*), the “general bias” against composition studies “by necessity spills over into the academic assessment of WPAs” (124). As the scholar for the composition faculty, who combines the scholarship of teaching with in-house publication, WPAs should counteract that bias by taking care not to characterize their work as merely “service” (121), but instead to make use of Ernest Boyer’s broader categories of “discovery [research], teaching, integration, and application” (122). In their eagerness for positive evaluations, however, Hult mentions that some WPAs (I somewhat recognize myself here) can potentially derail their personal lives by attempting to function equally well in all four of Boyer’s categories, which is just as unfair an expectation as is
trying to confine WPA work to the traditional "service" pigeonhole. She warns, "WPAs . . . shouldn’t succumb to the myth of the superhuman professor . . . Rather we should consciously direct our career paths in the best interest of both ourselves and our campus communities” (127).

Hult defines the scholarship of administration generally as “the systematic, theory-based oversight of a dynamic program” (126) and goes on to suggest how that work can be fairly evaluated in personnel decisions—through the formal adoption of Boyer’s categories, dialogue, the negotiation of a specific and reasonable job description (a glaring omission—on my part—from my own hire), the hiring of both junior and senior professors in rhetoric and composition, and the keeping of an administrative portfolio (127-130). My own portfolio will include this piece, in part to help justify how I’ve classified my WPA work for evaluation purposes.

Ed White moves us from WPA evaluation to program assessment in “The Rhetorical Problem of Program Evaluation and the WPA.” He notes that program evaluation seems foreign to many WPAs until they familiarize it by conceiving of it as a rhetorical situation demanding audience analysis and evidence (132-134). He cautions immediately against using a pretest-posttest model—though the pseudo-empirical “results” it generates may be what many audiences initially demand—because its positivist assumptions oversimplify the activity of student writing and thus the test will not measure what most writing instructors purport to teach (“higher-order skills” versus mere mechanics) (135). In order to combat requests for this model, White suggests that WPAs and teachers develop and formally approve a careful and complex statement of programmatic goals (137).

He then briefly describes and evaluates five models of program assessment. Those he feels are likely to fail include norm-referenced testing (138-139) and the single essay test (139-140). Those which in his view are likely to succeed are evaluation by varied measures such as student outcomes and faculty effects (141-143) and anecdotal results from friendly outside evaluators and opinion surveys (143-145). One evaluation activity White asserts is certain to yield validity is program assessment by genuine experts (145-148). This final model positions White to describe and encourage the use of the WPA Consultant-Evaluator Program.

At my institution, we have used the pretest-posttest model (focusing on writing ability and reflective judgment), student opinion surveys and self-studies in our writing program assessment efforts; alternative models have been implemented this year. While the expense of a consultant–evaluator visit can be prohibitive for smaller schools, I feel such a visit would be a valuable activity to increase campus dialogue about the nature of writing and what we can and should expect writing instruction to accomplish. The point is, as White concludes, to “help others see the complexity and importance of
writing ..., to be willing to accept the evidence of many kinds of serious inquiry into the nature of creative thought" (148).

While Hult asks readers to change how WPA work is evaluated, and White helps us to reconsider how student writing and writing programs are evaluated, Barbara Cambridge and Ben McClelland assert the need to reconceive the very role of the WPA in the structure of academic institutions. They note their surprise at recognizing that, due to WPAs’ positioning in the hegemonic “pyramid of power” common to university administrative structures (152), the traditional “director” model subverts our field’s attention to social construction theory (151). Leadership associated with “control, direction, and knowing what is best for others ... is incompatible with widely distributing ownership and responsibility in an organization” (Peter Block qtd. in Hult 156).

Unfortunately, this kind of leadership is what I feel was utilized in our new program’s first faculty development workshop. Due in part to the perceived lack of quality control in the previous program, I was encouraged to emphasize, in workshop discussions, strict conformity to common theoretical and pedagogical camps, camps chosen by the few for the many. Cambridge and McClelland argue that in order to make program relationships more equitable and WPA jobs less “overloaded” and dysfunctional (153), we might usefully apply Charles Handy’s definition of federalism to the workings of writing programs: “Maximize independence, provided that there is a necessary interdependence; ... encourage difference, but within limits; ... maintain a strong center, but one devoted to the service of its parts; ... be led from that center, but ... managed by the parts” (qtd. on 156). This delineation was reinforced by the work of Peter Block, who describes the four conditions of an organizational partnership thus: 1) each person involved is responsible for defining and enacting vision; 2) each person, even at different levels of authority, has a voice; 3) each person is responsible for the outcomes of the community; 4) each person is honest, because she or he is less vulnerable (156).

Having read Handy and Block’s descriptions of collaborative programs, I attempted to enact them in consultation with my own writing faculty, but the openness was construed by others as leniency and the allowance of piecemeal instruction, and met with criticism. One reason for this was my difficulty in “maintain[ing] contact without control” (Block, qtd. on 156). After experiencing high levels of tension between full-time and part-time faculty and between faculty and administrators in our first summer workshop, as well as being made well aware of the unwillingness of underpaid instructors to attend an excessive number of program functions, I was hesitant to engage in too many meetings. This lack was easily misinterpreted as “letting the faculty do whatever they wanted” in their
classrooms and "allowing the curriculum to drift," neither of which was actually the case. In the ensuing discussions, the philosophical and practical differences I mentioned earlier were brought to light, and I resigned the WPA position.

Conclusion
The brief review of Resituating Writing that appeared in the December 1996 issue of College Composition and Communication called the book "one of the first volumes in our field to address issues of administration in a sustained, critical fashion" (Rev. 618). As such, the text succeeds in elevating the prestige of WPA work in academe generally and in the minds of WPAs as well. If the intended audiences (new WPAs, other administrators, and graduate students) all read the text, that reading would indeed provoke more dialogue about writing program administration.

However, according to several of the book's contributors, the dialogue should still be confined to that sort which the institution most readily understands and sanctions. While the potential for radical program work is championed at the very beginning and the very end of the book as an opportunity afforded by writing programs' "difference" from the rest of the academy, the bulk of the rest of the material constitutes a depressingly realistic tale of caution. Be different, but not too different; promote change, but not too aggressively; in the interest of your program's (and your own) continuance, work safely within the system. I believe my own difficulties as a rookie WPA stemmed in part from allowing myself to get so fired up about the possibilities for change elucidated by Schuster and Cambridge and McClelland, that I failed to heed the qualifiers and warnings sandwiched in between.

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