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# On Being an Island: A Grounded Theory Study of Being a WPA and the Only Composition Scholar at an Institution

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ON BEING AN ISLAND:  
A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF BEING A WPA AND THE ONLY  
COMPOSITION SCHOLAR AT AN INSTITUTION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2014

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This study investigates the impact of being the only composition scholar on writing program administrators' work, relationships, and identities. The study data illuminates the experiences of a segment of the writing program administration population that is currently underrepresented: writing program administrators who are also the only composition scholars at their institutions. Twenty-two current or previous only-composition-scholar writing program administrators were surveyed to establish scholarly exigency. Fourteen of the survey participants were interviewed about their work, relationships and identities. The participants indicated their work was substantially affected by being the only composition scholar. They reported that ideological differences between literacy and composition studies resulted in a lack of respect for composition studies and for their expertise. Relationships with colleagues beyond the participants' home departments and programs were easier to navigate and more productive. The participants also indicated that being the only composition scholar at their institutions affected their rhetorical choices, created different challenges in curriculum design and change, caused them to feel alienated from the field of composition, and affected their ability to establish praxis. They also reported being satisfied in their positions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to the participants in this study who graciously agreed to talk with me and then provided the perspective and insight necessary to make this work worthwhile.

Bringing the participants' voices together and honoring their experiences was only possible with the support of Dr. Michael M. Williamson, my advisor, who always listened and provided the advice I needed. I feel privileged to have had access to his knowledge and experience while completing this study.

I am also thankful to my committee members, Dr. Ben Rafoth and Dr. Sue Welsh, for their patience and feedback during my dissertation process.

While the dissertation writing experience was fundamental to my education, I owe much of my success in this endeavor to my coursework teachers. I was fortunate to have both Dr. Williamson and Dr. Rafoth for multiple classes during my time at IUP. I benefited immensely from their teaching and left their classes better prepared to be the teacher and administrator that I hope to be.

I am also thankful to my summer cohort with whom I shared so many good conversations and good times.

And I am thankful to Ben M. who provided the music that kept me working.

Finally, I must recognize my family. Their support was unwavering.

## PREFACE

My desire to complete this study was solidified during an extended conversation I had with other WPAs about being a WPA and the only composition scholar at an institution, and about working with non-composition scholar colleagues.

The conversation began with a discussion of my working with my colleagues to change my university's first-year composition curriculum. In response to my description of the curriculum change, the other WPAs began asking about my work where, as one of the conference participants said, "[I] am all alone." As the conversation progressed, another conference attendee said my being "alone" and non-tenure track made me particularly vulnerable to abuse. And several of the other WPAs nodded their heads in agreement. When I raised concerns about these labels, they said I was so immersed in the environment that I was unable to see the ways in which I denied myself credit for the curriculum change as a means of placating my non-composition scholar colleagues. In their explanation, the lack of other composition scholars on the faculty meant that others probably were not deserving of the credit I was giving them as collaborators, and my position as a non-tenure track WPA meant that I was too vulnerable to be able to evaluate the situation clearly.

After I finished talking about my institution's curriculum change, one of the other WPAs described her curriculum change at her institution. Her path towards curriculum change, as a WPA with composition scholar colleagues was different than mine. She worked with a cohort of composition scholars at her institution to create a new curriculum, and then asked the mostly non-composition scholar teachers to pilot and teach it. She asked the group of WPAs, including myself, how she could get all of the

teachers to be active, willing participants in the curriculum change. When I asked what the writing teachers, most of whom did not have degrees in composition, currently thought of the new curriculum, she indicated that they did not have enough knowledge to evaluate the curriculum or participate in the process of developing it. She said that since the new curriculum focused on writing about writing, requiring the incorporation of academic articles on writing and writing instruction, the teachers were unable to participate in the evaluation of the curriculum. She was surprised that I asked about the role of the non-composition scholar composition teachers in the curriculum change, but I wasn't surprised that she was facing challenges that could be avoided.

In fairness to my WPA colleagues, I knew that my position as a WPA and the only composition scholar impacted my daily work—how I constructed even the most basic documents, how I conducted hallway conversations, and how I worked through more complicated matters like changing our first-year composition curriculum. And the impacts are not always positive. The relevancy of these conversations is that they expose many of the elements of WPA work that WPAs who are the only composition scholars at an institution may experience differently than WPAs with a composition scholar colleague. These conversations made evident, for brief moments, that WPAs who have composition scholar colleagues may define their duties, construct their power, establish relationships, and make programmatic decisions differently than those who are the only composition scholar at an institution.

This study is born of out of the curiosity and frustration I felt after these conversations. I wanted to continue the conversations, and this study offered me the opportunity to do so, but in a context which was more exploratory and less claim-driven.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### AN INTRODUCTION TO MY STUDY

I conducted a study of WPAs<sup>1</sup> who are the only composition scholar at their institutions with a focus on how they complete their daily work and how being the only composition scholar affects their relationships and professional identities. The study—exigency, design, findings, and conclusions—is described in this document.

In this document, I present the experiences and reflections of 14 only-composition-scholar WPAs. These experiences and reflections are compelling for their potential impact on current and future WPAs and for increasing our understanding of how writing programs are created, maintained, and grown at institutions with one composition scholar who is also the WPA. As is evident in the findings, the experiences share many features with the experiences of WPAs who have composition scholar colleagues, but being a WPA and the only composition scholar positions those WPAs uniquely in those experiences. As one participant, Tina, commented: WPAs who are the only composition scholar are not on an island with other composition scholars; they are an “island.”

#### **Participant-driven Exigency**

During the survey portion of this study, the design and findings of which are discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4, I asked WPAs who are, or have been, the only composition scholar and WPA at an institution, to tell me how significant being the only composition scholar is to their work as WPAs. The 22 respondents reported

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the term writing program administrator to name any individual who is charged with the administrative and leadership duties of directing a writing program. In most instances discussed in this dissertation, WPAs are attached to first-year composition programs, but the label of WPA also applies to Writing Center Directors, Writing Across the Curriculum Directors, and any other position which carries similar administrative expectations. In some cases, individuals may function as WPAs and not have an official title.

unequivocally that their being the only composition scholar while also being the WPA largely determined how they thought about their work, how they performed their duties, and how they established and sustained relationships with their colleagues. For example, 96% said they frequently or very frequently think or thought about being the only composition scholar and the WPA, and 91% said being the only composition scholar and WPA was very or quite relevant to how they carried about their WPA duties. When asked whether the current WPA scholarship has already adequately addressed only-composition-scholar WPA work, 50% said the literature was lacking in this area.

As is supported by the participants in this study, being a WPA and the only composition scholar is important to how a WPA completes his daily work, and it certainly affects a WPA's relationships with her colleagues. This study is my attempt to discover, question, and document those effects. I was fortunate enough to survey 22, and speak with 14, current and previous only-composition-scholar WPAs, to hear their experiences and learn about how being a WPA who is also the only composition scholar at an institution affects a WPA's daily work.

### **My Study**

In answer to the professional exigency that I have described, my study<sup>2</sup> was designed to contribute multiple accounts of WPA's experience as the only composition scholar at their institutions that can be compared and analyzed in order to gain a fuller understanding of what it means to be a WPA and the only composition scholar. Adding to the little available literature on only-composition-scholar WPA work, and the much larger body of work on writing program administration, in general, this study provides

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<sup>2</sup> This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Log#10-156.

preliminary grounded theories regarding the daily work of WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions.

### **Research Questions and Working with the Data**

This study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. How does being a WPA and the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's daily work?
2. How do WPAs who are the only composition scholars at an institution establish and maintain relationships that allow them to accomplish their daily work?
3. How does being the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's professional identity?

These questions focus on the condition of being the only composition scholar at an institution while allowing room to explore how that condition intersects with the primary themes discussed in the literature on writing program administration.

To answer these questions, I completed my study in three phases. (A more detailed explanation of the phases is provided in Chapter 3):

- A literature review of relevant scholarship
- A brief survey of WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institution
- Interviews with WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institution

The interviews were conducted in congruence with Rubin and Rubin's definition of responsive interviewing. Rubin and Rubin characterize responsive interviewing as *flexible* in design but always consistent with the belief that the researcher and interviewee "form a relationship during the interview process that creates ethical obligations for the interviewer" (Rubin & Rubin, p. 30). Through the responsive interview method, the participants and I discussed a wide range of

experiences and perceptions related to their work as WPAs who are also the only composition scholars at their institutions.

Due to the variety of experiences the participants shared during the interviews and the lack of already established theories on WPA work as the only composition scholar at an institution, the data was collected and analyzed according to grounded theory as developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss and later re-fashioned into constructivist grounded theory by Kathy Charmaz. According to Charmaz (2003), constructivist grounded theory dictates that data analysis be conducted in recognition of “the relativism of multiple social realities” that are constructed from “narrative realities” (p. 250). Constructivist grounded theory’s forefronting of the constructivist or relativist viewpoint makes it particularly useful for analyzing interview data gathered using Rubin and Rubin’s responsive interview model because responsive interviewing requires the interviewer to respect the participants’ realities as well as recognize the role of the interviewer in creating a new reality about their experiences. Instead of imposing a theoretical framework on the interview data provided, I analyzed the data for the emergent themes and then compared those themes across participants to establish thematic findings. I completed the study by comparing the thematic findings with the current literature on writing program administration.

### **Disciplinary Need for the Study**

In January 2011, the Academic Jobs Wiki,<sup>3</sup> which serves as a clearinghouse for all academic jobs listed during each academic year, listed sixty-two writing program administrator positions that were advertised in the 2010-2011 academic year. When I

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<sup>3</sup> The Academic Jobs Wiki is a valuable online resource for job candidates and institutions because it consolidates all of the job advertisements as posted through the Modern Language Association, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and on Higher Ed.Com as well other smaller forums.

investigated the website<sup>4</sup> for each school that was advertising for a WPA, I found fifty-two schools that provided information regarding their faculty members' specializations. Of these fifty-two, twenty-seven had one or no faculty members who identified composition studies as their specialization. Over half of the schools were trying to hire a WPA who would be the only composition scholar at their institution or were functioning with a WPA who is also the only composition scholar at their institution until the new hire. Information on the subject area in which each faculty member received their degrees was more difficult to ascertain because most schools listed the type of degree and the school which conferred it, but did not list the area of specialization. Of the thirty-six schools that provided areas of specialization, twenty-two schools had one or fewer faculty with a degree in composition. Also helpful in determining whether a position is likely to be an only-composition-scholar WPA position is the size of the school. Twenty-six of the sixty-two positions were at small schools with fewer than 5,000 students. The prevalence of positions at small schools is important because small schools are more likely to have fewer faculty members in total, and therefore, small schools are also more likely to have an only-composition-scholar WPA. All of these numbers indicate many prospective WPAs will be beginning their post-graduate careers as only-composition-scholar WPAs.

### **Scholarly Context**

The available scholarship on only-composition-scholar WPA work or from only-composition-scholar WPAs demonstrates that much of what has already been written about WPA work may not be directly applicable to the context in which the WPA is the

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<sup>4</sup> Because websites are often not up-to-date, and therefore, might contain incorrect information, the numbers I have provided should only be considered representative, in general, of the job market for prospective WPAs.



only composition scholar at the institution. For example, literature on small school WPA work may seem like a direct fit, but as made evident by the participants in this study, not all WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institution work at a small school. And the literature on small school WPA work emphasizes features of small schools that impact WPA work, features that other only-composition-scholar WPAs do not encounter and which cannot be used to explain the similar phenomenon experienced by both only-composition-scholar WPAs who are at small schools and those at larger schools. Another example is the literature which promotes feminist approaches to writing program administration. The options for feminist WPA work are significantly different for WPAs who have composition scholar colleagues.

In the survey portion of this study, I asked the respondents if the current writing program administration literature has sufficiently addressed—in quality or quantity—the relationship between being a WPA and being the only composition scholar at an institution. Fifty percent of the survey respondents said they believed the literature has not sufficiently addressed this type of position, and only 9% reported being satisfied with the literature's treatment of these positions.

The literature on writing program administration, however, does provide a good base from which to build an understanding of only-composition-scholar WPA work, even if the understanding is that only-composition-scholar WPA work can be fundamentally differently enacted on a daily basis. Within its brief history, writing program administration scholarship has focused on 1) identifying the many roles a typical WPA is expected to fulfill 2) defining writing program administration as it relates to power and authority, and 3) investigating the ways WPA positions are structured. Other important

discussion trends in the literature include working in literature-privileging English Departments, and providing advice and guidance to prospective WPAs. These foci were born out of the difficult tenuous positions WPAs often find themselves in due to factors such as the perceived lesser status of composition courses and scholarship within departments of English, and the assumption by faculty and administrators that writing instruction exists purely in service to the needs of other disciplines.

In advocating for better understanding and respect for WPA work, in general, not much studying of specific conditions such as being the WPA and the only composition scholar has occurred, nor have many scholars argued the merit of only-composition-scholar WPA work. Unfortunately, this lack of scholarship on only-composition-scholar WPAs and their work has left those WPAs, like me with serious questions about our own identities and ethics as WPAs. For example, what place does the WPA who is the only composition scholar at their institution hold in the field of composition? Are WPAs in these positions more vulnerable, more marginalized at their home institutions than their WPA peers who have a composition scholar colleague? Or what does it mean for writing program administration, in general, if graduate students, as the participants in this study experienced, are advised to avoid such positions? As the discipline continues to respond to the issues and positionalities that intersect WPA work, a WPA who is the only composition scholar at her institution may come to feel complicit in the hegemony her peers are fighting against even if that WPA's individual experience says otherwise. This potential outcome is disappointing in a field that has long fought to be seen as a valid scholarly enterprise and to have its members seen as respect-worthy knowledge makers and practitioners of writing instruction.

At this time, only one article, Randall McClure's "Army of One: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of WPA Work for the Lone Compositionist" (2008) specifically focuses on being a WPA and the only composition scholar at an institution. McClure's article presents his experience creating, maintaining, and using power as the only composition scholar at his institution. And he does a fine job of presenting WPAs in these positions as just as empowered, if not more so, than their WPA peers who have composition scholar peers. Other scholars such as Thomas Amorose, Catherine Latterell, Judith Hebb, and Rebecca Taylor Fremo, who were the only composition scholars and WPAs during the periods discussed in their articles, have chosen to focus on the small school context rather than their status as a WPA who is the only composition scholar at their institution. But like McClure, they focus on the role of power in their positions. In order to convey their views of power, all of these scholars provided personal narrative accounts of their own experiences. Fremo, Latterell and Hebb wrote about directing programs at small schools while being WPAs and the only composition scholars at their institutions, but other scholars have focused on the tenure status of WPAs with little attention to their also being a WPA and the only composition scholar. Keith Rhodes, for example, uses a tongue-in-cheek song to tell future WPAs not to become a WPA before receiving tenure, but the position he held pre-tenure (about which he writes) was also an only-composition-scholar WPA position. In other words, the only-composition-scholar WPA experience does appear in some scholarship not specifically focused on only-composition-scholar WPA work.

The stories in any of these texts provide only one way of understanding the position of WPA and the only composition scholar. As such, the stories, in both form

and content, are also serving as a catalyst for my study. In addition to representing an underrepresented WPA population, the representation of the experiences of WPAs who are the only composition scholar as provided in this study will be wider in scope than available from individual personal narratives. The empirical, multi-participant approach of this study will allow scholars in the field to more easily compare those experiences and the impact of them. And, while it perhaps feels far-reaching, the final goal of representing WPAs who are the only composition scholars at an institution in a new way is to support WPAs, so they and the writing teachers they work with can better serve our writing students. Increased or long-term marginalization from the support of other WPAs will eventually negatively impact our students as those WPAs who are the only composition scholars begin to feel that their own work is too far abroad from the conversations of the field.

### **Desired Study Outcomes**

The conflict in how only-composition-scholar WPAs and WPAs define their work, the limited amount of scholarship on only-composition-scholar WPA work, and the likelihood that many prospective WPAs will find themselves in positions like mine, positions which may make them feel not only isolated in their own departments but in the WPA community at-large, are the impetus for my study. My project is designed to reveal the impact of being the only composition scholar as experienced by other WPAs who are also the only composition scholar on their campuses. Because the label of victim from fellow WPAs troubles me the most, I wanted to give WPAs who are, or were, the only composition scholar at their institutions an opportunity to define their own experience.

The benefit of turning a critical lens on the professional issues and positionalities of WPA work is that the WPA community will be able to use the information to better

fulfill its supportive missions and promote productive and ethical working conditions for all WPAs. The Council of Writing Program Administrators has issued two statements, the 1992 Portland Resolution and the Statement on Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Program Administration, that represent the organization's attempt to codify standards for hiring and evaluating WPAs, but these statements, as in Chapter 2, do not fully represent the range of positions and environmental factors that WPAs experience. And the need to solidify and increase the status of WPAs as a professional community may also have a negative effect—marginalizing WPAs who are the only composition scholars and excluding them from conversations. They, however, have likely acted as a medium for better preparation of prospective WPAs and supported the trend of separating writing programs from literature-based English departments.

### **Myself as Researcher**

As is undoubtedly clear, I have an emotional and professional investment in this study. And I am sure that my work as a WPA who is also the only composition scholar at my institution will contribute to how I interpret all aspects of the study—from overall design to reviewing the literature to discovering results. I, however, view my experience as an only-composition-scholar WPA as a benefit rather than a hindrance. I believe my studying a marginalized population as a member of that population will discourage me from reinforcing the negative assumptions about only-composition-scholar WPA positions (and by association only-composition-scholar WPAs) that exist, but also allow me to approach my conversations with other only-composition-scholar WPAs with first-hand knowledge. This knowledge, in turn, makes me an empathic researcher. Finally, I designed my study to emphasize the participants' experience and through the data coding and analysis to mitigate the opportunity for me to see

the data *only* through my own expectations, a concern that I am aware is shared among qualitative researchers.

### **Terminology**

Several large concepts will be referred to throughout this dissertation and are used consistently in the literature on writing program administration. In an effort to avoid misunderstandings, this section provides their definitions as applicable to my study. I have chosen to define the terms *praxis*, *intellectual work*, *composition scholar*, *power*, and *system*, among the many that could be included, because it felt necessary to stabilize these terms before moving forward with discussion of the study. Further, given the contention that may exist around how to define *intellectual work* and *composition scholar*, sharing how I am using these terms seems pertinent.

Because *writing program administration*, *Writing Program Administrator (WPA)*, and *only-composition-scholar WPA* were defined previously in this chapter, I have not included them in this list. Less prominent terms will be defined as they appear in the context of the study.

### **Praxis**

Praxis refers to the always-already relationship that exists between theory and practice, and is used to describe the condition in which someone experiences such a convergence of theory and practice that they derive clearer or more complex meaning from it. Praxis as understood by the Marxist Humanists, who are credited with the concept, also refers to practice as way of understanding, and creating change in, the world (see Bernstein, 1971; Vranicki, 1965; Gadotti, 1996) . As theory is realized in practice, theory is altered, and in turn alters further practice. Through deliberate and thoughtful action, people can change their own living conditions. With its roots in

Marxism and Humanism, praxis became one of the main tenets of critical pedagogy, popularized in the work of Paulo Friere and Peter McClaren. In the context of critical pedagogy, praxis is considered a necessary component of liberation as people work towards a humane existence despite the material conditions of their lives and work to ultimately change those conditions which impede liberation. Though praxis always carries with it a positive connotation, in casual everyday conversation such as two teachers might have in a department hallway, it is usually not associated with a liberation agenda. Instead it is used to describe, generally, the marriage of theory to practice and the meaning that is borne from that marriage. Predrag Vranicki, also a Marxist Humanist, provides this general description of praxis, which depicts the form of praxis to which I refer in this study: “As the concept of practice embraces the sensuous and the theoretical – it is inadequate to oppose theory and practice, as if they were two things which should be a unity; practice itself, understood as a fundamental function of man, contains both in itself” (Vranicki). Applied to the context of writing program administration, praxis refers to the symbiotic connection a WPA experiences between administrative practice and theories of administration. In the literature review, Chapter 2, I discuss the lack of disciplinary space for only-composition-scholar WPAs to realize praxis because of the dissonance between the theories of writing program administration and only-composition-scholar WPAs’ experiences and practices.

### **Intellectual Work**

Intellectual work is used to describe a wide-range of activities that require the application of specialized knowledge or add to the making of new knowledge. Different than scholarship, intellectual work does not always include publication or conference presentations. As well, intellectual work can take a creative form, such as in creative

writing or visual arts. That said, not all intellectual work translates into a concrete creative product. But intellectual work most often does show or require engagement with the theories and practices of one or more scholarly disciplines. In WPA literature, scholars have primarily been concerned with the connections between intellectual work and institutional service, and between service and scholarship. Because Ernest Boyer (1990), in *Scholarship Reconsidered*, called on all institutions to redefine scholarship to include activities related to teaching and administration as well as publication, WPA scholars (Council, 1998; Bullock, 1987) have relied on Boyer's work to ground their arguments that writing program administration is an intellectual enterprise that may manifest itself as published scholarship but that may take other forms such as white papers or program curriculum. But in order for scholars in and outside of the rhetoric and composition field to accept that WPA positions are sites of scholarship, they must believe that service can be intellectual work. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 2.

### **Composition Scholar**

The term *composition scholar* is defined as someone who has specialized knowledge of writing, studies writing, and produces knowledge related to it, or has an advanced degree in composition studies or a related field. (Composition scholars may not have an advanced degree in composition, as there are many scholars in the field that chose to focus on writing studies after completing their graduate education or for whom studying composition in graduate school was not an option.) A composition scholar is also expected to have an investment in writing instruction. While this definition, on this surface, is fairly basic, two conditions exist that complicate it. The first condition is that many teachers of writing, especially of general education writing courses, study writing as it relates to their teaching and may even read scholarship in the field in order to inform



their classroom practices, but their scholarly interests lay primarily elsewhere. In other words, these teachers may do whatever they can to be thoughtful and educated writing teachers, but they complete most of their intellectual work in other areas of study. The scope of these teachers' knowledge of writing and writing instruction, therefore, is limited to the context of their teaching. Because so many writing teachers fit this profile, having an advanced degree in composition studies, or a closely related field, becomes a de facto means of evaluating whether or not someone is a composition scholar, despite many composition scholars not holding an advanced degree in composition or a related field. Since many do not hold advanced degrees in the field, someone can also establish themselves as a composition scholar by being highly active in the community of composition scholars at-large, either through publication, presentations or service, and identifying herself as a composition scholar.

Secondly, writing teachers without specialized knowledge of writing and writing instruction may be motivated to claim composition scholar status due to job market pressures, especially as the number of composition positions has increased and the number of literature positions has decreased. They may also claim scholar status out of ignorance that a large field dedicated to composition studies exists. Finally, they may believe that their limited knowledge of the field constitutes being a scholar; after all, they are studying and teaching writing. On guard against the many writing teachers who may want to identify themselves as composition scholars but do not have the necessary specialized knowledge to do so, composition scholars must demonstrate an unabashed commitment to the field in order to not be met with skepticism upon claiming the title of composition scholar. Unfortunately, the claiming of composition scholar status based on

scholarly study and production is made more difficult by the field's embrace of Boyer's (1990) definitions of scholarship. Boyer breaks down scholarship into four categories: discovery, integration, application and teaching. These four categories serve WPAs well because they allow WPAs to account for a variety of forms of scholarly production, such as curriculum development and teaching teachers. A scholar, according to Boyer, is someone who engages in scholarly work in these capacities. As such, WPAs are functioning as scholars when they complete much of their administrative work. But the broader definition of scholarship is not typically applied to composition teaching by teachers who do not have an advanced degree in the field. Teachers without advanced degrees in composition, or sustained scholarly production and contributions to the field of composition at-large, are not seen as full scholarly participants because they do not engage fully in all the categories of scholarly work that Boyer describes as forming an "interdependent whole" (p. 25).

While I acknowledge the necessary role of teaching in scholarship, in this study, I use composition scholar to mean someone who either has an advanced degree in composition studies, or has a significant publication and presentation record and has identified himself as a composition scholar with composition studies as his primary scholarly interest, and teaches composition. My use of the term allows for the scholarship of teaching without diminishing the importance other forms of scholarly output to the advancement of the field.

## **Power**

The term *power* is often used as short-hand for a specific form of power, such as authority, expertise or responsibility, or to mean any combination of these specific forms (Schwalm, 2008). Many scholars (Cambridge & McClelland, 1995; Amorose, 2000;

Hebb, 2005; Enchelmayer, 2008; McNabb, 2008, Schwalm, 2008; Ward, 2008), however, have argued that *power* is simply too broad to carry meaning in scholarship, and have devoted articles to defining specific forms of power as they apply to writing program administration. For example, David Schwalm (2008), in *WPA in Context*, examines authority as it relates to how WPA positions are defined. And Irene Ward (2008) argues that expert and referent power, the power from having developed a social and professional network, are the most important to a WPA's success. For the purposes of this study, I will name the specific form of power when possible. When I use the term *power*, I am referring, in general, to all or any means by which a WPA may influence others or affect change, unless I specifically name a form of power.

### **System**

My use of *system* is the same as that used in the context of complex system theories, which are applied in a wide variety of disciplines. In complex system theories, *system* refers to a unit of people, other living matter, and resources that interact towards a common outcome within a given natural and material context. Further, all of the components of one system typically also act within other systems. This phenomenon can be observed in WPA work as WPAs float between their roles as a teacher in the classroom, a colleague among her departmental or program peers, and an administrator within the larger university system. Systems theory focuses on how the various people or living organisms, as well as the various materials conditions or resources, in a system interact and impact each other. Since many different components interrelate across systems but each system maintains its own purpose, actions and reactions are usually a mix of random happenings and systematic undertakings. As noted by Margaret Syverson

(1999), the study and understanding of complex systems, with their combination of random and organized behavior, has led many scholars to better understand the causes and effects of any number of phenomenon that were previously unexplained (p. 3).

Scholars have benefitted from studying how a system's "network of independent agents— people, atoms, neurons, or molecules, for instance—act and interact in parallel with each other, simultaneously reacting to and co-constructing their own environment"

(p. 3). In order for chaos not to rule, for goals to be accomplished, and for necessary actions to be completed, all agents with a system must contribute to the system being

adaptive, dynamic and self-organizing (p. xv). In her often referenced article, "The Ecology of Writing," Marilyn Cooper (1986) uses this same understanding of complex systems to explain decisions writers make and how audiences respond to texts.

Syverson's and Coopers' texts created a path for other composition scholars to apply the systems concept to areas such as writing program administration. Louise Wetherbee

Phelps's, in her article "Turtles All the Way Down: Educating Academic Leaders" (2002)

compares the simultaneously independent and interdependent components involved in directing a writing program to the individual elements and system of pattern integration

that she sees in a carpet. She moves from this comparison to demonstrating how different

types of power are constructed and used by WPAs. As demonstrated by my study, the idea of writing programs and institutions being systems is important to WPAs who are

the only composition scholars. The absence of other composition scholars can impact

how the only-composition-scholar WPA acts within and upon the system in which she

works.

## **Organization of the Study**

The presentation of my study of the only-composition-scholar WPA experience is in the traditional form often used to present qualitative research. This first chapter has been devoted to introducing the topic of my study, providing my position as a researcher, introducing elements of my research design, and defining terms prominent in the study. In Chapter 2, the literature review, I define and discuss the themes in the available writing program administration scholarship and begin to envision how those themes might contribute to theorizing of only-composition-scholar WPA work. The limited amount of scholarship on the only-composition-scholar WPA experience as well as the closely related scholarship on directing writing programs at small schools is discussed in full within these themes. The literature review concludes with reasons the available literature on the only-composition-scholar WPA experience is not sufficient if we are to understand the many forms and realities of WPA work. In Chapter 3, I present my study design, including a summary of my participant selection process, and a detailed discussion of my data collection and analysis methodologies. In Chapter 4, I present my data, analyze it, and set forth my findings. And finally, in Chapter 5, I interpret my findings and provide further conclusions about the only-composition-scholar WPA experience.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I discuss the themes and issues in WPA scholarship that are particularly relevant to the work of WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions and argue the need for scholars to more explicitly examine the general themes and issues in the WPA scholarship as it relates to these positions. In support of this argument, I demonstrate, through analysis of the literature, that an empirical study of only-composition-scholar WPA work, is a necessary and timely step in theorizing writing program administration. My analysis reveals that 1) there is too little scholarship on being a WPA and the only composition scholar considering the large number<sup>5</sup> of WPAs who will occupy such positions; 2) the available scholarship on only-composition-scholar WPA work relies on first-person narrative accounts such that no empirical study of the work of WPAs who are the only composition scholar has been published; 3) all of the prominent themes in the literature are highly context dependent, and thus, may be conceived very differently in WPA work as the only composition scholar. My analysis of the literature as lacking in scholarship on only-composition-scholar WPA work is supported by the survey responses, discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Of the 22 survey respondents, only 9 percent said that the literature has adequately addressed the work of WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions.

I begin the chapter with a description of only-composition-scholar WPA literature and provide potential reasons for the lack of this literature. The next section provides definitions of writing program administration including depictions of WPAs' daily work. Because many of the definitions of writing program administration are directly related to

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 1 for information on the number of positions available during the 2010-2011 academic year.

how scholars view the relationship between writing program administration and power, the next section is devoted to the most prominent definitions of power found in the literature. The definitions are followed by a section devoted to how these forms of power are enacted by WPAs. A full discussion of administrative structures and putting power into practice is included in this section. The next section is about WPAs in departments that privilege literary study, sometimes at the disparaging of composition studies. In the final section, I review the advice found for future and current WPAs that is found in the literature.

In each section, I address the themes of writing program administration as evident in the literature, weaving in any relevant scholarship on the work of WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institutions. When relevant scholarship does not exist, the only-composition-scholar WPA experience is addressed at the end of the section as a reframing of the existing literature. The exception to this organization is the section “WPAs in Literature-privileging Departments” (p. 64) where the relationship of the theme to only-composition-scholar WPA work is very strong, regardless of the quantity of literature that has made the connection explicitly.

### **Literature on Being a WPA and the Only Composition Scholar**

At this time, only one article has been devoted exclusively to the experience of being a WPA and the only composition scholar: Randall McClure’s “Army of One: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of WPA Work for the Lone Compositionist,” published in 2008 as a brief essay in Theresa Enos and Shane Borrowman’s collection, *The Promise and Perils of Writing Program Administration*. As they are relevant, McClure’s observations,

experiences and arguments are interwoven into the chapter, as are other scholar's perspectives on the WPA as the only composition scholar experience.

Mention of a WPA's status as the only composition scholar often occurs in the scholarship on WPAs at small schools, which is also referenced throughout this chapter. The small school scholarship and experiences at small schools are sometimes conflated with the scholarship on only-composition-scholar WPAs and their experiences because as noted by Thomas Amorose (2000) in "WPA Work at the Small College or University: Re-Imagining Power and Making the Small School Visible," many small schools also have small programs. For example, three scholars whose articles on writing program administration at small schools are discussed in this chapter--Rebecca Taylor Fremo (2007), Judith Hebb (2005), and Catherine Latterell (2003)—were WPAs and the only composition scholars at their institutions during the time periods discussed in their articles. Their mention of their status as the only composition scholar feels secondary to their working at a small institution. The mention is so brief that it is difficult to find again in the text; for example, Hebb mentions being asked to write her own job description because she was the only composition scholar and the department had not previously had a WPA, but she aligns this experience with being at a small school. A small program is often associated with fewer faculty educated in composition studies, so a school with only five faculty in its English Department may be assumed to have only one composition educated faculty member, the WPA. But the small school scholarship should not be assumed to always be describing the only-composition-scholar WPA experience; a small program may be exclusively comprised of a few faculty all of whom may be composition scholars. Likewise, larger schools may employ no composition



scholars. As well, even if the WPA is an only-composition-scholar WPA, some of the ideas and experiences discussed in small school scholarship may not be due to the status as the WPA and only composition scholar. As Latterell (2003) mentions, small school WPAs may encounter “decision-making structures that are significantly more collapsed or flat” p. (321). The experience of a flattened hierarchy, according to Latterell, is a result of having many fewer other administrators at her institution, but Latterell’s experience of this flattened hierarchy is likely also affected by her being the only composition scholar. So while I am encouraged by the publication of articles by two small school, only-composition-scholar WPAs, attempting to dissect Latterell’s, Hebb’s (2005), and Fremo’s (2007) individual experiences into the categories of small school WPA and only-composition-scholar WPA is conceptually complicated because their experiences are born out of and reflect a large number of contextual determinants. When reading and reflecting on the scholarship discussed in this chapter, I relied on the scholars’ interpretation and naming of their own experiences. If a scholar attributed an experience to being at a small school, I accepted that position, and if they named being a WPA and the only composition scholar as the main determinant of an experience, I accepted that position.

One likely reason that only-composition-scholar WPA work has not been more explicitly represented is that these WPAs often teach at institutions, some of which are small schools that emphasize teaching over research in faculty evaluation and promotion (Borrowman & Enos, 2008; Ballif, David & Mountford, 2008). These individuals may carry a substantially heavier teaching load, giving them less time to write for research and publication than their peers at research institutions. Hartzog (1986) justified including

only WPAs at large research institutions because the programs at those institutions were more visible and their WPAs and programs had more influence over other WPAs and programs. She also mentioned that “align[ing]” her study with ‘major research universities’ serves the purpose of further “align[ing]” composition studies with research” (p. 35). Though Hartzog did not specifically address WPAs who are the only composition scholar, agendas such as hers call into question how the research on writing program administration has been conducted to promote disciplinary agendas. Researching and writing about only-composition-scholar WPAs may not advance the disciplinary identity of composition studies in an acceptable way, particularly as composition studies makes the argument that it is deserving of disciplinary status separate from English Studies. For example, only-composition-scholar WPAs may be seen as crutches which maintain the somewhat flawed system of staffing composition classes with non-composition-scholar faculty and graduate students. Without more attention to only-composition-scholar WPA work, in theory and practice, the parity will continue to exist between the positions that many WPAs occupy as WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institutions and the positions discussed in the scholarship.

### **Definitions of WPA Work**

Definitions of the work of writing program administrators serve two related needs: the need to understand the role of writing program administration as it functions within the discipline of rhetoric and composition, and the need of individual WPAs to better understand the work they do within their own institutions. The scholarship defining writing program administration as a subfield of composition is dominated by discussions of intellectual work and WPAs as ambassadors of the field; whereas, the

definitional literature based on individual WPAs and institutions is dominated by discussions of power. But all of the literature on defining writing program administration is unified by the discipline of composition's commitment to praxis as WPAs and WPA scholars work to understand how theory and practice evolve in relationship to each other. Due to the valuing of praxis within the field of composition, WPAs are expected to embody theories of administration and theories of teaching writing in their daily work. As such the scholarship that defines the WPA position in terms of the daily work seems like a reasonable place to begin. From the discussion of daily work, I progress to the larger definitions: writing program administration as teaching, and writing program as scholarship and intellectual work.

### **The Daily Work**

Writing program administration, like any other position, is greatly defined by the institutional context in which the position is enacted. (Many of the institutional factors that influence the daily work of WPAs are discussed later in this chapter.) That said, commonalities do exist among many individual WPA positions. In response to these commonalities and the potential variation, scholars (Brown, Lunsford, & White, 2008; Gunner, 1999; Schwalm, 2008) have been consistent in not tying definitions of the position to a core set of duties or expectations. The definitions of the daily work of writing program administration show the types and range of duties that are completed by WPAs rather than a set of duties that all WPAs perform.

Susan McLeod (2007) and Trudelle Thomas (1991) offer two of the most concrete depictions of daily WPA work. In *Writing Program Administration*, McLeod provides a concise yet comprehensive view of the position. Written as a literature review, McLeod's

text is useful for discovering the definitions of the position that already exist.<sup>6</sup> In summary of the published descriptions, she provides a cogent description of what a new WPA needs to understand upon beginning the position: “new WPAs will deal with [...] understanding administrative discourse and budgets, legal issues, the politics of WPA work, their own tenure and promotion processes, and – on a more personal level – how to handle the stress of administrative work (p.101). This statement is significant because it recognizes the diversity in a WPA’s daily work, while also recognizing that most WPAs must also be continually concerned with tenure and promotion, both factors that can lead to the WPA experiencing a high level of stress. Thomas’s (1991) description is even more specific, and is provided as she reflects on the advice and information that she provides graduate students who wish to become writing program administrators. In this passage, she describes a typical day on the job:

This morning I teach two classes and hold conferences with students. Then I meet with the academic vice president and my department chair to discuss plans for a writing assessment program for the six hundred students who move through our composition program each year. By midafternoon, I hope to escape to the library to fine-tune plans for a faculty workshop later this week. It's a typical day in the life of this writing program administrator. (p. 41)

Thomas’s description encapsulates one of the comments made over and over again in the literature defining the work of writing program administrators, that WPAs have many roles, many of which are occupied simultaneously and some of which even conflict with

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<sup>6</sup> Because McLeod (2007) primarily cites other scholars’ work, I am not heavily referencing *Writing Program Administration*, but her work remains important to the field for its comprehensiveness and summative insights.

each other. For instance in *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition*,<sup>7</sup> Michelle Ballif, Diane Davis, and Roxanne Mountford (2008) identify a reoccurring problem with the WPA position as "a struggle to balance the concurrent roles of teacher, researcher, administrator, and citizen of the university and of the discipline" (p. 9). For some WPAs, the number of roles can result in an uncomfortable amount of compromise.

Some only-composition-scholar WPAs such as Catherine Latterell and Ernest Enchelmayer may experience the multiple roles and tasks in a slightly different way, since both of them were asked to write their own job description. When Enchelmayer (2008) asked to see his job description in order to better understand his new position, he was told that his school didn't have one and was asked to write one. So, he both defined writing program administration and wrote the job description for the position into which he was hired. Judith Hebb (2005) also wrote her own job description when she started her work as a WPA and the only composition scholar. Her list includes:

- Review and contribute to current scholarship/practices in rhetoric and composition.
- Define the writing program goals and design the curriculum.
- Write course descriptions.
- Write and institute policies.
- Determine and administer placement instruments; make placement decisions for enrolling students into our school's three levels of English 101.
- Choose textbooks for all writing courses and write generic syllabi and writing assignments for English 101 and 102.

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<sup>7</sup> Though the premise of *Women's Ways of Making It* is to represent the experience of women in Rhetoric and Composition, many of the issues addressed in the book are not specific to female WPAs.

- Train, observe, mentor, supervise, and evaluate all adjunct, junior, and senior writing faculty; participate in hiring decisions.
- Assign teachers to writing classes each semester.
- Provide leadership for English faculty, function as role model for teaching writing, and maintain professionalism among a *team* of writing instructors.

(pp. 100-101)

These WPAs who write their own job descriptions as the only composition scholar are put in the very complex position of trying to define WPA work according to what they believe their new institutional home wants from them, their own expectations of the institution and themselves, and the beliefs and guidelines of the national WPA community. Asking an only-composition-scholar WPA to define her own position is asking the WPA to establish her own value to the institution while trying to be realistic about the number of responsibilities she can manage and interpret about the institution's expectations of the WPA. The only-composition-scholar WPAs are committing themselves, through their own creation, to a variety of roles and an enormous amount of work. The situation of a WPA writing his own job description is further complicated by the job description functioning as document by which a WPA may be evaluated and as a document that will be used to educate other faculty and administrators about the roles of the WPA.

While the multiple roles of a WPA can create conflict and increase workload, David Schwalm (2008) argues that our focus should not be on the compromises being made but rather on the "creative tension" (p. 22) created by the demands of these roles. He argues that the creative tension is a useful aspect of a WPA's job in that it pushes the

WPA to discover ways that the concerns of multiple constituencies are related to each other and how their multiple needs may be addressed. According to Schwalm, a WPA must embrace the creative tension to remain valuable (p. 22).

While Schwalm's (2008) view of the position does not directly contradict others' descriptions, more WPAs find the challenge of multiple roles to be more problematic than instructive. For WPAs that have their own theories of teaching writing and a pre-formed concept of who they will be as a WPA, being responsible for a nexus of constituencies can be surprisingly challenging. Cynthia Selfe, in the study undertaken for *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition*, reported that the greatest difficulty she faced on a daily basis was "trying to live [her] theory" (Ballif et al., 2008, p. 302). She clarifies by adding "we're very quick to spout democratic sorts of theory and liberatory pedagogy...but how do you fashion a curriculum that reflects your theory, how do you shape a faculty meeting? [...] How do you substantiate theory in the daily fabric of people's lives?" (p. 302). The field's dedication to praxis gives WPAs a difficult responsibility that can be complex to minister on a daily basis. No list of duties or job descriptions can answer the complicated questions and crises of identity that can be brought on by the multiple roles and pressures faced by WPAs.

Like Schwalm (2008), Donald Bushman (1999) argues that we should view the daily work of WPAs differently. In "The WPA as Pragmatist: Recasting 'Service as 'Human Science,'" Bushman says WPAs can lose sight of the valuable connection between their daily work and the making of disciplinary knowledge by focusing on all the daily problems WPAs are called upon to solve and seeing WPA positions as purely service positions. Citing the works of Richard Rorty, Louis Wetherbee Phelps, Geoffrey

Chase and Shirley K. Rose, among many others, Bushman shows how some of the most influential thinkers in composition and rhetoric have taught us ways to think not specifically what to think (p.31). He describes his pragmatist<sup>8</sup> view of writing program administration as follows: “when we look at composition studies through a pragmatist lens, we see that it is through *reflection* that writing teachers and WPAs *advance* new disciplinary knowledge, and it is through pedagogical *action* that we *enact* disciplinary knowledge!” (p. 31). In essence, Bushman resolves the daily conflict many WPAs experience between their multiple roles and the theory and practice of those roles by reminding WPAs that it is reflection on the daily work that builds a discipline.

### **Writing Program Administration as Teaching**

When WPAs participate in the “complex, nested set of dialogues” that make-up much of their daily work, they are often also teaching (Bushman, 1999, p. 36). The reach of the WPA-as-teacher can be as immediate as the colleague with whom they are speaking about an assignment or as wide as the entire institution for whom the WPA can be a directive force in determining how writing is positioned and discussed across the institution. Some of a WPA’s teaching may feel more distant from the classroom, and therefore may be unrecognizable as teaching to new WPAs. Teaching through activities such as leading faculty development sessions that impact a large number of a writing course sections through individual teachers, constitutes what Richard Gebhart (2008), in “Administration as Focus for Understanding the Teaching of Writing,” refers to as “macro-level teaching” (p. 35). The entire university is the WPA-as-teacher’s student constituency (Bruffee, 1999, p. 57). Gebhart argues that graduate students in rhetoric and

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<sup>8</sup> Bushman’s understanding and use of pragmatism derives from John Dewey’s theory of educational pragmatism, and may not correspond with other theories within the larger philosophical school of pragmatism.



composition should be made aware of the many different contexts in which they will be expected to teach if they become WPAs.

Educating fellow administrators is an important component of WPA work that may not be understood or accepted because not all administrators view their positions as teaching positions. Relaying a conversation he had with an unnamed former WPA, Bruffee (1999) says that other administrators should see themselves as teachers and that the teaching skills of WPAs work can be transferred into other administrative positions, showing that WPA is good preparation for other administrative positions. Bruffee, in speaking to an audience of WPAs eloquently remarks, "The qualities you develop in order to do that job, in order to represent and address that diverse constituency, are manifold. You have dealt yourselves a rare hand" (p. 57). Though Bruffee does not reference praxis, he is describing the outcome of WPAs' continued commitment to praxis. In seeking praxis, WPAs build the skills needed to be both effective teachers and administrators.

The root cause of the WPA-as-teacher position might not be as ideologically driven as it is driven by the practicalities and institutional constraints placed on the teaching of composition. Richard E. Miller (2001), in his article "From Intellectual Wasteland to Resource-Rich Colony" reflects on his experience as WPA at Rutgers. Agreeing with others' definitions of WPAs as teachers (Gebhardt, 2008), he ties the WPA-as-teacher role to the nature of labor in composition teaching. For Miller, a WPA's teaching responsibilities are primarily necessitated and reinforced by the often high turn-over rate of writing teachers and by the presence of writing teachers from other

disciplines.<sup>9</sup> While we are accustomed to thinking of our writing students as the newcomers to college writing, both “novice” and experienced writing teachers typically need training or continued faculty development. According to Miller, the continual requirement to educate new and experienced teachers obliges WPAs to continually examine and reflect upon the relationship between theory and practice (p. 31). WPAs are “forever faced with the task of introducing newcomers on both sides of the lectern to the idea of the writing process, sequenced assignments, group work, journals, revision, peer review” (p. 31). As with his take on WPAs’ daily work, Bushman offers a viewpoint that is between the more romantic notion of continual reflective practice to reinforce praxis and Miller’s more cynical market-driven view of the WPA-as-teacher. He argues that how we determine a WPA’s value and a writing program’s credibility is through a pragmatic sensibility; we characterize their value according to the teachers’ and students’ experiences of the program. The truth of a program’s effectiveness is created by WPAs’, teachers’, and students’ actions that impact the teaching and learning of writing combined with reflection on the experiences of teaching writing and learning (p. 34); “the test of a writing program's effectiveness is in the way it meets the given goals of that program—the student outcomes regarding writing, reading, and thinking skills” (Bushman, 1999, p. 34). WPAs can be a significant force in determining their and their program’s value at multiple levels. This viewpoint recognizes the pressure to continually re-establish the

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<sup>9</sup> While Miller acknowledges the difficulties and benefits for WPAs of writing teachers being from a variety of disciplines, he does not acknowledge that most writing teachers from other disciplines are from literary studies. This may be due to Miller’s position at an institution where writing teachers are from many different disciplines, not primarily literature. The historical relationship between composition and literary studies can make the education of new teachers from literary studies a more complex enterprise than Miller addresses in this essay.

WPAs' and writing programs' value while not completely divorcing this goal from the real work of teaching and learning to write.

### **Writing Program Administration as Scholarship and Intellectual Work**

As a WPA is thought to do much teaching among colleagues outside the classroom, breaking from the ways that teaching is traditionally conceptualized in the university, a WPA is also thought to complete scholarship that does not automatically fit the traditional definitions of scholarship. Richard Bullock's (1987) article, "When Administration Becomes Scholarship: The Future of Writing Program Administration," is one of the early attempts, echoed in most subsequent literature on the topic, to define WPA work as a form of scholarship. In this passage, Bullock makes the case for viewing WPA work as scholarship by comparing writing program administration to other forms of scholarship that combine theory and application in a product:

Faculty in these positions are not caretakers of a slice of bureaucracy; they are experts and scholars testing and refining their knowledge in the practical arena of application. The administration of writing programs under these circumstances advances our knowledge of the teaching of writing. No less than an architect's erection of a building or a playwright's successful directing of his or her own play, it is scholarship. (p. 14)

By avoiding drawing comparisons between published scholarly articles and books, and instead aligning WPA work with other forms of scholarly output, Bullock makes a compelling case for considering much of WPA work as scholarship.

In discussing a WPA's daily work, Bullock (1987) argues that a WPA must remain immersed in the scholarship of the discipline in order to better perform the

teaching duties associated with the position, including the teaching of other writing faculty. He, however, recognizes that this may be difficult for other faculty and administrators to understand because the daily operations of departments and institutions are usually seen as separate from the “pursuit and application of knowledge” (p. 12). This argument hinges on fellow faculty’s and administrators’ acceptance of the WPA-as-teacher, and their appreciation of praxis. If fellow faculty and administrators don’t view the WPA-as-teacher or value praxis, they will not accept writing program administration as a form of scholarship.

Many stories (Ballif et al., 2008; Charlton, 2005; George, 1999) are available which depict others’ failing to value the praxis embraced by WPAs and notably detailed in Ernest Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990). Most of these stories revolve around the issue of preparing for and seeking tenure,<sup>10</sup> but they contain pertinent reflections on how administration is viewed by other faculty and administrators. Shelley Reid shares this story of talking with her “non-composition-department members”:

It doesn’t surprise me that when I talk to other non-composition department members about having administration “count,” I meet not with hostility but mild confusion. Of course we will review administration: All service counts. Or: Your research is all about your teaching and administration, right, so they would all be linked together anyway, and so that’s all right. Or: Well, that’s ok, it’s not my field, administration, but I’m sure that someone who knows more about it will do a thorough evaluation of your work. Or: What do you mean by “count,” exactly? (p. 205)

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<sup>10</sup> Though scholarship focused on WPAs preparing for and seeking tenure exists, I have chosen to discuss this issue within the context of other concerns as it presents itself, rather than creating a section for it within this chapter.

Reid's story demonstrates the lack of awareness or conceptualization of the truly inter-dependent relationship for a WPA of the three standard categories of faculty evaluation: teaching, scholarship, and service. As Bullock (1987) notes, it is not simply that they all count, but rather that they must be "performed" as one, simultaneously (p. 13). Invoking the pragmatist approach of Bushman (1999) which called for WPAs to view their work as applied human science, Bullock argues for the constantly evolving relationship between theory and practice. He breaks his argument into three parts: defining WPA teachers as scholars, emphasizing the performance of theory as program creation and maintenance, and then finally defining writing programs as "dynamic laboratories" where theories are realized (p.18). Without the pragmatist views of WPA scholars like Bushman and Bullock, WPAs are left telling stories of trying to negotiate what they see as artificial distinctions between teaching, scholarship and service—that do not ring true in their daily work.

In agreement with Bullock and Bushman and in response to the needs of WPAs seeking tenure and promotion, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (1998) released a statement defining WPA work as intellectual work. The statement begins with an acknowledgement that the work of the statement is not to argue the intellectual value of WPA work, but rather to provide guidelines so WPAs can be more fairly evaluated. The statement gives five categories of intellectual work that by delineating the possible types of intellectual work serve to reinforce the variety of intellectual contributions a WPA makes that require in-depth knowledge and application of scholarship as well as making more visible the products of these applications. The five categories are program creation, curricular design, faculty development, program assessment, and program-

related textual production. The statement also specified that in writing program administration certain work products such as written program documents and funding application should be considered scholarship. According to the statement, scholarship meets these qualifications:

- It generates, clarifies, connects, reinterprets, or applies knowledge based on research, theory, and sound pedagogical practice;
- It requires disciplinary knowledge available only to an expert trained in or conversant with a particular field
- It requires highly developed analytical or problem solving skills derived from specific expertise, training, or research derived from scholarly knowledge
- It results in products or activities that can be evaluated by peers (e.g., publication, internal and outside evaluation, participant responses) as the contribution of the individual's insight, research, and disciplinary knowledge. (Council, 1998)

The Council cites both Boyer (1990) and the Association of Departments of English (1993) in support of their definitions of intellectual work and scholarship. The allowance for many different types of writing to be considered intellectual work products also aligns with the field of composition's recognition of "writing as a mode of learning" (Emig, 1977).

Relying on Boyer's (1990) distinction between "citizenship activities" and "projects that relate to scholarship itself" (p. 22) the statement further defined the intellectual work of WPAs by acknowledging that two types of service activities—those that are necessary and vital for community building and maintenance and those that are "tied directly to one's special field of knowledge" and are "serious, demanding work,

requiring the rigor—and the accountability—traditionally associated with research activities” (Boyer, 1990, p. 22). Neither Boyer, the Council, or the ADE distinguished between the service to a department, university or professional organization.

The Council’s statement did provide standards for determining whether service should be counted as scholarship: “First, it needs to advance knowledge—its production, clarification, connection, reinterpretation, or application. Second, it results in products or activities that can be evaluated by others.” But according to Randall McClure (2008) in “Army of One: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of WPA Work for the Lone Compositionist:”

these statements might still not carry enough weight. Unlike their non-WPA junior colleagues, WPAs who exist as armies of one must still find ways to match the efforts and levels of performance of their teaching-only colleagues in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service. (p. 108)

The statement on evaluating intellectual work is important because it provides all WPAs and their departments and institutions with a framework for determining how to fairly evaluate a WPA’s work. My general impression is that many institutions limit the types of work products that qualify as scholarship beyond the recommendations provided by Boyers, the Council, and the ADE. The potential discrepancies between the recommendations and the institutional policies may have a greater impact on WPAs who are the only composition scholar because only-composition-scholar WPAs are making arguments to count administrative work products as scholarship without having someone else in the field on faculty to support them. Since the Council statement can also shape the way that WPAs conceptualize and evaluate their own work, not considering how the

statement functions for only-composition-scholar WPAs may make these WPAs feel even more undervalued.

### **Definitions of Power: Authority, Expertise, Responsibility**

The naming and categorizing of WPA work which was discussed in the previous section can be a powerful tool for leveraging administrative and pedagogical authority, expertise, and responsibility. On the other hand, a WPA must be granted or able to seize the power to name and define their positions in order for the naming and categorizing to carry meaning. A WPA must also remain aware that names and categories can become limiting. Much WPA literature has been devoted to defining the power associated with WPA positions or that carried by individual WPAs, regardless of the power allotted to the position (Amorose, 2000; Cambridge & McClelland, 1995; Dickson, 1993; Phelps, 2002; White, 1991). This section reviews literature related to power and writing program administration, with specific attention to power as authority, expertise, and responsibility. Departmental and institutional hierarchies, the concerns created by defining WPA work as teaching and scholarship, the political nature of WPA work, and the ratio of WPAs' duties to their power are all featured prominently in the literature as key determinants of a WPA's potential and actualizable power. For only-composition-scholar WPAs, the literature on power may be the most problematic because how authority, expertise, and responsibility manifest themselves in the context of being the only composition scholar may be different from how they manifest at institutions with more than one composition scholar. A WPA who is also the only composition scholar does not ever exercise power among faculty of like scholarly backgrounds and interests because the WPA does not work with colleagues in his field. While much of the literature addresses, at least



marginally, the potential differences created by a WPA's context, the literature primarily approaches the topic of power as a concept that can be defined and explicated separately from whether the WPA is the only composition scholar.

### **Authority**

The article which best presents an argument for considering the role of a WPA's context in discussions of power, though it gives little direct attention to only-composition-scholar WPA positions, is David Schwalm's (2008) "The Writing Program (Administrator) in Context: Where Am I, and Can I Still Behave Like a Faculty Member?" In this article, Schwalm is primarily concerned with the form of power called *authority*—the term used when referring to a WPA's ability to influence others solely due to his holding an administrative position or due to the WPA position's location within institutional hierarchies. For Schwalm, a WPA's authority rests exclusively on two factors: 1) whether or not the WPA position is viewed as a collection of administrative tasks that happen to be performed by one person, or as an actual position that is codified within a department's or university's structure, and 2) where the WPA, as either a person with a collection of tasks or as someone in a recognized position, exists in departmental and institutional hierarchies. If a WPA has a collection of tasks but no formalized position, she "may have responsibilities equal to those of a dean but little more positional authority than a typical faculty member" (p.14). In regards to a WPA's position in institutional hierarchies, he argues that being:

buried deeply in the hierarchy with little authority, you lack direct access to resources and you may have difficulty attracting institutional focus to the accomplishments or objectives of your program. [...] On the other hand, the same

levels of bureaucracy can protect you from wrath flowing down from above. Authority and accountability usually go together. Clear understanding of this hierarchy and your place in it is essential for understanding how you will do your work. (p. 14)

In this argument, the authority that comes from how the WPA is positioned is more important than other forms of power that a WPA may have because how the WPA is positioned determines his ability to use his power.

Where a WPA exists in institutional hierarchies is important, but a WPA's authority may also derive from the status of the writing program with which the WPA is charged. Because writing courses are often viewed as service units to other disciplines despite the field of composition's consistent argument that writing courses have their own content (Lindemann, 1994; Crowley, 1995; Beason, 2000; Hesse, 2005; Boland, 2007; Downs and Wardle, 2007), the identity of writing programs may be viewed by many outside of the field of composition as devoid of an identity other than that created by the needs of other departments and administrators. Thus, the WPA may be seen as not needing authority; the authority lies with other faculty and administrators whose needs guide the program. Mary Boland (2007) speaks to the service status of composition: "composition has been assumed to belong to the entire university. Compositionists, working in colonized territory, understandably try to find ways to speak convincingly to the demands of those who employ" them (p. 44). Aronson and Hansen (1998), expressed concern that the service position of composition programs and the related lack of the WPA's authority can lead to exploitation and overwork as the position of WPA exists to meet the needs of others. If a WPA finds himself in this position, he may also find

himself competing for recognition and resources for his program, among other administrators with apparently more authority. This is a highly vulnerable position (Aronson & Hansen, 1998). This perception of writing programs is the downside of a WPA's desire for praxis where theories of administration and teaching correspond with practices and experiences of the program. The WPA's identity and professional status within individual institutions are inextricably tied.

Irene Ward (2008) adds that her lack of authority can also affect how she works with students. For example, she was responsible for helping students with enrollment issues but did not have the authority to change the policies that create the issues. She had to speak with students from a position of authority while she actually had very little authority to establish or change policies, even if the existing policies conflicted with her own knowledge of the field (p. 54). Using data collected through a survey of department chairs, Olson and Moxley (1989) show that WPAs are valued for their ability to perform just the kind of role that Ward describes; as summarized by White (1991), they are valued for their "accessibility and ability to communicate, that is, for [their] ability to keep things nicely under control without exerting any real authority" (p. 6). These views of authority make visible the sometimes more insidious consequences of WPAs lacking authority, the consequences that may have the greatest impact on how WPAs conduct and view their daily work.

### **Expertise**

While authority is a form of power that is likely to be bestowed upon a WPA or her position, expertise is viewed as co-created through the WPA's education, his ability to communicate ideas and plans, and his actions as macro-teacher and scholar, combined

with recognition of his expertise by fellow administrators and colleagues. In the same article in which Ward shares her perspective on working with students without much authority, she continues her reflection on power by stating that other forms of power—*expert power* and *referent power*— are highly effective and accessible to WPAs (Ward, 2008). Expert power refers to power created from having advanced knowledge and understanding of a specific area, and referent power is that which is created from the WPA's ability to work with others and connections to other people on campus (Ward, 2008). Expert and referent power combined create the expertise that WPAs often need; expert power is limited without referent power because a WPA needs referent power to be able to parlay expert power into change when necessary to improve the writing program. A WPA must have the knowledge but also the ability to use referent power when working with the large variety of people that constitute a WPA's constituency. Though scholarship on higher education leadership and administration exists, WPA positions are unique in their relationship to a not purely administrative field of study. As stated succinctly by Doug Hesse (2002), "no other administrative position so commingles agency with disciplinary knowledge" (p. 503). This same sentiment is echoed by an unnamed participant in *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition* (Ballif et al., 2008): "I had good relationships with my colleagues, but that wasn't enough. You have to have intellectual authority too" p. (227). Hesse's and the participant's statements make clear the connection between expertise and the WPA as a scholar engaged in valuable intellectual work. As Bullock (1987) noted in the earlier referenced quote on writing program administration as scholarship, WPAs are "experts and scholars testing and refining their knowledge in the practical arena of application" (p. 14). This

description of intellectual authority, or expertise, connects the expert form of power to WPAs' desire for praxis. WPAs are consistently comparing their theoretical knowledge and lived work which contributes to a WPA's intellectual authority. Inversely, a WPA who is unable to reach and maintain his desired level of praxis may undercut his sense of his own authority (Ballif et al., 2008, p. 302). Expert power is also vital because, in some instance, a WPA may need intellectual authority or expert power in order to be able to test and refine her ideas through application.

The downside of intellectual authority or expert power is an increase in a WPA's responsibilities, creating *writing icons* or WPAs acting as the *hubs* for everything related to writing on campus. The positive outcome of being a writing *hub* is the WPA is well-positioned to affect change. But these WPAs "are expected to be the actual glue that holds it all together" (Cambridge & McClelland, 1995, p. 157), and as Patti Kurtz (2008) warns, being a WPA can also mean being a "visible target for faculty" who want someone to hold accountable for their students' writing abilities but are "unwilling to listen to or value [the WPA's] suggestions" (61). In the context of small institutions, a WPA may not be able to avoid being the "icon" (Amorose, 2000, p. 94), and may find that the small school's commitment to writing, the very condition which makes the WPA an icon, may also have the effect of diminishing the WPA's power (p. 97). A campus at which the WPA is given icon status is also a campus which is highly invested in writing instruction and at which faculty across campus may want to provide input regarding writing instruction regardless of expertise. As Amorose suggests, this potential negative effect can be managed by a WPA who understands her own institutional context (p. 97). Being the campus writing authority has benefits and drawbacks, but most interesting is

that the degree to which iconic status can be equated with expectations and power is variable, and often not within the WPA's control.

### **Responsibility**

With expertise can be an increase in responsibilities, and with more responsibilities can come more opportunities to make or influence decisions. In this way, responsibility is a form of power that, in some cases, is easy to acquire. If a WPA is responsible for a particular task or initiative, she may not have final say in how it is administered but will be held accountable for the associated outcomes. The concern about responsibility expressed in the literature comes from circumstances when the WPA has a large amount of responsibility and accountability, but no authority. As noted by Hildy Miller (1996), "it is generally agreed that many administrators feel a sense of powerlessness, more specifically, a sense of having enormous responsibilities without accompanying power" (p. 80). A WPA may "feel like the plumber sent to fix a broken dam with a roll of Scotch tape" (Fulwiler, 2008, 92). The combination of many responsibilities with little power is what creates the sense of powerlessness. By way of the responsibilities, WPAs can see what needs to be changed or policies which need to be implemented, but feel as if their own hands are tied.

This feeling can be experienced at the level of a conversation with one student (Ward, 2008) as discussed earlier in this section and at the institutional level. Because a WPA's constituency is often the entire institution, the WPA can be held responsible for all student's writing abilities and performances, and for how each section of a writing class is taught, but also be denied the opportunity to make programmatic improvements because the institutional governance process excludes her or other administrators and

faculty are able to overrule her decisions. A WPA can then find herself in complicated political situations while trying to make changes or influence decisions without power.

Aronson and Hansen (1998) describe the problem as such:

From this apparent position of weakness, the WPA must negotiate a host of political challenges. These challenges include maintaining consistency across sections, training and retaining a large pool of instructors, managing complex budgets, and simply dealing with the interpersonal issues that arise when numbers of students and faculty are large. Writing programs are also highly visible. Faculty and administration across the university pay close attention to literacy skills, as do employers, legislators, parents, and other members of the community. As a result, the writing program is often held accountable when students lack college level literacy skills. (p. 26)

Thus, the power that comes with responsibility is often limited to changes that can be accomplished in smaller daily tasks and tasks that do not require departmental or institutional authority forcing a WPA to draw on his expert or referent power.

#### **Application of Power: “Use it or Lose It” or Restructure It**

The definitions of power give WPAs and scholars the language to analyze everyday experiences in terms of WPAs’ ability to affect change, but perhaps more useful is the scholarship that directly discusses how the various forms of power can and should be used by WPAs. In 1991, Edward White’s article, “Use It or Lose It: Power and the WPA,” was published and since then hardly an article on power and writing program administration has been published which does not cite it. In his article, White argues that WPAs need to stop being victims and start claiming the power that is due to them. He

opens the article with this description of his own entrance into WPA work:

Fortunately, the first time I encountered truly naked power as a WPA I was ready for it. Not consciously, I must add, But I had already been an English department chair for nine years, and then a statewide administrator in halls where nobody pretended (as they do on campus) that everyone is powerless. So I had absorbed from the atmosphere certain lessons: recognize the fact that all administration deals in power; power games demand aggressive players; assert that you have power (even if you don't) and you can often wield it. (White, 1991, p. 3)

Throughout the article, he embraces an embattled stance, telling fellow WPAs to figure out where their enemies "lurk" (p. 6) and to use "weapons of democracy" (p. 7). And to those readers who feel squeamish about his approach, who feel his approach is "overly militaristic and Machiavellian," he responds by saying the readers are "either new to administration" or that the readers "act in ways that [they] prefer not to recognize" (p.7). White's article has been influential because of his unabashed ownership of the idea that WPAs represent programs and persons that need protecting, and that protecting them requires a WPA who is not afraid to act with power. He acknowledges that writing teachers tend to view their WPA as the "boss, no matter how little power the position may in fact hold" (p. 9). He then explains that their viewing the WPA as boss can be seen as an opportunity to "improve the teaching of writing" (p. 9). When he says "we must empower ourselves in order to do our jobs," he is declaring that it is more ethical to act with power for the good of writing programs and those people associated with them than to turn away from power out of discomfort with it or disbelief that the WPA has any



power (p. 6). White's article was a clarion call to WPAs that were risking their effectiveness by denying themselves their potential power.

While some may bristle at White's use of militaristic terminology and warrior-like positioning, his approach seems to have freed others to discuss power and its use in new ways (Micciche, 2002; Phelps, 2002, Ward, 2008, Werder, 2000). The approaches to power that relate most closely to White's discussion are those which focus on leadership. Like White, who relied on his experiences in workplaces inside and outside of academia, these scholars who write on leadership often draw on theories of leadership and management most often associated with fields such as business and marketing (Ward, 2008; Phelps, 2002; Rose, 2005). This association may not be comfortable for some writing program administration scholars because traditional business models privilege bosses that hoard power at the expense of workers, and rely on established hierarchies to maintain power. Much leadership and management theory, however, does not reify these types of power structures. Echoing White, Ward says that "ambivalence towards leadership and its related power can diffuse both one's energy and effectiveness" (p. 55). To encourage positive leadership, she turns to theories which do not privilege the "great man," but instead supports leaders who are "vehicles of empowerment and agency," among their colleagues. Ward's understanding of positive leadership provides the opportunity for WPAs to own their roles as leaders while not acting in a top/down manner (p. 63). Though this may appear nearly opposite of White's (1991) understanding, the difference in their arguments appear to be due to the context or reasons they cite for using power and leadership skills. White writes of power as a means of protection from others who have power and may not value the writing program and its

personnel; White is concerned with external challenges. Ward writes primarily about how management theory can be used to effectively negotiate the roles, relationships and duties of writing program administration among colleagues, and as such may be characterized as focusing on internal challenges. Because of her internal approach, Ward's provides a way to use and build both expert and referent power, though the usefulness of both White's and Ward's approaches depends on the reason power and leadership are being employed.

The WPA's combined roles as teacher, administrator, and scholar can help produce WPAs who are wary of theories which may privilege one role over the other. WPAs may perceive that applying management theory means valuing the administrative part of their work at the expense of the other parts of it, and that embracing the role of leader or manager as conceived in leadership and management theory puts WPAs in ethically tenuous situations. The general idea is that if a WPA primarily acts like a manager for the company (the institution) she may find herself making decisions that are not in the best interest of the writing program or its faculty such as over-relying on adjunct labor or reinforcing top-down power structures by exercising her positional authority to institute curricular change.<sup>11</sup> Contemporary leadership and management theory, however, offers a lens through which to understand interpersonal interaction that does not compromise their professional or disciplinary ethics (Brown, 2002). Cambridge and McClelland (1995) draw on the work of John Gardner, a key figure in leadership studies, to promote a skill set for effective WPAs that includes among other skills

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<sup>11</sup> The literature on how WPAs may fall into these compromising situations is too numerous to discuss fully in this literature, but two of the scholars that have been highly influential on the discipline's push against WPA as managers are James Sledd and Marc Bousquet. Both detail the dangers of WPAs acting as bosses in a the corporate university.

“agreement building,” “networking,” and “flexibility” (p. 119). And in *Coming of Age* as a WPA, Jeanne Marie Rose (2005) documents her discovery of management theory and its application to her work as a new WPA struggling to understand and manage the many interpersonal relationships on which her work depends. Having been sufficiently cautioned that exercising power would alienate her from her colleagues and position her as a boss, she initially positioned herself as a “secret shopper” when observing fellow composition teachers; she wanted to observe what was happening in her department’s composition classes in the most benign and unobtrusive way possible (p. 81).

Management theory helped her realize that acting as a secret shopper was cutting her off from meaningful conversations about teaching. Without recognizing her authority and owning her expert power from the beginning of the observation process, she could not later in conversations with teachers about the observation assume her authority and expertise without exposing herself as disingenuous during the class observation. Rose recognizes that her misstep as a new WPA was in focusing on how she positioned herself rather than on building trust-based relationships with her colleagues. It is reasonable to assume that WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institution may be more likely to make choices similar to Rose’s since they do not have a ready-made cohort of faculty peers with whom they share disciplinary knowledge.

### **Feminist Administrative Structures**

The socio-cultural theory with which WPA scholars appear to be more familiar and comfortable is feminism. Like contemporary leadership and management theory (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007), feminism also highly values interpersonal relationships. But feminism may seem to be a better

ethical fit for WPAs than leadership theories because of feminism's explicit goal of disrupting traditionally top/down hierarchies and power allocation by calling into question those socio-cultural beliefs that have kept those hierarchies in place. WPAs may also be more comfortable with feminist approaches to administration because of feminism's long-established presence in composition pedagogy. In the early to mid-1990's, building on scholarship on creating feminist, student-centered classrooms, WPAs published a slate of articles on feminist approaches to administration. Two of the earliest and most cited articles are Marcia Dickson's (1993) "Directing without Power: Adventures in Constructing a Model of Feminist Writing Programs Administration" and Jeanne Gunner's (1994) "Decentering the WPA," both of which play on two well-known phrases in composition pedagogy—Peter's Elbow's book titled *Writing Without Teachers*<sup>12</sup> and *decentering the classroom*. Given the field's emphasis on praxis and the multiple roles of WPA as scholar, teacher and administrator, WPA scholars' transfer of classroom practice to administration seems a natural progression. Dickson, acknowledging the similarities between feminist administration and "successful business enterprise," characterizes "feminist administrative structures" as including:

- a willingness on the part of the WPA to relinquish control over the word-dictating official policy;
- a heavy emphasis on collaboration
- an agreement to assign duties according to ability rather than according to title or rank diversifying rather than delegating authority;

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<sup>12</sup> See Gerald, Amy Spangler, "An Uneasy Relationship: Feminist Composition and Peter Elbow." *Composition Studies* (31.2):73-89 for a discussion of the similarities between Elbow's and feminist pedagogy, including why some feminists pedagogues are not comfortable with Elbow's pedagogy being defined as feminist.

- an ongoing conversation about the projects in which the faculty is engaged: teaching, research, and administration;
- a workshop and a forum atmosphere that allows for experimentation in teaching and research;
- a commitment to provide ample support and mentoring services for all levels of participants; and
- a constant and steady system of rewarding excellence and effort.

(p. 152)

These characteristics mirror the pedagogical practices typically associated with a feminist classroom, and which have been adopted as sound writing pedagogy by feminist and non-feminist pedagogues alike.

Though Dickson's (1993) essay refers to directing without power, she is really reacting against authority and not all forms of power. If a WPA is to have power in a feminist administrative structure, according to Dickson, that power should be derived from accessibility and adaptability, both of which can be interpreted as relying on expert and referent power. The ability to affect program change comes from being a "conduit [linking] diverse members of the program," and "being ready to offer advice to those interested in developing new teaching techniques [and] being willing to talk about writing pedagogy without making the person you talk to feel threatened" (p. 149). Through conversations with faculty, staff, and other administrators, the WPA gains the knowledge necessary to continue to empower those around him. Using images such as WPAs forcing the "glass slipper" (a particular composition program curriculum) on the wrong "princess" (the wrong faculty department for this curriculum) (p. 151), and faculty

working together like at a “family picnic” where “people sit where they want, and everyone is responsible for seeing that the family gets fed and the children don’t drown in the lake” (p. 148), Dickson describes an administrative approach where the WPA accepts short term messiness that comes from valuing the beliefs of those who teach in the writing program in order to establish the long-term personal professional relationships that are necessary for sustained program effectiveness. Hildy Miller repeats Dickson’s position by characterizing leadership as “relational,” with authority being synonymous with “being receptive, cooperative, willing to promote discussion, listen to divergent views, and look for common interests” (p. 53). The WPA as a leader that shares power and values the opinions of those with whom she works also appears in the literature on WPAs at the small college and universities. Working with feminist administration models, Judith Hebb (2005) sees herself as a “writing people advocate” that “must be attuned to each individual’s personality, strengths, and weaknesses” so everyone can “contribute to the growth of [their] joint collaborative project” (p.103). And Catherine Latterell (2003) as an administrator of a technical writing program says, “I don’t direct anything.” Instead she is a “steward,” a custodian of projects and initiatives rather than the boss (p. 332). In all of these descriptions, the WPA uses their expertise to contribute to the writing program rather than dominate it. Both Latterell and Hebb are also only-composition-scholar WPAs.

Those relationships that allow the WPA to use her expertise effectively can also create a shared sense of responsibility for the program. Jeanne Gunner (1994), in her article “Decentering the WPA,” would prefer to take the dismantling of the traditional hierarchy even further, and further distribute the responsibilities of writing program

administration. While Dickson (1993) assumes there will still be an individual WPA to act as the central point person, Gunner favors writing program administration being the responsibility of a collective of interested individuals, rather than the responsibility of one person. Like Hildy Miller (1996) who argues that power should be exercised from a “power of equality” (p. 59), Gunner seeks to promote freedom of choice and equality among all writing faculty. She worries that making one person ultimately responsible for a program reinforces the marginalization of writing instruction and the devaluing of administration as a form of scholarship because making one person responsible keeps instructors from having real responsibility for the curriculum they teach, and it keeps others from learning about the work of administration (p. 8). A program may even use the existence of a WPA as excuse not to have to hire composition scholar writing teachers because a WPA will provide the necessary faculty development (p. 12). But in her discussion of departments not wanting to hire writing instructors educated in composition pedagogy, she has uncovered, but not addressed, the larger problem that will not be resolved through shared governance: that non-composition educated faculty educated in other areas are considered on-the-whole, ideologically, more valuable. Gunner’s argument would be more convincing if WPAs were able to effectively and consistently solve the problems created by circumstances Gunner references such as having composition teachers comprised of only graduate students in literary studies. In later articles, including “Identity and Location: A Study of WPA Models, Memberships, and Agendas” in 1995 and “Collaborative Administration” in 2002, Gunner returns to the idea of shared authority and governance with a more nuanced treatment of how context can and should affect administrative structures. In describing three types of collaborative

administrative structures-“‘flattened’ hierarchies,” “professional training tracks,” and “rotation collaboration,” she gives WPAs a more realistic set of potential structures from which to choose (258).

Many models of shared governance that fall into Gunner’s categories may not have the utopian effect of creating program ownership and authority throughout the program or department. In fact, when shared administrative duties are shared between multiple administrators, power and authority can actually be increased. In their article, “Doubling Our Chances: Co-directing a Writing Program,” Anne Aronson and Craig Hansen (1998) present a story of co-administrating where “two empowered voices [...] address the university community concerning literacy issues [and] create largely separate, multidisciplinary networks” (p. 27). Other benefits of their co-directing arrangement included shared workload and each of them having a colleague who shared their knowledge of and interest in the program, with whom they could share ideas and concerns. As they operated as one administrative unit in the university community and through their conversations during which they shared knowledge and understanding of program issues, co-directing increased Aronson’s and Hansen’s positional authority, expert power and referent power. Co-directing is one type of a feminist administration structure as it encourages the growth of power through the relationship of the co-chairs.

Feminist models of administration as discussed in the literature may be especially hard for only-composition-scholar WPAs or small school WPAs to enact because they may rely on material conditions that are not available to WPAs who are the only composition scholar and small school WPAs. Referencing Christine Hult’s statement that WPAs should surround themselves with “well-trained, professional writing experts”



(1995, p. 48) with whom they can share responsibilities, Thomas Amorose (2000) calls into question whether or not that is possible for many small school WPAs (p. 97).

Unclear is how a WPA without other professional writing experts is supposed to responsibly enact a feminist model of administration.

### **Rhetorical Agency**

Whereas feminist theory has been important for understanding the relationship between WPAs' power and how administrative positions are structured, rhetorical theory is a means for viewing how WPAs respond to the rhetorical situations they encounter in their daily work. Like feminist theory, rhetorical theory places high importance on communicative relationships that provide the grounds for rhetorical practice. But rhetorical theory also shows WPAs how to work within structures with the potential to dismantle them through language. WPA scholars writing on the power of rhetoric have located a WPA's power and influence in the WPA's ability to work within the constraints presented by an often broad and varied audience, specific administrative structures, and complex ideas about literacy (Werder, 2000; Charlton, 2005). If a WPA can navigate the manifold rhetorical situations she will face on a daily basis, she will be effective. From a rhetorical theory perspective, a WPA's main source of power is rhetorical agency—the combination of rhetorical ability and the authority to use it.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike positional authority, rhetorical agency can be more easily shared by giving others within the program the appropriate rhetorical spaces within which to work. In fact, a WPA's continued rhetorical agency is dependent on doing so. Carmen Werder (2000) describes the give and take of sound rhetorical practice as "enabling a freer range of

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<sup>13</sup> The push for WPA's to use their rhetorical agency harkens back to White's call for WPAs to "use it or lose it," since the methods of using it cited by White were primarily rhetorical: speak like you have power and you will have it.

motion” than traditional visions of power (p. 21):

By performing actions that position us in relation to others in such a way that we can mutually influence each other, we leave them room to move. By not focusing solely, narrowly, on changing their minds, but rather on the situation itself, we can foster shared agency. But this approach requires vulnerability and represents an ongoing challenge for it means that we have to keep going to the table, continually ready to negotiate, to redefine, to re-invent, to revise—all in the company of others. The kind of courage required here is the nerve to enter the fray each day. (p. 21)

For some scholars who are committed to larger issues of justice, sharing rhetorical agency may not go far enough in promoting a more ethical workplace or addressing institution-wide and public beliefs about writing.

Another potential problem a WPA may encounter when taking a rhetorical approach among her peers is that the WPA may be perceived as being manipulative or taking control, even as she perceives herself to be reaching out to the other party. Werder acknowledges that rhetorical positioning may be viewed as coercive or as another “power move” (20). Werder has made visible the false dilemma others may create for WPAs. Because agency is a type of power, and having rhetorical agency depends on the WPA having already established positional, expert or referent power, the WPA speaking and writing rhetorically may be questioned. After all, rhetoric is used to affect change. But rhetorical agency is not the same as coercive power—used to force change or make veiled threats. This misperception of WPAs’ intentions may be especially prevalent in situations where the persons with whom the WPA is communicating do not share the

same level of rhetorical agency. Donna Qualley and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater (2007) share their experiences working with teaching assistants in their programs and how their rhetoric did not always have the intended effect because the TAs were in a more vulnerable position. The teaching assistants heard ideas from a position of defensiveness, a feeling which Qualley and Chiseri-Strater forgot as they applied their rhetorical knowledge and principles and then failed to communicate. Qualley and Chiseri-Strater refer to their WPA as rhetor identities as "split at the root" (p. 171). Their experience with rhetorical agency echoes the conflict between knowledge and action that WPAs have expressed in most of the literature discussed thus far.

For some scholars, advocacy is a viable concept for maintaining praxis. According to Deborah Dew (2009) when we visibly use rhetoric to advocate for our personal and professional causes we are in turn legitimizing and demonstrating the very subject that we study and teach.

Numerous scholars have applied the same rhetorical principles discussed by Werder (2000), Qualley and Chiseri-Strater (2007), and Dew to larger scale efforts such as responding to state-wide curricular mandates, promoting literacy in local communities, and building writing-across-the-curriculum programs. WPAs who use their rhetorical agency progressively for the good of their programs, communities, and faculty are said to be acting as advocates or working as *activist WPAs* (Adler-Kassner, 2008). Adler-Kassner argues that WPAs can change the way that writing and writing programs are perceived by being more active and savvy storytellers, and by framing those stories in ways that make sense for the audiences WPAs are trying to reach but also in ways that don't compromise WPAs' theoretical and experiential understanding of writing and

writing instruction. Her pragmatic approach that includes rhetorical agency is a welcome antidote for the helplessness WPAs often feel in the face of their mounting responsibilities and the large number of people and organizations which attempt to hold them and writing programs accountable for all literacy efforts. In order to have an impact on the stories the public and government tell about writing and writing instruction, WPAs should approach the task "consciously, understanding the porous nature of the narrative that we are invoking, and think carefully about how our arguments are positioned within it" (p. 58). In other words, WPAs have to be careful that their ideas and rhetoric are not undone by participating in the narratives and language of other movements that do not share their goals. To that end, Adler-Kassner lays out concrete guidelines for WPAs who want to engage in public conversations about literacy in accordance with their own principles. With the participation of Adler-Kassner as the organization president, the Council of Writing Program Administrators has created the Network for Media Action, a place where WPAs can share rhetorical strategies and materials to be used in creating their own stories of writing and writing programs.

Providing the perspective of a new non-tenured track, only-composition-scholar WPA at a small school, Rebecca Taylor Fremo (2007) finds it difficult to see a strong correlation between power and practicing rhetoric as she has "to be *both* persuasive *and* informative at all times, constantly explaining and defining [her] job duties and the program's goals within the contact of nearly every conversation," leaving her much less time and energy to focus on persuasion and limiting her ability to act as an advocate (p. 196). She also sees a disconnect between the values she brings to her new job and the "unfamiliar institutional values and practices" in which she is being asked to affect

change. This disconnect hampers her ability to act with rhetorical agency as described by scholars who present rhetoric as the pathway to WPA success. She argues that only-composition-scholar WPAs such as herself should consider the “rhetorical strategies” of other marginalized speakers in the field such as Jacqueline Jones Royster and Geneva Smitherman (p. 199) in order to take a critical look at finding a voice as a marginalized member of an institution. In response to readers that might argue that she is not truly marginalized, she points to scholars who believe that WPA scholarship is less intellectually valuable than the study of writing itself, encouraging the field of composition and rhetoric to rethink its embrace of WPA scholarship. By questioning other scholars’ assertion that rhetoric is the path to greater success as a WPA, Fremo reveals yet another way that WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institution may feel marginalized.

### **Systems Theory**

Each of the approaches to WPAs’ use of power that I have discussed so far overlap considerably as WPAs, in general, share many pedagogical and professional values. The differences are mostly ones of emphasis. One theoretical approach that has not been discussed at great length in the literature on program administration, but has been explored in literature focused on writing and writing pedagogy (Cooper, 1986; Syverson, 1999) is complex systems theory. Complex systems theory, when applied to writing program administration, defines the opportunities and conflicts WPAs face as results of WPAs “participating in an environment – a ‘profession’ – where partly incompatible activity systems overlap and transact” (Phelps, 2002, 15). For example, complex systems theory would cast the miscommunications with TAs experienced by

Qualley and Chiseri-Strater (2007) as the product of the TAs functioning in multiple systems—the TAs operate within peer, student, and teacher systems while Qualley and Chiseri-Strater function in systems both separate from and overlapping with the TAs' systems. For example, Qualley and Chiseri-Strater and the TAs are all classroom teachers, but in one of those classrooms Qualley and Chiseri-Strater are the TAs' teachers. For Louise Wetherbee Phelps (2002), the path to being a more effective WPA is better understanding the systems in which you operate as well as the other systems with which you interact; understanding of the systems and the practice that arises from it are what crystallizes into a WPA's identity (p.15). Further, Phelps argues that complex systems theory gives teachers in graduate programs a way of conceptualizing power and identity that will be more useful to aspiring WPAs.

In direct response to scholars such as Gunner (1994; 2002) and Dickson (1993) who argue for dispersal of power and equate the dispersal of it with ethical administration, Phelps (2002) presents an approach to administration in which administrative “strength” is a “virtue” (p.25). She describes a strong leader as a “node in a multi-dimensional network of power and information flowing in many directions,” who “is a center that gathers, concentrates, and communicates power, tending to harmonize its dissonances and to achieve alignments” (pp. 27-28). She goes on to say that “WPAs catalyze, generate, align, and transmit power as it streams through systems of activity” (p. 27). Randall McClure (2008), in his essay on work as a “lone-compositionist,” typifies Phelps' vision of a successful WPA. Because he is “an army of one,” he has to “network nearly every day with so many departmental, university, and system-wide forces to foster understanding of and garner support for [his] work and those teaching composition

courses at [his] institution” (p. 104). When writing about the small school WPA experience, Thomas Amorose (2000) describes a similar phenomenon where “authority gets exercised at those junctures in the cultural life of the institution where issues and plans are essential to how the institution defines itself are being considered” (p. 95). These explanations of WPA work demonstrate that WPAs must have knowledge of the systems and the strength to carry out various actions, such as, resolving conflicts between teacher and students, securing resources from other administrators, and playing a key role in the “cultural” fabric of the institution (Amorose, p. 95). Drawing inspiration from a story of a turtle holding up a layer of earth, a turtle held up by other turtles, and patterns in a Turkish carpet, Phelps tells how a “leader’s practical efficacy depends on a dense multiplicity of other leaders, whose own creative power is in turn amplified by the ability of a centered leader to attune their contributions to a common enterprise.” (p. 28). Since the primary way in which the systems interact is through the people who inhabit them, Phelp’s approach also allows WPAs to keep the focus on the interpersonal relationships for which feminist scholars argued so successfully. For many WPAs, Phelp’s approach to power may better reflect the reality of their positions and their work by acknowledging that they simultaneously occupy multiple positions in multiple systems, some of which are non-academic, but that doing so does not necessarily mean that they cannot act as a strong “center” (p. 28) in at least one of those systems. The WPA only has to remember that he is only one of the “turtles” in the pattern of systems and activities that make up a WPA’s work. And Phelps’ depiction of power and WPA work is not antithetical to work as an only-composition-scholar WPA, but none of the “turtles” in only-composition-scholars’ systems are composition scholars. And if the agents in a system are responsible

for maintaining the system's goals and environment, not including other composition scholars has to impact how the system, functions—how its agents act and react, and how resources are defined and used.

### **Risk and Skepticism**

The definitions and approaches to power discussed in this section all imply or address a sense of risk and skepticism in WPA work that deserves mention. Edward White's (1991) article, which is the most forceful in tone and in which he argues for an assertive grasping of power, is written out of skepticism about his colleagues, many of whom, according to White, are enemies that must be dealt with strategically. The feminists in turn take on the risks associated with shared power to counter to their view of top/down administrators as being unable to ethically keep and use power. When scholars tell their stories of risk and skepticism they may concurrently increase WPAs' sense of risk and skepticism and give them comfort in knowing others have had similar experiences (Ballif, 2008; George, 1999). For WPAs who are the only composition, skepticism may be an important protective element of daily work. Regardless of which theoretical construct of power a WPA adopts and practices, the presence of risk and skepticism will have a continued presence in how they conceptualize their daily work.

### **Gender and Power**

Related to feminist approaches to power, but not equated with them, is the role gender plays in the construct of a WPA's authority, expert knowledge, and referent power. Some scholars attribute the prominence of feminist theory in composition pedagogy and writing program administration scholarship to the large number of females in the field. The accepted wisdom is that female WPAs viewed writing program



administration and power in ways incongruent with more masculine visions of them, leading to a rise in the prevalence of feminist visions of WPA work (McLeod, 2007, p. 13). The large number of women in the fields of composition and writing program administration has also contributed to the teaching of writing and writing program administration being considered “women’s work” (Ballif et al., 2008, p. 1). Referencing Theresa Enos and an unnamed respondent in *Women’s Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition*, Ballif, Davis and Mountford refer to the practice of departments and programs hiring “powerless (untenured, most likely female) WPA[s]” in order to resist change as a “dirty secret.” They sum up this situation with “damn the earnest woman who tries” (p. 119). This statement sums up a commonly held skeptical view of the relationship between power and the gendering of writing program administration. Another unnamed respondent in *Women’s Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition* recalls a department colleague referring to her and other female composition teachers with “disdain” as “the housewives” (p. 10). Feminism provided professional models for female WPAs that rewarded, rather than dismissed, the skills needed for women’s work. For example, Dickson (1993) encourages feminist WPAs to use their abilities “to listen, to ask the instructors for advice, and to let others talk out their reservations, their problems and their discoveries” and argues that “these important communications skills [are] potentially more important than the ability to write memos and directives” (p. 150). While it is important to recognize that the emphasis on relationship maintenance is not limited to female or feminist WPAs, these skills are still largely associated with the female gender.

Other scholars worry that embracing the skills that are traditionally defined as feminine, within institutions in which these traits are not valued, feeds discrimination. As Sally Barr-Ebest (1995) discovered in her study of the work habits and conditions of female and male WPAs, “men fare better than the women” even though all have “common training, background, duties, and responsibilities....They publish more, they are paid more, and they are more likely to be tenured” (p. 53). Responding to female WPAs spending more time on relationships than publishing, a male participant in Barr-Ebest’s study provides this summary of the discrimination against female WPAs:

Both men and women suffer from this lack of status [as scholars in composition and rhetoric]. Women are able to 'move on': but they have to prove themselves in other ways; again, the publishing makes the difference. The problem is in the fact that administration doesn't leave much room for publishing. So a woman administrator has 3 strikes against her before she gets to bat (to use a macho metaphor). The lack of status affects male WPAs by their being marginalized in the discipline in the same way as ALL in rhet comp are. BUT-their penis protects them against the triple blow that women have--2 strikes when men get to bat. Most insidious is that as 'word' people, people in English are very smooth at hiding their sexism and at playing the game of having none of 'those' feelings about professional women. (p. 64)

While the Barr-Ebest (1995) study is now almost twenty years old, Ballif, Davis and Mountford’s (2008) text, published in 2008, highlights many of the concerns expressed in Barr-Ebest’s article. The echoes of the Barr-Ebest study in the *Women’s Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition* demonstrate that discrimination based on gender is still a

problem, and that it complicates how daily work is defined as well as how power is perceived and used in writing program administration.

### **WPAs in Literary Studies-privileging Departments**

Composition programs often being housed in English Departments that emphasize and value the study of literature over composition is a workplace condition that has played a major role in the professional status of WPAs. And it's a major reason the field has needed much scholarship on defining the position and on defining power and its uses. Refrains of skepticism and disappointment are also often linked to the relationship between composition and literature programs as WPAs and composition faculty struggle to find and hold a place in their departments (Schilb, 2002; White, 2002; Rose, 2005; Micciche, 2002). In these circumstances, WPAs and other composition faculty are often faced with explaining their field, areas of study, and responsibilities to faculty whose interests lie elsewhere (in the most benign circumstances.) The scholarship that addresses the relationships between literature and composition faculty, and WPAs, is the most directly relevant scholarship to WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institutions. The issues composition faculty and WPAs experience in their relationship with literature faculty in departments that privilege literary study may be magnified if the WPA is the only faculty member educated in composition and rhetoric. Only-composition-scholar status may also morph relationships in ways that are more complicated than simply increasing or lowering the number of difficulties based on the number of composition faculty in the department.

The scholarship on WPAs working in English Departments that privilege literary study incorporate many of the conversations on WPA roles and power already discussed

in this chapter. With the understanding that WPAs are often misunderstood, that their work doesn't look like other faculty members' and administrators' work, and that they are expected to accomplish more than they have the actual power to do, scholarship that looks at the relationship between the disciplines of literature and composition, and their faculty, both acknowledges the difficulties of working in literary studies privileging environments and pushes to move beyond their embattled stances and become better communicators.

As someone who identifies himself as both a composition and literary scholar, John Schilb (2002) may be well-positioned to understand the relationship between composition and literary studies, and between literature and composition scholars. According to Schilb, most literature departments “privilege literature, at composition’s expense” (p. 168), a phenomenon that WPAs certainly experience as they work with their colleagues to analyze and improve their writing programs and “offer some degree of guidance about writing instruction—though not too much—to experienced faculty and other teachers in English and across the disciplines” (Micciche, 2002, p. 434). New WPAs may be especially shocked to learn that many literature-privileging departments still exist since many of them have been immersed in departments and graduate programs that grant doctoral degrees in composition, giving them a skewed perception of the place of writing instruction and composition faculty within most English Departments. In the following passage, Edward White (2002) gives a future WPA’s perspective on the fit of composition in English Departments that one of his and Theresa Enos’ students shared in a class on writing program administration:

[O]ne of the more reflective students said in passing that the complaints he had been noticing in the reading about the status of composition faculty in English departments were of purely historical interest. When I gave a puzzled reply, he responded that because composition and rhetoric faculty now were among the faculty leaders in English departments, recognized and rewarded for their teaching and scholarship, those bad old days were gone forever. I looked at Theresa and she looked back, both of us visualizing harrowing scenes from the recent past; we shook our heads sadly. He was, of course, generalizing from his sense of the situation at UA [University of Arizona] (and would that it were invariably true there!), and he found it hard to believe that those bad old days were still generally the daily life experience of WPAs in America." (White, 2002, p. 102)

When new WPAs, like the student in White's and Enos's class, enter an English department they bring with them new ideas and ambition and may be surprised to find that there is little room for their enthusiasm "when defending their territory" (Cambridge & McClelland, 1995, pp. 152-153). Schilb aims to catalog the WPA's position in literature-privileging English departments and is careful not to cast his own colleagues in a purely negative light. His first responsibility as the WPA at one institution was securing better offices for writing faculty, but he makes a point to say that his colleagues never openly "mock[ed]" composition (p. 165). Instead they showed their lack of respect for composition by "poorly hous[ing]" its faculty (p. 165). Schilb was lucky to find himself in an environment where literature colleagues were smart enough and respectful

enough to not be openly disparaging.<sup>14</sup> Richard McNabb (2008) also started his new job as a WPA only to find that the lack of respect for writing at his new campus was expressed through the lack of material resources. In this passage, he describes his surprise at discovering his new office space and resources:

When I was shown my windowless, yellow cinder-block office, a book case, and two desks occupied most of the small space. I was certain this was a mistake; after all, the writing program director at my previous institution had a suite of offices complete with administrative assistants and office staff. Thinking all programs ran on the same model, I was surprised to find that I was essentially going to be a one-person show—no separate office space, budget, computers or administrative assistants. Facing these conditions, I was amazed that the former director of writing was able to garner any institutional support to create a first-year program. All of this, of course, was indicative of the general attitude toward writing as a discipline. (pp. 64-65)

McNabb's realization that he wasn't going to have the resources he expected, but he would be expected to accomplish as much as his predecessor, is especially important because it reinforced for McNabb that he was a WPA and the only composition scholar at his institution. (Like other only-composition-scholar WPAs, McNabb was the WPA and only composition scholar because his institution's only faculty line for a composition scholar was also the line dedicated for a WPA.) Schilb's (2002) and McNabb's experiences make it easy to understand how new and old WPAs alike are still surprised

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<sup>14</sup> Schilb's (2002) experience mirrors that shared by the respondent in Barr-Ebest's (1995) study who said his colleagues were rhetorically savvy enough not to be openly sexist in their comments, but that the sexism was revealed in other material ways. In Schilb's case, the department was savvy enough not to openly reveal their disdain for composition studies.

by their feelings of embattlement and labeled as naïve. After all, unless the WPA brings other administrative experience to his new position, the surface conditions are not usually entirely negative or positive and therefore, may not enable the WPA to immediately see the reality of their positions.

Some scholars trace the antagonism between the disciplines to composition having a secured position in the general education curriculum and in writing-across the curriculum programs, combined with literature faculty's lack of respect for writing studies as a worthy intellectual pursuit (Schilb, 2002; Ballif et al., 2008). The position of composition in the general education curriculum means many literature faculty are required to teach composition while facing decreasing literature course offerings. The position of composition and the literature faculty's perception of the field of composition as intellectually inferior cause dissonance for the WPA, and composition and literature faculty. This dissonance is often displayed in concrete ways that affect both composition and literature morale, such as inadequate offices for composition faculty, low pay for adjunct composition instructors or direct comments about the facile nature of composition studies.

### **Lack of Respect for and Acceptance of the Discipline**

Some English Departments have decided not to have composition scholars on the faculty which indicates a belief that composition studies is not always viewed as an integral part of English studies (Schilb, 2002, p. 166). Schilb's interpretation of this stance is that these departments do not want their belletristic approach to "be soiled by the crass practicality" of composition studies (p. 166), a rather harsh view that may be true at some institutions, but that also means they likely will not have a WPA. In

*Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition* (Ballif et al., 2008), one unnamed respondent is quoted as cautioning new WPAs to 'be ready to be disliked and considered stupid (by lit faculty) for the sort of work you do' and another unnamed respondent said 'do your homework – in the job search, in your research, before committee meetings, etc. Because many faculty members consider the rhetoric/composition field filled with those "who couldn't make it in a real academic field"' (p. 10). Erin O'Neill (2008) describes her experience of being a WPA and the only composition scholar among literature faculty as one where her "expertise" was "continually questioned," and says she felt like a "lone missionary[y] preaching a new religion to zealots of strange and conflicting faiths" (p. 79). O'Neill uses the lone missionary metaphor to synthesize the mix of expertise, powerlessness, responsibilities, and an unknowledgeable but resistant constituency. McClure (2008) has also dealt with a mix of hostility and disengagement; a faculty member "took offense" at his "use of the term *composition program*" to remind McClure that he was "in charge" of "just a course or two," not a program. McNabb (2008), because he worked among literature faculty who weren't required to teach first-year composition, says that he experienced more opposition from adjunct writing teachers than his literature colleagues (p. 69), and found administering a writing program in an environment where his faculty peers were not invested in writing instruction to be "uncomplicated and unproblematic" (p. 68). In response to these potential problems of being a WPA who is also the only composition scholar at their institution in a literature-privileging department, an unnamed respondent in *Women's Ways of Making It* encourages only-composition-scholar WPAs in literature-privileging department to be skeptical:



You have to cultivate a kind of skepticism and cynicism about the writing program. If you don't do it, it will eat you alive. Unless there are senior compositionists around, nobody in the department will know whether you've done a good job or not. They won't care. What they'll care about is that you've kept down the controversy, kept a lid on kids rebelling and all that. That's what they care about. (p. 228)

Perhaps Hildi Miller's (1995) description of WPAs feeling "like figurehead monarchs of make-believe realms" is a good metaphorical description of some WPAs' experiences (p. 52). Clearly, literature faculty may have a wide variety of backgrounds and identities, and departments also have a variety of identities. Many departments will include faculty that fully embrace writing studies, and faculty that refuse to acknowledge the importance and intellectual merit of the field, alongside a majority of faculty that occupy positions between these extremes. Combined with the varying responsibilities of WPAs in these departments, the composition and literature relationship may look very different at individual institutions.

One further determinant of how respected a WPA feels among their literature colleagues is the literature's respect for the scholarly work of the WPA. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, the intellectual work of writing program administration may not always fit the form of traditional articles published in journals. In addition, article publications in composition may also look quite different than the articles published in literary journals. For example, it is not uncommon for articles in composition to have multiple authors, and to incorporate theories from disciplines as diverse as complex systems theory, psychology, and business management. So, the lack

of respect may be partially due to other faculty and administrators not knowing how to value a composition faculty member's or a WPA's work. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, a WPA's "achievements [...] can look, at best, illogical and unfamiliar and, at worst, insignificant and inscrutable to an evaluator panel of senior colleagues with (Janangelo, 1995, p. 7). Others, such as Wendy Bishop and Gay Lynn Crossley (1996), say that the problem does not always lie with other faculty undervaluing a WPA's work, but rather that WPAs spend too much time on maintaining and improving their writing programs and not on publication. They argue, like many, that composition faculty simply should avoid WPA positions until receiving tenure (p. 75). But as Gunner counters in her contribution to Ballif et al.'s (2008) study, "finding time to do research and publish as we direct a writing program is a major challenge, but the level of productivity will not be a factor if the nature of our work is not first valued as scholarly" (p. 121). Further complicating the situation, some composition scholars working among literature scholars, who do not appreciate the presence of composition in the department, may also resist the movement to recognize writing program administration as a scholarly endeavor. In her dissertation, *Explaining Ourselves to Others*, Jonikka Charlton (2005) suggests that some composition scholars are worried that the professionalization of writing program administration is crowding out other areas of study within composition and rhetoric that more directly contribute to writing and writing instruction. She suggests that composition scholars that have this concern may act and speak about writing program administration in ways similar to their literature colleagues who disparage the field (pp. 82-83). And Mara Holt (1999), in "On Coming to Voice," describes WPAs who position themselves as "identifying with the oppressor,' attempting to gain mainstream status by

identifying primarily as scholars, exploiting the rest of us who value teaching and service as scholarship's equal" (p. 40). Along with the theoretical and material reasons for antagonism between composition and literature faculty, individual faculty have their own professional motivations and visions for the field that can cause composition faculty to take very different positions regarding the value of writing program administration as scholarship. This certainly dampens the persuasive power of those who are arguing for it, and could cause literature faculty to determine that the problem lies within the field of composition, not between composition and literature.

Literary and composition studies do share a focus on written texts including the social and cultural forces that shape them, and scholars in both composition and literary studies share an interest in many of the same cultural studies theories (Schilb, 2002, p.167). And it is generally known that many composition scholars, some of whom have made a large impact on the field as a whole, were literary scholars when they began teaching and studying the teaching of writing. Of course, many of these scholars received their advanced degrees "before Composition" (Miller, R., 2001, p. 34) or were introduced to English studies in programs where composition did not exist as a field of study. These individuals may offer or offer themselves as proof that interests in literature and composition are not mutually exclusive. But the question of dual positioning in the composition and literature divide may not be about interests as much as the ability to sustain dual scholarly agendas and the division of resources (Schilb, 2002).

As difficult as the relationship with literary studies, literature faculty, and some composition faculty may be at times, writing program administration scholars make it clear that WPAs are responsible for trying to right these relationships, at least to the

degree that the writing program can continue to function effectively and towards whatever education of each other may be possible. In order to fulfill this responsibility, WPAs must embody all three of their primary roles: teacher, scholar, and administrator. They must all be willing to exercise their expert and referent forms of power. More explicitly, a WPA must be able to “function in a department where [her] area of study is not the thing most people care about, where people see one another’s successes as threats, and where, for [her] survival, [she] need[s] to learn how to build alliances with people outside of [her] field.” (Ballif et al., 2008, p. 10). New WPAs may face an even greater difficulty doing this if they share the naiveté expressed by White’s (2002) and Enos’s student regarding English department politics, or if they do not realize that the language they have been using graduate courses in composition may not transfer well into their new professional context (Charlton, 2005). Pointing to scholarship on writing program administration that describes misunderstandings among literature and composition colleagues, Charlton argues that WPAs are not doing a sufficient job of explaining themselves to others. While Charlton takes a hopeful position that WPAs can make a difference through better explanation, Jeanne Gunner (Anson, Gunner, and Thomas, 2008) is more skeptical and worries about the compromises this asks WPAs to make:

Collegiality is built-in shared knowledge of the literature of the field, and the intellectual nature of our work is constructed in the parlor of the disciplinary conversation as well as in the material practices and conditions of our daily lives. To accept only experience in the latter unfiltered through the critical discourses of the former is to leave ourselves as a field and organization open to an appearance

of extreme cynicism, bad professional faith, numbers-driven community building.  
(p. 83)

WPAs must draw on their rhetorical knowledge and knowledge of the systems which impact their work, as well as wisely use their interpersonal relationships, to have a cohesive and progressive composition program. But the competition for resources and status, having to consistently work within the terms defined by literature faculty, and finally an inability of one scholar being able to understand another's discipline without actually being it, may ultimately limit the results of rhetorical skills and knowing the systems.

The constraints which limit a WPAs performance place WPAs continually at-risk for disappointment in themselves for not being able to mediate situations as well as they think they should. WPAs can experience disappointment with their programs when all of their expertise and interpersonal skills do not produce a more resources or a better work environment. Irene Ward (2008) describes the typical new WPA as "young, single, inexperienced (first job), new to town, and the only writing specialist in the department" and without a "social support system" (p. 58). These only-composition-scholar WPAs are particularly apt to succumb to disappointment without the support that Ward sees as so vital, and it stands to reason that they would also be more dependent on other WPAs' stories of success and survival. Recently, Laura Micciche (2002) argued that the disappointment felt by WPAs when they realize that they are the "anomaly" (Janangelo, 1995, p. 7) has the potential to create a loneliness that further isolates them. But the loneliness may also be a strategy of "self-preservation and principled thinking" (Micciche, 2002, p. 447) as WPAs use it to protect themselves from the opinions of

others and from situations in which their disciplinary principles and ethics are challenged.

Micciche, discontented with the acceptance of loneliness as a primary component of many WPA narratives, describes the danger of accepting loneliness as follows:

The ability to have hope for the future of our profession requires us to demythologize the politics of loneliness by seeing ourselves in connection to, rather than in distinction from, those we learn to see as outside the parameters of our work lives. Loneliness can function as a seedbed for disappointment, the experience of feeling dispossessed of power, agency, and the capacity to make a difference. It is not only common to experience disappointment in academia or to witness the disappointments experienced by those around us, but also to become accustomed to, even to expect, disappointment, so that intervening in the conditions that create it often becomes unthinkable. (p. 447)

Like Adler-Kassner's (2008) *The Activist WPA* which reminded WPAs that they can change how their communities' perceptions of writing and writing instruction through strategically crafting new narratives, Micciche's article asks WPAs to move beyond their stories of loneliness and disappointment in order to participate in "the larger dialogue on administration and to articulate WPAs' reality to a wider audience [...] who [has] some stake in the way a department organizes, defines, and evaluates its work" (p. 434). And Thomas P. Miller (Anson, Gunner, & -Miller, 2008) provides yet another challenge to the stories we create when he asks that we not forget the other people in our stories—our colleagues. We should continue to ask ourselves:

How would [our] coworkers [...] respond to the stories we tell of them in places such as this? How would we have to shift our narratives to encompass their

experiences and purposes? And how would our sense of who we are shift if we included their perspectives on us in our accounts of what we do? (p. 91)

Adler-Kassner, Micciche, and Miller challenge WPAs to not just create stories for themselves and without the consideration of others' perspectives. Their arguments have the potential to change the outcomes of WPAs' efforts while also combating the negative emotional impacts that a WPA can experience.

### **Advice to Future and Current WPAs**

Experienced WPAs also realize the value in sharing stories that might assist other WPAs in understanding their own contexts. And considering the material and emotional costs that a WPA can experience when their work is undervalued or when they are unable to fulfill their roles of teacher, administrator and scholar successfully, scholars are apt to turn these stories into advice for prospective WPAs. Many of the themes that have been discussed in previous sections of this literature review reappear as advice elsewhere in the scholarship (Ballif, 2008; O'Neill, 2008; Bruffee, 1999; Rhodes, 1999, Townsend, 2007). Using what they have learned, scholars move from analyses of primarily their own experiences of writing program administration to telling prospective and current WPAs what they can and should do. Given the field's respect for praxis, the scholars' move towards practical applications of their theories of writing program administration is warranted and expected.

That said, the most prevalent piece of advice for prospective WPAs is not to take an administrative position before tenure. So many aspects of being a WPA, as have been detailed in this chapter, can interfere with a WPA receiving tenure. Both Cynthia Selfe and Jacqueline Jones Royster, during their interviews for *Women's Ways of Making It in*

*Rhetoric and Composition* (2008), mention that taking an administrative position before tenure is “unwise” and Royster adds, since having been a WPA prior to receiving tenure, that she wished someone had told her “don’t do that” (p. 287). The belief that no one should assume a WPA position before tenure was so widely accepted at one point in time that it was codified in the Portland Resolution (Hult, 1992)—a statement of recommendations issued by the Council of Writing Program Administrators for institutions to consider when determining a WPA’s duties, hiring a WPA, and evaluating WPAs. The resolution directly states that “the WPA should be a regular, full-time, tenured faculty member or a full-time administrator” (p. 89). Scholars like Keith Rhodes (1999) and Martha Townsend (2007), however, have mixed feelings about the advice not to accept a WPA position prior to tenure because he knows how unrealistic it is to expect this advice to be followed. Rhodes’ article, “Mothers Tell Your Children Not to Do as I Have Done: The Sin and Misery of Entering the Profession as a Composition Coordinator,” begins with this song:

There is a job in academe / coordinating composition  
It’s been the ruin of many a young prof / And Lord, I know ‘cause I’m one.  
Now my mentor was a rhetor / She showed me the world of 4Cs  
But my department chair does not venture there / And suspects it’s a social  
disease.  
The only thing a comp teacher needs / Are students, pens, and paper  
And the only time she or he is satisfied / Is . . . well, frankly, never.  
Now I’ve one foot on dismissal / And the other foot on too much work  
But I’m going back to my colleagues / Even though they think I’m a jerk.



Oh rhetors, tell your students / Not to do as I have done

To come right out of graduate school / And coordinate composition. (p. 86)

But Rhodes later admits in the article that this advice is unrealistic and does not allow him to properly account for all he learned and accomplished as a pre-tenure WPA.

Rather than further this common piece of advice, he considers ways that WPAs can better help prospective untenured, "rookie" WPAs (p. 91). Recent discussions on Writing Program Administrators listserv (WPA-L) (2009), the professional listserv for WPAs and those interested in issues involving writing program administration, indicate that the advice not to take an administrative position prior to tenure is falling out of favor. (While Rhodes has chosen to focus on his non-tenured status, he was also an only-composition-scholar WPA during the time that he describes in this article.<sup>15</sup>) Agreeing with Rhodes, Edward White (2002) says "we must be careful to help new WPAs live in the worlds they will be moving to" by focusing on the "contexts within which WPAs function, and these contexts are enormously varied and complicated ....We must share our ignorance as well as our knowledge with future WPAs." (p. 103). This call for a change in the advice given WPAs reflects the emphasis on context that is present in the current scholarship, like that of McClure (2008), Amorose (2000) and Fremo (2007). According to postings on the WPA-L during the fall of 2010, when advising prospective WPAs, teachers are now likely to focus on other aspects of the position under consideration rather than focusing heavily on the position being pre-tenure.

For those who have already accepted a WPA position or are currently working as

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<sup>15</sup> The school where I currently work as the WPA is the same school at which Keith Rhodes (1999) worked and about which he wrote his "Mothers, Tell Your Children" article. Keith was WPA many years before I accepted the position, but I partially credit him for the relatively good climate in which I work. I, however, also want to note that most of the faculty with whom Keith worked have retired and were replaced by faculty who, in general, are more knowledgeable and respectful of composition studies.

a WPA, scholars also offer practical advice. Prospective and current WPAs can find advice like “get yourself a good office staff that you can trust” and “let [the program] run itself” (Ballif et al., 2008, p. 227). In Bloom’s *Laws*, Lynn Z. Bloom (1997) shares her humorous and candid take on the position of WPA in 23 statements of truth about being a WPA. Tucked into these statements is advice that WPAs both write everything down and write down nothing. Unfortunately, some of published advice does, though probably intended to be practical, may be overwhelming in its description of WPA work. For example, Doug Hesse (2002) provides a list of suggestions for WPAs to consider in regards to institutional politics: WPAs should be involved in all conversations related to writing at departmental and institutional level, know the interests of others in the department and institution as they relate to writing, know how others (especially other administrators from which the WPA seeks resources) prefer to receive information, build “ethos” (p. 44) by attending campus events and social gatherings, know “the resource climate” (p. 49), and modify their work accordingly. He also provides a list of suggestions for navigating professional politics, politics related to the discipline at-large and other scholars in the discipline, and for operating in the “public sphere” as advocates for sound educational practices (p. 52)

Irene Ward (2008) provides a similar list which includes nine suggestions such as “obtain a reasonable job description and have an annual review with your chair” and “negotiate for the training you need: supervisory skills, leadership, and management” (pp. 58-59). Differently than Hesse’s list, Ward’s also contains statements that address the emotional dangers of administration as in “balance your life and outside interests with your work” and “stop thinking you are a victim” (pp. 60-61). Hesse’s and Ward’s

suggestions consolidate, into the more digestible advice format, the theories on and stories about defining WPA work as well as other prominent themes in the literature.

### **Conclusion**

Much of the advice and positioning of WPAs in the literature may not align with the experiences of only-composition-scholar WPAs because the ideas presented rely on a certain type of peer relationship being enacted. The literature also frames writing program administration according to a certain set of material conditions that may not be present for WPAs who are the only composition scholar—an assistant, office staff, a suite of offices, and TAs to train and supervise.

As well, most of the discussions of only-composition-scholar WPA work that are available rely on first-person narrative for explication. While it is understandable that the first published articles that discuss the WPA and only composition scholar experience would include a large amount of first-person narrative—those paving the way often need to simply be seen, a reliance on first-person narrative limits the scope of our understanding of only-composition-scholar WPA work. The combination of so little scholarship on the work of WPAs who are the only composition scholar and the reliance on first-person narratives means that an empirical study will contribute a needed wider-view.

I see two trends in the literature that indicate an empirical study of the experiences of WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institutions is timely. The first trend is shift to using theories, such as systems theory, that discuss the relationships between individuals and systems without the value-laden language of the feminist and power literature of the 1990s. This is important given that only-composition-scholar

WPA positions have been considered undesirable and sometimes even viewed as a drain on efforts to professionalize writing program administration. The second trend is the recent increase in articles published on being a WPA at a small school. Given that many small school WPAs are also only-composition-scholar WPA, room in the scholarship exists to reframe the small school experience as an only-composition-scholar WPA experience, or to study how the small school variable and being an only-composition-scholar WPA relate to each other.

Until now, the work of only-composition-scholar WPAs has mostly been a side-thought, randomly appearing in the existing literature, as is demonstrated in this literature review, when individual WPAs have chosen, through writing or speaking about other issues, to bring attention to their status as the only composition scholar at their institutions. I am not suggesting that an only-composition-scholar WPA's work is separate from issues like defining writing program administration as intellectual work or how a WPA should enact their authority, nor am I arguing that a WPA who is also the only composition scholar at their institution would necessarily experience the issues differently than a WPA who has composition scholar colleagues. Enough scholars, however, have referenced their only-composition-scholar WPA status in conjunction with other topics that I can reasonably deduce that they believe being a WPA who is also the only composition scholar at their institution affects their experience of WPA work in some way.

Because the current literature offers so little in terms of understanding the experiences of WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institution, beyond these brief mentions, I have provided a more thorough depiction of an only-composition-

scholar WPA's daily work and how being in such a position status has impacted the daily work of my study participants. My study will contribute experiences, stories, and insights from individual only-composition-scholar WPAs, providing further information which prospective and current WPAs can use when theorizing and working as WPAs. Additional information about the experiences of WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions may be particularly useful for those only-composition-scholar WPAs who are struggling with maintaining a sense of praxis in their own work and continue, like other WPAs, to find the right relationship between being a teacher, administrator, and scholar.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I detail the methodological approach of my study, beginning with an introduction to my study and my research questions. The next section provides a discussion of the grounded theory approach that I am using in order to support my study's goal of beginning to theorize WPA work when the WPA is the only composition scholar at their institution. Within the presentation of the grounded theory approach, I describe the theoretical premises of the approach and the practices associated with it. In the final section, I give a detailed description of the specific methods of my study. The methods include four phases: a literature review, brief survey of only-composition-scholar WPAs and interviews with only-composition-scholar WPAs. When working towards grounded theory, relevant literature is not used to establish codes and categories for data analysis thus I am including it as a method of prior immersion in the themes and concepts being discussed in the field as preparation for my study. My rationale for positioning the literature review as phase of study is provided in more detail in the section Methods, Phase I.

#### **My Study**

My study is designed to document the daily work experiences of WPAs who are also the only composition scholar at their institutions so that theories of WPA work in these types of positions can be further developed. A secondary outcome is theories of writing program administration, in general, may use the data provided in this study to better reflect the daily realities of only-composition-scholar WPA work. Currently, experiences of WPAs who are the only composition scholar have had little influence on current theories of writing program administration; empirical information regarding their

daily work has the potential to alter general theories of writing program administration. In the small amount of literature currently available on directing writing programs as only-composition scholar WPAs, the general writing program administration theories of authority, expertise, and rhetorical agency have already begun to be challenged by the stories told by WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institutions. Another important outcome of this study is providing only-composition-scholar WPAs a voice in the WPA community. Having a voice benefits WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institution and benefits the programs they administer because it provides the WPA participants with a sense of how other WPAs complete their daily work and are successful in their relationships. Finally, this study provides rich qualitative data that may prove useful in future studies of only-composition-scholar WPA work.

Because there is currently no empirical study of the only-composition-scholar WPA experience available—only personal narrative accounts, theories of their work are in the beginning stages of being formed. The development of theories of only-composition-scholar WPA work is such a new enterprise that the only article to date that attempts to theorize it through personal narrative is Randall McClure's "Army of One: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of WPA Work for the Lone Compositionist" (2008). As such, this study is not designed to test current theories about being a WPA and the only composition scholar, but rather to reveal issues that can aid in their development. For this reason, I used using a grounded theory approach for this study.

### **Research Questions**

This study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. How does being a WPA and the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's daily work?

2. How do WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution establish and maintain relationships that allow them to accomplish their daily work?
3. How does being the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's professional identity?

### **The Grounded Theory Approach**

Grounded theory has a rich methodological history that has evolved from the foundational Glaser and Strauss text (1967) outlining the approach, including its uses and strategies. In this section, I review the tenets of grounded theory as they apply to my study and discuss the implications for the project of using grounded theory.

#### **A Methodological Discussion**

The grounded theory approach to qualitative research provides a set of research practices, including specific data collection and analysis methods, while also demanding a researcher adopt a particular belief regarding knowledge-making. According to Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (2008), grounded theory refers to a set of practices that in combination provide an approach for developing theory from qualitative research data (p. 1). The theory developed from the grounded theory approach is grounded in the data; it is the grounded theory. The methodology that fosters the development of a grounded theory is, according to Strauss and Corbin, based on sixteen "assumptions about the world," which they attribute to the interactionist theories of George Mead and pragmatist theories of John Dewey. The list includes such beliefs as:

the external world is a representation [...]. Both this and the interior worlds are created and recreated through interaction [and] interactions may be followed by reviews of actions, one's own and those of others, as well as projections of future



ones. The reviews and evaluations made along the action/interaction course may affect a partial or even complete recasting of it.” (pp. 6-7)

Though these beliefs clearly support the idea that reality is constructed, some scholars (Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Charmaz, 2003, “Grounded Theory”) have charged Glaser with deviating too far from the original spirit of these assumptions in his promotion of grounded theory as a means to discover an absolute stable truth and call it a theory. For Strauss and Corbin, and Charmaz, a theory does not require an absolute stable truth.

Kathy Charmaz (2003, “Grounded Theory”), in response to critics that charged grounded theorists with being too consumed with finding “the truth,” recasts grounded theory practices in a constructivist paradigm. Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory allows researchers to work from the premise that multiple truths exist, including the researcher’s and the participants’, and that it is not necessary to completely reconcile these truths into a singular truth or theory. Constructivist grounded theory also asks researchers to more directly acknowledge their own role in constructing the stories that arise from qualitative research. Different than the classic grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss, constructivist grounded theory asks the researcher to:

- Assume that what we take as “real” is problematic—and that our analyses are interpretive
- Look for multiple definitions of reality
- Pay close attention to language—and *action*
- Examine how experience is constituted and structures are enacted.

(Charmaz, 2008)

Finally, constructivist grounded theory promotes less emphasis on the strict processes of

Glaser, Strauss and Corbin, because requiring specific types of “jargon, diagrams, conceptual maps, and systematic approaches [...] detract from grounded theory and attempt to gain power in their use” (Creswell, 2006, p. 66). For Charmaz, constructivist grounded theory requires that the data collection and analysis processes are adaptive and reflective throughout the research process.

My study’s focus on the daily work of WPAs who are the only composition scholar and praxis fits nicely with Mead’s, Dewey (Strauss and Corbin, 2008, p. 5) and Charmaz’s (2003, “Grounded Theory”) emphasis on the importance of reflection as the means of determining reality and creating knowledge. Rather than imposing a theory of writing program administration on the experiences and actions of my participants, the practices of grounded theory will require me to simultaneously collect data and reflect upon it, the process by which grounded theory is developed.

### **Common Practices of the Grounded Theory Approach**

According to Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), to whom the original definition of the grounded theory approach is credited, grounded theory methods include:

- Collecting and analyzing data concurrently
- Discovering codes and categories in the data, not applying codes and categories from already established theories
- Conducting theoretical sampling by adjusting types of data collected based on previously collected data and analysis of it.
- Constantly comparing components of the data with each other in order to discover similarities and differences, and new phenomenon.
- Considering each step in the process a step towards a grounded theory

- Completing a literature review to aid reflection on the data, not to pre-determine the concepts to be applied to the data.
- Reaching conceptual saturation so that new participants and new coding is no longer productive. (Corbin and Strauss, 2008)

Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (2008), and other grounded theory experts (Charmaz, 2003, “Grounded Theory”; Star, 2007) also propose specific practices for reflecting on the data as it is collected. These include activities such as memo writing after each data collection session and diagramming to depict the relationships between concepts as they appear during the data collection process.

**Coding.** The coding process is the most clearly delineated part of the grounded theory approach, with three stages of coding required: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Graham Gibbs defines each type as follows:

1. *Open coding*, where the text [data, memos, and diagrams] are read reflectively to identify relevant categories.
2. *Axial coding*, where categories are refined, developed, and related or interconnected.
3. *Selective Coding*, where the “core category,” or central category that ties all other categories in the theory together into a story, is identified, related to other categories. (p. 50)

For Corbin, open coding is actually just a component of axial coding because open coding alone is never sufficient, a research must always complete the next step of identifying relationships between the identified concepts in order for the initial coding of those concepts to have any purpose. And according to Corbin, the initial categories or

codes can only be developed in the context of other categories or codes. They exist in relation to each other, and it is through their relationships that a research is able to initially identify them (196). Regardless of number of stages, the coding process in grounded theory always depends on the process of discovery, honors the symbiotic relationship between data collection and analysis required in a grounded theory approach, and is completed with the goal of developing grounded theory.

### **Benefits and Limited Outcomes of Constructivist Grounded Theory for My Study**

These characteristics make constructivist grounded theory a suitable approach for my study. A large potential exists for WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions to view their positions and work differently from the ways their colleagues view them because only-composition-scholar WPAs have experiences and knowledge unique among their peers; thus, my study is positioned to highlight the influence of context and experience on how reality is defined by and for WPAs who are the only composition scholar. Constructivist grounded theory will give me the opportunity to use grounded theory methodologies, with the goal of contributing to the formation of a theory of only-composition-scholar WPA work, while also staying true to the underlying issue of subjectivity that exists in my project.

My study, however, is not a perfect fit for the application of grounded theory, even in its constructivist form. Due to time constraints and the study being completed to fulfill a dissertation requirement, the expectation that grounded theories arise out of data and participant saturation will not be met. I simply will not have the time or resources to continue with the project to the point of saturation. And therefore, any positing of theories from my study are preliminary at best and do not meet the standards for writing new, grounded theory. Instead, I envision my project as the beginning of research in the

WPA community that will lead to saturation. The data I collected and analyzed may be used in the future by me or other WPA scholars in an effort to discover theories that are more substantially grounded in the data on the daily work of WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions.

### **Study Design**

My study consists of three phases: Phase I) a review of the literature related to writing program administration, including the literature focused on the work of WPAs who are, or have been, the only composition scholar at an institution, Phase II) a brief survey of only-composition-scholar WPAs, and Phase III) interviews with WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants in Phases II and III of the study were current or former WPAs who were the only composition scholar on faculty at a university, or the person on faculty who performs administrative duties regularly associated with the position of WPA.

**Recruitment of only-composition-scholar WPA participants for phases II and III.** Even though only-composition-scholar WPAs are alone in their individual institutional contexts and have not had a strong voice in WPA literature, they are definitely not alone in the larger WPA community. As demonstrated on the Academic Jobs Wiki during the 2010-11 academic year, twenty-seven of fifty-two schools were either attempting to hire a WPA who would be the only composition scholar their institution or had a WPA who is also the only composition scholar at their institution. This approach made my pool of potential WPA participants fairly large. In order to make potential participants aware of my study and recruit interview participants, I distributed a brief survey to all members of the Writing Program Administrators listserv (WPA-L).

Members of WPA-L who were WPA and the only composition scholars on their campuses, or who have held WPA position as the only composition scholar, were invited to take the anonymous survey. Through the survey, the participants answered several questions about their work as only-composition-scholar WPAs. Survey takers were given the opportunity to identify themselves as potential interview participants for the Phase III interview portion of this study. I contacted by email those individuals who identified as willing to be interviewed in order to arrange a Skype or telephone interview. I sought informed consent at this time. My informed consent form is attached as Appendix E.

The survey was designed based on the recommendations of Floyd Jackson Fowler (2009), specifically his recommendations regarding wording of questions. According to Fowler, survey questions can be evaluated based on what they “tell us about some reality in which we have an interest” (p. 88). The wording of the questions is one of the primary means to ensure the question will provide valuable information. Well-worded questions are questions which are interpreted the same way by each respondent and do not rely on knowledge or assumptions that the respondent may not have (pp. 88 and 106). I also followed Fowler’s suggestion to avoid, when possible, providing a neutral answer or the opportunity for a respondent to opt out of answering a question.

The recruitment email and survey which will be sent to the WPA-L are attached as Appendix A and B, respectively.

### **Description of Participants**

All of my participants were current or former WPAs and the only composition scholars at an institution who were willing to share their perspectives on working these positions.

**Phase II: Survey Participants.** Twenty-two current or former WPAs who are or have been the only composition scholar completed the survey. In order to keep the survey brief and with the understanding that my study would rely primarily on the interview data gathered in Phase III, I asked the survey takers to provide only their gender and the number of years in a position as the WPA and the only comp scholar. Tables I and II reflect their responses.

Table 1

*Gender of Survey Participants*

Answer	Total Responses	%
Male	3	14
Female	18	82
I prefer not to identify using these terms	1	5
Total	22	100

An overwhelming number of the survey-takers were female. Current census information for writing program administrators is not available, and therefore, I am unable to determine whether the gender counts are representative of the WPA population as whole. For the same reason, I am also unable to determine whether the gender counts are representative of WPAs who are the only composition scholar.

Table 2 shows a clear majority of the survey participants have been, or were, in positions as the WPA and the only composition scholar for 0-7 years, with the largest percentage of participants falling within the 4-7 year range.

Table 2

*Survey Participants' Years as WPA and Only Composition Scholar*

Answer	Total Responses	%
0-3 years	7	32
4-7 years	10	45
8-11 years	4	18
12 or more years	1	5
Total	22	100

**Phase III: Interview Participants.** The survey yielded eighteen potential interview participants, and I was able to interview fourteen of them. These participants had a wide-range of experiences and served in a variety of WPA positions. Table 3 provides important demographic data for the interview participants.



Table 3

*Survey Participants' Responsibilities, Rank, and Years as Only-Composition-Scholar WPA*

Program Responsibilities	Rank	Years as only-composition-scholar WPA
1 <sup>st</sup> position: Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing Center	Associate Professor	<5
2 <sup>nd</sup> position: Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing Center	Associate Professor	5-9
Writing Program, Writing Across the Curriculum	Associate Professor	10-15
Writing Center	Instructor	5-9
Writing Program, Writing Across the Curriculum	Associate Professor	10-15
Writing Program, Writing Across the Curriculum	Assistant Professor	5-9
First-year composition, Writing Across the Curriculum, Writing Center	Assistant Professor	<5
Writing Program	Associate Professor	<5
Writing Program, Writing Across the Curriculum	Associate Professor	5-9
Writing Program	Assistant Professor	<5
Writing Program, Writing Across the Curriculum	Assistant Professor	<5
Writing Program and Writing Center	Associate Professor	<5
Writing Center	Staff	<5
Writing Program	Assistant Professor	<5
First-Year Composition	Assistant Professor	<5
Writing Program, Creative Writing, Writing Across the Curriculum	Full-time faculty	5-9

As is shown in Table 3, the interview participants are responsible for many aspects of writing programs.

There are two other aspects of my participants' identities that have, or had, a direct bearing on their experiences of being a WPA and the only composition scholarly.

Approximately 80 percent of my participants mentioned being the first composition scholar hired at their institution. This is significant because several of the participants mentioned entering into positions where their new colleagues did not understand what duties should be associated with the WPA position but there was also no history of previous WPAs doing well or poorly at the institution. I should also note that two participants, Tina and Amelia, were uncertain if they were the only composition scholar, though their survey responses indicate that they feel being the only composition scholar has a large impact on their work. I had conversations with both Tina and Amelia through which we determined that they were indeed the only composition scholars at their institutions. Amelia's confusions came from her being one of several people at her institution who rotate in and out of the WPA position. Though they all work as WPAs, Amelia is the only composition scholar among the faculty who share the WPA position.

The institutional contexts in which the interview participants worked may be equally a factor in the WPAs' thoughts and behavior. As Table 4 shows, the participants work in institutions of varying type and size. Seven of the participants work at public institutions, and 7 work at private institutions, with one of the private institutions being for-profit.

Table 4

*Interview Participants' Institutional Contexts*

School Size	Location of Program or Unit	Number of Colleagues	Colleagues' Disciplinary Identities
7,700	Humanities	10-20	Mix of Humanities
6,000	English	20-30	Almost all literary studies, creative writing represented

9,500	English	40-50	Almost all literary studies, creative writing represented
1,000	English	10-20	Almost all literary studies, creative writing represented
2,500	College of Business	<10	All literary studies
3,000	English	10-20	All literary studies
1,600	English	<10	All literary studies
8,400	General Studies	<10	Almost all literary studies, creative writing and profession communications represented
14,000	English	30-40	Majority literary studies, large presence of creative writing, and other related disciplines represented
800	Humanities and Natural Sciences	<10	Almost all literary studies, creative writing represented
2,000	Technical Communication	10-20	Technical Communications, educational backgrounds vary
5,000	English	<10	Almost all literary studies, creative writing represented
1,400	General Ed	20-30	Almost all literary studies, creative writing represented
5,000	English	10-20	Almost all literary studies, creative writing represented
20,000	English	40-50	Almost all literary studies, creative writing represented
1,400	Liberal Studies	10-20	Almost all literary studies, creative writing represented

Because the size of the institution and work as a WPA and the only composition scholar is often assumed to be correlated, I have further broken down the size data (Table 5). The average school size is 5,581; the mean is 4,000. Size of the institution may be associated with being the only composition scholar because small schools have a smaller number of total faculty, in general. The average ratio of total faculty to the only composition scholar is 17:1; the mean is 11:1. These numbers are significant because they show being the WPA and only composition scholar is not merely a product of being on at a small school or on a small faculty where each area of study is only represented by one faculty member.

Table 5

*Interview Participants' Institution Sizes and Faculty Ratios*

School Sizes Smallest to Largest	Faculty to Composition Scholar Ratio
800	5:1
1,000	12:1
1,400	13:1
1,400	9:1
1,600	5:1
2,000	7:1
2,500	7:1
3,000	10:1
5,000	9:1
5,000	15:1
6,000	26:1
7,700	16:1
8,400	8:1
9,500	43:1
14,000	38:1
20,000	47:1
5581 Average Size; 4000 Median Size	17:1 Average Ratio; 11:1 Median Ratio

There is not a correlation between school size and the type of department or unit.

More participants work, or worked, in English Departments than any other type of

department or unit, while the range of school sizes is more equally distributed. The other types of units or departments are Humanities or General Studies-based. Of note are the two participants who are housed in departments or units that are not traditionally classified as humanities: Technical Communication and the College of Business. With the exception of the Technical Communication department, all departments or units are comprised of almost exclusively literature faculty. The areas of study represented in the departments and units have a significant impact on the work of WPAs who are the only composition scholar as is discussed in Chapter 4: Findings.

### **Phase I: Literature Review**

**Purpose.** The grounded theory approach as originally defined by Glaser and Strauss called on practitioners of the approach to avoid completing a literature review until all data had been collected and analyzed. The literature review is only supposed to be used to further test or interpret the already established findings; thus, the literature review should not be completed prior to data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser (2004) later revised his viewpoint to allow for reviewing the literature prior to collecting data so the researcher can use the knowledge to shape the aspects of data collection such as what questions are asked in interviews (para. 46). Corbin and Strauss (2008) offer a slightly different position; they recognize the value in completing a literature review prior to collection data, but issue a warning against doing so because it will “hinder creativity” and “stand between the researcher and the data” (p. 42) The literature review process that is intended only to “sensitize” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 319) the researcher might have a stronger effect and determine initial codes and categories for the researcher to use in analyzing her data. She further argues that grounded theorists always use “sensitizing concepts,” those concepts that represent the researchers’ interest and pre-established

knowledge, when beginning to code data (Charmaz, 2003, p. 319). But for Charmaz (2003) the issue of the literature being too much of a determinant can be countered by being explicit about the literature review process, reflecting on the process, and accounting for the role of the literature in the development of the grounded theory. My reading of the debate about how to use the literature review is that constructivist grounded theory allows for a highly reflective use of the literature to discover general themes, but to remain true to the practice of not using the literature to develop the actual codes and categories that finally shape the findings is still an important part of the grounded theory approach.

**Collection.** My method for collecting the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 took place in the following manner:

1. First I searched for the literature that was overtly related to the work of WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institutions. This generated one article, Randall McClure's "Army of One: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of WPA Work for the Lone Compositionist," (2008).
2. I then worked backwards, from McClure's bibliography and issues he raised, to literature that addressed the small school WPA experience and writing program administration, in general.
3. Through constant comparison, I determined I had reached a point of saturation. I was no longer finding texts that added to the conversation or spoke to an issue more effectively than the texts I was already using.

I did not restrict my literature selection by date, but if a text was published before 2000, I made a considerable effort to find newer sources to also address the issues being raised in

the older text. In the end, if I felt that the perspective was not particularly time sensitive, I was not concerned with using an older text. Because writing program administration is a small and fairly new area of study, many of the older texts continue to be regularly cited; for example, Richard Bullock's "When Administration Becomes Scholarship: The Future of Writing Program Administration" published in 1987, and Edward White's "Use It or Lose It: Power and the WPA," published in 1991, continue to be heavily influential. In addition, the size of the field means I was not overwhelmed with the number of potential sources which may have necessitated being more restrictive in my use of older texts.

**Analysis.** My analysis of the literature was also based on constant comparison. By constantly comparing one text to another, I was able to determine which themes were most prevalent and where scholars disagreed with each other. During constant comparison, I kept a running list of subject headings and filled in each section with passages and ideas from the sources. This process also allowed me to identify the outlier concepts, such as the use of complex systems theory in Phelps' "Turtles All the Way Down: Educating Academic Leaders" (2002). Because of the potential of using complex systems to understand work of only-composition-scholar WPAs that Phelps' article reconfirmed for me, I did not discount this article and its arguments based on its outlier status. Through constant comparison, I was "sensitized" to the most prevalent themes and concepts in literature.

Finally, in the writing of the literature review, I was able to use the writing process to further conceptualize themes and concepts. This further conceptualization included demonstrating the potential relevance of the literature to the daily work of

WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institutions . The process of writing the literature review was highly instructive in that I was forced to articulate connections between the different texts and ask pertinent questions regarding connections to the only-composition-scholar experience.

**The Collection and Analysis Relationship.** The themes and concepts to which I was “sensitized” during the literature review to my research questions, and therefore, did not prompt me to revise the questions. My questions are broad in their focus on daily work, relationships with colleagues, and identity to allow for a variety of themes and concepts to emerge from the data and still be applicable to my study.

I also have not revised my interview questions to reflect the themes or concepts in the literature out of concern that doing so may cross the line that Corbin and Strauss (2008) delineate between becoming knowledgeable about my subject and allowing the literature review to overly determine the data I will receive and how I then analyze it. I completed the interview phases (Phases III) of my study, and my participants did share experiences that relate directly to the themes and concepts that arose during the literature review. I used these instances as opportunities to ask follow up questions related to the themes and concepts in the literature review. Participants then chose whether they wanted to provide additional information on the issue being discussed.

### **Overview of Empirical Data Collection and Analysis**

Each phase of my study was designed to answer my research questions, and each research question directed my study towards the development of preliminary grounded theories. The following chart summarizes the connection between the research questions, methods of data collections, and data analysis methods. The collection methods are listed in the order of their importance for answering the designated research question.



Table 6

*Alignment of Research Questions, and Data Collection and Analysis Methods*

Research Questions	Collection Methods	Data Analysis Methods
How does being a WPA and the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's daily work?	Survey; Interviews with WPAs	Basic counting, field notes, memoing, coding, constant comparison, thinking in metaphors
How do WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution establish and maintain relationships that allow them to accomplish their daily work?	Interviews with WPAs	field notes, memoing, coding, constant comparison, thinking in metaphors
How does being the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's professional identity?	Interviews with WPAs	field notes, memoing, coding, constant comparison, thinking in metaphors

**Phase II: Survey Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection occurred in three phases, with each phase contributing data that was compared with the data acquired in the other phases. Phase II: The Survey provided a loose sense of how current and former WPAs think about only-composition-scholar WPA work, and was conducted prior to Phases III: Interviews with WPAs who are or have been the only composition scholar while acting as WPA. Phase III: Interviews with WPAs who are, or have been, the only composition scholar while also being a WPA produced first-hand accounts of the participants' daily work. During Phase III, data was collected and analyzed simultaneously, as possible, in accordance with a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Charmaz, 2003).

For the sake of clarity, in this section, I first describe separately the two activities of collection and analysis for each phase, even though the dialectical relationship between the two activities in Phases II and III was central to the goals of this study. I will

then explain for each phase how the two activities might speak to each other.

**Purpose.** The survey served two purposes: to recruit participants (as discussed previously in this chapter) and to get a general impression of how current and former only-composition-scholar WPAs think about their daily work. In this section, I describe the survey as an instrument to acquaint me with how only-composition-scholar WPAs feel about simultaneously being the only composition scholar and WPA.

**Collection.** I sent an email (Appendix A) to the WPA-L requesting that members complete a survey (Appendix B) regarding their work as only-composition-scholar WPAs. A link to the survey was provided in the email text. The survey has been created using Qualtrics, and the survey responses will be returned to me through the Qualtrics program.

**Analysis.** My goal in analyzing the survey responses was to get a feel for how current and former WPAs who are, or were, the only composition scholar think about their work. Towards this goal, I completed basic counting of the responses, followed by memo writing about them. Through memo writing, I established a base line of knowledge and questions from which I conducted the Phase III interviews. I also used memo writing as a space for analyzing the responses and reflecting on the ways that the survey responses confounded or my confirmed expectations.

**The Collection and Analysis Relationship.** The analysis of the survey responses did not affect how I conduct the survey since I will not be re-surveying during the study. I, however, did use the survey responses and my memo writing about them to prepare for the interviews in Phases III. A reflexive relationship between collection and analysis was not established because the survey was distributed in bulk and no further surveying was

conducted. I, however, did reflect upon the survey results when conducting the Phase III interviews with the WPA participants and was more knowledgeable about my participants based on their survey answers.

### **Phase III: Interview Data Collection and Analysis**

**Purpose.** Interviewing current and former only-composition-scholar WPAs provided the most important data set of my study. Through these interviews, I gathered first-hand accounts and impressions of the participants' daily work. These interviews also served the secondary purpose of giving the participants the opportunity to share their experiences and hear their own voices in the context of this study.

**Collection.** I initially interviewed each participant by Skype or telephone. These interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. Attention was given to making the interview experience comparable for each participant. I then asked follow-up questions by email.

I began the interview process with a list of potential interview questions (Appendix C), but the actual questions that I asked during the Skype and telephone interview processes were determined by several factors including the participants' individual contexts as WPAs, the survey responses gathered in Phase II of the study, and the themes that arose out of the literature review. The questions, as a whole, were focused on topics that were pertinent to all of my research questions. I asked questions about the participants' definition of, and identification as, a WPA who is or was the only composition scholar at an institution, 2) the relevancy of being a the only composition scholar and the WPA to their daily work, and 3) the impact of being a the only composition scholar and the WPA on their relationships with colleagues.

The interviews were conducted in congruence with Rubin and Rubin's (2005) definition of responsive interviewing. Rubin and Rubin characterize responsive interviewing as "flexible" in design but always consistent with the belief that the researcher and interviewee "form a relationship during the interview process that creates ethical obligations for the interviewer" (p. 30). Rubin and Rubin also encourage continuous redesign continually redesigning the interview questions and process according to the interview experience (p. 62), which is a nice complement to the grounded theory approach's commitment to a dialectical relationship between data collection and analysis.

Using the responsive interviewing model also required:

1. A privileging of "the interviewees' interpretations of their experiences and their understanding of the world" (Rubin & Rubin, p. 36).
2. A recognition that the meaning constructed from the research is a joint construction of between the interviewer and interviewee, obliging researchers to remain aware of their role in its construction.
3. An understanding that the interviewee is sharing resources with the researcher (time, expertise, anecdotes, interpretations) that necessitates the researcher protecting the confidence of the interviewee.

Following through with the responsive interview model and with a continued focus on the larger goal of testing the existing theories, I repeatedly revised my interview questions. Through revision of the questions, I attempted to put the interviews in conversation with each other. Being careful to preserve anonymity, I shared participants' responses with other participants also with the goal of creating a conversation between the participants and the interview data.

During the interview process, careful attention will be paid to the participants' willingness to discuss the issues being addressed in the interview. All participants may elect to skip a question, not discuss a particular issue, or stop the interview at any point during the interview.

### **Analysis.**

**Field Notes.** Research notes are the first tangible form of analysis produced by a researcher using the grounded theory approach. As the name implies, these notes are taken in the field or immediately following a field experience. In my study, I completed field notes during the interviews, when possible, and directly after each interview. My field notes will capture my immediate observations regarding the interviews. While on the surface, the details included in my field notes may appear objective, the process of seeing is to some degree interpretative. My field notes were used to help me recall aspects of the interview that were not documented in the transcript as I completed the coding process. The field notes also captured those concrete observations that are not documented as part of the interview discussion

**Memoing.** According to Graham Gibbs (2007) memoing is a practice that has been adapted from the grounded theory approach as a common practice in qualitative research of many kinds. Memoing is the practice of recording notes about the data during the coding process, so that a researcher keeps a running log of their reactions to the data and the coding process. Memos are different than field notes because they do not record the details of the interview experience but rather reactions and concepts that arise from it.

Gibbs suggests maintaining four categories within each memo, adapted from Glaser and Strauss (1967): observation notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes, and personal notes. I

documented concepts and my interpretations in all four categories throughout the process of analyzing the data, but some types of notes took precedence over others in some individual memos.

**Coding.** During the coding process, I used the three types of coding suggested by Strauss and Corbin (2008) and Gibbs (2007) for a grounded theory approach: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During open coding, the first stage of coding, I completed an initial reading of the data for patterns and “categories” that were emerging from the data (Gibbs, 2007, p. 50). After open coding, I completed axial coding through which I started to document connections between the patterns and categories that emerged during open coding. Finally, selective coding is the process of discovering a “core category” that brings the data back together again. The core category is the umbrella under which the other categories come together and make sense as a whole, so that the coding process eventually ends with a cohesive view of the data or a “story” (Gibbs, 2007, p. 50). Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), as acknowledged earlier in this chapter in the section on the practices of the grounded theory approach, views open coding and axial coding as actually one activity, I have defined them separately for my own clarity as a researcher. This decision does not mean that I disregarded the connections between the patterns and categories that I discovered during the open coding process. Rather, I wanted to make sure that I gave the necessary attention to developing individual categories before giving full attention to the relationships that exist between them.

A grounded theory approach commonly includes several activities designed to aid the analysis of the data, which may be used before, during and after coding. During the

process of analyzing the data, as applicable, I completed the following activities: constant comparison of “incidents” and “theories” of the incidents as shared by the participants, thinking in terms of metaphors and similes (an activity that corresponds the use of metaphors and similes in the scholarship in writing program administrations), and diagramming (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

*Use of NVivo.* All coding was completed using NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software that aids researchers in “managing the coding and retrieval of texts combined with sophisticated searching” (Gibbs, 2007, p. 106). I transcribed my interviews using Express Scribe, a transcription software, and imported the transcripts into NVivo. I conducted the coding processes using the software’s tools, which includes tools for creating free nodes, the term for independent codes in NVivo, and tree nodes, NVivo’s term for hierarchal clusters of codes. NVivo allowed me to document, in one place, my observations and reactions during the coding process.

**The Collection and Analysis Relationship.** As I conducted the interviews, I remained “flexible” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 30) in guiding and participating in the conversation, in order to establish the reflexive nature of collection and analysis from the beginning. Beyond their immediate influence on the current interview conversation, what I hear during one interview influenced the questions I asked and my interpretation of answers in future interviews. As suggested by Charmaz (2003, “Inside Interviewing”), I used my field notes to document the details of how continual redesign (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) specifically impacts individual interviews, and my role as a researcher in the continual redesign process.

## **Integrity of the Study Design**

**Trustworthiness.** In my study, triangulation was achieved through both a triangulation of data sources and a triangulation of methods or analytical tools. Data was provided through the survey, interviews, and researcher observation. All data was analyzed using at least three of the following: an extensive coding process, constant comparison, applications of metaphor, and comparison with the literature review.

**Member Checking.** I provided transcripts of our interview conversations to all study interview participants and asked the participants for needed with additions, deletions, and clarifications. This process is to ensure that the interview transcripts reflect both the participants' and my understanding of our conversation, and allowed participants to revise their comments for accuracy.

## **Organization of Findings**

The findings of my study are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. I began each chapter with a brief description of the themes that emerged from analysis of the data. The remainder of each chapters will be organized to best represent the development of the themes, starting with the individual themes and categories and their relationship to each other.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

This study was designed to determine how being a WPA and the only composition scholar affects the daily work of WPAs, with specific attention to how these WPAs establish and maintain relationships that allow them to accomplish their daily work. The study also focused on how being a WPA and the only composition scholar affects the professional identities of WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions.

The findings in this chapter are the result of two phases of empirical data collection undertaken to answer the following questions:

1. How does being a WPA and the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's daily work?
2. How do WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution establish and maintain relationships that allow them to accomplish their daily work?
3. How does being the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's professional identity?

In Phase II, I conducted a survey of WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions to solicit initial information about their WPA work and to identify participants for the Phase III interviews. In Phase III, I conducted interviews with fourteen of the WPAs who volunteered to be interviewed through the survey.

The surveys revealed that only-composition-scholar WPAs believe that being the only composition scholar significantly impacts their work and identities. The interviews yielded rich and compelling data that further explained the significance of being the only composition scholar to the participants as well as their schools, colleagues, and students.

One significant finding is that many of only-composition-scholar WPAs in this study were working among colleagues that did not respect the WPA's disciplinary expertise and with colleagues who lacked the disciplinary knowledge to participate fully in shaping and maintaining the writing programs. When working directly with these colleagues, the participants often felt unable to use their expertise to better their institutions' writing programs, and adjusted their rhetorical approaches to maintain positive relationships even if doing so meant compromising their own beliefs and understanding of teaching writing. Equally significant, and more positive, is that most of WPA participants were able to build alliances and collaborate with colleagues outside of their home departments. These relationships allowed the only-composition-scholar WPAs to successfully establish writing programs or initiatives outside of their own departments.

### **Phase II: Survey Findings**

The survey (Appendix B) was distributed to all WPA-L subscribers, and 22 individuals who are, or have been, the only composition scholar and WPA at an institution completed the survey. As described in Chapter 3, the majority of the survey respondents had been in WPA positions as the only composition scholar for one to seven years.

The survey responses from these participants are significant because they told me how much impact being the only composition scholar had on the respondents work and identities. The survey results persuasively argue that being a WPA and the only composition scholar greatly impacts the people in those positions. When answering the survey questions, the respondents indicated being the only composition scholar had a large impact on how they think about and complete their daily work and on how they

build and maintain relationships with their colleagues. These questions addressed this issue and the answers to them are discussed in the following section.

### **Responses to Survey Questions**

The first non-demographic question on the survey asked the respondents how frequently they thought about being a WPA and the only composition scholar at their institutions. The responses are represented in Table 7. Ninety-six percent of the participants said that being the only composition scholar as a WPA very frequently or frequently enters into their thinking, with 57% of the 96% choosing very frequently. These high percentages show that being the only composition scholar and WPA plays at least a psychological role in these WPAs' professional lives.

Table 7

*Survey Responses to Question #4: When Completing Daily Work, How Often Does, or Did, Your Being The WPA and the Only Composition Scholar Enter Into Your Thinking? How Often Did You Think About Occupying Both of These Positions Simultaneously?*

Answer	Number Responses	%
Very frequently	12	55
Frequently	9	44
Infrequently	1	5
Never	0	0
Total	22	100

The following question asked the WPAs how relevant being a WPA and the only composition scholar was to how they carried out their duties. See Table 8 for a full breakdown of the responses to this question. 91% said being in this type of position was very relevant or quite relevant to how they perform their jobs, with 67% choosing very relevant.

Table 8

*Survey Responses to Question #5: How Relevant Is or Was Being the Only Composition Scholar to Your Carrying Out Your Duties as a WPA?*

Answer	Number of Responses	%
Very relevant	14	64
Quite relevant	6	27
Somewhat relevant	2	9
Not relevant	0	0

In response to the question about the degree to which being the WPA and only composition scholar affects their relationships with colleagues, fewer colleagues reported a correlation between their positions and their relationships with their institutional colleagues. The responses to this question are listed in Table 9. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents said it was very important or quite important, with forty-one percent choosing quite relevant.

Table 9

*Survey Responses to Question #6: How Much of a Determining Factor Is or Was Being the Only Composition Scholar to the Professional Relationships You Have or Had With Your Faculty and Administrative Colleagues?*

Answer	Number of Responses	Percentage
Very important	8	36%
Quite important	9	41%
Somewhat important	5	23%
Not important	0	0%
Total	22	100%

These responses regarding the building and maintaining of relationships are especially interesting when compared to the data from the interviews. As is discussed later in this chapter, the interview data shows that the interview participants are highly concerned with how being the only composition scholar affects their ability to work with

others and how being the only composition scholar affects the rhetorical choices they make when in conversation with their colleagues. Given the interview data, I would expect the number of very important answers to be higher. But since the interview participants self-selected to participate in the interviews, a plausible explanation is that those WPAs who feel a greater impact on their relationships are more interested in being interviewed about their positions. I do not believe that it indicates that those participants who self-selected as interview participants are less satisfied with their relationships, but it may indicate those who self-selected are simply more interested in discussing their work with another WPA.

As part of the survey, the respondents also reported whether the current writing program administration literature has adequately addressed—in quality or quantity—the relationship between being a WPA and being the only composition scholar at an institution. See Table 10 for a list of responses and rate of occurrence. Fifty percent of the respondents said that the literature has not adequately addressed this type of position, while nine percent said the literature has adequately addressed it. A large number of respondents chose maybe (14%) or not sure (27%).

Table 10

*Survey Responses to Question #7: Has WPA scholarship adequately addressed—in quantity or quality—the relationship between WPA work and being a WPA who is the only composition scholar?*

Answer	Number of Responses	Percentage
Yes	2	9%
No	11	50%
Maybe	3	14%
Not sure	6	27%
Total	22	100%

These numbers helped me understand the potential contribution of this study to the field, or at least to the WPAs who responded to the survey. Further, this portion of the survey data previews the discussion of the scholarship in the interview data in which the participants talk about the challenges they face when completing their own research and contributing to the scholarly community.

### **Conclusion**

In combination, the responses to the survey questions about the impact of being an only-composition-scholar WPA on the respondents indicate that an overwhelming sense that being the only composition scholar at their institutions has a large impact on how the respondents think about their WPA work, carry out their WPA duties, and build and maintain relationships with their colleagues. In addition, the participants do not feel that the literature on writing program administration reflects the impact on WPAs of being the only composition scholar.

All of the survey data should be read and interpreted with the understanding that the bias of the survey respondents, and the degree to which the responses are representative of most WPAs who are also the only composition scholar, are undeterminable.

### **Reaching Forward to Phase III: Interviews**

The final question of the survey asked the respondents if they were interested in being interviewed about being a WPA and being the only composition scholar at an institution. Ten survey respondents said they were willing to be interviewed, nine respondents said they were interested but wanted to learn more about my project, and three said they were not interested in being interviewed. Those respondents who

indicated that they wanted to know more about my project before making their decision about being interviewed were prompted to ask a question or share any concerns they might have. Three responses to this prompt were compelling. Two of the respondents spoke to their interest in the topic of being the WPA and the only composition scholar.

Wendy articulated her interest as follows:

I am the only composition scholar and first full time hire in the writing area at my institution. Since I've been here, this is my fifth year, we've hired two additional full time writing faculty, but one is an MFA, fiction, and the other is a literature scholar, and neither really wants anything to do with composition, what they were hired to teach. I sometimes forget there are other people out there in positions similar to mine.

Two other participants said they would only be willing to participate if I could guarantee that their responses would be kept confidential. Francine expressed her interest and concern:

I'm so pleased to see that you're interested in this topic—it is still very relevant for those of us working in smaller institutions, in particular....My questions deal with how you'd be using the interview data, and the degree of confidentiality you'd be able to offer respondents. These can be sensitive issues, as you know.

Wendy's and Francine's responses were important to me as I prepared for the interviews because they demonstrate an emotional connection to the topic. These responses informed my approach to the interviews and increased my empathy with the interview participants.

The survey data from the interview participants allowed me to get to know my interview participants before our interview conversations. For example, I knew that one of the interview participants, Amelia, did not believe that being the only composition scholar has as great an impact on her work as a WPA as some of the other participants believed it did. In some interviews, I found it useful to actually reference an interview participant's survey responses as part of the conversation.

While the survey did not provide data that directly answered my research questions, it did, however, begin my relationship with the interview participants with much lower stakes than they would report about their perceptions of the interviews, as Francine's statement suggests.. I knew going into the interviews that my participants believed that being the only composition scholar at an institution had a large impact on their work as WPAs and that many of them believed that the literature had not adequately addressed this type of position.

### **Phase III: Interview Findings**

As I mentioned previously, the interviews were conducted to gain a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between being a WPA and the only composition scholar, and to answer the study research questions:

1. How does being a WPA and the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's daily work?
2. How do WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution establish and maintain relationships that allow them to accomplish their daily work?
3. How does being the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's professional identity?



The first set of interviews was conducted with all 14 participants. Follow-up questions were answered by email by 5 participants. The interview participants talked with me at some length—the first set of interviews averaged 74 minutes—about many issues related to being the only composition scholar and a WPA.

Though I began the interview phase with a list of potential questions to ask, I added questions as the interviews progressed, both individually and as a set. I was also open to any additional topics raised by the participants, and when necessary, asked follow-up questions. Through the interviews, I captured a range of insights and observations—many more than I can address in this dissertation—that answered my research questions, while confirming and challenging aspects of the current theories and literature on writing program administration.

The interview conversations went the way of many everyday conversations; we talked about, around and through ideas, seizing on connections between ideas and circumstances when possible. While this process made placing the data into themes difficult, I extracted the following themes from the data:

- differences in ideology and terminology
- power and authority
- rhetorical work
- decision-making
- praxis
- identity
- satisfaction.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I present the findings within these themes. In Chapter 4, I present the findings related to ideological and terminological differences, power and authority, rhetorical work, and decision-making. And in Chapter 5, I present the findings of a more cumulative nature: praxis, identity, and satisfaction. Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss how these findings do or do not fit with current theories of writing program administration, and I suggest further areas of study based on thematic findings.

### **Ideological Differences between Literary and Composition Studies**

The participants in this study identified ideological differences between literary and composition studies as a major factor in how they complete their daily WPA work. In keeping with the literature (Schilb, 2002; Hult, 1995, Cambridge & McClelland 1995), the participants defined the ideological split as differences in the ways each discipline values reading, writing, and pedagogy. They further explained how ideological differences affect the distribution of resources, how they manifest themselves as language differences, and why the differences sometimes go unaddressed.

*A Difference in Values.* The participants consistently noted that different ideologies exist in how literary and composition scholars value writing and reading, including the importance placed on different types of writing and reading. Ethan described the difference as literary scholars lending more cultural and educational importance to literature; “literature faculty would probably see [literature] as being particularly culturally important in terms of differentiating the educated from the uneducated.” Tina has experienced this same conflict in values as she has worked with a colleague that believes teaching composition is beneath her, and as she has talked with another colleague who said “someday you’ll be able to teach real classes.” Tina noted, however, that this same colleague who made the comment about teaching real classes,

values her work and is glad that someone is on faculty ““who knows what they are doing in composition.””

Other participants explained similar mixed reactions to their work. Deanna described how happy her colleagues were when she was hired but that the faculty communicated their lack of respect or interest in the work of composition by never taking up the conversations or work themselves—even though they all teach composition courses. She said:

You can never rely on them and count on them to spend the time and energy, investigation, exploring, and reflecting on your field. You have got to always be out there, before you can make decisions, before you can do anything, saying what rhet/comp is, this is how rhet/comp thinks. And then, this is why I want to do what I want to do. They just take so much for granted and they come from such a place of cultural privilege that is absolutely invisible to them.

According to these participants, their literature colleagues have a view of literature’s place within our culture and their institutions that privileges reading and writing about literature. And if you do not have composition colleagues, you are continually trying to get your colleagues invested and interested in a subject that they teach but do not wholly value.

The view of literature as more important combined with diminishing resources and fewer students interested in literary studies can make the work difficult for a WPA who is also the only composition scholar. Francine described the problem:

These differences really do impact those of us working as the only comp scholars in our departments simply because we don’t have others who may be able to

support our perspectives and who have a voice in the department as well, so it often feels as if you are going it alone and trying to make sense of those distinctions between English Studies as a whole and Rhetoric and Composition, but also in terms of trying to change policies, curricula, educate our fellow department members and so forth. Having worked in the past in positions where there were other rhet and comp fellows on the staff with me, it is a bit easier, but I do think that certainly being alone makes it all the more difficult to navigate some of those distinctions between the lit folks and the comp folks.

Tina echoed Francine when she said “if I am being honest with myself, [having a composition scholar colleague] is having somebody that understands. A lot of the difficulty for me comes down to whether or not the colleagues that I have recognize that what I am doing has intellectual value, that the field does, that it does exist, that it is just as rigorous....” Tina and Francine show how literature colleagues valuing literary texts and analysis over other texts and writing can be interpreted as devaluing the WPA’s work, in general.

Two participants, Stella and Samantha, said that ideological differences were not a negative factor in their daily work. Stella described her experience at a for-profit institution at which the continual mandates of the corporate owner has made her liberal studies colleagues more concerned with the effects of corporate ownership than with the differences among themselves. Samantha named her colleagues’ interest in the field of composition as the reason the ideological differences did not have a negative impact on her work.

The impact of the ideological differences can also be attributed to a scarcity of resources. At institutions where higher disciplinary value means more resources, the ideological differences may be more pronounced or more visible. Deanna described the tension at her school, which she attributed to ideological differences that have more impact because of the job market:

So I think our Ph.D. faculty [in literature] who are coming out still have the old world values. And junior [literary] scholars come in, and now we have a climate and culture that keeps rhet and comp in competition with literature. I think the job market is stronger for rhet comp right now, that makes it more threatening and when people feel threatened and they are in competing dynamics, it is very hard for literature faculty to see us as a welcome entity and that is what is happening here locally for me.

Deanna continued her comment by making a connection between the ideological differences, the job market, and the overall success of her own writing program.

The force with which we have grown, the veracity with which we have framed in our curriculum and really become strong and central to this department's work has set up a competing dynamic between rhet and comp and literature that is right now amazingly toxic and volatile. We are very threatening, unfortunately.

This type of environment where values, resources, and program success are in conflict places WPAs in a double-bind in which they must strive for successful programs with the realization that doing so may seed conflict. This circumstance is particularly problematic for WPAs who are the only composition scholar because, as their writing programs' most

visible advocate, they may be held individually responsible for both outcomes: the success and the conflict.

The participants also said that tensions due to ideological differences and a competition for resources may go unaddressed due to a lack of support for the WPA's position or composition as a field. Francine said:

I have a good relationship with the majority of the members of my department, but we pedagogically and even in terms of thinking what the future of our department is all about, have really vast differences that we don't really talk about enough.

When I ask Francine if those conversations are “dangerous,” she said she “fear[s] that is the case.” She was not clear about what she is afraid of, but as the only composition scholar, she and the writing program cannot afford to be compromised politically. If her colleagues, with whom she currently has good relationships, decide not to support her, no one else is there to do the work. Though Ethan also has believed that the ideological differences need to be addressed, his institution has been unsuccessful at doing so. He said he and his colleagues need a “DMZ,” but that “humanities folks have for [many] years refused to talk to us.” For Ethan the consequences of the ideological differences, and his desire to talk through them, resulted in significant negative consequences. He was only granted tenure after a protracted battle with his colleagues, and was only successful when he was able to prove that the subject of his scholarship was welcome in the field of composition.

**A Difference in Language.** Several participants identified differences in terminology, not ideological differences, as the primary concern or impediment to

completing their work. But, through the participants' comments about language, larger differences were revealed in how they and their colleagues view writing or writing instruction. Samantha's comment about writing outcome statements for her institution demonstrates how the use of discipline specific terminology intersects with values and knowledge:

[My school has] these WAC outcomes that were written by someone who was not in the discipline. So when you compare the ones that I wrote for first-year composition and compare them with what they wrote for the university outcomes, it is just a horrible mismatch because they wrote them according to what they thought writing is and I wrote them according to the discipline. I have taken it to a couple of conferences, just to try and get help, what do I do with these because they don't talk to each other? What they were looking at was all product-based stuff and of course my stuff is all process-based. And I am behind the times anyway, too, post-process theory and all that, I have just left it alone because there is no way in the world I could explain that to them.

Samantha has linked the problems with the outcomes to knowledge discrepancies, but these differences in knowledge also mean that her colleagues have valued product-based as opposed to process-based outcomes.

McKenna is certain that her colleagues value her work—"they value my work, whether collaborative or solo and regardless of focus, as very worthy"—but she does "think it has been easier for people to dismiss [her] ideas or disparage [her] use of specialized terminology when [she has] been the only composition scholar." And she said that being the only composition scholar has impacted "vocabulary choices for

building rubrics for program assessment, program assessment plans, learning goals for courses, and such things.” Since field specific terminology is tied to disciplinary values and knowledge, affected terminology can change the meaning of the work.

Lesley and McKenna both talked about how differences in language can be isolating. In her first interview, McKenna elaborated on the problem of terminology and isolation:

[P]eople want my opinion, but I don’t think they always value my opinion when I state it, and it does seem like we spend a lot of time debating things like what do we mean by [a specific term which composition scholars would define similarly] for hours, I almost can’t use the word [...] in my program anymore [...] and I don’t know why that particular term is a problem. It is used by a lot of people. I think it has been both a weird mix of feeling of solitude in that there are not a lot of other people I can talk to at my own institution who really understand what I am talking about.

Lesley, having a similar experience as McKenna said that her “expertise actually made [her] out of touch with what was actually going on, which was really bizarre.” These quotes illustrate how the problem of terminology can really be a problem of value and how that can interfere with a WPA completing his daily work. With another composition scholar on the faculty, the work of educating other faculty would be shared, and McKenna and Lesley would have the opportunity to have conversations with people that they do not have to also teach.

Negotiating the terminology was trickier, and the consequences more immediate, for the participants who shared WPA duties with other faculty. Emma holds an Assistant



WPA position where the WPA is not a composition scholar. Before Emma arrived, the WPA had been making program policy and curriculum changes based on her ideas about teaching writing, completely independent of composition scholarship and with “invented” (Emma) terminology. Emma has had to be very careful not to undermine the WPA by using terminology from the field of composition. She doesn’t “want to step on toes” or “offend,” and “[she is] very aware of [her] liminal space [there].” At the same time she says that she has to “accept what [she] has to accept.” She, like the other participants, are very willing to adjust how they speak about teaching writing, but much of the time, how they speak of it cannot be separated from what they are saying.

To be clear, many of the participants also talked about faculty who were willing to listen through the language differences, and the participants, on some occasions, found new useful ideas in those differences. Stella has felt an obligation “to get the faculty speaking the language right. Whereas if [she] had a whole composition faculty that had unified philosophies that would be easier.” Stella’s situation and the other participants’ comments all illustrate why WPAs who are also the only composition scholar might have “mix[ed] feelings” (McKenna) about their terminology, their choices about how to use it, and how it relates to their work at-large.

### **Power: Authority and Responsibility**

As defined in the literature, authority and responsibilities are often a means of establishing and using power (Bullock, 1987; Cambridge and McClelland, 1995; Amorose, 2000). The interview participants spoke about both the effect of expert (Ward, 2008) and positional authority (Schwalm, 2008) on their daily work, as well as the responsibilities associated with their positions. When applicable to their own positions, the participants also talked about sharing authority and responsibilities with a colleague

or colleagues.

**Expert Authority.** Expert authority, as defined in the literature (Ward, 2008), is the authority granted to an individual based on the individual's specialized knowledge or expertise. Many of the participants understood that as the only composition scholar at an institution they have the expert authority needed to complete their work to the best of their ability. Indeed, many of the participants reported that their departments welcomed having a composition scholar on faculty. The participants made three points about their expert authority: it has made them more vulnerable than WPAs who have composition scholar colleagues, it has been limited by ideological differences with their departmental colleagues, and it has been more useful outside of their home departments.

Having expert authority can also make a WPA more vulnerable. Recently, Wendy led the redesign of her institution's first-year writing program. While "everyone all over campus" "deferred" to her, she also knew that she would be the sole responsible party if the program changes were unsuccessful. She said, "If these classes flop, I am it."

Participants also said that at institutions where the ideological differences between literary and composition studies are more pronounced, a WPA may have less expert authority. As McKenna described the situation,

It is kind of nice to be the person who is seen as the expert but not always nice.

Flattering but also a burden, particularly when [the expertise] is kind of dismissed.

It seems as long as it is work that can be handed off to me, it is done, but if it is an opinion that is not valued by others, that is a problem.

In cases where the WPA does not have expert authority within his own department, he may still have authority outside of his department. In Tina's experience,

she has had more expert authority out of her own department because her colleagues outside of her department “don’t really understand what is the problem between literature and composition” and she “feel[s] like that gives [her] a little more power.” Francine also talked about the limits of her expert authority within her own department. Her colleagues have respected her as a scholar, but her expert authority does not extend far enough or is not strong enough to “convince [her colleagues to] change their behaviors in the classroom.” Becca was also able to use her expert authority to build relationships beyond the English Department. At the start of one of her WPA positions, she realized that her institution had many faculty, beyond the English department who cared about student writing; she sought out those faculty and they asked her for advice. Becca said her expertise was more respected in disciplines where professionals are more accustomed to using outside consultants.

The limitations placed on a WPA’s expert authority because of ideological differences may be felt more dramatically by a WPA who is the only composition scholar and who is, therefore, a distinct minority ideologically.

**Positional Authority.** Positional authority is defined as the authority gained through holding a particular position (Schwalm, 2008); a WPA holds some authority by simply being the WPA. As Schwalm argues, the amount of position authority a WPA has depends greatly on how the WPA position is defined at the institutional level.

The participants indicated that a WPA’s positional authority is diminished if the WPA’s status and rank are equal or below that of her colleagues. Becca remembers being asked “why can’t you do something about composition” and she would explain that

she had no control over what or how people in her program taught composition because it was taught almost entirely by tenure or tenure-line faculty.

For other participants, lack of tenure lowered their positional authority because without tenure they were not comfortable making arguments for programmatic changes. Ethan and Becca both said lack of tenure caused them to back away from using their positional authority to make certain arguments. Ethan was asked to argue for changes to the writing program at his institution, but he eventually chose not to participate in the conversations because he didn't have tenure. When a new composition scholar colleague assumed Ethan's WPA position with tenure, she and Ethan could be more aggressive in their approach to the program changes, even though some of his other colleagues refused to read it. He said:

We started working in a strategic plan together. We wrote it, and it was based on the rhet comp research—over 100 pages long, multiple sections, a research based document, we turned one of them into a chapter on multimodal assessment and the [my home] department refused to read it. And, at that time, there was some going back and forth with the new provost who was determined that these changes were going to take place, and at that point, [my new colleague] started negotiating with the provost and [another] college [on our campus].

Ethan's new colleague was able to move beyond the departmental colleagues who refused to read the document and advance their project, in a way that Ethan was not able to do as the only-composition-scholar and without tenure. Ethan went from a risky situation which severely limited his administrative opportunities to a situation where he

was able to work with a tenured composition scholar colleague to improve the writing program.

**Shared Authority and Power.** The literature discusses shared power and authority as an important facet of ethical WPA work (Dickson, 1993; Gunner, 1994; Aronson & Hansen, 1998; Gunner, 2002, Phelps, 2002). Most of the participants have not been able to share power or authority because no one exists with the appropriate scholarly expertise with whom to share the power and authority. But several of the participants—Emma, McKenna, Rihanna, Ethan, and Amelia—have shared WPA work with faculty who are not composition scholars. While describing relationships that were generally positive, these participants reported several differences due to their being the only composition scholar in the relationship: some tension existed between the participants' and their non-composition-scholar WPA colleagues due to an imbalance in expert authority and, at times, this tension limited progress in making program changes.

These participants may have experienced tension with their co-WPAs because their co-WPAs did not have scholarly expertise in composition. As described earlier in this chapter, Emma was an assistant WPA to a WPA who was not a composition scholar. Her supervising WPA not being a composition scholar made Emma's expertise even more problematic because the supervising WPA was sharing the power and authority with Emma as opposed to Emma determining how the power and authority would be shared. As a non-tenure track faculty member, Emma did not have voting rights in her department but her supervisor did. And she reported being keenly aware of "when [she] is authorized [by her supervisor] to speak and about what." In addition, based on her expertise, other faculty assumed that Emma was the lead WPA, not an assistant, which

Emma was sure that the lead WPA would find upsetting.

Other participants highlighted how sharing WPA work limited what they were able to accomplish in their programs. Ethan currently works with a WPA who runs the writing center but is not a composition scholar. He mentioned that his work is limited until the writing center director immerses herself in the field. Until then, he is sharing authority and power with someone who is not ready to share it with him because of her lack of disciplinary knowledge. Rihanna, who was previously in a position where she was on a team of four composition scholars who shared the WPA work, now works with a first-year composition program administrator who is not a composition scholar. Rihanna's supervising a first-year composition program administrator who is not a composition scholar is probably much less risky for Rihanna than it is for Emma who is being supervised by a non-composition scholar. Her new colleague not being a composition scholar does not limit Rihanna's authority, but it changes what she is able to accomplish.

The participants had mixed feelings about the co-WPA work with non-composition scholars. Amelia is not sure that the other WPA not being a composition scholar is a problem, since Amelia's own interests are not writing program administration. She summarized her thoughts about sharing the work as:

At the same time, I do have a lot of broader knowledge of what is going on in terms of first year writing in a general way and also just about the field and how our program fits into that or doesn't fit into that. . . . I would say that just the people I work with their view is fairly institution specific because their experience is

about what is happening here, and maybe other places where they worked, so I have a broader view.

Like Emma, Amelia said she is in “an odd middle place.” She explained:

It is great to not feel like you are the only person out there making decisions, especially on issues like now we are going through a whole curriculum change, university-wide, and that has been kind of contentious and it has been great not to be the lone-composition person speaking out for and against these things in college wide meetings, so I think in that way...the collaboration has worked. I think other colleagues of mine in other places, their collaborations are more like and then we did this assessment study and then we published it, and it is never going to happen here unless I am the one [who does the work].

According to Amelia, the important distinction between her and her colleagues is not their different disciplines, but rather that she has both the educational background and the classroom practice, and her colleagues only have the classroom practice. Sometimes the expertise from Amelia’s education and practice has conflicted with the other WPAs’ expertise from their classroom experiences:

I feel like it is pretty, we really get along, I think it is pretty respectful for the most part but at the same time, I think that there are certain times when might feel like, I kind of know about this issue or you guys are positioning this thing that we are doing as this totally innovative thing and really it is something that a lot of people do. It is not like we don’t get along. Obviously that kind of conversation and deliberation would be different if it were all composition-oriented people as

opposed to people who think of composition in this purely composition/first year writing kind of thing.

I have shared many comments from Amelia's interview because she gave voice to the "odd middle place," that many WPAs who are the only composition find themselves in regarding shared authority or power.

**Responsibilities.** The WPA literature on responsibility describes responsibility as the combined outcome of authority, expectations, and individual duties (Miller, 1996; Fulwiler, 2008; Ward, 2008). The participants in this study made comments that demonstrated how combining authority, expectations, and duties into explicit and implicit responsibilities affects WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution. The participants said their responsibilities are daunting because they sometimes feel as if they cannot do their best work alone, that they are underprepared, or that they cannot meet the expectations set forth in WPA and composition scholarship. They also said that the impact of the lack of preparedness or feeling like they cannot always do their best work without a composition scholar colleague is increased because much of their work is highly visible. One of the more dispiriting reflections was that the responsibilities only-composition-scholar WPAs carry, though often numerous, are not valued by their colleagues. Though many of the comments were somewhat negative, participants were also quick to point out that their responsibilities often come with benefits.

The participants who share their WPA responsibilities with non-composition scholar colleagues, Emma, McKenna and Amelia, did not discuss their responsibilities to the same extent as the other participants. Through their discussion of collaboration, hiring decisions, and programmatic decisions, discussed late in this chapter, they indicated that



having a composition scholar colleague would lessen their burden and change how they met their responsibilities.

The potential for work can be daunting for any WPA. If you are the only composition scholar, you bear the burden alone or share the work with WPA colleagues who are not composition scholars. Sheila provided an example of being given a responsibility that she could have better met with a composition colleague with whom to work on the project. Though Sheila had very little writing center experience, she was compelled to start a writing center on her campus. She said she “ma[de] a mess of things” which could have been avoided if she had another composition scholar with whom she could talk through her ideas. While Sheila may have consulted writing center scholarship and scholars at other institutions for advice, like many only-composition-scholar WPAs, she had to make many decisions on her own based on her own institutional pressures and constraints. Becca discussed budget responsibilities, specifically not knowing her dean’s expectations for using and managing her program’s funds and not having someone with knowledge of writing program administration with which to consult about the program budget. Her dean eventually mentored Becca in how and when to spend her funds and when to use funds from other sources. While Becca gained insight from her dean that may not have been gleaned from a composition scholar colleague, she did not get the perspective of a peer who understood the special needs of writing programs and how they may relate to budgetary decisions.

As Lesley said in her interview, she is “using everything and then some that [she] went to graduate school for” because my program has: so many issues, a bunch of ESL/Chinese students who are coming across, and everybody wants me to work with

that. And now we are having trouble with admissions admitting people who are underprepared for college severely and we do not have support for that, and it is like all these pieces coming together, and I really can't figure out if I am tenacious or a sucker. According to some of the participants, more work is always waiting to be done, and it can be overwhelming to be the only person who can knowledgeably respond to the ideas or concerns as they arise.

Other participants talked about being the only advocate for writing as being the most exhilarating, but tiring aspect of their work. Samantha explained her experience as follows:

[Y]ou are constantly the advocate for writing, and it is not just writing in the department[...]. I was hired to mostly do the first year comp and get it organized and run the writing center, which I also didn't have a background in, but I figured it is a small writing center, how hard can it be. But as the reputation grew and I kept growing the writing center towards more writing across the curriculum, now if there are any questions about writing on campus, I am the point person. It is tiring.

Samantha's comment demonstrates the problem of lack of preparedness when compounded by increased expectations.

The participants also discussed their responsibilities and the pressure they feel to align their work with the expectations set forth in WPA and composition scholarship. According to Sheila, this is especially problematic when a WPA's responsibility falls outside of their scholarly or experiential knowledge. Lesley shared a similar idea when speaking about her responsibilities; she has tried "very much to take into consideration

what [she] know[s] of the field within the literature [...] along with what [her] local context really calls for.” Sheila also described the layering of knowledge as it applies to designing a writing program:

[Y]ou have to think about curriculum design too, not just curriculum design for comp, but also for technical writing, separate areas of the field [...] how can I possibly be expected to know all of this, it is not possible.

She continued to say that WPAs who are the only composition scholar are asked to complete work for which they may not be prepared under a non-moving “microscope.” This is a difficult reality when, as Lesley noted, WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institution are often “stretched thin” and left feeling that they could “do it better.”

A WPA’s responsibilities, as noted by some of the participants, may accumulate because no one else wants to do the work. Deanna described her responsibilities from the time of her arrival at her institution:

So they recruited me and saw me as someone who was Ph.D. credentialed and therefore legitimate and therefore valued and respected for that particular credential so in terms on deferring and defaulting and seeking advice and seeking know-how because of my expertise I was very well treated at the start[...].But that also brought with it 150% responsibility for anything and everything on writing so there was like this great big potato sack full of “it’s yours.” You don’t have a say in it and it is all part of the release and the release was quite pronounced in terms of what the department’s expectations were for me—picking up, cleaning up, clearing up and attending to everything that nobody else wanted,

so there was also very much, in the air, equal measure of “go do that job because we don’t want to do it” There were absolutely cultural and normative assumptions about the nature of the work that I was doing and a felt relief that someone else would do it.

For WPAs who are the only composition scholar, the “potato sack” of responsibilities can reflect the ideological differences discussed earlier in this chapter.

From a more positive perspective, participants such as Tina and Sheila recognized the benefits of being responsible for so many aspects of their institutions’ writing programs. Tina said she would rather have colleagues with whom to share responsibilities, but not having these colleagues has caused her to seek help beyond her institution. She has reached out to faculty on other campuses within her university system. Likewise, Sheila said she appreciates that her responsibilities encouraged and, in some cases, forced her to meet more people across campus. She acknowledged that because of her contacts across campus she more quickly learned her campus’s culture and she has been able to more effectively advocate for fair labor conditions at her institution.

Though they didn’t arise as full-fledged themes or findings, a few potential paradoxes arose from the participants’ comments from the data on responsibilities that deserve mention. 1) WPAs who are the only composition scholar are often asked to complete, and are evaluated on their completion, of tasks that they do not know how to do, and that no one else at their institution knows how to do, 2) because they do not have a composition scholar colleague to consult, WPAs who are the only composition scholar often have to rely more heavily on the scholarship from which they increasingly feel distanced (this phenomenon is discussed in Chapter 5), and 4) successful WPAs get more

work, but WPAs who are the only composition scholar have no one to share it with. Finally, the responsibility of helping faculty teach composition when those faculty are not educated in the field of composition sets apart WPAs who are the only composition scholar from other faculty members who are also the only scholar in a another field.

The interview data demonstrated that WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution have a complex relationship to authority, and responsibilities. They understand that being the only composition scholar is empowering in ways, but it can also make the WPA more than vulnerable than WPAs who have composition colleagues. From the participants, I learned that more worrisome than the number of tasks are the assumptions about the type of work WPAs do and the pressure WPAs who are the only composition scholar feel to be a never-ceasing advocate for writing. WPAs with composition colleagues have the opportunity to share the psychological and physical burdens of the work. WPAs who are the only scholar at an institution are more likely to reach beyond the boundaries of their departments to find someone with whom to share their ideas and work.

### **Rhetorical Work**

A WPA's ability to navigate various, and sometimes difficult rhetorical situations, is a large determinant of the WPA's success because a WPA's rhetorical skill enables the WPA to use their expert and positional authority (Werder, 2000; Charlton, 2005; Dew, 2009; Qualley & Chiseri-Strater, 2007). In alignment with WPA scholarship, the participants in this study viewed rhetorical savvy as fundamental to their success, and reported that being a WPA and the only composition scholar changed the rhetorical nature of their work.

When asked if she could think of any conversations that she would conduct differently if she were not the only composition scholar, Lesley paused and said, “Maybe all of them.” When I asked in response if it was primarily the content that would be different, she again paused. She replied, “I just...I don’t think I would even be having them.” The participants in this study talked at greater length about their rhetorical decisions than any of the other subjects we discussed.

The participants discussed a wide range of rhetorical situations and responses to them. For some participants, their rhetorical work was largely determined by the situations they entered when they began their WPA positions. In general, the participants reported being careful and keeping quiet as rhetorical approaches. They also discussed the rhetorical decision to reference WPA, composition, or education scholarship in conversation. Also important to the participants was the rhetorical work of seeking tenure and promotion, and the rhetorical work of creating and maintaining relationships with their colleagues.

**When They Arrived.** White (2002) called on WPA scholars to recognize the widely varied institutional situations into which new WPAs may enter. But most mentions in the literature of the rhetorical situations into which new WPAs enter are in the context of other conversations such as those about hiring, working with literature faculty, and defining the scope of the WPA position at individual institutions (Schilb, 2002; O’Neill, 2008; McClure, 2008).

The rhetorical situations into which the participants stepped when they took their WPA positions varied. Some participants reported entering into well-functioning departments. At one point in our conversation, Sheila said she felt it was “super

important” for others to know that she “has never worked in a bad department.”

Likewise, McKenna started her position knowing that her department was very happy to have a faculty member with a degree in composition.

Rihanna also felt welcome in her new position, but there was considerable tension around the previous WPA’s leaving. The previous WPA at her institution had an MFA and knew she was being replaced by someone with a doctorate in composition. Francine had a more negative introduction to her position; she was warned about the “dysfunctional” nature of her department when she started her job. She has traced the tension in her department when she arrived to a recent curriculum change, and the ideological conflicts and competition for resources between literary studies and composition that were revealed through that curriculum change:

I think that, over time, there has actually been kind of a building tension between literature and writing. Some of it is personality, but some of it also I think is that the past, the past three hires that the department has had have all been in writing. And I think that that has made the literature folks feel lesser in the department. But also, prior to my arrival at, at [my institution], the core changed, and we changed from a kind of, you know, Chinese-menu style, you know, you pick your two literature, your two sciences, to a competency-based model, and in that process, literature basically lost its role in the core.

Lesley also reported entering into a department that was rife with conflict. She was told that her “department ha[d] issues” and to not get “mired in them.” Lesley was the sixth hire in eight years in her position because “nobody else wanted to deal with it; it is just too much”; one of her students described her job as “the Hogwarts defense of the dark

arts position.” Despite these conditions, Lesley reported that she has successfully avoided joining sides in the long-standing disagreements in her department. She has undoubtedly accomplished this through rhetorical savvy.

**Being Careful.** In the literature, Werder says that “the kind of courage required” in WPA work “is the nerve to enter the fray each day” (p. 21). According to the only-composition-scholar-WPAs in this study, sometimes it is not advisable to enter the fray. In these instances, the participants--even the participants who were welcomed into their department or who have a genial work environment—reported needing to be careful in how they speak and listen at work.

Samantha’s comment aptly describes the thoughts expressed by several other participants. She said:

I think as rhetoricians we stop and think about what is going on, what is motivating people to say things. Just over the last four years I have learned to shut up and listen to the real question and try to figure out what do they really want me to say here and understanding what battle is worth fighting. That kind of decision: is this person really going to listen to what I have to say, or do I just need to get rid of them, pare back to what they need and we’ll deal with it.

With the exception of one participant, Amelia, the participants who spoke about strategic speaking and listening said their strategies are different because they do not have another composition scholar on faculty with them.

Being careful can take several different forms. For McKenna, being careful meant mindfully choosing the terminology that she uses, making sure that those listening to her understand that the terms are not uniquely hers, “they come from the scholarship,”



and she has tried to do this in a “way that isn’t going to make anybody feel bad if they are not familiar with the scholarship, or [reference concepts] that people would be familiar with to help them feel like that is something they know, and that they feel comfortable with, whether or not they agree with it.”

Francine’s comments put the rhetorical work in the context of the ideological differences that a WPA who is the only composition scholar might have to navigate rhetorically. Francine said she has to remain very aware of the ideological and emotional “fault lines” that exist for some of her colleagues, but shared that she wasn’t as conscious of them when she began her position. She has “become much more rhetorically guarded over time” and her “comfort level has gone down, as opposed to the other way around.” She also attributes her guardedness to her increased awareness of how much her colleagues know about the “rhetorical issues of composition.” Her primary strategy for dealing with the “fault lines” and her colleagues’ lack of knowledge is to carefully “frame” issues when she raises them to her colleagues.

Francine was also able to speak to how her rhetorical choices or strategies may change with a composition scholar colleague. Now that she has a composition scholar colleague, Francine has felt a little more freedom in how she speaks, but she also has been mentoring her new “fresh out of grad school” colleague in how she speaks with faculty and serving as an “interpret[er]” for the new faculty member and her other colleagues. She described this work as coming from a “protective impulse.” Francine’s descriptions of her experiences revealed how having a composition colleague does not necessarily eradicate the “fault lines” but instead creates a circumstance where two colleagues with similar language can navigate them together.

**Keeping Quiet.** Because the literature on rhetorical work is primarily interested in how rhetorical strategies may empower WPAs (Werder, 2000; Dew, 2009; Adler-Kassner, 2008) the literature does not directly or extensively discuss the practice of keeping quiet. But many of the participants mentioned keeping quiet as a rhetorical strategy. The reasons they choose to stay quiet include needing more time to prepare a response, politics, valuing compromise and thinking that it would not do any good to speak. Of the participants that talked about staying quiet, several remarked on how they might behave differently if they had a composition scholar colleague.

Emma and Becca reported staying quiet to manage their responses and expectations. Emma shared two types of situations where she might remain silent. She recently found herself in the elevator with a colleague who took the opportunity to complain to Emma about how awful student writing is. Her “real response came after [she] walked away;” she later sent the colleague an email to tell him her assessment of student writing as someone who manages the writing center, and to own her position as “a person who works in this space [and does] real work.” She has a good relationship with this colleague, and she believes the email was well-received. Becca also reported having times where she “just keep[s] quiet” until she has “soaked it in well enough to be able to talk about it,” and other times when she has remained quiet to avoid making “enemies” and with the knowledge that she wasn’t “going to change things.” Amelia also talked about keeping quiet if she knew she would not be able to impact the discussion or decision.

Some participants said they might be quiet when there was a power differential and a knowledge differential between themselves and the person to whom they were

speaking. Because of her position as an assistant to a non-composition scholar WPA, Emma also finds herself being quiet in discussions about teaching writing when the supervising WPA is present. She had a moment when she realized that she had to be “careful about what she said.” In Emma’s words “[Her supervisor] can say whatever she wants, I have to watch what I say. When we are behind closed doors and I have been honest, she will listen and argue. And arguing in private is fine.” While Emma has valued the chance to argue behind closed doors, she is not entirely comfortable with these conversations either. The same WPA with whom she has argued in private told her that she “didn’t have an opinion until [she] got tenure.” Emma has had mixed feelings about this seemingly well-intentioned caution as she believes it might be a convenient and sanctioned means of further silencing her. But for all the times that she is quieter than she wants to be, her supervisor’s “hands-off” approach and her location in the writing center, have given Emma autonomy to share and enact her own ideas. These moments have felt “really great”; “administratively [she has] been very frustrated but [she is] trying to channel that into productive ways” (Emma).

The participants had different projections about how quiet they would be if they had a composition scholar colleague. McKenna shared a story from when she was new in her position in order to illustrate a time she decided to become quiet because she did not have a colleague and the situation had changed in the hands of a non-composition scholar colleague:

[O]ne of the first things I tried to do with the WAC classes was ask faculty across the curriculum to email me a copy of their syllabus, and...I just said we wanted to gather information about the variety of what people were teaching, and people

freaked out...and we really were just gathering information. And if there was a stronger core of faculty with stronger composition background or writing theory background, then I might have felt like we could be a little unified front and instead I felt like on one hand my program wanted me to coordinate and do some of this work that hadn't been done for several decades but on the other hand I was then being attacked for it, and while my program was supportive of me privately, that didn't really help in the public venue, so it just seemed like politically all I could do was back down, and I don't know if it is just because times have changed and other things have happened at our college which is part of it but it may also be because the current coordinator doesn't have a composition background but knows that I do and that other people have showed interest, that she has been able to take more assertive stances in some of these areas and complete some of that work that I started but had to put on the back burner because it seemed politically not viable, and I think there are a lot of factors that go into that but I think that might be one of them, she has more people who have her back.

McKenna's speculation that her non-composition colleague has been able to make more progress with the WAC courses because of not being a composition scholar puts forward a paradox: to do informed work a WPA should be a scholar in the field, but a WPA who is the only composition scholar may not have the support to do that work if he is informed in the field.

One participant was less clear about whether being the only composition scholar and the WPA had encouraged her to keep quiet when she otherwise would be more vocal.

When asked if she would be more or less quiet if she had a composition colleague, Wendy didn't think her own behavior would vary. She said, "I think I would stay the same. It is my program and I want it to be successful and if I know something isn't going to work, I will speak up. I will try to play the believing game but if it clearly isn't going to work, I'll be adamant about that." But she also said that she may not be as vocal if she had a composition scholar colleague because she would have someone to "second [her]" or "think of ways to explain things that [she hasn't] thought of." She said, "It would be nice to have someone along with me who could see that no that really is a terrible idea." Wendy's comments left me uncertain about the potential effects of having a composition scholar colleague on how and when Wendy is vocal. It is possible that her desire to be "adamant" would come in conflict with a composition colleagues' need for the same, and equally possible that her need to be adamant would be diminished by having a colleague who could also speak about teaching writing.

According to the participants, it is not uncommon to have the same conversation multiple times with the same teachers of composition in their programs, no matter how adamant or clear the WPA was in the original conversation. A WPA may choose to be quiet about the repetition in order to keep the conversation going. For McKenna, this choice to be silent is also made out of empathy. She understands that people do not always process information or come to terms with an idea in a linear fashion. Her choice to remain quiet is predicated on her colleagues' lack of knowledge in the field of composition:

[I]n terms of the rhetorical postures that I take on, I am more, I think I am more likely to ask a lot of questions and listen a lot and kind of play dumb a little bit,

than I would be with other people who I felt were also more knowledgeable in the field, where I think I would be more inclined to state my opinion and debate back and forth in a more lively manner than I am with my program colleagues....[with] those who are more novice, I am more likely to try to find out where they are, without mentioning anything that sounds scary, or theoretical, if that makes sense.

In reflection, McKenna added, “On one hand being the main composition scholar makes me play dumb, but you can’t reference literature and play dumb at the same time very well.” As with the other findings in this chapter, a study of all WPAs, regardless of whether they are the only composition scholar, may produce similar results. They may also experience moments when they feel pressured to remain quiet. The difference may be in the regularity with which such moments occur, or in the degree or types of consequences of being quiet. Most importantly, the participants of this study interpreted their need to stay quiet to be, at least, a partial product of their status as the only composition scholar at an institution.

**Referencing Scholarship.** WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution are, by nature of their positions, placed in situations when citing or discussing scholarship on teaching writing is needed. The current literature on writing program administration does not address the act of referencing scholarship. But through my interviews with the participants, it was clear that the decision to reference scholarship is an important one and one that is often made in response to a complex rhetorical situation. Over half of the participants mentioned that deciding when to reference scholarship was an important component of their daily work and one that they felt was made more important because of their positions as the only composition scholar.

The participants referenced scholarship on writing and teaching writing for a variety of reasons. The main reasons the participants gave for referencing scholarship were to defend or situate an idea in the field, to define themselves as scholars, and to share scholarly knowledge with experienced teachers and fellow administrators.

Sheila's comment depicts a common situation in which a WPA references scholarship to defend an idea. She described her response to a faculty member who thinks the writing program at her institution should place more of an emphasis on grammar and usage:

A typical moment, you know, I am the one that gets the calls from angry professors [that] people can't write, why aren't you teaching them this, why aren't you teaching them that, why aren't you teaching grammar, and the whole b.s. that you get, and so I mean a very discreet instance [of referencing] literature is to pull out those studies that talk about teaching grammar explicitly, it doesn't work, it has been demonstrated over and over again, empirically, this is not just people arguing against it. And the other thing, and I don't know if I would call this literature, is the book that talks about Harvard and the history of composition instruction in the US, and it has been since like 1890 that people have been bitching about students' writing; your complaints are not new, so given that they are not new, let's talk about what we can do. These are probably not very good examples of referencing literature but I find myself taking the defense.

As Sheila notes, a WPA may reference scholarship in "defense" against entrenched ideas.

McKenna also has referenced scholarship as a way of situating her ideas and suggestions in the field of composition, especially among experienced teachers that do

not have scholarly knowledge in composition, and to affirm her own position as a composition scholar. She has referenced scholarship even when not arguing a claim, just “to give credit” to the field and make people aware that the issue has been studied and discussed in the scholarship (McKenna). She admitted that this can be tricky when working with her colleagues “who teach composition, and [...] have a lot of experience and not necessarily expertise.” McKenna continued to explain that the moment of referencing scholarship not only situates an idea or decision, but that it also situates her as a composition scholar. She described it as “connecting for a moment with that community, not feeling like that next time that I see someone at a conference, I will be thinking ‘Oh yea, everyone at my institution just thinks that is my idea not because I told them that.’”

Tina’s comment shows the pressure she felt to simultaneously defend an idea and affirm her identity as a scholar. When Tina used [a particular approach] in her own composition class, a faculty member who had very limited knowledge of the field of composition was critical and said that Tina should not be using [this approach] to teach writing. Tina did her “homework” in order to respond to the criticism, and was able to say “here are all the texts that have been published in the last ten years about [this approach] and here are all the articles that have been published about ethnography. Here’s what people are saying, like scholars in the field are saying.” The pressure to represent the field at-large but also to situate themselves in a field that may be mostly unknown to all of their colleagues puts a large amount of pressure on WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution. If the participants had composition scholar colleagues, they would not be the sole representatives of an entire discipline, and they



would be situated in the field partly through contrast and comparison with their composition scholar colleagues.

Amelia, Francine, and McKenna talked further about some of the reasons that referencing scholarship can be a difficult decision. When I mentioned that the other WPAs with whom she co-directs the writing program might be considered under-prepared, Amelia reminded me that they are prepared but through experience:

I would say also that the people who I work with who have literature degrees who have worked in other programs are very, very well prepared in terms of the pedagogical, they are quite rigorous, both of them came from participating in or running ivy league writing programs, so I feel like their experiences are quite informed but quite different from my own background. I went to a state university and got a comp and rhetoric degree, the classic kind of training, and it is a lot different.

In her context, citing scholarship may bring into contrast the value of experience and the value of scholarly learning. Amelia is not alone in noticing that referencing scholarship puts these values into relief. She defines the situation as follows:

As soon as you make the choice to reference literature you are stepping out and drawing people's attention to the fact that you have expertise in this area that is different—that everyone else has experience in this area because they teach the courses and they have learned a lot through teaching those courses and they are not just people who are just blank slates or graduate students in their first semester or learning composition theory for the first time, but have not yet taught. [I] have this area of expertise that they haven't developed to the same degree, and that is

not something that I feel comfortable drawing attention to, more frequently than seems necessary, but I have to say that sometimes it seems like it will really help this conversation go forward if we discuss portfolio reflection in the way that [Kathleen Blake] Yancey might talk about it, instead of just in the way that we talk about it.

Both Amelia's and McKenna's interpretations can be connected to the need for composition teachers exceeding the number of composition scholars available to teach composition classes. Because of the discrepancy in number of composition scholars and the number of classes to be taught, many composition teachers are not composition scholars but have been teaching composition classes for many years, some of them quite successfully. Francine summarizes the situation by saying that the "emphasis on General Education" as the home for composition instruction has created the need for WPAs to use their expertise so that other composition teachers do not need the expertise. According to Francine, a WPA's expertise carries more value because the teachers with whom they work are not composition scholars.

Because the participants know they are the writing advocate and the person responsible for educating their colleagues about the field of composition, they also mentioned using scholarship during less confrontational circumstances. Wendy said that even when there isn't a conflict to resolve, she has tried to reference "things that [she has] read and have specific places people can go that will support what [she] is saying. She appreciates it when other faculty do the same. Sheila said that the faculty at her institution are only interested in turning to the scholarship if there is a "puzzle" to solve and the scholarship is being used as a "problem solving tool," But she has also facilitated a

reading group that read and discussed scholarship on teaching writing, and the faculty liked it.

Referencing scholarship can be an effective rhetorical move. Ethan was able to use scholarship to first justify an argument about writing being an applied discipline and then to argue for removing the writing program from Humanities at his institution. He actually went beyond simply referencing the scholarship and provided copies of articles to his dean. His dean responded by telling Ethan that Ethan “had done a lot to educate him about the distinctiveness of [the] field and how it fundamentally differs from the other humanities.” These early conversations about the scholarship empowered the dean in his decision to move the writing program from the Humanities to the School of Business. Emma also had an opportunity to discuss a piece of scholarship with her dean. The dean sent an article on plagiarism written by Rebecca Moore Howard to Emma, and Emma replied with an email in which she responded to the content of the Howard essay. She perceived the email from the dean as the dean’s attempt to open a dialogue about plagiarism with her and her WPA supervisor, but Emma was the only one of the three recipients of the dean’s email to “respond back from the position of the literature.” She was careful, she said, to “validate” the dean’s position on the issue of plagiarism and to “craft the perfect email.” Emma did not receive a response from her dean. She, however, has received friendly responses from colleagues when she has mentioned relevant scholarship during department meetings.

Stella was the only participant to talk about her experiences working with another composition scholar and how that can change how people receive references to scholarship. At one point in her time as WPA, Stella has a colleague who had a

composition degree and, when appropriate, this colleague would support Stella's ideas by referencing related scholarship. For example, he would say, "oh yes, this is what was done, this is what Lad Tobin said about that." Stella attributed some of the positive response to her colleague's comments to his being young and male. Her assessment of the role of gender may be accurate; however, no other participants mentioned gender as a factor in how their use of scholarship was received by their colleagues.

***Tenure and promotion.*** WPA scholars have been highly concerned with the importance of tenure and the tenure process for WPAs, from advising students and colleagues not to take WPA positions pre-tenure and then taking a more subtle and thoughtful stance on pre-tenure WPA positions. (Bishop & Crossley, 1996; Rhodes, 1999; White, 2002; Ballif et al., 2008; Reid, 2008). The Council of Writing Program Administrators has also been actively involved in the issue of writing program administration and tenure. In 1999, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) published "Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Program. Currently, a CWPA taskforce, "Task Force on Non-Tenured/Untenured WPA," exists to address concerns specific to untenured WPAs, both the tenurable and the non-tenurable.

The participants whom I interviewed agree that the topic of tenure and promotion deserves attention because it can affect how a WPA completes her daily work. WPAs who are the only composition scholar, according to the participants, have to be particularly careful about how they speak and act pre-tenure. They are already vulnerable because of being rather visible on campus, having the success of their work partly depend on individuals who teach in the field but are not educated in it, and presenting cases for tenure that might not look like other cases for tenure. Finally, several participants

mentioned that the tenure process highlighted their isolation as only-composition-scholar WPAs.

Though the participants' comments focused on concerns and problems with the tenure process for only-composition-scholar WPAs, only one participant, Ethan, reported significant interference in his tenure review as retribution for decisions he made as WPA. Though his hard work has culminated in a successful writing program, his tenure review was prolonged and involved an ethics investigation of the tenure committee. The other participants who spoke of fearing retribution did not report experiencing any as part of their own performance review processes.

The participants, however, consistently expressed that they were worried about being too visible or upsetting their colleagues pre-tenure. Becca told me about an encounter with a colleague during which the colleague implied that his success teaching writing trumped her experience and expertise. She could not respond to the colleague as she wanted to because the colleague would later be on the committee which voted on Becca's application for tenure. For Becca, this exchange was a good example of her changing how she spoke with a faculty member because she did not have tenure. During an important meeting, Samantha was asked to proffer an opinion about which many of her other non-departmental colleagues disagreed. She said:

Yes, I am the writing person, who else would have brought this to their attention?

But I asked that my name not be in the minutes and that it be said that the English Department raised this concern, which they were happy to do, but there were still

all these people in the meeting. Then I found out this was a presidential thing—

get people in seats, and I am like, I don't have tenure.

In this circumstance, Samantha knew that her statements might be traced back to her, but she preferred to deemphasize her position as the writing person and operate under the auspices of the English Department. In this instance being the only composition scholar made Samantha more vulnerable.

Some participants had concerns about specific departmental or program colleagues. When I asked Tina how she felt about stepping out of the WPA position and moving back into a position with no official administrative duties at her institution, she said she was "glad to do it" because:

[T]here is a lot of push back from the faculty, we have a lot of people who have never studied composition but think they know a lot about it. And without the protection of tenure, it is really hard to do anything. You have to think about yourself and are these people going to vote for me in four years....My colleague [who will step into the WPA position] is pretty amenable to me taking the lead on a lot of things. Like I head the assessment for composition, so he has been like whatever you want to do with that, because I go to conferences, go to panels on assessment, and I have designed the assessment based on what I have learned, so he is pretty open to that and anything I would like to do for the program, which is really nice, but there are other people who seem like they support you but they really don't, that sort of thing. It gets very murky. So I am waiting for the time that I have tenure to really make any kind of change, which is sad, but that is the way the world works.

Tina's situation is interesting because her expertise as the only composition scholar will

still be valued and used when she is not in the WPA position, but to gain some pre-tenure protection, she has to use her expertise under cover of her colleague who meanwhile will occupy the WPA position.

As a continuing member of a WPA team, Amelia has not been able to decrease her visibility in the same way as Tina. Amelia's approach is to seize opportunities to make decisions "collective[ly]" with her non-composition-scholar WPA colleagues, and to make "more subtle" program changes when she can. In this excerpt, Amelia described how she might resolve the problem of a composition teacher not making sound pedagogical choices and how being pre-tenure affects her actions in response to the teacher:

I am definitely untenured and I also don't want to rock the boat, so [...] if there are things that I disagree with, even an issue like teacher training, I think that I would rather, maybe this is passive aggressive, but I think that maybe I would just change the way that I would do that teacher training in a more subtle way or suggest it, as opposed to making it like a confrontational issue like why did you tell that instructor to do this when really we should be teaching these kinds of things. I think that I am probably more passive in that way [...] as a personality I am very much about the collective and consensus[...] so it is also just not my style to lay down the law and say, or be confrontational about something.

Amelia highlighted an important point: the political pressures of being pre-tenure as a WPA who is the only composition scholar at an institution, might not require that the

WPA act differently than they would post-tenure. In the above excerpt, Amelia is sorting

through the relationship between being pre-tenure and her own personality.

Another factor which may compound the pre-tenure worries of a WPA who is the only composition scholar is their tenure application look different than their colleagues' applications. Most of the participants in this study are in English departments where the majority of their colleagues are literature scholars, and most of the participants' tenure applications will be reviewed in-department before being forwarded to university administrators or committees. For this reason, WPAs who are the only composition scholar are faced with the simultaneous rhetorical tasks of explaining their accomplishments in ways that colleagues outside their field can understand, educating their colleagues about WPA work, educating their colleagues about norms in the discipline of composition, and arguing their own case for tenure. Becca, Francine, Deanna, Wendy, and Samantha are participants who have successfully made their case for tenure or feel as if they are on a successful path towards tenure.

Wendy, Lesley, Becca, and Deanna talked specifically about the work they began as soon as they were hired in order to make the tenure application process easier. In each of her annual reviews, William emphasized that she has been the lead on many projects and that she is "shouldering a lot of this on [her] own because [she] is the only person who does it and who knows it." Because of these efforts, she said, "[T]hey are aware of what my position is and how much work I have to do on my own." Lesley has also been persuasive in her annual reviews. She reported that her "peer reviewer had even commented in his letter that there is no way that [their institution] could expect publications from someone who is doing this [type of programmatic work] at this time." Lesley did not say how she expected the lack of publications early in her time as the



WPA to affect her final application for tenure.

While Lesley was not able to pursue publication as vigorously as she might have if she were not a new WPA, Becca felt the influence on her scholarship differently. Early in her time as WPA and the only composition scholar at an institution, Becca decided to shift the focus to her research in an area that was both interesting to her and relatable to her colleagues. She said being the WPA and the only composition scholar in a department of literary studies colleagues “really shaped [her] research career.” She did a lot more “rhetorical analysis than [she] might have otherwise because [she knew] that would be recognizable to the people that were making decisions about [her]. [She] worked with archival documents. [She] chose [her] topics very carefully.” Deanna also knew that her colleagues might not understand her work and that their lack of understanding might affect her chances of getting tenure. From the start, Deanna knew that she would be tasked with educating her colleagues about her work. She has been fortunate to have “educable colleagues” who, she said:

[A]ssented to all the ways that I defined my work and my scholarship and they worked amazingly well with me throughout all of my tenure and promotion because of the tremendous amount of labor that we did. A tremendous amount of labor was on the table—work output, work products—that gave me sway in my tenure and promotion. I don’t know what it would be like to have had someone there who not only could do that but could be a colleague. I had no intellectual company and I had no collegial company.

Deanna received tenure and her colleagues recognized the merits and quantity of her

work.

The tenure process was also a reminder for Deanna that she had “no intellectual company” and that no one with knowledge of the field of composition was there to help her through the tenure application process. Samantha also talked about the loneliness of going through the tenure process as a highly visible WPA who is also the only composition scholar. Samantha will be the only WPA and composition scholar to ever apply for tenure at her institution. In reflection on her upcoming application for tenure, Samantha said:

I am going up for tenure in October and I just talked to my dean yesterday, and nobody, he sees how tired I am, and he kind of understands it, but no one really understands what I am going through because I am the first person who will have gone up for tenure in this position.

For both Deanna and Samantha, the tenure application process reminded them that they are different than other tenure applicants because they are different than their colleagues.

Being the only composition scholar and WPA to apply at her institution made Francine feel freedom as opposed to restriction. The previous WPA at her institution did apply for tenure, but he was not a composition scholar. So, she was the first composition scholar to apply. She remarked on the freedom that this allowed her to “define” what it meant to apply for tenure as a composition scholar at her institution. The committee did not have a preconceived idea of what her application should look like. The work that she included in her application was not measured against the work of another composition scholar.

***Recognition of Scholarship.*** Four of the participants—Francine, Samantha,

Lesley, and Tina—specifically mentioned receiving some resistance about categorizing some of their WPA work as scholarship. Though this is not the majority of participants, defining WPA work as scholarship is discussed in-depth in the literature and in the Council’s “Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Program Administration” which indicates a significance to WPAs in general. For this reason, I believe these participants’ responses are important to share.

While a definition of scholarly output is set forth in the “Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Program Administration,” it is not an easy argument for many WPAs to make. This is especially true for WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution because they have to simultaneously present their case for tenure and be the sole representative of the field of composition. Francine said that she did not have to make much of an argument about the methodologies used in her research because of so many faculty at her institution do empirical research. But counting her WPA work as scholarship only happened after she made a strong argument. She described the conversation she had with her chair when preparing materials for her first annual review:

Recognition of administration as scholarship...is something that I really kind of grappled with the entire time I was, because I just couldn’t wrap my head around the fact that this component of my job that eats up 85% of my time was not somehow going to be part of my evaluation and annual review. And so I remember approaching my chair, my first year, and saying in my annual review how do you want me to account for my scholarship? And he was like, well, you don’t really have to at all? And I just said, no I do. So I kind of developed, I based all of my annual evaluations and my tenure letter, on Boyer as a way of

making sure, whether they wanted to hear it or not, I was going to account for administration as scholarship and I think it worked. I think it did, that may have been my most successful piece of rhetorical positioning that I've achieved simply by kind of creating that category and it has certainly shaped my reviews all the way through, you know, my deans reviews and the tenure committee's review itself and so forth.

Francine's "successful piece of rhetoric" gained her tenure and shifted at least some of her colleagues' perceptions of WPA work, in general.

Lesley has also been successful in arguing for WPA work to be evaluated as scholarship. When told that she should only count her WPA work as service, she "made the argument that [WPA work] was pedagogy and scholarship and service." She was "complimented" by a member of her review committee for making a "cogent argument" that WPA work "was intellectual work." She explicitly argued for the intellectual work of developing an assessment program, writing "program materials," and "putting together a common syllabus." Future composition scholar WPAs at Lesley's institution will be able to work from the precedent set by Lesley and her colleagues.

Samantha has been in the process of convincing her dean that her WPA is intellectual work that should be counted towards scholarship in her annual reviews. She has made some progress, but is still having to make the argument. Samantha reflected on her conversations with her dean:

[The dean] is like wow look at all this service and teaching, and he wants to put all the WPA stuff in service, not scholarship and not teaching, which it is, it is all just service and then he looks at my scholarship and says well you are lighter on

the scholarship. I just want to look at him and say, well I was born on this planet and I have not figured out how to manipulate the space/time continuum, would you like me to pitch for the softball team too?...He is starting to understand that I actually teach the adjuncts how to teach writing and he gets that and he understands that I do a lot of one on one with the writing consultants in the writing center but the scholarship part of it and that I am constantly in scholarship to keep up to date, nothing, it doesn't register. I am not producing anything... Yea, even though I totally revamped the program and made writing outcomes and it is based on scholarship, they don't see it that way.

Unfortunately, as the only composition scholar, Samantha is the only one at her institution with the expertise needed to make this argument.

This problem of recognizing scholarship may be connected to a devaluing of the field of composition. Tina anticipated that her WPA work will not count as intellectual work and towards her scholarship requirement for tenure. She commented on her situation and tied the problem of institutions not recognizing WPA work as an intellectual endeavor back to the way that composition scholarship is generally valued; "it is directly related to, in many ways, being a professor." If her colleagues connected teaching composition with being a scholar in composition, it would be less of a struggle for them to see that the WPA work is also a form of scholarship. Tina's colleagues believe that anyone can teach composition, regardless of their scholarly expertise; therefore Tina's WPA work that is focused on the teaching of composition also does not require scholarly expertise. Tina expressed some frustration that WPAs at other schools are allowed to

count their WPA work as intellectual work or scholarship.

**Outreach and Relational Work.** Outreach and relational work is the work of establishing and maintaining relationships with colleagues, both from in and outside a WPA's home program or department. In 1999, Donald Bushman described WPA work as a "human science," and other scholars have also focused on the significance of relationships to a WPA's success (Brown, 2002; Latterell, 2003; Rose, 2005; Brown, Lunsford, & White, 2008; McClure, 2008; Ward, 2008; Adler-Kassner, 2008; Dew, 2009). The participants in this study agreed that their work is a "human science." When I asked Deanna how much of her work as a WPA has been relational work, she replied, "It is huge."

The participants said that they were forced to approach building and attending their relationships differently because they are the only composition scholar and the WPA. In their home departments, only-composition-scholar WPAs must do all the outreach work for composition because there is no one else to do it. But most of the participants' comments about their relational work focused on their efforts to build relationships outside of their home programs. They reported that their cross-campus relationships sometimes developed because their WPA positions put them in contact with many colleagues across campus, that their cross-campus relationships were sometimes established out of a need to find people invested in writing instruction or in similar administrative positions. They also said that cross-campus relationships are easier to establish and sustain.

Sometimes a WPA has to make a concerted effort to have these conversations about writing and writing programs, and at other times being the writing expert puts the

WPA in place to have them. Sheila found that she was on “all these committees that deal with campus-wide issues” which gave her the opportunity to talk with people from various parts of the university and taught her “how the whole system works.” Because she is more educated about “how the system works,” knowledge that she says is not always “easy to develop” on your own, she is more knowledgeable when talking with colleagues about writing initiatives at her institution.

Other participants discussed making special effort to connect with colleagues outside of their home programs. Deanna and Becca spent considerable time getting to know colleagues across campus and giving others on campus a chance to know them. Deanna said she spent “so much time in the [her] first two or three years being known.” She went “office to office, taking the time to say ok, you specialize in Brit Lit, tell me about your work, tell me about you, here’s what I am doing...letting them who you are, letting them know what you do, letting them know why you are doing it, so they can know you and trust you.” Becca described her approach to developing relationships with colleagues outside of her own department:

Well, in every department and every university there are people who really care about student writing, and that is particularly true at engineering schools, so I just found out who those people were and I made appointments to see them, and we talked about student writing and what could be done....I went to every event on campus, the College of Architecture’s annual show was a huge affair, architects from all over town, they served salmon and caviar, and I joined a faculty club, and there were monthly Friday evening parties, and a lot of business got done there, so I got to know a lot of people in that way.

The process that Becca described is time-consuming, and I can imagine it might be intimidating to some new faculty members who have to reach out on their own. Becca was mentored to take this approach by an Associate Dean at one school and an Assistant Dean at another. They reminded her that she would do well to reach out to faculty in other departments.

Several participants talked about the importance of developing supportive relationships or allies across campus, particularly if the WPA receives little support in her own program or department. And as some participants have explained, a WPA who is the only composition scholar may find they have more in common with individuals who are in similar positions on campus. For Rihanna, her connection with the librarians on her campus has been an organic one. She explained her relationship with the librarians as follows:

Because the librarians have pushed so much for information literacy, they have become my greatest allies and my actual colleagues in ways they might not have if I had my own colleagues because they are alone and I am alone. So we get to create some connections. So I think that those have been surprisingly nice connections as much as I think the lone person helps to feed all the problems the discipline has in terms of how other people perceive us.

Rihanna acknowledges in this passage that being the “lone person” has caused her to reach out in ways that she may not have if she had composition scholar colleagues.

Samantha also forged good relationships with the librarians on her campus. She learned from “friends in the architecture program” that the architecture faculty were working with the librarians to improve student writing, and so she joined the conversation already in



progress. Librarians seem to be popular allies and perhaps it also has to do with the WPA who is the only composition scholar being in a similar position as some librarians. As Francine explains, “I think, you know that the kind of precarious nature of a lot their positions and that, that kind of sense that I’m, I’m teaching but I’m staff, or I’m teaching, but I’m an administrator, you know, really those roles are very similar” to WPAs’ who are the only composition scholar at an institution. Samantha says a WPA who is the only composition scholar must “figur[e] out who [their] allies are and figure[e] out who is going to help [them].”

The location of allies might be equally important as the number. Ethan made an interesting companion comment when he told me that power does not always come from the connection to people on campus but from the location of those people within the institutional structure. He said:

The way I supplemented the lack of other comp scholars was by developing supporters outside the humanities primarily in the business college, educating them a little bit at a time, and getting them to see that I really wasn’t being a trouble maker in the humanities, I really wasn’t crazy, and that the things that I was working on were all going to be of benefit to their program and that has been really important.

WPAs who are the only composition scholar know that they cannot do all of the work on their own, but with whom they choose to align themselves makes a difference as well. In Ethan’s situation, the College of Business dean and faculty had the interest in writing and the resources—monetarily and through institutional clout—to be productive supporters of Ethan’s ideas. Ethan strengthened the College of Business’s desire to create a writing

program by hosting a WPA affiliate conference at his institution and inviting faculty and administrators to attend. At the conference he gave a presentation “on the need to create a vertical writing experience” for students and the dean and faculty in Business were able to see how their students would benefit from a “vertical” writing program.

Because, as an administrator told Becca, you will always find people who “care about writing,” some of the participants have been able to match their expertise in writing with individuals on their campuses that are especially interested in their students as writers. Lesley said on her campus “the idea is becoming more and more that writing is the business of the college and not simply the English department” and she has “kept asking everyone ‘what do you think, what do you need.’” She also says she has “tried to do a lot of consensus building, and my sense is...the English Department has not always had goodwill with the rest of the college and maybe that I came in and I was very ‘asking what you want before I tell you what I am going to do’ may have helped with that.” By locating the people on campus that care about writing and being careful in how she has worked with those faculty, the perception of who owns writing is changing. The outcome of this work is that Lesley has been asked to lead the development of a stand-alone writing program for which the classes are taught by faculty from a variety of disciplines. Lesley has not yet determined how she will be able to complete this work along with her other duties, but she is excited by the prospect.

The participants in this study consistently reported that talking with colleagues outside of their own departments was easier than talking with their departmental colleagues. McKenna shared this description of the difference between talking with colleagues that are part of her program and those not part of it:

I don't know it just feels easy to talk with [colleagues outside my program] and have that more expert stance without me having to moderate it the way I do with people in my program, but that doesn't mean that the collaborations with people in my program have been difficult, they have just been different, in that I have had to position myself, position my own expertise differently, and pretend to be more naïve, I guess. Unless being asked not to be, and even then, being careful to try to read body language, and go OK, that was enough of a dose of composition for everyone today. The eyes are starting to glaze.

Talking with colleagues in other programs is not fraught with the same departmental and disciplinary histories. When I asked Tina if she had a similar feeling about talking with faculty outside her department she responded:

Absolutely. In fact, I really get along the best with people outside the department [such as other administrators and staff of student support programs] because it is more pedagogical and more theoretical and they understand the tie between the two and I think a lot of times when I am thinking about how to shape a response to literature faculty, you really have to consider what it is they are looking for, they are looking for the research, they are looking for the statistics, they are looking to be validated.

To support the idea that the discomfort she feels when talking to her department colleagues is related to ideological differences, Tina described her departmental colleagues' reaction to a recent conversation she had with them regarding assessment. She said:

I got a lot of push back on [my assessment idea] because people said who cares what students say. I thought this was a perfect kind of assessment for us to do here, but what did people say: we don't care what the students think, they think whatever they think and I said but you really don't value their opinion at all, this is a teaching centered university...[Now] I have to really think about how to situate our assessment and the value we are getting out of it, by being more theoretical and thinking more about the data and presenting the data and especially with the student essays really emphasizing that aspect is going to be really important, where I thought before it was going to be the student voices that were going to be very important.

By sharing this excerpt in the context of our discussion about working with faculty outside her department, Tina implied that colleagues outside of the department would not have had the same objections to her assessment plan. In developing relationships beyond her department, Tina has made connections with faculty with whom she may have more in common ideologically, and with whom she is able to have conversations and not have to continually mind the "fault lines" (McKenna).

The connection to faculty outside of their home programs might be based on shared approaches to research. The ease with which Emma has connected with people outside her department, according to Emma, is due to similarities in how they think about research. She has developed a supportive relationship with other faculty who are "very comfortable researching human subjects." As the "lone person" with writing expertise, Emma has noticed that her WPA supervisor has not "forg[ed] these relationships." She explained, "I don't know that it is an accident that this contact isn't being made between

a literature person and someone in the social sciences.” Emma’s relationships with colleagues beyond the English Department have provided her an opportunity to talk about her scholarship with individuals who do similar types of research.

### **Collaboration**

How WPAs collaborate, and the role of collaboration in their daily work, has not been addressed in the literature on writing program administration. But collaboration, as a practice, does seem the natural or desired outcome when theories of WPA work including management, feminist, rhetorical, and systems theory are discussed in the literature (White, 1991; Dickson, 1993; Cambridge & McClelland, 1995; Aronson & Hansen, 1998; Phelps, 2002; Ward, 2008; McClure, 2008, Dew, 2009). Perhaps the impulse towards collaboration connects back to Bushman’s assessment of writing program administration as a “human science” (1999), and the importance of collaboration in writing pedagogy and composition scholarship.

Because of the emphasis placed on collaboration as a fundamental part of WPA work, I asked each participant directly about their opportunities for collaboration. Some participants also talked about collaboration without my asking. In total, 12 of the 14 participants talked about collaboration as a meaningful component of their daily work as a WPA and the only composition scholar at an institution. The participants said they struggled to collaborate within their home programs to such a degree that their programs may be negatively impacted, which has caused some frustration. But participants have had a small amount of intra-program success, though not necessarily because of being in co-WPA positions. As with building relationships with colleagues, collaborating has been easier with colleagues in other programs. Two participants, McKenna and Becca noted that physical space affected their ability to work collaboratively.

Rihanna's comments about lack of individuals with whom to collaborate convey the problem many only-composition-scholar WPAs face in trying to find an intra-program colleague collaborator and the outcomes of not having a peer composition colleague collaborator. She offered this critique of her situation:

The thing that is kind of funny is of course, when you are in the position where you are the only one, people don't care that much about what you do as long as it doesn't infringe on something they think they should care about [...] At my current job, I just look like a dictator, and I possibly sound like a dictator because I don't have the other people to exchange ideas with and on equal footing. The composition coordinator I hired and work with is wonderful, she just doesn't have the field knowledge. And her hire is dependent on my pleasure which means an unequal colleague. So I look a lot like, to myself,...a dictator, but a dictator in a country that no one cares about.

The bigger concern for Rihanna has been "that it is really hard to invent in a local vacuum." She said she has a lot of resources outside of her institution, including people she can talk to, but "it is really different when they are not like right there. And so I find that to be the hardest thing. It is hard to come up with things that are innovative yet appropriate." Only-composition-scholar WPAs are affected by not having knowledgeable peer collaborators, but their programs may be impacted as well.

The participants are keenly aware of the value of collaboration in the field of composition, which creates another layer of pressure for WPAs who are the only composition scholar. Connecting her desire for a collaborator to the need to develop relationships outside of her department, Rihanna said, "I know that the ideal is much

more of a collaborative environment, so it is funny to be at a place where it is harder and I have grown relationships with people outside of composition as collaborators.” Sheila also spoke about the value placed on collaboration and being the only composition scholar:

[L]ots of articles have been written about it, and it would seem that our field values collaboration more than other fields, and so it is kind of an unstated value that people who have been trained in composition are aware of: of course we collaborate, we collaborate with everybody, that is just what we do and that gets violated when there is only one comp person who is a WPA.

In order to work collaboratively, only-composition-scholar WPAs have two choices: work with someone who is not at their institution and does not have the knowledge of their local context or work with someone who is not a composition scholar.

The most obvious people with whom a WPA might collaborate are colleagues in their own programs, but many participants said it was easier to collaborate with individuals in other disciplines because faculty in other disciplines were more likely to value collaboration more than the WPA’s literary scholar colleagues. For example, Becca found willing collaborators in Engineering; Ethan found willing collaborators in his institution’s business college; Francine found a collaborator in her institution’s general education program; McKenna collaborated with a colleague in her institution’s math department; Wendy said the design faculty always wanted to collaborate; and Stella has collaborated with colleagues in her institution’s art and physics programs.

In contrast, Wendy, who is at a college with many fine arts majors, pointed out that not all other disciplines value collaboration. There are certain types of arts, for example, that value solitary production over collaborative production.

The difficulty of collaborating intra-programmatically may be traced back to ideological differences. Francine said the problem of finding collaborators extends beyond simply not having composition scholar colleagues. She offered this reflection on why her work with her departmental colleagues is not collaborative in nature:

Well, you know, it's interesting. I haven't thought about them as collaborative relationships, in many ways, especially when it comes down to policy and what gets taught in the classroom. Like, if it ever comes to either of those things, then I feel as if it isn't collaborative, that it's more just, okay, you know, here's how *you're* talking about it, and here's how *you're* talking about it, and you're not agreeing, right? [...] and you know, again, mostly because I think [collaboration] just requires those kind of working relationships that do, that do involve a way of talking about writing in a given context that is remotely similar...

The real requirement for a collaborative relationship, according to Francine, is two people who approach writing and writing instruction similarly.

Some participants have had success collaborating with literary studies colleagues. McKenna was the only participant to talk about collaborating voluntarily on a project with her literary studies colleagues and she described the experience as “great.” She attributed the success of her departmental collaboration partly to the fact that she does not work with “traditional literature scholars.”



Because McKenna has collaborated with both literary studies colleagues and colleagues in other departments, she was able to describe how the collaborations were “different.”

She said collaborating with colleagues outside her program is:

just different in that I don't feel, when I was co-authoring an article with a colleague in [in another program] and I was talking about teaching [his subject area] as part of a writing class, and he was talking about teaching writing as part of a class [in his subject area], and we didn't have to, we each recognized the other person as being more expert in the area, and there wasn't any need to worry about hurting someone's feelings or anything.

McKenna specifically said that her collaborations outside of the department are not “easier,” but not having to worry about hurting colleagues' feelings must be a benefit to collaborating outside her department.

Being in a co-WPA position does not necessarily mean that collaboration will be easy or develop naturally, especially if only one of the WPAs is a composition scholar. Amelia contributed to the conversation about collaboration from her perspective as a co-WPA. Her position, by definition, is collaborative. Though, as described in an earlier shared passage, Amelia has not always been comfortable with her co-director's knowledge of composition being limited to her colleague's own experience, Amelia has been at ease with the large amount of “compromise.” In reflecting on the co-directorship, she said, “I don't think I am the kind of person that would like to forward this particular vision of a writing program and enact it, and that is what works for me. The best WPA that I can be is the one that works with other people.” Emma is the other participant who shares WPA responsibilities with a non-composition scholar colleague, but her

relationship with her WPA supervisor has not developed into a trusting collaborative relationship.

When offering reasons that collaborative relationships have flourished at her institution, McKenna cited the layout of their faculty offices as a reason that her colleagues gravitate towards interdisciplinary work. Until recently, faculty offices at McKenna's institution were not assigned and grouped according to discipline, so faculty in English were dispersed across campus. According to McKenna, that environment "led to a lot more interdisciplinary conversations, just because you are talking to your neighbors." Becca also mentioned campus logistics as playing a role in how collaborative relationships develop. Becca is currently at a large university, and she said it was "easier to collaborate" when she was the WPA and the only composition scholar because she was at "smaller schools." "It is funny," she said, "on bad weather days, I would walk through [another building] to get to my building and there would often be people waiting in the hall to see me." Clearly, physical conditions can help or hinder an only-composition-scholar WPA's efforts to collaborate with colleagues in other disciplines.

In my interviews, the participants demonstrated a strong desire to work collaboratively, and have mostly succeeded in their efforts, even if most of the successes have been outside their home departments or programs. As Wendy mentioned, having a composition scholar colleague would decrease her efforts to talk with colleagues across campus, so being the only composition scholar may play a vital role in educating colleagues in other disciplines about teaching writing. In Chapter 5, the effects of the

participants' outreach and collaborative efforts are discussed as a benefit to the field of composition.

### **Decision-making**

As with collaboration, the act of making decisions is not typically addressed separately from other themes in the literature; one source, Stuart Brown's "Applying Ethics: A Decision-making Heuristic for Writing Program Administrators" (2002) specifically addresses how WPAs make decisions on a daily basis. Brown suggests that WPAs continually evaluate whether they can "live with" the decision. Decision-making is part of the discussion of other themes in many pieces of WPA scholarship (Gunner, 1999, Amorose, 2000; Adler-Kassner, 2008; Aronson & Hansen, 2008; Fremo, 2007; Miller, 1996; Miller, 2001; Ward, 2008). Decision-making has its most prominent presence in narratives of WPA work (Bishop & Crossley, 1996; Rhodes, 1999; Ballif, Davis, & Mountford, 2008; Rose, 2005; Enchelmayer, 2008; Fulwiler, 2008; McNabb, 2008; O'Neill, 2008).

During the interviews, the participants reflected on how being a WPA who is the only composition scholar at an institution has affected their decision-making. In speaking generally about decision-making and the impact of being the only composition scholar, the participants said that making decisions was complicated by having to educate their colleagues, that the participants' scholarly knowledge meant sometimes they made different decisions than their colleagues would otherwise make, and that potential for support affected the decisions they made. The participants applied these concerns specifically to hiring decisions and programmatic decisions.

Several participants said that educating their colleagues played a large role in their

decisions because WPAs who are the only composition scholar are out-numbered by individuals who do not have scholarly expertise in composition. Stella said of making-decisions, “A lot of times when we are making decisions I really have to teach writing theory or comp 101.” McKenna is also in the position of educating her colleagues to make decisions about their writing program. She has found her colleagues’ experience in the classroom, and how her colleagues rely on it as their only form of expertise, to be a foil in her attempts to educate them. She often has to wait for her colleagues’ understanding through experience to catch up to what she knows through the scholarship on teaching writing before making a decision for her program. She calls it a “very inefficient use of time and learning.” Recent programmatic decisions at McKenna’s institution took nine years instead of three to four years that she estimates it would have taken if she was working with another composition scholar.

As a co-director of her institution’s writing program, Amelia provided a comparison of her decisions and her co-director’s decisions to illustrate how a difference in scholarly background changes the decisions that are made. Amelia mentioned training new instructors and graduate students as a time when she sees a difference in the types of decisions she makes because of her disciplinary knowledge. She sees her role as a mentor who educates the new composition teachers whereas someone not in the field might take a more managerial approach and have cross section standardization as their primary goal. She said:

because I am coming from a particular kind of background, my attention is definitely on thinking about the different kinds of constraints a graduate instructor might have and also teaching them, thinking about them as beginning instructors.

Like what are the things that they might need in terms of like how do we create the pedagogical foundation that is going to be more invigorating in like a longer sense, as opposed to saying the things that you must teach because this is the standard of the program, I think I am much less willing to do that thing because I think that part of what we should be doing when teaching graduate instructors is helping them get their bearings and helping them figure out to make their own decisions and why they are making their own decisions, as opposed to giving them a syllabus and sending them on their way.

Amelia's unique position as a co-director with a non-composition scholar, again, has allowed her to see how her work and decision-making might be carried out by a non-composition scholar WPA.

Several participants mentioned worrying about lack of support for their suggestions or decisions, or being out-voted. Rihanna said that "being the only comp person and the WPA means that I am always in a particular role and I always will be out-voted." A WPA position typically requires the WPA to lead a writing program through programmatic changes or to make suggestions from their position as an expert in teaching writing. For Tina, being the only composition scholar at an institution means that she has to pay more attention to who is likely to support decisions she makes. While she has felt confident in the decisions that she has made as a WPA, she reflected on her decision-making process:

Will other people support your decisions? So you may feel like this is the best thing for the department, the best thing for composition, but it is not going to be supported, so is it better to do something that is going to be shot down or is it

better to compromise what you want to do and get it done, and kind of do small pieces?

The participants in this study reported that being the only composition scholar at an institution greatly affected the decisions they have pursued because their support networks are different than those of WPAs who have composition scholar colleagues.

In our conversations, the participants acknowledged that having composition colleagues does not guarantee their support; in fact the disagreements among composition colleagues can be just as numerous or intense, but when working with composition colleagues, you are seeking support from individuals who speak a similar language and who have some shared ideological understanding or basic knowledge of the discipline of composition. Stella's comment defines the difference between working with and without a composition scholar colleague:

If I had someone to bounce it off of, and say play devil's advocate, you be Elbow and I'll be Bartholomae, and let's look at it from these two different theories. I would include that person in the process and may or may not come to the same conclusion, but I would probably feel more confident in it.

According to the participants, WPAs who are the only composition scholar would appreciate the chance to disagree with a composition scholar colleague as part of their decision-making.

**Hiring Decisions.** Hiring decisions include any decisions that are made regarding the hiring of faculty or staff, and the process by which those decisions are made. The hiring process and the decisions about when and whom to hire were talked about by the participants as a component of their work that was heavily affected by being a WPA who

is the only composition scholar. The first several participants with whom I spoke mentioned the hiring process as particularly difficult to negotiate, and taking the cue from those interviews, I raised the issue during subsequent interviews. The reasons for the difficulties varied; the most prominent themes in the discussions on hiring were the role of the WPA's expertise, the definition of expertise as applied to applicants, the perceived need to hire, and the process of making hiring decisions. In general, the participants felt that the problems they encounter during the hiring process are linked to the ideological conflicts between composition scholars and their non-composition scholar colleagues.

When a department is trying to hire someone who will teach writing classes, a WPA who is the only composition scholar is once again in the role of being the sole representative of the field. In this comment from Sheila, she discusses how her expertise, and her beliefs about teaching writing, caused her to evaluate candidates differently than her non-composition scholar colleagues:

I started insisting that the adjuncts have Masters degrees and that they submit, when they applied for the job, a writing sample, and this was seen like a good idea, wow we hadn't thought of that, so actually how it has been viewed here is I put quote/unquote standards in place, whereas how I viewed it was, and that was fine because it was a very positive view of it, but how I viewed it was this is the usual. My god, you didn't ask for a writing sample? But I mean they don't recognize it as a field, and they do think anyone can teach writing. And so what it comes down to here, for me to maintain any measure of quality control, and I don't mind using that kind of language, I have to basically talk about can this person teach the standard curriculum, putting a standard curriculum in place has

been one of the best things I have done because if somebody doesn't do it, I can say they can't do, they aren't qualified to teach this curriculum, not you don't have a degree in the field, they don't give a crap.

Her expertise allowed her to evaluate the current writing teachers and future applicants in a way that her colleagues had not been able or willing to do.

Amelia, Becca, McKenna also spoke about the role of expertise in hiring decisions. Their experiences highlight the different ways colleagues may define composition expertise. When Amelia's institution has wanted to hire a faculty member who will teach writing, she "want[s] to hire somebody else who is more composition oriented but qualifications are what the hiring committee is interested in and not privileging [composition] knowledge or experience." Amelia also said that she does not think her colleagues are good readers of composition scholars' application materials because they tend to lean towards applicants who have scholarly interests that are easily related to their own. Amelia has believed that her work with historical documents was what persuaded her current institution to hire her. In her interview, Becca told me that the most contentious discussion she was part of as a WPA and the only composition scholar was about hiring a "technical writing person, and then our debate was about what literary secondary area this person should have." McKenna has also been part of difficult conversations about hiring faculty. This is how she described the recent hiring situation at her institution:

[W]e were intentionally seeking people to primarily teach composition, and we claimed at the outset that what we really wanted was somebody with composition background and then we hired a poet and a comparative literature scholar [...],



and I wasn't the only person saying this person doesn't have a composition background, remember that is what we said that we wanted, but that discussion was heated and often unpleasant and left hard feelings, even though the last person we hired just got tenure, so it has been five years ago, and people still have bitter feelings from that search. And in part over to what extent should our hire really be a compositionist.

In the situations described by Amelia, Becca, and McKenna, their expertise was not in question as much as what expertise in composition meant.

The definition of expertise is further challenged when a local hire or one-year hire applies for a more permanent position. These individuals might not have the expertise Sheila or Amelia would prefer, but they are good fits within the department for other reasons. For Sheila, it is hard to argue the value of these candidates having studied composition when most of her colleagues do not recognize composition as a discipline.

Only-composition-scholar WPAs may also find themselves arguing the need to hire another composition scholar, but they might not always be in the best position to make that decision. Tina said her institution had been "struggling to hire good adjuncts. It used to be you put a body in the classroom and that was enough, but I am really, really trying to get us past that point." In our interview, she also talked about the number and types of courses that she teaches, in addition to composition courses, but said she wasn't sure that they needed another composition scholar. Seventy percent of her institution's English majors are writing majors, and she is currently responsible for teaching an advanced writing course, a grammar and style course, a tutoring class and a rhetoric course. When I asked if her belief that her school did not need another composition

scholar might be influenced by the way her school values composition as a field of study, she said, “I feel like to some extent that could be true. I think that it is just not a conversation that we would have.” I shared this exchange with Tina because it revealed the negotiation of values in which WPAs who are the only composition scholar participate. According to the cultural norms of Tina’s institution, they do not need another composition scholar faculty member.

Likewise, Rihanna, who was at the largest institution of all the participants, had a difficult time arguing that her school should hire another composition scholar, even after an external reviewer advised her institution to do so. She reported:

We had an external review last year and the thing that the fellow said...was it is strange for a school your size to only have one tenure track person in rhet comp. And it was really interesting, in the context of all of the different things he said, a number of critiques and positive things, was how the department chose to discount his credibility and chose to discount points that he said, my department looks at service like you work so hard there should be someone to help you and I think the way that they think of help is really condescending. [...] If you asked my colleagues what I actually do, it would range between well she is in charge of all the writing at the university OR she is in charge of these [over 25] TAs, so that is like [over 750] students. So they do the math badly at their end, so I think either example would facilitate their ability to write off the need for another hire. To say well you are doing just fine. My chair said we need another English Ed hire before we need a comp hire because you do just fine without anybody. So if I was like a hot mess, there’d be another hire, and they just kind of like don’t

respond if I say that. If you work hard it won't come, you'll just prove you can do it without it.

Rihanna's institution's wanted an expert in teaching writing but has not wanted to hire enough experts to truly cover their needs.

Institutions and programs often use student enrollment in programs to determine the need to hire another faculty member. Samantha summarized her situation regarding another faculty member as follows:

[S]o I am trying to focus on the first year program the best I can and do the best I can with that, and the WC, and we do have a prof writing track in the English major and I am trying to put together a prof writing minor, but that is going to be more and whatever adjuncts I can put together, which means the faculty may not be inclined to ok the minor just because there is no full time people besides myself. It is kind of like one of these catch22s, you can't have a hire because we don't have a program, but we can't have a program because we don't have someone else.

Samantha, in her own words, does not "have the expertise and [she doesn't] have the time, so [she'd] love a colleague." Institutional resources often demand that a consistent need be established before a new faculty hire will be allowed.

The problem, as Rihanna's and Samantha's reflections brought to the fore, is that their colleagues' and fellow administrators' have a view of writing expertise that allows colleagues and administrators to continue to require more work of the only writing expert without the understanding that the writing expert is not actually an expert in everything related to writing.

*The Hiring Process.* When the participants' programs have wanted to hire someone to teach writing—either a composition scholar or a faculty member who will teach composition as part of his course load, the participants have had different levels of involvement in the process. Tina, Wendy, and Amelia described in detail their involvement in the hiring process and the impact of being the only composition scholar on their involvement. Because this section is about the process of hiring, these findings are presented with more narrative description. The narrative should better reveal the moments in which the participants are in or out of the hiring process, or somewhere in between.

Tina's story of participating in the hiring process is short. While Tina has also been responsible for working with new writing faculty, she has not "even really [had] a voice" during the hiring process. She attributed some of her lack of voice to her being only in her second year at her institution, and the department having already decided the area of study into which they needed to hire someone. She also said that her department was still debating "what the lines [were] going to look like," and that she was not involved in that conversation, though these individuals will be teaching composition as well as literature or creative writing.

Wendy has been involved, to a large extent, in the hiring of faculty that will teach composition at her institution. She has participated in writing ads, interviewing candidates and deciding to whom they should offer positions. When she wrote her first job ad she made mistakes in how she worded the ad that she has felt might have been avoided if she had another composition scholar on campus to work on the ad with her. She was surprised when the people she helped select as future writing teachers ended up

teaching mostly literature classes. She had been told that these new hires would teach composition, but soon after they arrived, they were rarely teaching composition. As soon as literature classes became available for them to teach, they were happy to move into teaching those classes. This development was frustrating to Wendy.

Wendy has also worked with her chair to hire adjuncts. She has felt like she would have more success when arguing that adjuncts should have more teaching experience, if she had a composition scholar colleague:

My boss, we do the interviews together, he tends to give people with no teaching experience more of a chance than I want to give them, so they says let's give this person a try, and then I end up doing a lot more mentoring and a lot more hand-holding. So if I had someone who knows our field and knows what it takes that would step in and say that is probably right. Those are the types of things that would go differently.

With another composition scholar on faculty, Wendy speculates that the conversations about candidates would be different.

Amelia has been less formally involved in the hiring process than Wendy. Though she has always been the only person on faculty who has expertise in teaching writing, Amelia has not been a member of the departmental hiring committee and has not always been outspoken when given the opportunity to contribute to the hiring conversation. At her institution, the departmental hiring committee conducts the search and makes the final hiring decisions. The committee has consulted Amelia as one of the WPAs and only composition scholar at her institution, but she, like many other faculty in the department, do not have an actual vote. Amelia offered this explanation of her situation as someone

not on the committee but who is consulted:

I feel like I am pretty reserved in the sense that I would probably prefer to, knowing where I would disagree and knowing that I don't have a voice, I would probably defer and not say anything because I just know what the situation is. I would obviously express my opinion, definitely express my opinion when asked, but when it is like 5 against one, 5 people feel differently than I do and I am not even on the committee, I don't really have any power in that situation.

Because of other participants' comments about tenure and promotion, I was concerned that Amelia might not be participating fully in the conversation to protect herself. She said this was not out of self-preservation, but rather that she did not want to "put all this time into convincing people of something that is probably not going to go anywhere any way."

When I asked how she felt about the later stages of the process when she chose not to participate, she said she was comfortable because it was her decision not to participate. She added that she actually did not "want to be on the hiring committee, but [...] these hires happened when I was definitely more junior, but now that I have been here five years. If we did another hire now, I probably would be more outspoken."

My exchange with Amelia reveals much about the difficulty WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution might experience during the process of hiring faculty members. So many factors impinge on a WPA and only composition scholar's need and willingness to participate in hiring conversations. But only-composition-scholar WPAs being excluded from hiring deliberations is in contrast to other areas of

their work, such as program design, where some participants thought they might actually have too much voice or freedom.

**Programmatic Decisions.** Programmatic decisions are the decisions WPAs make related to writing program curricula or policies. All the participants talked about the daily work involved in making programmatic changes at their institution. When I asked the participants to talk about how being the only composition scholar affected their decisions as a WPA, they talked most about the role of expertise—both their own and their colleagues’, and how the decision-making process may be truncated for a WPA who is the only composition scholar, but implementing programmatic change may be slower.

The participants said that they may have made different decisions for their programs if they had a composition scholar colleague. Sheila remembered an instance in which she may have made a different decision if there was another composition colleague on faculty:

We have a Learning Center; we don’t have a writing center; we have an all-purpose learning center, and I was like we need writing tutors, but who does it fall on to train these tutors? Me. And number one I really don’t have much background in learning center stuff, and so I think if there would have been another comp person, I guess I would have bounced this idea off of them. Should we do this? I guess I didn’t think of the ramifications of [my decision to hire certain tutors] and they quit after a semester and we are starting all over again, and I didn’t see any of that coming. That would have been a really good thing to have somebody else say, “Hey what do you think of this? Should we do this?” It

was a mess I created of my own doing because I didn't have anybody else to consult.

Another composition colleague could have helped Sheila talk through her ideas, helped her research them further, or even provided expertise or additional experience in writing center administration. Sheila was asked to do a job for which she did not have the immediate expertise; she made the best decision she could to meet the needs of her institution. Sheila's work on this project was public, as WPA work often is, and her decision was one that directly affected students, tutors and student writers.

Emma discussed how the decisions about her institution's writing curriculum would be different if she had a composition scholar colleague. Emma talked about how the curriculum itself might look different if one or more other composition scholars were designing the curriculum. Connecting back to her earlier statement about her WPA supervisor inventing terminology to talk about composition, and Emma's own desire for her department to use common terminology from the discipline of composition, she offered this reflection:

I often think about what the comp teaching would look like, so that kind of very literal work would look like, what would the work with students look like, when students come into the Writing Center clearly befuddled because their teacher's using language that is not his or her own, right, because this isn't language that everyone agreed upon, everyone is using it in different ways, so students are clearly befuddled because their teachers are being coerced to use language that doesn't feel right to them in talking about writing. I wonder how that would look different, I wonder how those relationships with students would look, I wonder



how students' products would look different, I wonder how teachers' assignments would look if they weren't being coerced by a non-comp person to use, very explicitly to use a language that is unfamiliar. So yeah, I do wonder that often. In her supervisor's refusal to use the language of the field of composition, Emma saw a lack of respect for the field that, through the confusion of language, permeates the teachers' and the students' work.

Rihanna also talked about how her colleague's lack of expertise in writing sometimes affected her decisions. Because a large portion of Rihanna's job is working with Master's students who are teaching assistants, she has had to take into account the teaching assistants' lack of knowledge as well as the lack of knowledge of her colleagues. She had made decisions regarding how she educated the teaching assistants in order to increase their knowledge of teaching writing as they enter the classroom for the first time. She said she was "inventing a program for whom the idea of expertise didn't exist and there would be nobody other than a Master's teaching assistant teaching the course," though the other faculty have a say in the curriculum of the composition program. "A lot" of her "decisions are what kind of decision can I make in my context where people don't know a lot about this, or understand a lot, or don't value it." When I heard Rihanna speak of her situation, I wondered how much of a difference it would make if she had one other person, a composition scholar, who understood and valued teaching writing.

Several participants said that sometimes not having a composition scholar colleague, independent from a department's or program's respect for composition as a discipline, means that the decision-making process is truncated. In my conversation with Sheila, she indicated that her colleagues did not have the expertise needed to question

some of her decisions. She discussed a change to a freshman course that was met with little resistance and was quickly implemented. She has felt certain that it would have gone differently with another composition scholar on faculty “because you know there are all these arguments against doing something like that and you know I can think of a million off the top of my head.” She is not “convinced it [was] the best decision that [they] made.” With a composition scholar colleague, Sheila likely would have had “different conversations” about the change she proposed and those conversations may have slowed down the process.

Varying from Sheila’s experience, Stella reported feeling like decisions were implemented slower because of her being the only composition scholar. Stella described a colleague who in the portfolio reading sessions has been unable to change how she reads portfolios. Stella’s decision to change their assessment protocols was quick, but the implementation has been slow because Stella had to wait for some faculty members to align their portfolio reading skills with the program’s expectations. Each time they read portfolios, Stella had to repeat her argument for why they have adopted the new approach to reading portfolios. Samantha is also somewhat frustrated by the slow speed at which she is able to make program changes; she is slowed down by her workload.

In general, the participants felt somewhat ill-at-ease at with the process of making programmatic decisions. Though they may have been satisfied with many of their actual decisions, the decision making was complicated by their being the only writing expert or lacking specific expertise in writing programs. And the participants felt that the timeframe for making decisions and implementing changes was influenced by their being the only composition scholar at their institutions.

## **Conclusion**

The findings in this chapter reflect the complex situations that WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution face in their daily work as well as their strategies for negotiating those situations. Too often, the participants in this study reported a lack of understanding and respect for the field of composition among their departmental or program colleagues. They also reported that the lack of understanding significantly altered how, and if, they were able to successfully fulfill their WPA duties.

Three additional sections of findings are presented in Chapter 5: Summative Findings. Even more than the findings discussed in this chapter, the findings related to Praxis, Identity, and Satisfaction are summative in nature. As such, I have addressed them in a separate chapter and hope the discussion of those findings serves as a bridge between the individual findings presented in this chapter and the concluding statements of Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CUMULATIVE FINDINGS

This study was designed to answer research questions about the daily work of WPAs who are also the only composition scholar their institution. To answer these questions, I conducted a survey and interviews with participants in this type of position. During the interviews, the participants and I discussed the impact of being a WPA and the only composition scholar on their sense of praxis, professional identities, and satisfaction with their work. Since the individual thematic findings in Chapter 4 are the building blocks on which the participants' sense of praxis, identities, and satisfaction is formed, I am addressing these findings separately as cumulative findings. In some studies, the researcher may step in and make these summative claims on her own, but in this study, the highly intelligent and reflective participants have provided their own summations.

#### **Praxis**

In general, the discipline of composition places a high value on praxis as an alignment of a teacher's or administrator's scholarly and pedagogical practices with the theoretical premises to which they adhere. Praxis, for many WPAs, may also include a third element—ideology, whereby it can be seen as a reflexive triangulation of practice, theory and beliefs (Cooper, 1987; Bullock, 1987; Bushman, 1987; Micciche, 2002; Gerald, 2003; Adler-Kassner, 2008; Ballif, Davis, & Mountford, 2008; Gebhardt, 2008). In their interviews, the participants primarily talked about praxis, if not named as such, in relationship to the ideological differences between composition and literary studies, the act of citing scholarship, and the hiring process.

Regarding their desire and ability to establish praxis in their own work, the

participants made several observations. They said even if they are reflective practitioners it is difficult to follow through on some ideas due to institutional constraints and being the only composition scholar. In addition, according to the participants, theoretical ideas and practices may come together on the surface, but praxis may not be achieved because only-composition-scholar WPAs may be reflecting “in a vacuum” (Rihanna). And as noted by McKenna, the desire for praxis may also lead to more work for a WPA. One participant, Deanna, mentioned the importance of graduate education in preparing future WPAs to more effectively and efficiently work towards praxis in their future WPA positions.

As an example of how institutional constraints may affect an only-composition-scholar WPAs establishing praxis, Tina provided this reflection:

[E]verything that I read now a days is all about to what extent does this fit in with my own life, my own work at my school, and to what extent does it fit in with the research that I am doing, and so I think that the reflective aspect is a huge part and I also, to relate it back to what I am doing as an administrator, to what extent can this perhaps help shape the work that I do as an administrator? Are these things that I would like to implement and how can I draw from this. I went to a presentation at a conference about assessment, it was a great idea, I thought: wow, if I could, but there is not a way it would ever fly at my school [...] That would be great, but I just found out there is money but the money is limited, but there would be so little support for that, no one would want to do it. And even in my own department they would say: why would we do that?

Tina desires a fit between the scholarship, her own beliefs, and her WPA work, but she

has not been entirely successful due to institutional constraints. These are the same institutional constraints that any WPA, not just WPAs who are the only composition scholar, may experience. Tina, however, may have had a better chance of surmounting the institutional constraints if she had more buy-in among her colleagues.

Francine's comment demonstrates why it may appear as if praxis is being achieved, but the constraint of being the only composition scholar truncates the reflective process and therefore is a foil to the process of achieving praxis. She described her situation:

[A]ctually putting things into practice, can happen much more quickly [if you are the only composition scholar], and it does often happen, because we are pretty much the only game in town, we can make those changes and then reflect on them, and revise them as we see fit. So when we are able to make positive changes that reflect both our beliefs and our knowledge in the field, and then again reflect on them once they are in place, I think that praxis aimed towards change and progressive implementation of new policy is actually, in some ways, more readily achieved when one is the only comp scholar.

But Francine went on to explain that:

[T]here are ways in which being the only comp faculty member does kind of deter praxis [...] Certainly for me, reflection often takes place in community, and it is the result of talking through particular institutional situations, problems, and so forth with other comp scholars, so while I do have those that I can reach out to that are outside of my institution [...] I think that is probably something that is

more difficult to achieve as the only individual, simply because there aren't as many folks to collaborate with.

Francine's comments are important because they elucidated two potential layers of praxis: one that is more surface, and the other that is rooted in reflection.

McKenna elucidated another tension between her own desire for praxis and the institutional constraints she has experienced. McKenna summarized her relationship to praxis as "my colleagues are happy that my wanting to achieve praxis makes me likely to volunteer more for program assessment tasks, etc." Imbedded in this comment is the idea that McKenna's need for praxis is potentially detrimental to her achieving it; the more she wants praxis, the more work she has to do, the less her colleagues have to engage with the work, and perhaps the less likely she will be able, for sheer lack of time, to achieve it.

In an attempt to help future WPAs who may also be the only composition scholar, Deanna proposed that the field of composition make a stronger commit to teaching writing program administration to graduate students in composition, "as we do in-kind to all the literary areas of expertise that literary faculty are trained for." She supported this claim by saying "you need to have your teaching, scholarship, and research overlay with administration, so one becomes the grounds for the other, and you need to get trained to do that." Deanna argues that we cannot assume new WPAs will know how to mediate all of these demands in a way that supports their ideological commitments.

### **Identity**

Identity in the context of the participant interviews refers to how the participants define themselves as WPAs, both individually and in the field at-large. The literature on

WPA identity is various and numerous since an overwhelming majority of the scholarship on writing program administration seeks to define writing program administration and the role of WPAs (Bullock, 1987; Cambridge & McClelland, 1995; Bushman, 1999; George, 1999; Charlton, 2005; Hebb, 2005; Dew & Horning, 2007; Dew, 2009) . In my conversations with the participants, the participants focused more narrowly on how each of them defined her or himself as a WPA, and as a WPA who is the only composition scholar. The participants answered questions such as are you able to be the WPA you want to be as the only composition scholar at your institution and how is your identity as a scholar affected by being the only composition scholar and a WPA.

In answer to this line of questioning, the participants concentrated on their sense of purpose, their identities in comparison to the discipline's view of positions like theirs, and their confidence in their work.

### **Sense of Purpose**

A WPAs sense of purpose is a partial determinant of how much being the WPA and only composition scholar impacts their identities as WPAs. Some of the participants relied on the discipline's ideological commitments to define their purpose and themselves and others asserted their ideological commitments by talking back to the field of composition studies.

Deanna said that her identity as a WPA was primarily determined by her commitment to the discipline of composition and the intrinsic rewards of aligning herself with a discipline in which she strongly believes. Deanna commented:



My intellectual training explicitly centered me in a relationship to this work that said this is not about the life of the mind for you as a professor, living the high life, but rather you have moral, ethical responsibility to see the marginal people and to take care of students in kind. So I was trained that way. So for me it was never a matter of all of a sudden discovering this huge burden, it was central to my work and I really found that to be a redeeming part of my identity.

Being the WPA and only composition scholar has allowed Deanna to continue to fulfill her larger purpose.

Sheila has a more complicated relationship to the sense of purpose espoused by the discipline. Sheila has also seen herself as an advocate for marginalized students, but she is not as satisfied with how her position has allowed her to realize this goal. The message she received from her graduate education was “if you are not researching how students are marginalized in three different ways, you are not doing anything worthwhile.” With her current workload and not having another composition scholar colleague, Sheila “feel[s] separated] from her intended purpose as a WPA and teacher, and “cut-off from [her] activist tendencies.” She explained further that the “amount of strategy that it would take to get something in place would be really difficult.”

Sheila acknowledged and reflected on being somewhat disheartened by posts to the WPA-L where she sees that other WPAs:

seem to be able to embody that, they seem to be able to embody the activist and the WPA-ism. How is it that they are able, maybe they don't, maybe it doesn't look like that, maybe their faculty would say that it is b.s., or their students would say that is b.s., I don't know.

The same ideological focus for Deanna and Sheila has not resulted in their having the same reported sense of fulfillment in their work, though they are both the only composition scholars at their institutions.

One of the participants focused on how her own sense of purpose has developed over the last few years. Emma has come to her own sense of purpose through doing WPA work and through connecting to other writing center WPAs at national conferences. At the one conference, Emma recalled initially making the connection between her work in a writing center and the identity of WPA. She explained her thought process which she described as a “coming of age:”

[W]e were talking about how all of us were in fact WPAs, and I was like, wait a minute, I do do WPA work. [...] And I know I am doing this work, I know I do the bulk of the work, really the bulk of the administrative work, of the WC. I have conversations with deans and faculty members, and support services, academic advisors, career development, so I am doing this work but no one is really naming it that here. [This] has been so much a process of me saying I am a composition scholar, not just someone who got this job as a grad student, though I think that is kind of the way I identified myself when I got the job [...] and I have found my own identity through this position. This is work I am committed to, I am going to change my focus now, and there is this thing called WPA, and when you are the only comp scholar, when you are the only person thinking about either of those as roles within the institution, nobody else is using that language so it is really kind of a coming of age.

In this passage, Emma detailed how her sense of purpose came into being and was then named.

The participants also reflected on how only-composition-scholar-WPA positions might be viewed by the WPA scholar community. Many of the participants, either through advice they received while in graduate school or other conversations, understood that there can be a stigma around being a WPA and the only composition scholar. The participants overwhelmingly said that their positions, though complicated, are valuable to the field at-large and that it was time for the WPA community to recognize the complexities and benefits associated with these positions. Nine of the participants said WPAs who are the only composition scholar play a large role in educating others about the field of composition, and that at many institutions the alternative is much less attractive.

Wendy summarized this common sentiment and explained how the field of composition benefits from her work and the work of other only-composition-scholar WPAs:

I don't think [these positions] are detrimental to the field. This is one way that we make ourselves known, get the word out to people that our field does exist and here is what we do, and here are all these resources that we have. I don't see that at all. I have a whole bunch of colleagues in other fields at my school that now know about rhetoric and composition that didn't know about it before and have students who want to be writing majors and I have students who see what I do and ask about how I got here. I think it is a great part of our field. I would hate to see

people not taking these positions because they would be the only rhetoric and composition person.

The burden of having to educate her non-composition scholar colleagues also gives Wendy the opportunity to contribute to the field.

The participants reported not feeling entirely comfortable with tying their own sense of purpose too closely to the role of colleague educator. McKenna said she has “mixed feelings” because she knows that it is “not good” to have a WPA to which everyone turns when writing related issues need to be addressed. But, she added, “it is better than not having [anyone]” and that she “really like[s] [her] job.” In mentioning that she likes her job, McKenna made clear that WPAs who are the only composition scholars should also not be seen as martyrs or victims that are suffering through their work.

Several participants also said they understood that only-composition-scholar WPAs who are successful in their positions and are the only composition scholar are perpetuating the myth that anyone, with minimal training, can and should be allowed to teach composition. As the person who trains the teaching assistants at her institution, Rihanna is keenly aware of the dilemma created for composition scholars when you ask them to educate teachers about teaching writing in a short amount of time. In this passage, she reflects further on this common situation:

[L]et’s think about the alternative, what would be happening here, it would be doing what they had been doing, that students would take a writing course from a first year MA student who have never taken or taught, or had any experience, with composition and somebody with an MFA in poetry would give them a book and

so good luck with that. So I think in a sense there is no way I am doing a disservice to the field by taking this job. The other sense is that it reinforces... a lot of bad paradigms, but I think it is like how do you change it unless you are part of it. So, I am like now at least my department has to contend with the fact I am in a field that my department doesn't believe is a field though I publish in it, so I think partly that's how you change the things other people believe about the discipline, by being in it. So I think it is just too simplistic to just say you are doing the field a disservice. Because the field, what is that, it is just a bunch of people who obviously have too much ego if that is the case.

With her experience as a WPA and time in the field, Rihanna has called out individuals in the discipline who might have lost touch with the realities of many WPAs and the educational purpose of their work. She argues that if other composition scholars believe that individuals in these positions are acting in disservice to the field, their sense of the field may be defined more by their own egos than the work of the only-composition-scholar WPAs. She capped off her comments on this issue by adding, "sometimes your composition colleagues suck, too." With this comment, Deanna is referencing the potential for WPAs who are the only composition scholar to romanticize the idea of having a composition scholar colleague or colleagues.

Deanna seconded Rihanna's calling out of the field but acknowledged that the Council of Writing Program Administrators is working hard to make sure that the behavior of WPAs being "admonished and reprimanded," "bullied about or ignored and silenced" is not repeated.

Deanna identified a larger problem behind this bad behavior and negative comments about certain types of WPA positions:

[I]t works from the premise that this work is service, this work is pejorative, this work is politically dangerous, this work is something you should just do for a short time and get the hell out, and it defines this labor in a diminished way that hurts us to a greater degree than any other rethinking of this job as an area of professional expertise can do. It is like they would never think of defining an area of professional expertise, in any concentration in literary studies, as being slum work, bad work, whatever. So they, meaning people who are WPAs [...], who simultaneously critique and harrumph about bad junior faculty, at the same time they are establishing position statements to define it as intellectual work. I mean, come on. Step up and train people well and see it as a booming area of professional expertise [...] [I]f we step up and do the professional, intellectual, graduate level training for this work, people can thrive. I just refuse to believe that it is a black or white, all bad or all good thing and I think we undermine our own intellectual and cultural standing in English by continuing to define this work as something to avoid.

According to Deanna, to demean these positions, and “harrumph” about the WPAs in them, is to recast the positions as “service” only and deny those WPAs full recognition of the intellectual work they are doing.

Francine also said that “in some ways it is a failure of our field, to a certain extent, to really recognize the conditions in which so many people are working now.”

The pushback against the field from the participants is a highly interesting component of my conversations with them about their identities within the field at-large.

### **Scholarly Identities**

The participants in this study also have the opportunity to shape the field through their own scholarship and as consumers of others' scholarship. When asked how their own scholarship or scholarly identities were affected by being the only composition scholar, many of the participants reported being less able to produce scholarship that would be valuable to the discipline. But there were also several participants who said being the only composition scholar did not decrease their scholarly output. The participants also spoke to their different relationship to composition and WPA scholarship since being an only-composition-scholar-WPA position. The degree to which being the only composition scholar affects a WPA's scholarly output is likely also determined by individual goals, inclination and energy

**As Scholars.** Samantha's comment reflects a common feeling of not having valuable, new ideas to contribute to the scholarly conversation:

where I feel like it hurts me the most is in scholarship in that when I go to the Cs, I get depressed because I can't be in those conversations, there is no way I can do that kind of academic work anymore and that the big guns can do because there is no way it can happen where I am at because I am still fighting a battle they fought twenty years ago. So that is where I feel like I am slipping every year--in my ability to talk to my own discipline.

The more time Samantha spends in her position, the less she feels connected with scholarly conversations in the field.

Being “cut-off” from the scholarly conversation may also be due to institutional conditions that may occur simultaneously with being the only composition scholar.

Francine spoke to the phenomenon of being at a small school, being the only composition scholar, and the WPA:

So much of what we know in writing program admin is really shaped by individuals at larger institutions where there are full blown writing programs.

Where sometimes I just long for the days when I had TAs in the classroom, where you really can get in and help people to do things in the first year class [...]. I do think that there is a shortage of voices that comes from [small] institutions and I understand why, I don't know how you would account for my greatest achievement was teaching people not to grade on grammar primarily.

Francine recognized the problem of only-composition-scholar WPAs at small schools not being present in the literature, but also understood how difficult it was for WPAs in these positions to be present in the literature.

Several of the participants offered explanations, based on institutional context, for only-composition-scholar WPAs' lack of scholarly participation. Becca said that since many WPAs who are the only composition scholar are also at institutions without graduate programs in composition and rhetoric, these WPAs do not have the benefit of being intellectually invigorated by working with graduate students in their own discipline. Samantha said she felt as if her ability to contribute to the scholarship might be dismissed because of her working at a religiously-affiliated institution. And Stella has had the same concern as the WPA at a for-profit institution. Samantha and Stella may



experience a double-yoke: being a WPA and the only composition scholar, and being at institutions that may be looked down upon by other composition scholars.

The participants also pointed to workload as a contributing factor to their lack of presence in the scholarship. In reaction to the scholarship that is currently being produced, Sheila said:

When I look at [other scholars'] work, I'm like who has time to even do that.

And what planet do they live on, to have the luxury, I have the same opinion of them now that I had of literature scholars, who cares about Joseph Conrad, what does this have to do with anything, you know, that is kind of how I feel, so cut-off, I literally don't have time to do it, but cut off also.

The workload of only-composition-scholar WPAs may prohibit them from presenting and publishing scholarship.

Not all of the participants reported feeling like they were unable to produce the amount or type of scholarship that they wanted to produce. Amelia is comfortable with her scholarly output, and Tina recognized that the gap between the experiences of being a WPA and only composition scholar and the available WPA scholarship is an opportunity to make a contribution. Tina described her view of the gap in the literature and how it might be an opening for future scholarship:

I think that has been huge influence on my research too is that the field is sort of hinting at what it is like to be in these positions, but it is not complicating it enough. It is also not giving those positions enough credit. And really thinking about are they valid, and you'll get kind of the side that says: yes, these are all amazing, wonderful experiences, and everybody should do them, or you get the

other side that says they are not amazing wonderful experiences, they exploit graduate students, they cause them deep amounts of misery, and it is very rare that you see a piece that complicates that and looks at the both sides, and shows the ways that these two things are related.

Drawing on her graduate school experiences, Tina has been working on a project that she hopes will provide a more complicated view of being a graduate student WPA.

**As Consumers.** Many of the participants told me that they read scholarship differently because they are the only composition scholar and WPA at their institutions. Several participants said they are forced to turn more often to the available scholarship because they are responsible for knowing about so many different areas within the discipline of composition studies, and it is much more than they can know on their own. The participants do not have composition scholar colleagues to consult, so they consult the scholarship.

In response to my asking if she had a different relationship to composition and WPA scholarship, Tina said “she read[s] a lot more of [the scholarship]” including “a lot of things on assessment” and she “pretty much read[s] the WPA journal cover to cover.”

Combining these comments with the participants’ comments about referencing scholarship as a rhetorical strategy, as discussed in Chapter 4, I understand that there is a greater reliance on scholarship for many of the participants.

### **Confidence**

In narratives from WPAs, confidence is often discussed in the context of working with their new colleagues or working outside of their own scholarly expertise (Holt, 1999; Rose, 2005, Ballif, Davis & Mountford, 2008; Fulwiler, 2008). Like the WPAs in the published narratives, some of the participants’ confidence had changed over time.

Other participants reported feeling consistently confident in their work. The participants also discussed how having a composition scholar colleague might affect their confidence and how graduate coursework in writing program administration would help new WPAs feel more confident.

A WPA feeling out of step with the scholarship in composition and writing program administration can translate into a WPA feeling less confident about their WPA work. Francine provided a cogent explanation of how decision-making, scholarship, being a WPA, and being the only composition scholar intersected with and affected her confidence:

I think the challenge of working as a solitary WPA or solitary comp person is that your ability to be confident in your decisions is often limited by the limitations of your possible decisions [...] I often feel as if so many of the decisions that I make are compromises, they are things that we have to do, so I think over time that can slowly erode your confidence. I find, sadly, it is quite infrequent that I say: wow, that was really the best decision as opposed to that was the best decision I could make given the circumstances [...] [T]his was the first year in leading assessment that I really felt confident in talking to my colleagues because I think it has taken that long to [...] stand my ground. Tenure probably helped, but [...] I am not a very good judge of a lot of [the] fault lines [...] I feel like it has really taken me that long to get a sense of where those lines lie. And oddly enough, recognizing that has given me more confidence in being able to address them.

Francine continued her comment with an explanation of how being confident in her WPA work is related to her confidence as a scholar in the field of composition:

I think one of the interesting things for me is that as I become more confident in within my current institutional contexts and with my current colleagues, I become less confident in my role in the field [...] I don't even want to talk about what I am doing in the program, and certainly the idea of publishing on anything other than these kinds of issues as a WPA is almost off the table right now, and so I think that my confidence as a rhet and comp scholar and community member has in many ways, is an inverse relationship to my confidence level at my institution. And that seems unhealthy, over the long term.

I suspect that much of what Francine has experienced would not change with a composition scholar colleague, but what I hear in her explanation is that a composition scholar colleague could help her negotiate the "fault-lines" and help tether her to the field in ways that are difficult to do on her own.

Confidence has varied over time for other participants as well. Emma described having to go outside her college to "get any sense of what this job might look like." She also said she had "innate confidence" at one point and "didn't even feel like confidence was even a question" but that, in retrospect, she may have been over-confident. Emma has experienced a "constant process of building up and tearing down, building up and tearing down" of her confidence. Emma's comment about having to look outside to visualize her position directly connects her confidence to her being the only composition scholar.

Sheila has become more confident in her decisions because she is less convinced that "at the end of the day [...] it really matters which decisions we make." She clarified her statement by saying, "I mean if there is going to be an impact, I am not sure we will

see it, you'd have to look 20 years down the line.' So she has taken on a "just run with it" and see what happens attitude in response to some situations; she said, "If it goes horribly wrong, we will fix it and so what." She is now more "comfortable" with this approach than she was earlier in her career as a WPA. She also has found it to be a much more efficient approach to making certain types of changes.

Other participants—Deanna, Stella, and Wendy— have not experienced fluctuations in their confidence. Deanna has been consistently confident in her decisions because of her steady sense of purpose:

You make decisions based on best practices in the field so there are ethical reasons for doing things and intellectual reasons for doing things, and I have always been pretty passionate about that and trying to use my power to do good for others[...]. [Y]ou say as a WPA these are going to be the principles upon which I make my decisions and whenever I make decisions I foreground those principles[...] I think as long as I stay in the stream of those principles I have confidence. I can't control how other people understand my commitments or my arguments nor their competing or complementary values but I just felt well trained and mature enough [...] and you just get to a place where you feel satisfied and grounded in your work and if you do good work and people feel valued and appreciated that give you a confidence. My confidence comes from doing good for others and seeing the fruits of that labor for them, more than anything.

Deanna's confidence is independent of her status as the only composition scholar at her institution.

The importance of being the only composition scholar to their confidence was discussed explicitly by two of the participants—Amelia and Tina. Like Sheila, who said she would probably feel more scholarly and more intellectually challenged if she had a composition scholar colleague, Amelia wondered if she would be less confident in her decisions if she had a composition scholar colleague:

[O]ne of the interesting things is like if I was working with other composition scholars I [don't know if I would] feel as confident in my decisions as I do now, in the sense that I kind of know that this is my area of expertise, where if I was working with other more experienced composition people, I might feel like more, I might second guess or think like maybe I should rethink stuff in a way that I don't necessarily do now.

She added, with humor, “maybe that just means I am a jerk.” As someone who highly values collaboration and compromise, Amelia's feeling more confident as the only composition scholar, made her momentarily question the reason for her confidence.

Tina offered the perspective of someone who first worked as a WPA with composition scholar colleagues and then worked as a WPA who was the only composition scholar. When applying for the WPA position in which she was the only composition scholar, she was undaunted by the job descriptions that asked for applicants that could take on many large responsibilities. She said about looking at the job ads:

I thought it is not a big deal, I am sure I can do this. And went in for the interview and got the job, and was really happy about it, but I think there is a difference from being a graduate student where it is a different kind of, I still had colleagues but we weren't on the same level, or it was hard for them to think of us

as all on the same level, even though we were all in comp, but the only comp scholar and being WPA, is a different kind of loneliness, you really feel like you are an island.

Tina's point is that being confident when among peers is different than being confident when "you are an island."

Two participants—Sheila and Francine—discussed the importance of graduate education in WPA work. Sheila says that she was "not prepared for her work" as a WPA and the only composition scholar though she worked in WPA positions as a graduate student. Sheila did not have the opportunity to take courses which addressed WPA work. Francine, in contrast, felt that she was confident going into a WPA position because WPA studies was part of her coursework and she had experience in a WPA position as graduate student. Sheila's and Francine's comments tie back to Deanna's comment about the necessity of graduate studies in writing program administration.

### **Satisfaction**

I have chosen to conclude the findings with a discussion of the participants' emotional satisfaction in their positions as WPAs and the only composition scholars at their institutions. In concluding with this theme, I am following the lead of some of the participants who chose to conclude their interviews by telling me that they like their jobs. But I also want to acknowledge the participants, some of whom also told me that they are satisfied with their positions, who also made a point to tell me that they are lonely.

Several scholars have written about satisfaction as a WPA, and they have each argued that satisfaction is largely determined by the individual WPA—their expectations, preferences, and goals, while acknowledging that certain environmental factors—such as

budget control and respectful colleagues— cannot be overlooked as factors in a WPA's satisfaction (Bishop & Crossley, 1996; Micciche, 2002; O'Neill, 2008; Fulwiler, 2008; Qualley & Chiseri-Strater, 2007; McClure, 2008). The participants in this study, perhaps because all of the participants are the only composition scholars at their institutions, focused their comments on the environmental factors that influenced their satisfaction. In general, the participants are not satisfied with being the only composition scholar, but they are happy to be writing program administrators.

Several participants mentioned being lonely in their positions. When I asked Lesley to define the relationship between being a WPA and the only composition scholar at her institution, she responded:

I have struggled the last three years because, I don't know how I would define the relationship, but I know the word lonely comes to mind a lot and that I find that there is so much that I cannot take for granted that I did at other institutions because there were other comp scholars there that had the same assumptions that I did, more or less. So it is very isolating, lonely, like I said.

Her feelings of loneliness were affirmed by Stella of whom I asked the same question.

Stella said she:

think[s] a lot of it is about the loneliness, the not having colleagues—all those [WPAs with composition scholar colleagues] complain that they don't get to see each other, they don't have time, blah, blah, blah—but I think if it were valuable you would make the time, at least they have a choice of not seeing those people and can say I wish I could see them more.



Tina made a comment that was strikingly similar to Stella's as she imagined what it would be like to be in a department with other composition scholars:

[I] imagine being faculty in a department with even just four other comp specialists, there are then 3 other people that you can talk to immediately. You can walk down the hall to that person's office and say: hey, do you know x y or z? do you know any articles about X? or can you check this for me? You have those people immediately accessible to you, even if you don't feel like they are. They are physically accessible to you; whereas, if I need ideas or I need somebody [...] I have to email people and I have to wait a couple of days and write back.

When responding to the survey, Wendy said "sometimes I forget that there are other people out there in positions like mine."

Being lonely at times has not precluded the participants from being happy, in general, in their positions. Emma said that her job "has been a godsend in many ways" and it is a "blessing." When I ask Lesley if she is happy in her position and with the progress of her program, she answered with certainty: "yes, yes." Wendy's response to my question about whether she would classify her position as a positive or negative was equally positive. She said:

Oh, I love it. So positive. I love being a WPA; I have been wanting to do that since my first day of my Master's degree program, so I am doing exactly what I'd want to be doing. I would just love another full-time colleague that is in my field.

That is the only part that I miss.

Wendy is generally satisfied with her current position even if she wishes she had a composition scholar colleague.

Some of the participants, however, felt more ambiguously about their positions and work. When I asked Rihanna whether she liked her position she said it wasn't "an easy question" because she is very happy when working with students, but is not happy in her current department. She "keeps up with the job market" because she doesn't "love coming to work every day." From our conversation, I understand that part of her dissatisfaction is tied to her colleague's lack of respect for her expertise and field of study. This may be exacerbated by being the only composition scholar at her institution.

Samantha made a comment similar to Rihanna's when I asked her if she liked her job. She said:

Parts of it I absolutely love and parts of it...it drives me crazy. It would take a lot for me to leave because it works in a lot of ways. Let's see, when the dean said to me yesterday, one more year and you're more of a permanent fixture around here, it kind of made me a little nauseous. Part of me was like great and the other was like [sigh]. But at the same time I don't know what else is out there, you know what I mean? I do enjoy being a large and growing fish in a very small pond. It does appeal but at the same time there are issues with that too.

Samantha and Rihanna both recognize the positive aspects of their positions, but the benefits and rewards associated with their positions do not clearly outweigh the disadvantages and costs.

The few benefits that sometimes come with being a WPA and the only composition scholar can be enough to keep some WPAs in these positions, even when the WPA feels conflicted about those benefits. As Samantha said, "what is out there" is an

unknown. Given the level of happiness that some of the participants reported, the benefits must outweigh the disadvantages in some instances.

### **Conclusion**

The summative findings related to praxis, identity and satisfaction demonstrate how the everyday experiences of WPAs who are the only composition scholars at the institutions, discussed in Chapter 4, can sow larger concerns. The participants' comments, however, demonstrate that the enjoyable and rewarding aspects of their work can outweigh those concerns. The participants are keenly aware of the field's sometimes negative perception of their positions and are eager to see that perception complicated.

In Chapter 6, I connect, or reveal disconnections, between both sets of findings and several of the main theoretical tenets in the scholarship on writing program administration. Specifically, I address the theories of WPA work that address power and authority, collaboration, and rhetorical work as they relate to praxis. After addressing these theories, I discuss implication and make suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I return to the research questions that were the driving force behind this study, and begin to integrate the study's findings with the existing scholarship on writing program administration. I also discuss the implications of the study's findings for WPAs and writing programs, including the students that occupy them. Finally, I offer suggestions for future research and a few concluding comments.

The purpose of this study was to bring into relief the experiences of WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions and then use the new understanding of these WPAs and positions to support or challenge current theories of writing program administration. The participants in this study, many who only agreed to talk under a guarantee of anonymity, issued a mandate during their interviews that other writing program administrators and scholars acknowledge and validate the work of WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their respective institutions. Specifically, the participants called for their disciplinary colleagues to provide a more complex picture of only-composition-scholar-WPA work and to continue to increase their support of WPAs who hold those positions.

When I began this study, I established these three research questions to guide the project:

1. How does being a WPA and the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's daily work?
2. How do WPAs who are the only composition scholar at an institution establish and maintain relationships that allow them to accomplish their daily work?

3. How does being the only composition scholar at an institution affect a WPA's professional identity?

The findings in response to these questions are discussed fully in Chapters 4 and 5. In the following sections, I bring together the research questions and summarize the most significant findings.

### **How Does Being a WPA and the Only Composition Scholar at an Institution Affect a WPA's Daily Work?**

The participants talked at some length about their strategies for completing their daily work. From our conversations, I learned that:

- An only composition scholar's WPA's literary studies or humanities colleagues may not recognize that composition is a discipline or relate to the values that ground many WPAs' and composition scholars' work.
- A WPA who is the only composition scholar at her institution may be respected enough to garner them many different responsibilities, but their literary studies or humanities colleagues may not respect the work or discipline enough to see the need for more full-time faculty or support the hiring of an additional composition scholar.
- An only-composition-scholar-WPA's colleagues may trust the WPA more than the WPA is comfortable being trusted. The WPA's recommendations may not be appropriately challenged.
- Being the WPA and the only composition scholar may speed up programmatic change and the process by which change is achieved, or it may slow it down or halt it completely. The speed with which decisions can be made and instituted seems primarily determined by the values and personalities of the WPAs' colleagues.

- WPAs who are also the only composition scholar at their institutions manage their daily work and conversations by being rhetorically aware and savvy. The participants' rhetorical skills get them through conversations in which they must strategically use their expertise, such as when they reference scholarship or argue to hire a particular applicant, and when they are working with faculty who lack knowledge of teaching writing.

### **How Do WPAs Who Are the Only Composition Scholar at an Institution Establish and Maintain Relationships That Allow Them to Accomplish Their Daily Work?**

Because WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institutions cannot depend on shared disciplinary knowledge or values with a composition scholar colleague, they must build relationships with their colleagues through other means. The participants and I talked about the necessary relational work of WPAs who are the only composition scholar at the institution. From them, I learned:

- Because only-composition-scholar WPAs do not have disciplinary solidarity with any of their program colleagues, programmatic decisions that require votes may hang entirely on the only-composition-scholar-WPA's ability to build relationships with individuals within their own departments who may not recognize composition as a discipline or understand the intellectual premises of the field.
- WPAs who are the only composition scholar may have an easier time cultivating relationships with colleagues outside of their own departments and programs. This is sometimes the result of not having to contend with the conflicting values between literary scholars and composition scholars when building the relationships, and sometimes it is the result of being better able to relate to other colleagues' research methods or finding someone who shares other interests and experiences.

- The WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions may worry about the effect of their relationships on their tenure applications and may adjust their speech or behavior to protect themselves.
- Only-composition-scholar WPAs may value their cross-campus relationships, but they may also feel lonely in their home departments and programs.

**How Does Being the Only Composition Scholar at an Institution Affect a WPA's Professional Identity?**

- Only-composition-scholar WPAs may feel conflicted about being a WPA and the only composition scholar at their institutions. They may be comfortable with their work because it is what they always imagined doing and who they are as WPAs reflects their values. However, they may also be uncomfortable with their role as the sole expert and the lack of peer input.
- Praxis is valued among only-composition-scholar WPAs; however, being the only composition scholar may deter praxis. The colleagues of WPAs who are the only composition scholar may not be ready for programmatic discussions or changes that would help the WPA establish praxis, and the WPA does not have knowledgeable peers with which to collaborate and reflect on their work.
- WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions may feel disenfranchised as scholars, or as if they are losing their identities as scholars. These WPAs may view their work and conversations as too far behind the scholarly recommendations or trends to be a contribution to the field.

- Only-composition-scholar WPAs, however, may be highly confident that their positions are valuable to the field at-large.

As previously mentioned, it is difficult to ascertain which findings are more or less attributable to the WPAs' status as the only composition scholars at their institutions. I simply followed the participants' lead in establishing the connections that are reflected in my summaries of the findings. If they connected their experiences and reflections to their being the only composition scholar, I also connected them. In instances where I impose a connection, I relied on contextual cues within the individual interviews.

Overall, the interviews with WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions revealed a host of paradoxes, such as being valuable but not always feeling like they had something valuable to say in their own scholarship or being hired because of their expertise in teaching writing and then feeling as if that expertise is sometimes dismissed. Though the findings may seem contradictory at times, many of them can exist as simultaneously because of the complex nature of writing program administration and the contexts in which the participants work.

### **Talking Back to the Scholarship on Writing Program Administration**

I have chosen to talk back to the literature through the lens of praxis because each theme addressed by the participants ties back to praxis; it is the ideal to which WPAs aspire. For example, when the participants discussed a difference in terminology with their literary scholar colleagues, they were essentially talking about how a difference in language kept them from achieving praxis by disrupting conversations. And when the participants talked about collaborating with colleagues in other department and programs, they were talking about striving for praxis by reaching outside of their own departments



and programs. By working with these colleagues, the participants were able to conduct meaningful research and collaborate in the ways called for in much of WPA literature. As these examples demonstrate, the value of praxis was ever present in the discussions of the participants' work.

According to the WPAs in this study, WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions have a harder time achieving praxis through their daily work than WPAs who have a composition scholar colleague. Bushman (1999) asked that WPAs look at writing program administration through a pragmatic lens in their work towards praxis. WPAs should continually reflect on their actions, and from those reflections, WPAs will "advance new disciplinary knowledge." WPAs then take the new disciplinary knowledge and enact it, to continue the cycle of practice and reflection. Bushman's path to praxis may be a difficult one for WPAs who are the only composition scholar because their positions may not allow them to act and reflect in the ways that Bushman described. Thus, WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institution may feel destined to fall short of achieving praxis. Of course, WPAs who have composition scholar colleagues may face institutional constraints, such as a composition scholar colleague who is combative or has different goals for their writing program. In Michelle Ballif, Diane Davis and Roxanne Mountford's *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition* (2008), Cynthia Selfe said the hardest part of her job was "trying to live [her] theory." WPAs who are the only composition scholar may have a more difficult time "trying to live [their] theories" because they do not have the opportunity to reflect with a knowledgeable peer within their own institutional context. Not being able to reflect with such a colleague may keep the WPA from making

discoveries through reflection and then transferring what they learn from reflection back in their administrative work.

### **Power, Authority, and Praxis**

Realized or denied power and authority can determine the direction and nature of an only-composition-scholar WPA's efforts towards praxis. While uncompromised power and authority may seem like an ideal route to praxis, it is not the case because unchecked power and authority are in direction conflict with the feminist approaches to WPA work that many WPAs hope to enact. And, as highlighted by the participants in this study, WPAs often feel a strong commitment to members of their university communities that may have less power with their own university systems. Yet, WPAs may have to exercise their power and authority in order to advocate for these disadvantaged members of their communities. The relationship between power, authority, and praxis is complex leading WPAs to question how and when they use their power and authority.

Power is the theme I am addressing first because it has such a long tenure in the scholarship of writing program administration and because the issue of power, in some form, was raised by each participant. Interestingly, participants' experiences and the literature aligned most clearly around the issue of power. Ed White's landmark essay, "Use It or Lose it" (1991), called on WPAs to recognize and use their power, whether power through expertise or position, to improve their writing programs. One of the participants in this study, Ethan, said White's essay was instructive when negotiating the needs of his program with administrators and colleagues at his institution. He credited White for giving him the language and spirit necessary to speak out against poor

decisions being made that affected his writing program. In her essay, “Two Things” (2008), Patti Kurtz talks about the problem of being visible and the person “held accountable” for their programs successes while working with teachers and other administrators that are “unwilling to listen to or value [the WPA’s] suggestions” (61). The participants also said this was a problem in completing their daily work. A WPA may have expert authority and positional authority, but she may be less successful because her work is dependent on the work of her colleagues. Doug Hesse (2002) says, “No other administrative position so commingles agency with disciplinary knowledge” (p. 503), and in their interviews, the participants shared stories and examples of how this commingling of expectations facilitated or deterred the completion of their daily work. According to the participants, their work or program changes may be deferred especially if the participants’ workload is overwhelming and their responsibilities extend beyond their own expertise.

The participants also noted that there are times when they are able to influence a change or decision based on their expert and positional authority, but just as interesting was when they were not able to use that authority. The inconsistency with which their power was recognized was frustrating for some of the participants. And some participants said unchecked power was equally discomfiting. Having a composition colleague, according to the participants, may temper these extremes. The literature reports a complex view of power and writing program administration, and the participants’ reflected a complex relationship to power as WPAs who are also the only composition scholar at their institutions. The ways in which WPAs are and are not able to use their

power and authority, and when they are comfortable with their use, translate into attempts to achieve praxis that may or may be realized.

The scholarship on feminist writing program administration advocates for shared authority and leadership. This scholarship makes the argument that writing program administration does not have to be power-driven or hierarchical in order to be effective. This is an area of the scholarship that I did not expect to correlate well with the work of WPAs who are also the only composition scholars at their institutions. The interviews confirmed my assumption that shared authority in a writing program is limited by discrepancies in scholarly knowledge. Many of the participants said they would like a colleague with whom they could share administrative responsibilities. The two participants, Amelia and Emma, who worked as part of an administrative pair reported that they are not on equal expert footing with their administrative partners. In both instances, the administrative partner is not a composition scholar. The difference in knowledge and commitment to the field of composition keeps the administrative partnerships from being consistently fruitful. I should note, however, that one of the participants is happier in her partnership than the other because of working as part of a different kind of administrative structure where she and her partner have mutual respect for each other's work. But even in this happy pairing, the participant felt as if she sometimes carries a heavier burden.

Many of the participants reported working collaboratively with colleagues outside of their own departments and programs and seemed to place a high value on these collaborative relationships. But the collaborations within their programs proved more stressful. From the participants' interview comments, I am able to ascertain that most of

them are not in positions to act only as “stewards” (Latterell, 2003) of their programs. I also learned from the participants that advising them to work “among well-trained, professional writing experts” was not realistic (Hult, 1995). Thomas Amorose (2000) said this advice does not work for small school WPAs, and the same is true for WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their schools, regardless of the school’s size. Only-composition-scholar WPAs, even those at larger institutions, often do not have the option of hiring another composition scholar. And new graduate students who hope to enter writing program administration often do not have a choice between institutions with or without compositions scholars. According to the participants, only-composition-scholar WPAs who wish to establish praxis through an alignment of feminist practice and theory as discussed in the literature may be facing an impossible task.

### **Rhetorical and Relational Work, and Praxis**

Rhetorical and relational work are daily components of WPA work. Through rhetorical and relational work WPAs create and manage situations and relationships to foster praxis. Unfortunately, being the only composition scholar may necessitate WPAs manage rhetorical situations and relationships in ways that are not conducive to praxis if those approaches to management conflict with the WPAs disciplinary knowledge. On the other hand, successful rhetorical and relational work may be the main means by which any WPA is able to achieve praxis as much WPA work is persuasive and depends on the WPA acting as a nexus of information and positions.

WPAs who are the only composition scholars and WPAs with composition scholars are likely equally immersed in relational work; the difference for WPAs who are the only composition scholars is that none of their relational work, at their institutions, is with another composition scholar. The participants in this study echoed Randall McClure

(2008), and said they spend a large amount of time building and maintaining relationships in order to “foster understanding of and garner support for [their] work and those teaching composition courses” (McClure, 2008). Forming alliances and working to make writing a priority among individuals with other primary interests (Ballif et al., 2008) was also a common goal of the participants’ daily work. The participants’ experiences and interview comments aligned with the writing program administration literature on relational work, with the exception of the participants’ reporting that they worked more easily with colleagues outside of their own departments and programs. This phenomenon is not fully discussed in the literature. Because the phenomenon of WPAs building relationships in other departments and programs in lieu of relationships in their home departments and programs, we do not have a full picture of how this decisions affects only-composition-scholar WPAs’ ability to achieve praxis.

To manage difficult rhetorical situations or to keep good situations from turning bad, the participants relied heavily on specific rhetorical strategies that did not always align with their understanding of the field or beliefs about writing program administration. The participants reported that conversations about hiring were especially complex rhetorically because the participants had the expertise to evaluate candidates who would teach composition but that they were not always sanctioned to participate in those conversations, or to use their expertise in them. They also experienced a dilemma when deciding whether to cite composition scholarship. Discussions about pedagogy or curricula might be helped if those participating in the conversation knew about relevant composition scholarship and could discuss it in the context of their own institutional contexts. However, the participants in this study told me they have to be very careful

about when and how they cite or bring in scholarship from the field. In these instances, the WPA participants are, as described by Donna Qualley and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater (2007), “split at the root.” WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institutions have to occupy rhetorically the position of expert and non-expert. Rebecca Taylor Fremo (2007) said the rhetorical situations of small school WPA work are often difficult because they require that the WPA be both persuasive and informative at all times. The participants of this study helped me see this as a concern that is also experienced by WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institutions, even if their institutions are mid-sized or larger. If successfully navigating rhetorical situations is fundamental to a WPA establishing praxis, I have a hard time imagining being “split at the root” as a positive factor in non-composition-scholar WPAs’ efforts towards praxis. However, without allowing for the split, these WPAs may have to deny or respond to situations in ways that also deter praxis by making the work of program change, faculty development, and other areas of writing program administration more difficult.

### **Identity and Praxis**

How and to what degree a WPA is able to achieve praxis plays a large role in how they conceptualize themselves as WPAs. The participants in this study who defined their success by their ability to honor their own values reported a greater sense of praxis. For example, Deanna and Sheila felt established praxis through advocating for disadvantaged populations. But for most of the participants, including Deanna and Sheila, being non-composition-scholar WPAs was taking a toll on their scholarly and professional identities.

One outcome of being an only-composition-scholar WPA that may negatively affect praxis is loneliness. Laura Micciche (2002) called on WPAs to be more critical in their use of the narrative of loneliness, which she defined as the stories WPAs tell that depict and reinforce the idea that WPA work is necessarily lonely. She asked WPAs to redraw the boundaries of their identities in such a way that they see “[themselves] in connection to, rather than in distinct from” (p. 447) those they work with but who are different from them. Micciche’s concern was that WPAs might “mythologize” loneliness in such a way that they “expect” it and can no longer “intervene” in the “conditions that create” that loneliness (p. 447). The WPAs who participated in this study said that their positions as the only composition scholar at their schools are often lonely. These same participants, however, did not neglect to acknowledge the ways that their positions are fulfilling. My impression from my interviews is that the WPAs who participated in this study are continually taking measures to intervene in the conditions that create their loneliness, but that much of the time those conditions are beyond their reasonable control. WPAs often find community outside of their own institutions at venues such as the Conference of College Composition and Communication annual convention, the Council of Writing Program Administrators conference, and the WPA-L. The participants in this study, however, still felt isolated from current conversations in the field. They reported feeling as if they did not have a perspective or research on teaching writing or writing program administration that would be interesting to others in the field of composition. The literature on writing program administration, to my knowledge, does not address this phenomenon and its impact on the field and writing programs. For WPAs who value the shared knowledge, collaborative disciplinary contributions, and shared authority,



isolation is not ideal for praxis, and the reflexive relationship between praxis and identity may reinforce the isolation.

### **Implications for WPAs**

This study provides descriptions and reflections on a type of WPA position that has not been adequately addressed in the current scholarship. The participants' responses comprise the first set of empirical data produced about the work of only-composition-scholar WPAs. As such, the data provides detailed lived experiences against which the current literature can be evaluated. Through this comparison, which yielded both similarities and differences, WPAs will have a better understanding of how their own positions fit into the larger framework of writing program administration.

Situating the work of WPAs who are the only composition scholar at their institutions within the subdiscipline of writing program administration is an especially important step in the field since it legitimizes the work and positions. This study shows the WPA community that WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions are doing good work in sometimes less than ideal conditions, and that WPAs in these positions are committed to the long-term health of the discipline of composition. With greater understanding of the positions, the historical practice of warning graduate students away from these positions may wane or be reconsidered. Changing how graduate students and teachers talk about these positions will support graduate students who enter these positions and WPAs who are currently in them.

One way that only-composition-scholar WPAs contribute to the discipline is by building relationships outside of their home departments and programs. As these WPAs continue to do this work, the definition of writing program administration may be

impacted, and future WPAs may experience a greater expectation to also build and maintain these relationships, even if this expectation comes at the expense of relationships within their home departments and requires a more intimate knowledge of university structures and politics. Further, the relationships with colleagues from across campus may also increase visibility for the intellectual work of writing program administration.

I hope that the study also elucidates the ways in which WPAs in these positions might need additional support from their WPA peers at other institutions specifically because they are alone. This support is needed whether the WPA is at a small school, large public university, for-profit or religiously affiliated institution. WPAs who are the only composition scholars are at many types of schools, but their missions are essentially the same as those of WPAs who have composition scholar colleagues.

### **Implications for Writing Programs and Their Students**

Individuals who are not WPAs, but who care about the success of writing programs should be interested in this study because it details the ways that WPAs who are the only composition scholars are successful in their positions, and the ways that they may be unnecessarily and unproductively challenged in their positions. These WPAs are hired for their expertise in writing instruction and are asked to assume a large number of responsibilities that often span multiple sub-disciplines within the field of composition. As such, they must do the extra work of acquiring knowledge in new areas of study while educating their colleagues. These WPAs do not have any appropriately educated colleagues with whom to share this work.

When an only-composition-scholar WPA's work is undervalued due to lack of understanding and the WPA experiences conflicts with colleagues over values and resources, support for their ideas may be diminished. Without consistent intra-departmental or intra-program support, necessary decisions and changes may be slowed or halted, and any pedagogical or programmatic changes that are intended to improve writing instruction at their institutions may be delayed.

As only-composition-scholar WPAs seek and build relationships outside of their home departments and programs, writing programs and writing students will be affected by programmatic and research efforts generated from these relationships. While these relationships were reported as positive by the participants, a WPA's time and energy are somewhat finite and these relationships may draw a WPA's attention away from their home department or programs. This diversion of a WPA's attention may or may not be advantageous depending on the specific needs of the students, programs, and institutions.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study took me into the work lives of WPAs who are the only composition scholars at their institutions, and it allowed me to do a comparison of the participants' experiences with the current scholarship on writing program administration. This study, however, did not answer more complex questions about how the various aspects of the participants' experiences relate to each other. As such, I suggest future research address the following questions:

- How do the colleagues of WPAs who are the only composition scholar perceive of their WPA's work? Are these WPAs as successful as ambassadors of the discipline as the WPA hopes they are? This particular question was originally part of this study

but due to issues of confidentiality, the sensitive nature of some of the participants' contributions, and the need to manage the scope of this study, it was not addressed. Several participants recommended that colleagues' perceptions be investigated as a separate study. When asked in the interviews if a study of colleague's perceptions of WPAs would be a valuable contribution, the participants overwhelmingly said yes.

- What are the long-term political and programmatic effects of WPAs who are the only composition scholars working more easily with colleagues outside their home departments or programs?
- What is the effect of only-composition-scholar WPA work on the national effort to put into practice proposed definitions of intellectual work and scholarship?
- How does a program having a WPA who is the only composition scholar affect the development of upper-level writing curricula?
- How is the confidence of a WPA who is the only composition scholar affected by working in a department in which the WPA's colleagues are hostile or dismissive of composition as a discipline?

Any of these questions can be pursued with the ultimate goal of reaching data saturation about writing program administration as the only composition scholar at an institution.

### **Final Reflection**

While it might not be reflected in the portions of the interviews quoted in Chapters 4 and 5, the insights and humor of the participants who participated in this study made me even more committed to documenting their experiences and reflections. At the same time that I was overwhelmed by the participants' intelligence and wit, I was also overwhelmed by the deeply institutionalized nature of the problems with which the

participants contend on a regular basis. The discipline of composition is still fighting to be acknowledged or respected in many institutions, and I am concerned that individual composition scholars are doing this work alone. However, even if the field is accepted by all faculty as a legitimate field of study, the values held by composition scholars and their colleagues can be disparate, which may carry its own consequences.

When Tina said that she left like “an island,” she captured the physical, disciplinary and emotional nature of being a WPA and the only composition scholar. The better the data and literature on WPA work reflects the differences between working as a WPA with composition scholars and as a WPA without them—the differences between being on an island and being an island—the better informed all current and future WPAs will be about the work of writing program administration.

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## Appendix A

### Email Sent to the Writing Program Administrators Listserv (WPA-L)

Dear WPA-L Colleagues,

Earlier this year, there was a strand on the list about unconventional paths into our profession and discipline. I am one of those people who haven't exactly taken the expected path into a WPA position. After many years on this list, and a quite a few as a WPA, I am now mid-way through my dissertation, and hoping for your assistance.

My dissertation is on the daily work of WPAs who are the only composition scholars on their campus. I am hoping to gather some initial, general data via survey from WPAs who are or have been in such positions. (For this study, a composition scholar is someone with an advanced degree in rhetoric and composition or teaching writing, or someone who has completed the equivalent through study and publication.)

If you are a WPA and the only composition scholar on your campus OR you have previously been in such a position, I would appreciate your taking my survey about the work you do. The survey is brief, and should take fewer than 5 minutes to complete.

Here's the link:

[https://iup.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_bBez5w5l8mgDucc](https://iup.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bBez5w5l8mgDucc)

Thank you in advance for your time and support. If you'd like more information about my project or the survey, I'd be happy to provide it. Feel free to contact me off-list, [r.gallaher@iup.edu](mailto:r.gallaher@iup.edu) or [reg@nwmissouri.edu](mailto:reg@nwmissouri.edu).

Best,

Robin Gallaher

PhD Candidate, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Composition Coordinator, Northwest Missouri State University



## Appendix B

### Survey Distributed to WPA-L Members

#### INTRODUCTION TO THE SURVEY

This survey is designed to collect general information about writing program administrators' (WPAs') experiences of being the only composition scholar in their home departments, including how being the only composition scholar has or has not impacted their daily work.

Please use the following definitions when responding to the survey:

A **WPA** holds an administrative position charged with the development and maintenance of a writing program. This position is often associated with first-year composition and writing-across-the curriculum programs, and writing centers. But the position may carry a variety of titles. For the purpose of this survey, the title is less important than the survey-taker's self-identification as a WPA.

A **composition scholar** has an advanced degree in rhetoric and composition, the teaching of writing, or similar education, or someone who has completed substantial independent study and publication of the scholarship on teaching writing.

**Daily work** is the work WPAs complete on a regular basis as well as work associated with special projects. The term daily is included to indicate the ordinary but meaningful work that may go unnoticed and that may be considered maintenance work.

Because your survey response will be anonymous, you cannot withdraw your participation in the survey after the survey has been submitted.

**Estimated Completion Time: 5 minutes**

#### SURVEY

- 1) Are you currently or have you been a WPA and also the only composition scholar at the institution?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
- 2) How many years have you worked, or did you work, as a WPA who was the only composition scholar?
  - a. 0-3 years
  - b. 4-7 years
  - c. 8-11 years
  - d. 12+ years

- 3) What is your gender?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  
- 4) When completing daily work, how often does (did) your position as the WPA and the only composition scholar enter your thinking?
  - a. Very frequently
  - b. Frequently
  - c. Infrequently
  - d. Never
  
- 5) How relevant is or was being the only composition scholar to how you complete(d) your daily work as a WPA? For example, how much did it influence your choice of rhetorical stance, your diction, or how you reference(d) to composition scholarship?
  - a. Very relevant
  - b. Quite relevant
  - c. Somewhat relevant
  - d. Not relevant
  
- 6) How important is being the only composition scholar to the professional relationships you have or had with your faculty colleagues as the WPA?
  - a. Very important
  - b. Quite important
  - c. Somewhat important
  - d. Not important
  
- 7) Has the position of WPA and being the only composition scholar been adequately—in quantity or quality—addressed in WPA scholarship?
  - a. Yes
  - b. Maybe
  - c. No
  - d. Do not know

**You have now completed the survey. Thank you for your time.**

<p>If you are willing to be interviewed for a study on how being the only composition scholar affects your daily work as a WPA, please select NEXT.</p> <p>You may also choose NEXT if you would like to learn more about the study before deciding to participate.</p> <p>NEXT button}</p>	<p>If you are not willing to be interviewed for a study on how being the only composition scholar affects or affected your daily work as a WPA, please select SUBMIT.</p> <p>{SUBMIT button}</p>
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(For those who chose NEXT.)

I appreciate your willingness to participate further in my study or to learn more about it.

Name:	_____I am willing to be interviewed for the study.
Institution:	_____I would like to learn more about the study.
Email:	.
Phone:	

## Appendix C

### Only-Composition-Scholar WPA Interview Script and Topics

Before we begin, I would like to request that you not refer to other individuals such as colleagues or former colleagues by name. You may use a pseudonym for individuals you talk about or simply refer to individuals with general phrases such as “faculty colleague” or “fellow administrator.”

#### The Definition of, and Identification as an Only-Composition-Scholar WPA

I'd like to talk a little bit about the role WPA when the WPA is the only composition scholar at an institution. For one of the survey questions you indicated how often you thought about being a WPA and the only composition scholar, I'd like to talk more about your response.

- Meaning of the phrase Only-Composition-Scholar WPA
- Feelings about being an Only-Composition-Scholar WPA
- Potential alternative phrases

#### The Relevancy of Being an Only-Composition-Scholar WPA to Daily Work

I'd like to talk a little bit about the relevancy of being the only composition scholar at your institution to the work you do.

- The only composition scholar position and the role of a WPA
- Effect on your decision-making
- Effect on process, products and outcomes of daily work
- Relevancy to colleagues' work
- Potential influence of having another compositionist colleague on your daily work

#### The Impact of Being a Being a WPA and the Only Composition Scholar on Relationships with Colleagues

Now, I'd like to talk about your relationships with your colleagues.

- Potential influence of having another compositionist colleague on relationships with colleagues
- Satisfaction with colleague relationships
- Worry over relationships with faculty as an only-composition-scholar WPA
- Potential description of WPA work from colleagues' perspective and how it relates to the interview participant being the only composition scholar.

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent Form

#### On Being an Island: A Grounded Theory Study of Being a WPA and the Only Composition Scholar at an Institution

The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

The purpose of this study is to research how being the only composition at your institution affects your daily work of writing program administration. Areas of focus will include the impact on your daily conversations, and written correspondence, with special attention given to the overall impact of being the only composition scholar on your relationships with your colleagues and your professional identity.

Participation in the study includes:

- being interviewed no more than three times for no longer than two hours each time  
and, if you are agreeable,
- sharing examples of written daily work such as emails and other written documents.

You may elect to participate without sharing written documents.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with me. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying the Project Director, Dr. Michael M. Williamson, or me in personal conversation, by telephone call or by email. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below.

**Researcher:**

Robin Gallaher  
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*This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional*

*Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (phone: 724-357-7730).*

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:**

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

**Name** (*please print*): \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone #:** \_\_\_\_\_

Best days and times to reach you: \_\_\_\_\_

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Investigator's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_