account the variety of factors that affect how teachers and students are situated in relation to teaching and learning. For example, in “Teaching My Class” and her famous essay, “Freshmen Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise,” Bloom argues that all teachers share her middle class background, values, and assumptions and that all students are striving uncritically towards a middle class existence. In this argument, she assumes that schools/universities only perform a reproductive function in society, never acknowledging, as argued in critical pedagogy, that schools can also be sites of resistance. Despite some interesting ideas in these essays, by overgeneralizing and by failing to engage the theory implicit in her argument, Bloom forecloses on the possibility of productive engagement and reflection by her readers.

There is much to recommend this collection of essays which, in many ways, represents a life in composition. At its best, Composition Studies as a Creative Art forces us to see the connections between all of us as compositionists and invites us to be self-reflective about our own teaching and professional lives, as it did for me early this January. At these moments, Bloom opens a discussion about important issues in the field. There are, however, times when Bloom does not fulfill this potential, giving us instead glimpses of the possibilities in her scholarship.

Windsor, Ontario

WORKS CITED


Reviewed by Lynnell Edwards, Concordia University-Portland

In his introduction to Linda Myers-Breslin’s Administrative Problem Solving for Writing Programs and Writing Centers: Scenarios in Effective Program Management Douglas Hesse remarks that “Certain kinds of
knowledge cannot be analytically transmitted,” (vii) and that work of the Writing Program Administrator is known “only by working as a WPA, just as physicians can learn most of the arts of medicine only by being physicians” (x). If this is so, then a book like this will succeed if it presents that work in all its locally contingent dimensions and asks readers to participate—to engage—as members of a greater community in the drama of that event and re-create, through their own practice, conversation, reflection, and new knowledge. The nineteen “scenarios” that comprise this collection don’t fail in this regard, and further, offer a case study themselves in the art and science of administering a writing program, a foundation of key features upon which we might begin to build a theoretically sound paradigm for local practice.

There’s a lot to like about this collection: the unapologetic use of second-person to put readers in the driver’s seat and to engage real response to the drama of each scenario; the wide variety of institutions and program designs represented; the broad organization of case studies that assumes readers will access them when and how they like. And different readers will certainly take different things from the text. For the new WPA or writing center director at a mid-sized public institution there are creative solutions to problems of personnel, budget, curriculum, and space—practical realities not often addressed in graduate coursework in composition. For the lone “writing guru” at a small liberal arts college who simultaneously oversees the writing center, directs a modest writing-across-the-curriculum program, and teaches a slate of composition courses, this is a connection to the larger professional world, a “reality” check for her own practices, a sourcebook of adaptable solutions.

Finally, though the collection is not structured like a workbook, it is not hard to imagine it as the core text in a graduate course in writing program administration. As such it responds to the call by Richard E. Miller in his recent article in WPA for “sustained work in acquiring what I have called here ‘the administrator’s point of view’” and “the addition of courses that focus on management theory, historical and ethnographic work on how institutions change, labor studies, and unionization, for starters” (38). If not used as a course design, though, this text could at least provide material for graduate workshops on writing program administration.

The collection is organized into three sections, offering scenarios in the order that they might present themselves during the course of a semester: Selection and Training (including TA and tutor development); Program Development (spanning issues of writing across the curriculum, technology, and internal reorganization); Professional Issues of Department Authority and Professional Development (speculating about power relations, the implications of space on program design, and administrative
and pedagogical paradigms). Each scenario unfolds in the same manner—Institution Overview, Scenario, Your Charge, and Author’s Case Commentary—suggesting that there is an emergent model for the “scenario” (the selections are not quite defined as case studies) that may have theoretical authority in future scholarship.

But scenarios like this also reveal, as any such collection of best practices and cautionary tales will, the landscape of the profession, in this case writing program administration. From the broadest view, commonalities emerge that begin to give us a picture of what theoretically sound practice for locally constructed work might look like. Based on the representative cases offered, one might conclude the following about the work of the WPA from contributors to Administrative Problem Solving:

1) The work of the WPA seems to be at least as closely aligned with other administrative offices, including the dean’s, as it is with the local English department. And these administrators can be as unpredictable and fickle as the most cranky senior faculty member in English. While Louise Wetherbee Phelps writes that for every dean “that has indicated that she distrusts plans, like certain forms of writing across the curriculum, that depend heavily on soft money and cannot be sustained or institutionalized in the long term” (82), Richard Bullock suggests that there are also deans who have “been supportive of innovation and of the writing program in the past” (9). Thus aligned with the administration, WPAs can find themselves faced with what Joan Mullin calls “the fact that any program favored by the administration is in danger of being voted down by a continually demoralized faculty” (97). So far from their faculty homes, WPAs must often renegotiate the space from which they effectively wield authority.

2) Successful writing program administration often depends on successful “people skills.” Whether the authors of a given scenario were explicit in their explanation of how “management by walking around” aided them in their success, many cases rested on the belief that—in the words of Linda Houston—“Eating lunch with other faculty and staff, being active in faculty governance, and talking to staff about their issues have played a major role in fighting for the needs of the Writing Lab” (120). Or, as Ben McClelland puts it, “Public relations is a tool that you should employ as effectively as your rhetorically sharp mind will permit” (177-8). Even more practically, he writes “rolling up your sleeves and helping TAs paint and move furniture into their offices also builds esprit de corps and may give you a measure of trust hard to win otherwise” (177). And while not all would agree with Barry M. Maid—“Finally, perception was more important that reality” (208)—certainly there is no small amount of honest “spin doctoring” and well-intentioned glad-handing associated with being an effective WPA.
3) The work of the WPA is often ill-defined, initially overwhelming, and typically carried out by a relative newcomer to the faculty—sometimes under protest at the cost of the hire and/or the program. Consider the following from Myers-Breslin: “This is your year to prove yourself. You are still considered ‘new’ faculty and many want to see what you are made of, especially the graduate students and the ten lecturers who teach in your department” (190). Or, as Rita Malenczyk offers, “Your responsibilities, as the new hire, are to direct first-year composition, to facilitate writing across the curriculum, and to oversee the first-year placement and sophomore competency tests” (151). This is certainly no small task for a junior faculty member; one wonders whether or not, in fact, this collection might not as easily have been titled *Survivor V: The Halls of Higher Ed.*

4) The primary teaching staff in writing programs consists of adjunct faculty and graduate students who are almost never happy, but for entirely different reasons. Allene Cooper, et al., write that the WPA will invariably find that the “adjunct faculty, like their counterparts at other colleges and universities, have traditionally faced problems of low pay, no job security, no benefits, and no upward mobility within their profession.... Many feel almost invisible—it’s not uncommon for other faculty members not even to recognize them as fellow teachers” (48). On the other hand, WPAs may be charged to manage newly-empowered graduate students, who according to McClelland, “follow their professors around campus like so many groupies at a summer rock festival” (173) and who may hand you a memo in response to your proposed weeklong workshop before class begins wherein they list “a number of concerns” (176).

5) Writing programs, at large, small, and mid-sized schools have not instituted innovative uses of technology in significant ways in the effective administration of writing programs, at least as of this collection’s publication in 1999. This is a curiosity, to be sure, since composition studies has been notably forward-looking in terms of the implications of the digital word on issues of language use; rigorous scholarship in this field has at least a fifteen-year history. But despite the digital revolution in higher education, the explosion of distance learning through web-based courses, and the proliferation of hard- and software support for the writing process, writing program administrators seem to have made relatively little use of these innovations in their own program management or design. The descriptions of programmatic change, even revolution in departments, seem amazingly low-tech. Kimball takes up the question of going online in her discussion of “Computers in the Writing Center,” but her imagined audience consists of writing center directors and staff who are, apparently, unaware of such resources as the writing center listserv WCcenter, the homepage for the National Writing Centers Association, or even some of the more high-
profile OWLs such as those at Purdue and Missouri. It is a little difficult to imagine who these readers might be. Deborah Holdstein, in a highly fictionalized case offers a "worst-case scenario for new WPAs" (128), and outlines how to create de novo a coherent writing program that integrates technology. While certainly there are still numerous campuses that are struggling with fundamental questions of "whether or not" regarding technology and the curriculum, the collection might have benefited from at least one or two scenarios that wrestled with the issues presented by programs that were more decidedly technology-driven.

Certainly, these generalities have countless exceptions, particularly, if we take as a truism that WPA work and research is by definition locally defined and articulated. As Miller points out in his WPA essay, composition itself is "a locally-incarnated entity, whose course content and intellectual goals are almost entirely shaped by a host of utterly contingent forces and issues—administrative styles, institutional expectations, the residential pedagogical culture, the available work force, and the perceived ability of entering students" (38-9). There can be no doubt that there are as many approaches to writing program administration as there are WPAs. But this book, other recent collections, such as Shirley K. Rose and Irwin Weiser’s The Writing Program Administrator as Researcher, and the journal WPA suggest that the case study, or its cousin the "scenario," may provide the vehicle we need for developing a theoretically sound paradigm for local practice. If so, a critique of the studies in this collection suggests two things.

First, there needs to be careful thought about the inclusion of ostensibly relevant details that have no part in the final discussion. For instance, all the studies contained considerable detail about student populations, and a number of these described typically non-traditional populations of adult, ESL, or economically marginalized students. Certainly this collective picture presents a very realistic profile of our increasingly diverse undergraduate population. That virtually none of the scenarios used this information in the "Author’s Commentary" seems significant, however. The point is not, necessarily, whether or not it is important to the decision-making process that, as Paul Bodmer writes, students’ "ethnic background is primarily northern European, specifically Scandinavian and German," in a small, rural two-year college (Myers-Breslin 56). But, rather, if that material is to be included as a prominent part of the case study, then it is realistic to expect that it will somehow be accounted for in the answer.

Second, it would be helpful to establish a clearer protocol to identify whether the discussion is unfolding as wholly true, composite, or wholly fictional. While it may not be necessary to offer case studies of strictly one type or another within a single collection, it would be helpful to establish
some protocol in the Introduction for immediately making it clear just what it is we are reading. Readers may find themselves wondering whether a place like “Grand Lake University” is real or not, and if not, how to understand the status of the information included. For instance, Phelps creates a composite picture of a fictional “Cicero University,” pointing out that it is not Syracuse University, her own school, but that the “two schools share many institutional features” (84). However, the program and history at Cicero have been “heavily fictionalized: simplified, idealized, and reinvented for my purposes from the materials of my own experience and knowledge” (84-5). And it is only after two-thirds of the discussion has been outlined that we discover that the events at Malenczyk’s fictionalized “Northfield,” “resemble, though not completely, recent events in my life” (159). Though these and other authors eventually identify the relative veracity of their stories, it is difficult as a reader to be on such uncertain ground.

These modest considerations, however, serve only to reflect critically on what is already a compelling documentation of the work of the writing program administrator. It offers prospective, new, and experienced WPAs a virtual community and an exciting body of practices from which they may create new and locally useful knowledge. Your mission as WPA, should you choose to accept it, will require the patience, the finesse, the craft, and the intuition of an artist and a manager; it will not, now, require that you go forward alone.

Portland, Oregon

WORKS CITED


Reviewed by Bonnie Kyburz, Utah Valley State College

Thomas Newkirk’s The Performance of Self in Student Writing presents readers with important reconstructive work for composition studies. At a time when many scholars in the field resist static theoretical notions of our ostensibly collective purpose(s), it seems necessary that we review key