Affirming Difference: Inhabiting the WPA Otherwise

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A unique line of WPA scholarship highlights the bodily, mental, and emotional toll of administering writing programs, which has prompted analysis of the institutional mechanisms that produce frustration in WPA work. Writing programs are comprised of a wide range of (non)human institutional forces in often incoherent and unsustainable ways, which works to alienate individual administrators from their institutionalized subject-position because it prevents WPAs from recognizing themselves as good, or even coherent, administrators. In response, I argue that this multiplicity can be affirmed as a means of experimenting with the unique dynamics it makes available, but only if the recognizability of the "good WPA" is deliberately obscured. Thus, this affirmatively oriented mode of experimentation relies on, ironically enough, a careful practice of "not knowing" what it means to be a good WPA.

Leon Coburn's 1982 "Notes of a freshman Freshman Comp director *or* Lasciate ogni Esperanza void ch' entrate"[1] may very well serve as the hyperbolic Ur-source of what I have come to call "frustration narratives." This genre of writing program administration (WPA) scholarship addresses problems related to WPA work through quasi-personal and critically-oriented narratives that are often sardonic, parodic, and/or self-deprecating. Coburn not only invokes Dante's hellish signage in his title but also characterizes his single year as the director of composition at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas as one "of frustration, anger, and defeat." He continues, "no matter how bleak the summary sounds, the day-to-day reality was much worse" (9). The six-page article proceeds as a chronological litany of everything that went wrong: lack of funding, bureaucratic logjams, scheduling nightmares, and even two pregnant secretaries. He follows his account with a brief reflection on how to survive the job: find allies and slowly wear down the (enemy) faculty in a war of attrition. While Coburn does offer the caveat that directors have a unique opportunity to significantly impact students and he does offer a few "silver linings," he goes out of his way to note that he only includes this section because his wife insisted that the original draft was too negative.

1. Dante's "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."

While Coburn's account is hilariously and rather self-consciously over-the-top, it nonetheless enacts and perpetuates a commonplace vision of writing program administration. WPAs are often tasked with managing massive programs with insufficient institutional support and garner little professional legitimacy for the trouble. Even a cursory survey of WPA scholarship shows that "frustration narratives" are neither new nor rare.[2] Yet, they have gained little traction outside of explicitly WPA-centric conversations. Laura Micciche demonstrates as much by the sheer fact that, in writing to a *College English* audience in 2002 about this kind of scholarship, she needed to provide an extended introduction and a direct plea to make her case that the disappointment of WPAs is worth taking seriously by a broader audience.

Even when they are read, "frustration narratives" are often and all too quickly dismissed as a kind of subculturally sanctioned form of whining. Wendy Bishop and Gay Lynn Crossley offer a glimpse of this problematic attitude by sharing a comment made by an anonymous reviewer on an initial article submission outlining Bishop's WPA experience, an experience which resulted in her resignation. In it, the reviewer laments, "I am disturbed at how easily the authors permit themselves to present this story as another victim-narrative that you hear so often in accounts of composition, of WPAs, and even of women WPAs" (74). In addition to exposing bald sexism, the rare opportunity to see an anonymous comment like this makes a predominant bias explicit and demonstrates that this bias misses what these narratives do rhetorically: they are primarily written to provoke dialogue about frustration in WPA labor and to make that work acknowledged, engaged, and transformed. Despite these efforts, the general conditions of WPA work are either ignored or dismissed – often along gendered and racial lines.[3]

The general sense that writing program administration is undervalued and emotionally taxing has not changed much in recent years. In her 2018 WPA plenary address, Susan Miller-Cochran echoes many of the key arguments made in "frustration scholarship" over the past thirty years: writing directors are constantly pulled in multiple and competing directions that often directly pit their scholarly, ethical, and pedagogical commitments against a plurality of institutionalized expectations. Meaghan Brewer and Kristen di Gennero confirm the still-marginalized place of composition studies in general, and WPA labor more specifically, in many English departments by bringing to light the "microaggressions" that invalidate the worth of composition studies

2. Just to list a handful: Bloom (1992), Bishop and Crossley (1996), Smoke (1998), George (1999), McGee (2005), Craig and Perryman-Clark (2011, 2016), Malenczyk (2012), DeGenaro (2018).

3. See Holbrook and Craig and Perryman-Clark.

relative to literary studies – especially in its "service" roles. William DeGenero filters his experience as a WPA through his identification with Kurt Cobain's frustration with the music industry. It's been nearly forty years since Maxine Hairston predicted "winds of change" in 1982; and while there has certainly been quite a bit of change for the field writ large, the frustration narratives published today do not look all that different from those published ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. If anything, the disappointment they express has intensified in our increasingly corporate climate.

While frustration narratives are common, surprisingly enduring, and consistent, very little has been written about them. That is, very few scholars have addressed the genre as a genre. There are at least three articles that break this norm: Jeanne Gunner's "Ideology, Theory, and the Genre of Writing Programs," Micciche's "More than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work," and Matthew Heard's "Cultivating Sensibility in Writing Program Administration." While on the surface, they seem to only share a common concern for the disappointment engendered by writing program administration (which is certainly not uncommon in WPA studies), they stand out in at least two ways. First, unlike frustration narratives, these three articles largely take the difficulty engendered by the WPA position as an empirical given in order to focus their attention on the structures that produce this marginalization and frustration. Second, Gunner, Micciche, and Heard demonstrate, in their own ways, where and how WPAs might mobilize those institutional structures that tend to produce frustration differently.

Gunner and Micciche published their work in 2002 and Heard published his in 2008. Gunner and Heard's work have barely been cited at all; and, while Micciche's article has been frequently cited, the vast majority of that scholarship extends on her theory of emotions to make an argument about some other profession (e.g. Writing Center Administration in Jackson et. al.) or dimension of rhetoric and composition (e.g., the academic job market in Sano-Franchini). No one has yet adequately engaged Micciche analysis of the structures that produce frustration in WPA labor or attended to how those structures might be remobilized. We've missed an opportunity. Micciche offers a rich account of how emotion, labor, and writing program administration intersect, while Heard and Gunner imagine powerful ways of engaging and re-mobilizing the structures that produce WPA identity and emotion. But they need to be updated and rethought; this conversation is too important to become relegated to the archives of composition studies.

In advancing this inquiry, I argue that the structural dynamics of WPA labor that tend to produce frustration can be made otherwise and even affirmed. Such affirmation would deliberately blur the boundaries that separate individual WPAs from their institutionalized subject position so as to experiment with

the unique and unexpected combinations that a singular multiplicity makes available. Following a philosophical tradition that runs through Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Gilles Deleuze, I argue that an affirmative style of inhabiting the university is inclined to cultivate a lighter, and perhaps more joyful, affective disposition toward the ever-shifting and often uncontrollable dynamics of the university. I conclude by considering an example from my time as an Assistant Director of First-Year English (FYE) as part of a massive overhaul of our state flagship university's general education requirements. Our first year writing program was tasked with implementing a new learning outcome for the teaching of information literacy in an existing first-year composition course. I turn to this example because it illuminates the dynamics that intersect, and thereby multiply, writing programs. The role I played in the overhaul allows me to uniquely highlight some of the very local opportunities our WPA had in affirming the differences that emerged during the process.

Institutional Affect-Machines

Micciche's "More than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work" gives an excellent account for why frustration is such a regular feature of WPA labor. Disappointment, she argues, is produced within institutional contexts because the historical, institutional, and ideological forces that shape how writing programs are inscribed within universities are often at odds with the values and beliefs that fundamentally inform many WPAs' vision of what writing programs should be. Relying explicitly on Marx's concept of alienated labor, Micchiche argues that the relative powerlessness of WPAs to meaningfully shape the programs they direct creates an "affective dissonance" between labor and laborer. The repetition of this dissonance can lead WPAs to "become *accustomed* to, even to *expect*, disappointment," which, Micciche rightly warns, restricts their ability to make productive connections to others and radically contracts the horizons of what they deem to be possible (447; emphasis original).

What is key about Micciche's analysis is that she shows how far disappointment cuts into the WPA experience. Because "work is one of the key processes through which we develop a sense of self-worth and potentiality," the institutionalized disappointment that Micciche addresses is not simply the superficial frustration caused by the kinds of logistical blockages that pop up in any environment (437). Rather, this type of disappointment arises from a deeply set self-alienation. In other words, what "gets disappointed" in these situations is our ability to see ourselves as WPAs–or at least as good WPAs. When our most fundamental commitments to writing scholarship and instruction–commitments that likely drove us to and through graduate school–are rendered incompatible with how our writing programs are inscribed in our

universities, we are put in positions where we feel like our only options are futile resistance or resignation.

In response, Micciche proposes that we broaden the dialogue and material analysis of disappointment in WPA studies to include the emotional dimension of administration in the academy more generally in an effort to improve the material conditions that produce disappointment.[4] I thoroughly support these aims. They can also be supplemented; indeed, Micciche's work sets the stage for imagining such supplements. What is particularly enabling about her scholarship is that she sketches out the complexity at work in the emotional mechanisms she analyzes. One of the most recurring claims made in frustration narratives is that the sheer number of competing demands made on writing programs tend to produce what Trudy Smoke calls the "paradox of powerless power" (93). The writing program may be officially structured into the university in one way, but it is pressed upon by a plurality of forces that shape and complicate that place, multiplying it as those demands provoke its boundaries to oscillate. The program is one thing for its director, another for its (often contingent) faculty, another for upper-level administrators, another for non-departmental faculty, and many other things for the wide range of students that pass through it. Micciche reveals that disappointment is produced by a dissonance between this multiplicity and the complex identity positions that individual WPAs bring to it.

Building on this insight, I turn to the language of "affect" to describe how disappointment not only manifests as the personal experience of individual WPAs, but also as an institutional condition of writing programs. Whereas the language of emotion is likely to draw to mind the internal experience of individual WPAs (something I by no means wish to discount), the language of affect better directs us to see those feelings as symptoms of broader and more external sets of relations (the circumstances that produce the "I feel"). Furthermore, while Micciche primarily relies on the language of emotion, "affect" speaks to her titular claim that disappointment is "more than just a feeling." [5] The way she describes disappointment as something institutionally produced within

4. Rebecca Jackson et al. do exactly this by taking Micciche up on her call and exploring the emotional labor of writing center directors (2016).

5. Micciche distinguishes between affect and emotion in Doing Emotion, arguing that emotion better "evokes the potential to enact and construct, name and defile, become and undo–to perform meaning and to stand as a marker for meanings that get performed" whereas affect speaks to the more general "preverbal, visceral conditions that encompass emotions and feeling" (14-15), though she acknowledges that she's not set on maintaining a rigorous distinction. My wrinkle on the affect/emotion relationship is important here only insofar as it complicates the boundaries between the individual-WPA and the WPA-position.

WPAs, and as something that folds back onto WPAs to shape their potential power, resonates with the concept of affect, at least within an intellectual tradition passing from Spinoza through Deleuze to, more recently, Brian Massumi and Erin Manning. In this tradition of thought, emotion tends to center on individuals and their feelings while affect points to a kind of pre-individual intersection of relations (both human and nonhuman). These thinkers tend to describe this pre-individual intersection of relations as a body; a body that is capable of affecting and being affected by others. What I'm suggesting is that the language of affect allows us to see writing programs as pre-individual bodies, whereas it makes less sense to talk about the emotional state of a writing program (for more on this, see Edbauer, 2009). This affect/emotion distinction is an important tool for exploring how the machinery of writing programs can be re-appropriated to produce different sets of relations and productions. In the next section, I turn to two scholars who effectively experiment with just this sort of appropriation in an attempt to turn disadvantage into advantage.

Rewiring the Machinery

Gunner, like Micciche, begins with the premise that writing programs are inextricably caught up within larger ideological discourses that "are not entirely commensurate with a given course or courses" (Gunner "Ideology" 7). Yet, she argues that despite this historical and institutional disadvantage, the sheer heterogeneity of ideological discourses that traffic through writing programs can actually be valuable.

Gunner advises WPAs to observe moments of instability in ideological discourses as they circulate through the university, noting that "moments of ideological ambivalence" may create opportunities for WPAs to tie their initiatives "to more culturally privileged and hence more powerful discourses… so that [they] might have material force" (15-16). For instance, Gunner points to a moment when she tapped into the language of "cultural diversity" that had been gaining sway at her institution. Gunner mobilized this language to disrupt the connection between writing and "correctness," which arose from discourses centered around colonial civility and individualism. The momentary power imbalance between these discourses, and the subsequent ambiguity it created, provided an opportunity for Gunner to articulate her initiative within a (temporarily) more institutionally powerful discourse.

Gunner, however, does not attend to the affective dimension of her approach, and we are left to think through how a tactical orientation to writing program administration bears on the affective machinery of the writing program. I write "tactical" (a word she does not use) because she effectively configures WPAs as astute observers of an ideological battlefield, looking for

discord on which to capitalize.[6] I see at least two non-exclusive ways in which a tactical orientation could contribute to an affective disposition. The obvious upside is that Gunner, through a kind of institutional jujitsu, articulates a smart way of turning disadvantage into advantage. Simply put, increasing the program's ability to realize its will is empowering–and empowerment can lead to the kind of hopefulness that expands and diversifies the horizons of what we deem possible.

Tactical administration simultaneously fosters a kind of alienation because it relies on a presumed antagonism between the program and the non-program. While tactical agility can be quite effective, and is often necessary, it simultaneously demands a relatively clear articulation of "the sides." Thus, while this kind of alienation is quite different than the disappointment that Micciche highlights, a tactical orientation still has a way of alienating WPAs because it tends to entrench one's own ideological commitments while at the same time configuring the complex dynamics that constitute the writing program as a field of resources to harness. In short, the power of the writing program to affect and be affected by difference is diminished by a tactical orientation, even as the agency of the individual WPA increases. Both this decrease and increase are driven by the same configuration of power that articulates the writing program as a battlefield.

Similar to Gunner, Heard seeks to turn weakness into strength by showing how the traditionally disadvantaged place of the writing program actually makes it an ideal place from which to "sensibly" attune to ideological conflicts as they flow through writing programs. Heard argues that the vulnerability of the WPA position allows individual WPAs to develop a sensitivity to how institutionalized forces press upon, and thereby (re)shape, the identities of others. Such an attunement can disrupt our entrenched orientations because running into discordances between value systems carries with it the potential to "pull us out of our habitual patterns of thought and action" so as to reveal the impact they have on others (42). Heard provides a great example of this, wherein his desire to train GTAs according to his theoretical commitments worked to blind him to the needs of his students (44-45). Thus, by attuning reciprocally to the pressures that traffic through our programs, a sensible ethos can also reveal the larger ideological forces that overdetermine the value of writing and its function in our lives.

What is interesting about Heard's argument is that he shows how WPAs are uniquely suited to disrupt, nuance, and even transform their position as

6. I adopt "tactic" to invoke de Certeau's distinction between "strategy"–the general implementation of a plan based from a position of power–and "tactics"–countermovements within a field of power.

WPA into one that is more sensibly oriented toward others. Because sensibility is a posture rather than an identity, the institutionalized vulnerability of the WPA position serves as a means by which WPAs can continually revise and adapt their own orientation as they respond to the forces that constrain others. This sensible orientation seeks to disrupt our investment in the identity boundaries that work to alienate WPAs by actively building connections to others in ways that enlarge the scope of what counts as "us."

Yet, I do not think that it is immediately clear what kinds of affective connections are likely to be built between "us" and "other." Heard describes sensibility as "a living awareness of *outside pressures and tensions that press upon us*…" (41; emphasis added). Essentially, a sensible posture illuminates, or allows us to "witness," the local ways in which outside forces press upon others, especially the way that economic imperatives have predetermined the value of writing in ways reduce or marginalize modes of writing that do not conform to that imperative. And yet, while sensibility might jar us out of our habitual modes of being, it risks doing so by realigning the marginalized "we" against a more generally offending party (e.g. anything that we recognize as violating the identity of others). A posture of sensibility thus inclines us to code "outside pressures" as something "they" do to "us" even as the boundaries of the "they" and "us" are redrawn in response to that pressure. WPAs, for example, may come to recognize the vulnerability of other students and faculty, but only insofar as they recognize their vulnerability to a violating force–some other determinate other. So, while an ethos of sensibility is likely to redefine and enlarge the territory of a community, in founding sensibility around violence and vulnerability, Heard also creates a dividing line that shifts rather than disrupts the "us vs. them" logic.

While both Gunner and Heard open up what is possible through the WPA position, they do so in ways that do little to address the affective machinery that Micciche's work has allowed me to tease out here. This is less a critique of Gunner and Heard than it is a way of emphasizing the importance of attending to the questions and problems raised by this dimension of administration. But this analysis also raises a few questions of its own. Is there a way to administrate that is productive and yet does not, or at least is less inclined to, perpetuate alienation? Is there a way of responding to otherness without having to identify it, and thereby colonize it, according to recognizable ideologies or concepts like vulnerability and violence?

Identity, Subjectivity, and Affirmation

At this point, reexamining the dynamics at play in producing frustration and alienation provides a clearer sense of the tension operating between the "us" and "them" at the heart of this affective machinery. Each of the positions I've

addressed presume a certain commitment to the individual identity of the WPA ("us") against the power of the WPA as an institutionalized subject-position always already co-opted by a host of competing claims ("them"). I want to amplify a distinction I've been making via the language of "subjectivity" and individual "identity" to tease out the significance between two networks of power. Let "subjectivity" be the complex network of institutional dynamics that constitute the WPA position that subject (or interpolate) individual WPAs to its power. Let individual "identity" be the complex network of identity positions and value commitments that both consciously and unconsciously shape individual WPAs.[7] Rendering the distinction in this way illuminates the directionality of this encounter between subjectivity and identity. Individual identity is rendered subject to the multiplicity of the WPA position, which presumes that identity is made vulnerable to the shaping power of a more dominant subjectivity. It is precisely this power differential that racializes and genders WPA bodies: the WPA subject-position, historically informed by a feminized sense of "service" and racialized sense of "civility," disciplines individual-WPAs by overdetermining their value, making it especially hard for black bodies to become WPAs at all.

Making this distinction between identity and subjectivity is another way of fleshing out an important feature of the affective machinery of writing program administration. Whereas it would be more appropriate to speak to the emotional state of an individual marked by an identity, affect better speaks to the inclination, or disposition, of a pre-individual confluence of human and non-human forces institutionalized in the form of a WPA subject-position as it encounters individual WPA identity. Thus, it is not right to say that identity is emotional while subjectivity is affective, but that affect speaks to the pre-individual body that is the conjunction of an identity and a subjectivity–an orientation that inclines a writing program to affect and be affected in ways that are irreducible to any one person. It is the dissonance between these two networks of power that cultivates the disappointment of writing program administration.

There is, of course, good reason to commit to our identities as WPAs, since the forces to which we are subject disproportionately bear on the identity positions we bring to the job. As Louis Althusser might claim, the interpolating force of the "hey, you there" may well recruit both the police officer and the subject of his hail to a juridical structure, but not with equal force. It would seem that the only options available to those marginalized by this disequilibrium are to acquiesce to these subjectifying forces, sincerely resist them, or tactically

7. Individual identity is itself a product of other networks of subjectivity: the difference between identity and subjectivity is relative.

and/or sensibly remobilize them into the occasionally subversive advantage (all while maintaining a more constant disadvantage). A general commitment to maintaining identity against subjectivity has a way of rendering the multiplicity of the writing program in only one of two ways: either as an obstacle or form of domination (as most frustration narratives confirm) or as raw material to re-mobilize (as Gunner and Heard show is possible).

While the WPA subject position is itself multiple, it is also singular insofar as it functions as a juncture point of intersecting dynamics. So, while its constituent parts are multiple, they connect in a singular fashion. The fact that writing programs are so difficult to render according to any one institutional perspective confirms that they are nothing more than the intersectional difference of a great diversity of forces–including the identity of the WPA who inhabits it. Given this relationship, I propose a different way of orienting ourselves to administration that deemphasizes the boundaries that separate individual WPA identity from the institutionalized WPA subject-position by experimenting with the particular ways a multiplicity of demands and identities and subject positions intersect each other to continually constitute and reconstitute the pre-individual body of the writing program. This would constitute a kind of affirmation of the singular difference that emerges as identity and subjectivity conjoin, folding WPA identity through a writing program and WPA subject position through one's identity. This mutual distribution blurs the boundaries between the "us" and "them" through a transformation born of conjunction.

It is perhaps easy to see this "affirmation" as a form of resignation: the disequilibrium between identity and subjectivity poses a very real threat to a WPA's individual identity–especially to those WPAs who are gendered and racialized into more marginalized corners of the academy. Yet, while it would be foolish to discount this disequilibrium, it is also important to see how subjectivity is fractured and how that fracture makes subjectivity susceptible to the differential force of individual identity. The multiplicity of the WPA subject position (all of those often-competing claims) also means that there can be no one position to which a WPA could become subject because WPA subjectivity is always constituted by an intersection of multiple forces.

Strictly speaking, then, there is no "thing" to which we could resign ourselves. There is only the difference that emerges from an intersection. For example, one's gender, race, sexual orientation, body (etc.) makes its own mark on the writing program and, thereby, alters its field of possibilities. Furthermore, historical and scholarly forces (such as those constituted in the body of what I've called frustration narratives) work as a part of the complex as well. Thus, rendering one's individual identity subject to the institutional position of the WPA means that its force bears upon the WPA subject position, infecting it with its difference. Far from simply resigning oneself to the subjective power

of the WPA-position, an affirmative orientation would seek to activate the unique difference produced by the constellation of forces at work for the sake of transforming them. How might the force of frustration scholarship circulate through one's writing program? In considering this question from a racialized perspective, scholars as diverse as Henry Louis Gates Jr., Jeffrey Nealon, and Amber Kelsie note that such an intensification might transform questions concerning racial inclusion into experiments of black transformation. Following this line of thinking, the affirmative-WPA would become a virus that infects the institutionalized body they inhabit, working to introduce their difference into a field of asymmetrical relations.

An affirmative orientation to administration would require a different kind of commitment to the identity of the WPA: a commitment to identity as a kind of antigen that provokes a response in a larger institutional body rather than as a territory whose integrity must be protected. This perspective, though, would require that we deliberately obscure the boundaries that distinguish the constituent claims on the writing program so the differences their intersections create come to the fore and their recognizability recedes into the background. Affirmation cares about what identity can do and become more than with what identity is.

John Muckelbauer proposes a similar orientation, but as a strategy for how we read scholarship. When we read so as to identify the concepts, problems, and texts that a work mobilizes, we dramatically reduce the inventive power of how they might intersect in interesting and unforeseen ways. As Muckelbauer puts it, "experimenting with what a concept can do requires a certain uncertainty about what the concept is*"* (48). This kind of experimentation requires a reader to actively not-know the boundaries that separate a conceptual landscape. In the case of writing program administration, if we pretend to know, in a determinate sense, what it is to be a good WPA in advance–or even know the boundaries that separate the WPA from the non-WPA–we simultaneously work to shut down what a WPA could do other than accept, instrumentalize, resist, or acknowledge those multiple dynamics that intersect writing programs.

This "not knowing" is not ignorance. We should be immersed in administrative practice and theory as well as the historical practices that gender and racialize WPA labor. We should carefully attend to the unique organization and histories of our institutions. As a heuristic, this active not-knowing is an explicit and carefully cultivated orientation toward what the dynamics that make up writing programs are capable of doing other than solidifying and reifying a particular vision of them. In other words, it is a "not knowing in advance" what a dynamic can produce.

Consider the affective dimension of this affirmative orientation. Gilles Deleuze argues that there are two principal kinds of affects: joy and sadness

(Deleuze *Spinoza* 48-51). Sadness is the state of a body (always pre-individual multiplicities for Deleuze) decreasing its ability to affect and be affected by others. Joy is the state of a body increasing its ability to affect and be affected by others. "Sadness" could easily stand in for what Micciche calls disappointment and loneliness. Severing the connections between labor and laborer, or between an individual identity and an institutionalized subject position, decreases the ability of writing programs to affect and be affected by difference. It is important to see that the tactical and sensible orientations that Gunner and Heard propose increase the vitality of the WPA-body only insofar as that-which-is-different from the individual WPA is made a resource. Though empowering, and thereby joy-making to a degree, the boundaries these approaches reify also cut WPAs off from its inventive potential by focusing on ready-made identity claims.

An affirmative orientation to administration configures writing programs less in terms of bounded territories and more in terms of the intersecting lines that traverse through those territories; indeed, it allows us to see these territories as nothing more than by-products of a prior relationality. This allows the territorial boundaries of the writing program to recede into the background as the WPA emerges as a singular, pre-individual body: identity + subjectivity. What is joyful about affirmation is that it unites and intensifies the multiplicity of the WPA body for the sake of its own transformation. Another way of putting it: the joy of affirmation lies in the becoming of a body as it expresses itself into something new, whereas sadness lies in the calcification of the boundaries that alienates the being of that body. This is why "becoming" a WPA can never be a matter of a body realizing itself as a WPA ("to become a WPA"), but only ever refers to the continual making and unmaking process of becoming: the gerund makes "becoming" something perpetually unsettled.

Affirming a General Education Revamp?

From 2011 to 2013, I was involved as an Assistant Director of First-Year English and RA to our Director of First-Year English in a major initiative to revamp the general education program of a state flagship university system. The project was inaugurated in the form of a question, in 2005, by the university's then-provost: "What do our students need to know to thrive as well-educated citizens in the twenty-first century?" This question, which was largely informed by the 2005 study "College Learning for the New Global Century" by the *Association of American Colleges and Universities* (AACU), kicked off over a decade's worth of institutional change. Because some of these requirements necessitated that some courses serve a much larger population and, in other cases, entirely new courses had to be developed for new requirements, student demand shifted and put pressure on departments to respond. It is no

exaggeration to describe this initiative as a multiple and differential force that changed name, shape, and intensity as it distributed through the university.

The new requirements are grounded in collections of learning-outcomes developed by faculty committees designated as "subject matter experts" (e.g., the Written Communication requirements (CMW) were developed by representatives from English, business, and journalism and mass communication). Thus, departments no longer "own" required courses. Theoretically, any course could fulfill the new requirements, so long as it is approved by the requisite committee. Given this interdisciplinary structure, any department that wishes to submit a course for approval would need to appeal to a committee that is primarily, or even exclusively, composed of faculty outside of their own department.

By the time I was involved in 2011, our director had already managed to have our two-semester first-year writing sequence (ENGL 101 and 102) approved to grant the six-required-credits of CMW and had the second semester course (ENGL 102) tentatively approved to grant the 3-credits needed for the new information literacy requirement (INF). This required that we "overlay" INF into ENGL 102 in ways that satisfied criteria devised by a completely non-English faculty (the "overlay" itself was a product of prior compromise on how new requirements would be made available to students, especially in the initial years after the requirements took effect). In effect, our job was to re-create ENGL 102 to satisfy CMW and INF requirements articulated and assessed by two separate, almost exclusively non-English, faculty bodies.

My relatively moderate involvement as a graduate student, and especially my position as liaison to the library, put me in a particularly good position to observe how our director responded to the pressures put on the program as well as some of the multiple ways in which the initiative circulated through the university. This allows me to highlight how Micciche, Gunner, and Heard's scholarship sheds light on those approaches as well as how and where an affirmative approach to administration was made available.

There is a relatively straightforward way of telling this story that highlights the emotional machinery at work that Micciche makes visible. The general education revamp was created by powers far beyond our director's control. The ideological commitments that shaped the CMW and INF requirements did not entirely align with hers, yet they pressed upon the program nonetheless. She did her best to shape the requirements upstream, as they passed through exploratory committees and task forces. She negotiated with other faculty from the library and the schools of business and of journalism and mass communication, who served on the development committees, (e.g., limiting emphasis on grammatical correctness). On the other side of the power divide, she did her best to involve and facilitate administrators and instructors affected by the change across the university's regional two-year campuses.

Some of these negotiations went well; others were more fraught. For example, her efforts to lower the enrollment cap on ENGL 102 to accommodate the added grading and prep time that INF demands of faculty did not succeed. Ultimately, most of the emotional weight fell on her shoulders as she attempted to balance her duty to shape, resist, implement, and distribute the new learning outcomes.

Yet, our director's precarious position also afforded her certain tactical advantages, made more visible by Gunner's scholarship. She was able to tap into language circulating around the initiative by espousing the value of civically and globally-minded education in order to highlight the value of rhetoric's historical commitments to public engagement and of critical engagement with cultural contexts. Highlighting the dimensions of rhetoric germane to the discourse of the general education revamp, our director was also able to harness the force of the learning outcomes without having to explicitly resist them.

Counter to Gunner, Heard's ethic of sensibility emphasizes the ways in which the general education initiative rippled throughout the university, putting other departments and programs in similarly vulnerable positions, thereby highlighting how those differences might productively pull our director out of her habitual modes of seeing her administrative role. In this case, it became apparent that the university's library was put in a precarious position insofar as it marked a kind of ground-zero for information literacy expertise but had a very shallow pool of instructors and no curricular resources to speak of. Our director made me FYE's liaison to the library and tasked me with collaborating with a small group of staff who served as consultants to the INF overlay project. The work that we did not only allowed us to better ground INF instruction in information science, but strengthened the institutional ties between the English department and the library and between the library and the INF requirement, which also served to jump-start the library's own initiatives to create a new online course that also fulfilled the INF requirement. Thus, the disruptive force of the initiative created an opportunity to remake FYE's relationship to the library.

All three of these perspectives reveal important ongoing dynamics operative during our involvement in this revamp. To supplement these perspectives, I want to highlight some opportunities we had to affirm the unique difference that marked the program as a site of intersecting dynamics (e.g., between the INF and CMW mandates; between the library and FYE program; between the holistic commitments of our director and the ends-oriented values that informed the general education initiative; between the old version of ENGL 102 and the disciplinary knowledge driving information literacy instruction). Doing this, though, presumes a certain willingness and practiced artistry on

our director's part to not know what ENGL 102 ought to be; or, at minimum, it required an ability to loosen her grip on that knowledge.

My research on how peer-institutions have handled combining writing and information literacy instruction in the past brought up an interesting "portfolio" model from Oregon State (Deitering and Jameson). Conversations with our library consultants had already made it very clear that worthwhile information literacy instruction needs to be recursively integrated into practice. This meant that we could not simply devote class periods to teach abstract principles of research. Furthermore, a portfolio model roughly fit with the course's pedagogical commitments and gave us a path forward for synthesizing writing and research instruction. But the question arose: What does a portfolio do when it encompasses both writing and information literacy? Furthermore, what role does rhetoric play in this combination? Our solution was two-fold. The first change was to tightly organize the assignment sequence so that the portfolio revolved solely around a single research project: every assignment was designed to contribute to it. This ensures that students do quite a bit of structured invention and research work long before they are expected to submit a term paper, annotated bibliography, or even an outline or proposal. The second change was to build both writing and information literacy practice into nearly every assignment as part of a more general rhetorical analysis. This combination is most evident in a series of roughly three-page assignments that ask students to reflectively develop a research strategy for finding a source on a topic they are potentially interested in writing on. Once found, students analyze the text based on a particular rhetorical concept (e.g., ethos, pathos, logos) and then highlight how their analysis might inform future research and writing on the topic. Organizing our assignment sequence around a recursively and reflectively developed research program allowed us to integrate research into the course as a central pillar of the class rather than as a technical add-on, as it had been configured in previous iterations of the course.

What emerged from this process was a version of ENGL 102 that both looked familiar and completely different. By productively blurring the distinctions between information literacy, writing, and rhetoric, we were able to remake ENGL 102's center. No element of the course feels like it is any more dedicated to one of these three elements than any of the others; in fact, it is difficult to divorce an iterative approach to research from the process of discovery through writing or rhetorical invention and persuasion. Doing this, though, required that our director let go of her vision of ENGL 102 (a course that she had redesigned only a few years earlier) enough to allow the difference of Information Literacy to do its work.

While this is a small slice of what was a massive institutional initiative, the example shows how the general education requirement sparked a unique

intersection that enabled a productive reimagining of ENGL 102. Of course, not all of the intersections prompted by the wider overhaul were capable of being affirmed to the same positive effect. This is why I supplement, not supplant, approaches advanced by Micciche, Gunner, and Heard. Some dynamics would have been best responded to with a certain sensibility, others with tactical agility, and others were just plain frustrating and demanded critical attention (and, of course, these responses are almost always blurred with each other in some unique combination).

I further want to emphasize that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to verify whether or not our director was "really" affirming the situation in any final or empirical sense. After all, ENGL 102 is still taught as a rhetoric course, and one could make the argument that its information literacy component has, to a degree, been colonized by that more general rhetorical orientation. Yet, our director consistently configured the overhaul–and all of the various components it gathered–as an inventive opportunity. Our director's orientation to the otherness of INF folded back onto her to help cultivate an affective disposition that extended beyond her individual identity. My goal here is to highlight how an affirmative approach emphasizes the inventive potential the encounter made possible, for the information literacy requirement, the rhetorical instruction of writing in ENGL 102, and for the institutional inscription of our WPA.

Conclusions: We Don't Know What Administration Can Do

WPA scholarship has repeatedly drawn attention to the physical bodies of writing program directors. As Gunner put it in her WPA plenary address, they get "worn down, burned out, disappointed, and lonely" (Gunner "Heroic Bodies"). Most frustration narratives validate this generalization, focusing on individual persons and bodies and the impact they have on crafting our professional identities. That is, WPA scholarship of this vein mostly focuses on the effects that WPA work has on WPAs, thereby focusing on the interiority of individual people. This is important work. But, as I note above, Heard draws our attention away from just the state of the WPA-as-a-person and shows how an institutional position is distributed through and folds back onto its bureaucratic environment.

In many ways, Heard calls for a kind of a disruption of the WPA body as something siloed within universities to reveal where and how that body extends beyond itself, through and into the various pathways of university writing. An affirmative approach to administration affirms nothing more than this extended (or pre-individual, as I've been calling it) body of the WPA itself. Doing so puts our identity as WPAs at risk as it is distributed through and transformed by the heterogeneity of the WPA position. This risk, though, is not that of erasure; it is a continual process of becoming. Affirming one's identity as WPA

is simultaneously a will-to-become-oneself-to-the-point-of-non-recognition. To echo and adapt Baruch Spinoza, we do not know what writing program administration can do, and this "not knowing" is in no way a lack, but the very possibility of becoming-WPA.

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