“AT WHAT COST?”: A FOUND POEM HIGHLIGHTING SYSTEMIC INEQUALITIES AND POWER STRUCTURES FOR FACULTY PROGRAM COORDINATORS

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Abstract

Research on the experiences of minoritized faculty shows that they face disproportionate challenges to professional support and career advancement. While broader research on faculty experiences highlights these inequities, program coordination is a distinct role further hindering minoritized faculty experiences. Program coordination entails roles such as guiding recruitment, admissions, mentoring, and student support efforts. Through the use of arts-based research via a found poem, we provide a nuanced understanding of minoritized faculty program coordinator experiences. This article (re) presents the experiences of 81 faculty program coordinators and highlights the impact of inequities they faced in the areas of scholarship, teaching, career advancement, and personal well-being. The found poem highlights four components experienced within program coordinators’ journeys: Vital, What am I working towards, Support them at all costs, and At what cost.

Keywords: faculty, program coordination, arts-based research, found poem, higher education/student affairs

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Never Enough

Res life for life
until too many students took their own
Seeking refuge, new dreams, and goals
GRE. PhD.
So many new acronyms and systems
I did not know

Just keep writing
Another line on the CV
Help others to help yourself
One more paper. One more project.
Always one more
Don't let up now
Visiting. Clinical.
Finally. Tenure-track.

I am a scholar now?
But that's not how they want me
"Support students" they say
You're here to serve us them
Plan. Manage. Organize.
Butts in seats. Dollar signs on the budget sheet.
Recruit them, take care of them.
Always one more
Rinse and repeat to show that we care

Why aren't you writing
You said you want tenure but that doesn't show
40/40/200
WTF. Even quant scholars know they numbers don't work
I wish I would have known

The introductory poem, Never Enough, captures our experiences coming to and navigating our careers transitioning through roles as practitioners, doctoral students, and faculty members. Within this poem we share reflections on our systemic perceptions and personal experiences with the hope that bringing light to the labor of HESA program coordinators may improve equity for those who continue this critical work.

Graduate program coordination is a unique role that is often classified as a faculty service responsibility and entails guiding recruitment, admissions, mentoring, student support efforts, and more pending student and program needs (Shelton et al., 2024). Although official graduate program names and curriculum may vary slightly–ranging from "Higher Education" to "Student Affairs" or "College Student personnel"–we use Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) as an inclusive umbrella term for programs in this area because commonalities across programs are our focus rather than their differences. Specifically, program coordinators in HESA programs face particular pressures due to enrollment challenges, layered with inequities rooted in oppressive practices for faculty with minoritized social identities (Shelton et al., 2024).

Although there is a lack of formal scholarship on enrollment competition between HESA programs, there is hyper competition across postsecondary education broadly (Build, 2023). Recent shifts in graduate enrollment, exacerbated by global and political events like the COVID-19 pandemic, have placed additional pressures on HESA graduate programs (Institute of Education Sciences, 2023). These realities influence HESA program coordinators who are often undercompensated as they balance recruitment and support roles in tumultuous times alongside their professional goals (Shelton et al., 2024). Acknowledging these contexts, this arts-based study offers a found poem as a part of a national study that contextualizes the roles and responsibilities of faculty graduate program coordinators. We explored the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of faculty graduate program coordinators?
    a. How does this role influence their professional trajectories? Personal lives?

Specifically, an arts-based approach for this work provides the space for humanization of the people who engage much of the emotional labor for HESA graduate programs. This work also represents a step toward our healing for us and others in this position. Given that the data was often discouraging, the arts-based found poem format allowed for a hopeful retelling. As described by Andrea Gibson, American poet, activist, and queer feminist performer:

"Even when
The truth isn't hopeful
The telling of it is" (Gibson, 2018).

Thus, we invite readers to explore this topic through an emotional and sensory lens, centering the expressive and interpretive potential of arts-based research.

Literature

In this section, we delve into the academic literature surrounding the cultural and historical contexts that shape the roles of faculty members who serve as graduate program coordinators today. Program coordinator roles vary, but may include leading recruitment, admissions, mentoring, and student support efforts. To contextualize these roles, we begin by exploring the dynamics of faculty positions, generally, particularly regarding social identities and evolving faculty career realities. Subsequently, we delve into the historical and contemporary norms within higher education, shedding light on how these norms influence the roles and expectations of graduate program coordinators.

Faculty Contexts

The contextual realities of faculty roles highlight challenges faced by marginalized faculty and the shifting landscape of academic employment (Griffin, 2019a, 2019b; Morgan et al., 2022; Schultz & Stansbury, 2022; Wapman et al., 2022; White-Lewis, 2020).

Demographic Gaps

Despite progress, demographic gaps persist among faculty (AAUP, 2020), especially for faculty who occupy contingent roles, which are increas-

ingly common among HESA graduate program coordinators. Even when present, challenges are compounded for those who hold marginalized identities, such as women or faculty of color, who often experience additional expectations regarding service and mentorship (Blockett et al., 2016; Eagan & Garvey, 2015). For instance, faculty from minoritized backgrounds frequently report added service demands related to student support and mentoring, which are particularly pronounced for coordinators (Beemyn, 2003; Dilley, 2002; Pitcher, 2017). These faculty, often early in their careers, contend with significant teaching and administrative loads, detracting from their ability to focus on research and advancement (Kezar & Harper, 2023; Shelton & Ardoin, 2020).

Demands and Obstacles

The intersectional experiences of HESA faculty coordinators highlight the layered demands placed upon them. For example, women faculty and faculty from racial or ethnic minorities face unique obstacles, including biases in student evaluations, and racial microaggressions (French et al., 2020; Ponjuan et al., 2011). Similarly, faculty with other marginalized identities—such as LGBTQ+ or disabled faculty—often encounter additional labor demands and lack institutional support, especially in roles like program coordination that extend beyond conventional faculty duties (Friedensen et al., 2021).

Inequities Among Multiple Marginalized Identities

The challenges faced by women faculty have garnered considerable attention in research (Mason et al., 2006; O'Meara & Bloomgarden, 2011; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). From balancing family responsibilities to navigating biases in recognition and career advancement, women encounter numerous hurdles in academia (French et al., 2020; Ponjuan et al., 2011). Similarly, faculty members from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds face unique obstacles, including racial microaggressions and biases in student evaluations and service expectations (Blockett et al., 2016; Settles et al., 2018). Inequalities also persist for faculty members with other minoritized social identities (Beemyn, 2003; Dilley, 2002; Pitcher, 2017). The experiences of queer and disabled faculty members, for example, are often overlooked in academic discourse (Friedensen et al., 2021). Moreover, the distribution of faculty labor underscores power differentials within academia, with tenure-track positions becoming scarcer and contingent roles increasingly common, particularly among faculty from historically marginalized groups (Kezar & Harper, 2023; Shelton & Ardoin, 2020). By addressing the challenges and inequalities faced by marginalized faculty, academic institutions can support retention of diverse faculty and foster a more inclusive and equitable environment for all.

Graduate Program Coordinator Context

Historical and contemporary norms within higher education shape the roles and expectations of graduate program coordinators, underscoring the complexities of this position (American Association of University Professors - AAUP, 2020). Graduate programs play a key role in establishing and legitimizing professional fields, including Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA). As such, supporting these programs requires substantial labor from faculty coordinators (Schuh et al., 2017). Although service is acknowledged as part of a normative faculty role (Dennison, 2012), program coordination encompasses a unique blend of administrative, teaching, and mentoring tasks that exceed faculty members' usual duties associated with university service.

Student Expectations

Coordinators often go beyond traditional committee involvement to play an essential role in student recruitment, admissions, curriculum development, and holistic student support. Many students view program coordinators as central

figures who address their academic, professional, and personal development needs, seeing them as supporters of their entire experience, rather than solely their academic identities (Schuh et al., 2017). As students' expectations for holistic support grow, so too do the time and emotional commitments required of program coordinators to meet these expanded roles.

Contingent Faculty

In recent years, faculty workload has become an increasingly scrutinized topic within higher education due to both political and institutional critiques of faculty roles. Coordinators, especially in fields like HESA, must navigate a shifting landscape where demands for increased diversity in faculty appointments coincide with significant growth in contingent faculty labor (Dennison, 2012). Coordinators who are also contingent or early-career faculty often experience amplified pressures to support student needs while advancing in their own careers—a situation further complicated by the expansion of contingent roles in academia. These dual expectations can disproportionately impact faculty from historically minoritized groups, who may encounter additional service burdens related to their identities. Literature indicates that minoritized and contingent faculty often face obstacles in career advancement, workload recognition, and access to resources compared to their tenured or tenure-track counterparts, challenges that are intensified in program coordination roles (Blockett et al., 2016; French et al., 2020; Porter, 2007; Settles et al., 2018).

Understanding the realities faced by faculty members in contingent roles, including those serving as program coordinators, is crucial (Higher Ed Faculty Searches, 2024; Porter et al., 2020). These individuals often face disproportionate teaching and service responsibilities, which can detract from their ability to engage in research. Overall, examining the diverse experiences of faculty members, particularly those serving as program coordinators, provides valuable insights for supporting student success, professional development of faculty members, and the retention of minoritized faculty who often begin in these roles (Shelton & Ardoin, 2020; Kezar & Harper, 2023).

Career Stage and Identity

The combination of career stage and identity adds another layer to these roles. Graduate program coordinators are frequently early-career faculty, and many belong to historically marginalized groups or hold contingent positions, situating them in a space where their work is essential but often under-recognized. This dynamic places coordinators at the intersection of high-stakes administrative responsibilities and limited institutional support. Their contributions are essential to the success and retention of graduate students, yet the career advancement of coordinators may be constrained by the lack of recognition and support for these expanded roles. Recognizing and addressing the unique pressures and contributions of graduate program coordinators—particularly those in HESA programs—could help institutions support faculty retention, foster a more inclusive academic culture, and align with broader institutional commitments to diversity and equity.

Paradigm

Throughout the arts-based research (ABR) process, we employed a critical paradigm which centered "producing situated and partial knowledge, accessing and magnifying subjugated voices, decentering authoring and paying attention to the discursive practices that shape experience and our articulation of human experience" (Leavy, 2020, p. 86). This paradigm was appropriate for our found poem as, "…these critical approaches also call attention to the artificiality of binary categories like the rational-emotional split, which historically dominated knowledge production" (Leavy, 2020, p. 86). Additional scholars informed our thinking about ABR such as guiding the process of intuitively sorting participant words into passages

that synthesize meaning (Prendergast, 2009), intentionally weaving these phrases together in a cohesive whole that has artistic form via line breaks and formatting (Teman, 2010), and centering diverse ways of connecting with knowledge and meaning-making (Bhattacharya, 2013). Although many of these sources informing our ABR approach stem from methods-focused scholarship, one unique study in particular was important for seeing found poetry reflected in HESA literature.

A "small but growing" (Denton et al., 2018, p. 18) body of ABR, particularly visual methods, exists in HESA literature such as photovoice, photo-elicitation, and critical media studies (Magolda, 2018). These studies range from the use of photo journals combined with interviews and focus groups to understand the importance of college student residence hall bedrooms for sense of belonging (Samura et al., 2021) to photovoice between two rounds of interviews exploring campus belonging for queer Students of Color (Duran, 2019). These studies highlight how, "higher education researchers have not drawn as much from other graphic methods" (Denton et al., 2018), but some studies employed non-photographic methods such as the use of magazine collage, sculpting materials, and free-writing to examine college student self-authorship journeys (Welkner & Baxter Magolda, 2014), and Denton's (2014) study on using interviews combined with participant created artwork such as poetry, paintings, drawings, ans a shaped bonsai tree to express being a gay college man living with HIV. We were particularly drawn to Robinson's (2022) use of found poetry to explore trans faculty and queer battle fatigue regarding navigating identity politics in the academy, which allowed for a nuanced understanding of this minoritized population. Ultimately, we were inspired by creating work that "disrupts traditional ways of thinking and honors and amplifies the multiple voices, realities, and truths of the participants" (p. 914) via found poetry.

Within this study, we remained attentive to the ways that faculty can often emphasize rational perspectives; this framework encouraged us and our participants to view the data more holistically without bifurcating participants' experiences between cognitive and emotional. "Epistemologically, ABR assumes the arts can create and convey meaning" (p. 86). From a critical perspective, we agree that this form provides a powerful tool for contextualizing the realities of program coordination. In alignment with the initial study's framework of cultural-historical activity theory framework (Núñez, 2022), this presentation of data moves beyond viewing participant responses individually and instead, creates and conveys the collective influence of this form of academic labor.

Methods

In the research study, we used a constructivist grounded theory paradigm (Charmaz, 2014, 2017) with critical qualitative methods (Charmaz, 2020; Leavy, 2020). This allowed for a systematic qualitative procedure to explore this topic at a conceptual level with a critical lens (Charmaz, 2020) while being attentive to the voices of marginalized participants and how they convey their human experiences (Leavy, 2020).

Arts-Based Research

The current work is rooted in the liberatory arts-based research (ABR), which we believe "can uniquely educate, inspire, illuminate, resist, heal, and persuade" (Leavy, 2020, p. ix). ABR allowed us to "...address social research questions in holistic and engaged ways" (Leavy, 2015, p. 4), which allowed us to amplify the collective themes in new and innovative ways through poetry. We were particularly interested in embracing the healing component offered by ABR (Lou, 2018) as participants named damage caused by systems-level harm. In particular, we uplifted participant experiences via ABR to reflect how "Utilizing creativity can help students, faculty, and practitioners develop more socially just and inclusive environments to transform the self, critical community, and landscape of

institutions" (Lou, 2018, p. 211). Within this ABR approach, found poetry was a particularly powerful match for our study.

We chose found poetry for this study, as the objective of poetry is "to use words to discover meaning through creative textual/verbal thinking" (Leavy, 2002, p. 285). This objective aligns with our philosophical approach, as "The use of poems in the production of social scientific knowledge" is "another way of interpreting and thus understanding" (p. 85). Ultimately, "poetry is research" (Leavy, 2020, p. 85) as representing data "in poetic form can help the researcher evoke different meanings from the data, work through different sets of issues, and help the audience receive the data differently" (Leavy, 2020, p. 86). These specific ABR elements allowed us to uplift a philosophical approach to our work that aims to explore the arts as a means to share experiences that will inspire change while cultivating resistance and healing, which reflects Leavy's (2020) ABR strengths.

Found Poetry

Found poetry, also known as research poetry (Langer & Furman, 2004) is created directly from participants' own words to present a focused narrative (Butler-Kisber, 2018; Patrick 2016). As such, "In found poetry, all of the content is 'found' within the data provided by participants" (Robinson, 2022, p. 914) which used only direct quotes from our participant open-ended survey responses. Our use of found poetry helped validate diverse approaches to understanding and existence, to creating knowledge and interpreting meaning (Bhattacharya, 2013). It also emphasized a research method that is not always prioritized in academic discussions (Bhattacharya, 2013). With a study focused on the experiences of people who are not always–or perhaps even rarely–prioritized, this approach demonstrates the importance not only of the labor of program coordinators but of bringing multiple approaches and perspectives.

This method is especially impactful considering that not all qualitative researchers have embraced research/found poems due to their perceived "creative" essence (Leavy, 2015). We push beyond conceptions of who is allowed to engage creative work or what venue is appropriate for creativity; the creativity of program coordinators is celebrated in their work on recruitment and student programs. Here, we extend that creativity to the ways that their voices and stories are shared. When operating in oppressive systems, small forms of resistance such as the use of poetry for conveying meaning have power for creating more liberatory spaces. Ultimately, the final found poem allowed for a narrative to highlight and validate the realities of faculty graduate program coordinators, particularly those with minoritized social identities. Beginning to frame and amplify the negative impact of program coordination on faculty members' professional and personal lives is but a step towards changing the contexts that perpetuate this exploitation. May this poem serve as a tool for other program coordinators to feel seen and empowered that they too can take steps towards building more liberatory spaces in higher education. For those seeking an exploration of these data in an alternative non-arts-based form, please see [Author] (2024).

Participants

For the survey component of the data, we used purposeful sampling as participants held specific characteristics related to the research question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All 81 participants met the criteria of being a current faculty graduate-level program coordinator. Regarding social identities, we provided an open-ended box for participant race and for gender and received the following responses: Race (67% white, and less than 5% each of African American, Asian American, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Jewish, and Multiracial); "Cis woman/Woman/Female" (59%), "Cis Man, Man, Male" (30%), and "Non-Binary" (1%). We also asked for any additional salient social identities participants would like to share in an

open-ended box, and received responses ranging from queer to immigrant, childless, atheist, working class background, disabled, veteran, liberal, Muslim, and neurological disorder. Across all survey respondents, with the exception of two participants, all participants identified with at least one historically minoritized identity; many had multiple minoritized identities.

Data Collection

Recognizing the value of diverse data sources and perspectives, this study incorporates information gathered from various time points, including an initial survey and several focus groups. We are aware of our own positionalities as faculty with firsthand experience in program coordination. The experiences of participants span an extensive period, offering insights that extend beyond the present context. To collect survey data, we conducted a pilot study with a select group of recently retired program coordinators to gather their feedback, which informed revisions to the survey. The survey instrument consisted of closed-ended questions addressing the contexts of program coordination, as well as open-ended questions that allowed respondents to articulate their contributions to students, programs, and their visions for the future of graduate preparation programs. After incorporating suggestions from pilot participants, we distributed the survey through the HESA professional association listserv (CSPTalk), which included a link to a Qualtrics consent form and demographic questions. The survey was open for approximately three weeks in early 2023, yielding a total of 81 participants. We achieved high completion rates with minimal attrition; even if participants did not finish, we retained all data provided.

For the focus groups, we organized three program presentations at national conferences where we presented initial survey findings and facilitated discussions with program coordinators about their experiences, norms, rules, and artifacts within their respective environments and broader activity systems. These conversational sessions were open to anyone attending the conferences, and given that surveys were anonymous, we did not track potential overlap between survey participation and focus groups. We conducted three presentations, lasting an average of 30 minutes, each attended by approximately 20 program coordinators who could voluntarily participate in the open conversations. Given the informal and fluid nature of the conference session spaces, we did not track potential overlap between session attendees. We were open to any feedback, including repeat attendees, based on our goal of creating work that reflected our colleagues' dynamic experiences. Overall, engaging multiple sources of data enhanced our understanding of program coordination at a cultural level to situate our knowledge beyond an individualist perspective. The survey data and conversational data served as the data for our found poem.

Data Analysis

For this paper, we analyzed the open-ended survey responses from 81 faculty program coordinators with a lens informed by the focus groups. We analyzed open-ended survey question data using techniques associated with constructivist grounded theory to create "an interpretative rendering" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 111) that highlights narratives, contexts, and actions. The contextual emphasis within this methodological tradition supported the type of analysis necessary for exploring participants' experiences. The first cycle coding method (Saldaña, 2016) employed in vivo coding to reflect participant language in naming codes and categories, prioritizing and honoring participants' voices, which is foundational for grounded theory (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2016). Second-cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016) involved focused coding to identify the most frequent or significant codes, developing the most salient categories (Charmaz, 2014). Analytic memoing, aligned with these methods, demonstrated research rigor (Saldaña, 2016) by revealing our thinking process about data analysis and also served as a code and category-generating

method (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2016).

Further informed by processes of developing a found poem (Faulkner, 2009; Robinson, 2022), we read all open-ended survey responses multiple times to take notes on narratives within each participant's broader story, and then created memoing notes about themes across participant stories. Next, we highlighted specific words or phrases that directly illuminated the main themes across responses. After grouping phrases under each theme, we further refined each narrative segment by removing extraneous words that did not contribute directly to the core essence of the themes. What remained were the most poignant words and phrases shared directly by participants, as we did not add any of our own content. This method included "intuitively sorting out words, phrases, sentences, passages that synthesize meaning from the prose" (Prendergast, 2009, p. 136). We also engaged Teman's (2010) process of intentionally weaving together participant words and phrases to create a unified whole with the addition of poetic form such as line breaks and formatting to create the final poem. Ultimately, this process resulted in a collective voice that highlighted the experiences of faculty graduate program coordinators, which as a found poem "represents holistically what otherwise might go unnoticed" (Prendergast, 2009, p. 136).

Throughout this process, we focused on research rigor by aligning study elements, reflecting on the iterative nature of the research process, integrating multiple data sources, openly discussing and interrogating values, assumptions, and beliefs, completing member checks and peer debriefings, reflective journaling, and centering ethics (Bhattacharya, 2017). We were also guided by Leavy's (2002) ABR evaluation criteria that include ethical practices such as reflexivity, methodology considerations such as question-method fit and engaging as a reflective team, trustworthiness and authenticity, accessibility to various audiences, artfulness via coherence and authenticity, and personal fingerprint or creativity which we employed throughout the creation of the art.

Positionality

Using constructivist grounded theory with a critical lens led us to be attentive to issues of reflexivity and positionality (Charmaz, 2014, 2020). We were attentive to issues of reflexivity that have shaped our experiences including, but not limited to race, gender, and sexual orientation, as well as varying positionality as HESA faculty members and current or former program coordinators at various career stages. Recognizing our individual and collective positionalities as current and former HESA program coordinators, each of us holds multiple minoritized identities that inform our perspectives.

The context surrounding this study is equally significant. It originated from a collaborative initiative with the College Student Educators International (ACPA) Senior and Emerging Scholars. The Senior Scholars aim to "advocate for the integration of scholarship into practice" (ACPA, 2024), and this study exemplifies one approach to achieving that goal. Discussions within the 2022 cohort of Emerging Scholars highlighted the challenges faced by members balancing research with service while managing HESA program coordination duties. Additionally, the first author served as Chair/Acting Past Chair of the ACPA Commission for Faculty and Graduate Preparation (CFGP) during this research. Our involvement at a national level with faculty groups created a particular commitment to an in-depth understanding of the need for this scholarship as we engaged in ongoing formal and informal conversations with colleagues in program coordination roles.

As three white women in tenured or tenure-track roles, we are mindful of our positionality and privileges, especially in relation to the subject matter of this paper. Although we connected with participants over shared program coordination realities generally, and related to being women, we held privileged outsider perspectives regarding experiencing racism our Participants of Color faced.

Given the small nature of our field and the even smaller sub-group of program coordinators, participants taking the survey may have been aware of researchers' identities that influenced comfort with disclosure levels. The in-person sessions allowed for sharing in groups reflecting a variety of social identities and career paths, which made for robust collective wisdom.

We also recognize our responsibility to current, past, and future HESA program coordinators. This paper seeks to amplify the lived experiences of faculty in these critical roles, and we believe it is essential to leverage this publication platform to examine power imbalances and propose recommendations for addressing them. These realities shaped how each of us conceptualized and were invested in the study. We were particularly attentive to the affective component arising from the data, including in creating the found poem. As queer women in an academic service role, we engaged in this arts-based process from a place of reclaiming our agency and space within the tensions of existing in inequitable academic labor systems.

Findings

This arts-based research includes a found poem as part of a national study into the roles and responsibilities of faculty graduate program coordinators. Our findings are based on survey and focus group data from 81 HESA faculty program coordinators. Given this unique and important role, we aimed to explore the following questions as an avenue to better understand and ultimately advocate for HESA faculty program coordinators: What experiences do faculty graduate program coordinators encounter? In what ways does this role impact their professional journeys and personal lives? In an effort to hold space for readers to connect with and imagine within the poem before reading our discussion and implications, the following section shares the found poem, followed by our analysis and resultant vision for practice.

Found Poem

The following found poem directly reflects participant voices as they spoke about their journeys as graduate program coordinators.

VITAL
students' success
someone has to
collaborate. advocate. support. model.
connected
influencing future
socialization
creating
sustaining
building
academic skills. sense of belonging.
powerful
truly a joy.

WHAT AM I WORKING TOWARDS
what scholarly activity
virtually impossible
stress. quick response.
internal and mental struggles
less brain power. up-ended.
slowed. down.
emotional/intellectual energy
quit.
challenging
extensive amount of time
energy/capacity
always available
take precedent
displaces
relationship. trust.
care for myself
students are priority
absolutely no benefit
non-tenure track assistant professor
no professional development
expected
do this forever
ride the wave
work more.

would have quit
make it work
socio-emotional well-being. physical health. mental health
outright exhausted.
bandwidth
sheer volume
time spent. intensity. hours devoted. unmeasurable
student crisis
not appreciated
blame
running. flying. out the window.
protected them and hurt myself.

SUPPORT THEM AT ALL COSTS

macro-power systems
systemic structures
identities
navigate
expectation as woman
warm and coddling
I am not.
bear greater amount
felt gender so much
speech disfluency
impression management
masking
busywork. do it all.
Black woman
Superwoman
mule tropes
mammy trope
Muslim, American, white, woman, straight, disabled, first-gen., bit on the fluffy-side
Intersectionality. systemic structures.
wear me down
expectation
care-takers
homemaker
keeping things comfortable
vulnerable
high expectations for myself
hard time 'letting' myself be 'average'
not sustainable
outcomes.
accountability.
capitalism.
low applications. attrition. discontent. budget cuts.
wear me down
a lot to carry
try to hold my tongue.

AT WHAT COST

determined to win the race
takes over completely
hard to have a personal life
a lot to manage
suffered
a divorce
research and scholarship
anxiety
stress
exercise difficult
delayed seeking promotion
consumes. overtaken. respond ASAP.
cannot have day off
overwhelming
pressure
emotional energy
consumes
personal time and money
no time
don't sleep
late nights
weekends
7 days a week
holiday breaks
do anything and everything
impossible
sacrificed
professional hazing
do it over, make other choices
leaving academia.

Poem Findings

Study findings highlighted areas of incongru-

ence for program coordinators, especially related to social identity, in the areas of scholarship, teaching, career advancement, and personal well-being. Further data analysis using arts-based methods resulted in a found poem with four components experienced within program coordinators' journeys: *Vital, What am I working towards, Support them at all costs*, *and At what cost*. We offer an overview of the meaning of each poem section below before presenting the found poem.

Vital.

Participants emphasized the importance of the program coordination role. They noted the direct tie to student success, particularly related to facilitating collaboration, advocacy, support, and role modeling. Participants also highlighted how program coordination is critical for making connections and influencing the future of the field through socialization, creating and sustaining supportive environments, and building academic skills and a sense of belonging. This essential role was impactful at individual, academic program, and field-levels. Ultimately, participants felt that engaging in program coordination was a powerful process that brought them joy due to the positive impact they had on students in particular.

What am I working towards.

Despite the vital nature of the program coordinator role for others, both tenure track and non-tenure track participants questioned the negative impact on their own well-being and professional trajectories. They noted that engaging in scholarly activity is virtually impossible due to overwhelming stress and the need for quick responses. The high-demand role slowed research progress due to depleting emotional and intellectual energy. Extensive time and effort are required of program coordinators, yet there is no professional development or individual career progression benefit. The constant availability and prioritization of student needs over self-care lead to displacement of personal well-being, and the sheer volume and intensity of work caused outright exhaustion. In addition to the lack of appreciation and carrying responsibility for program success, these faculty often protect their students at the cost of their own health.

Support them at all costs.

Due to demands around offering limitless service and support via the program coordination role, there was a negative impact on personal well-being and professional trajectories. Consistently, participants named tensions and oppression related to their minoritized identities. Women noted that navigating macro-power systems and systemic oppression meant contending with societal expectations to be warm and coddling. This burden was intensified by the additional amount of work expected by others due to gendered roles. Furthermore, structural oppression related to intersecting identities around gender and race led to challenges. Participants noted that being a Woman of Color meant battling stereotypes of being caretakers and homemakers, while also being expected to serve as high achievers for the benefit of others. Gender was not the only minoritized identity mentioned. Another participant noted that a disability led to impression management, which caused additional strain from trying to overcompensate by overperforming. Participants highlighted these challenges that resulted in high personal expectations amidst external pressures, including being responsible for program outcomes amidst realities of capitalism, low applications, attrition, discontent, and budget cuts.

At what cost.

Navigating challenges related to program coordination came at a personal and professional cost to participants. They highlighted the all-consuming nature of the role, noting it was overwhelming and completely took over life. Participants experienced strain on personal relationships, including divorce, as well as facing role-related anxiety and stress, and health issues from not having time to exercise. It was common for participants to explain

that the immediacy of the role meant not taking any time off, including working nights, weekends, and holidays. The demanding nature of program coordination also meant that participants had little time for other main work responsibilities such as research and scholarship, leading to delayed promotion. The pace of program coordination was relentless for participants, and caused a strain on emotional energy, personal time, rest, and finances. Participants described program coordination as overwhelming, professional hazing, and sacrifice, leading some to consider leaving academia due to seeing no way out of the role that is not fairly compensated or rewarded.

Discussion and Implications

Study findings highlighted areas of incongruence for program coordinators, especially related to social identity, in the areas of scholarship, teaching, career advancement, and personal well-being. Further data analysis using arts-based methods resulted in a found poem with four components experienced within program coordinators' journeys: *Vital, What am I working towards, Support them at all costs, and At what cost*.

Faculty members serving as program coordinators shape professional fields by guiding graduate preparation programs, and this role represents a unique service responsibility that varies in both responsibilities and compensation. Current study findings build upon existing literature highlighting inequities in faculty workloads for minoritized faculty (Griffin, 2019a, 2019b; Morgan et al., 2022; Schultz & Stansbury, 2022; Wapman et al., 2022; White-Lewis, 2020). Our study extends findings regarding challenges faced by faculty who are women (Mason et al., 2006; O'Meara & Bloomgarden, 2011; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006), racially and ethnically minoritized faculty (Blockett et al., 2016; Settles et al., 2018), queer faculty, and disabled faculty (Fridensen et al., 2021). Our study also mirrored existing literature findings on the connection between minoritized faculty being over-represented in contingent or non-tenure track faculty roles, which are additionally at the margins of career advancement opportunity and disproportionate service expectations (Blockett et al, 2016; French et al., 2020; Kezar & Harper, 2023; Porter, 2007; Settles et al., 2018; Shelton & Ardoin, 2020). Furthermore, our study reflected the AAUP (2020) report about academic and faculty norms influencing program coordinator roles and expectations. Building on this reality, a unique aspect of the current study was noting the additional layers of complexity for program coordinators in the HESA field specifically.

For those seeking additional structural analysis and guidance for department chairs, Deans, and other stakeholders who have responsibility for supporting HESA program coordinators, [Author] (2024) engages in a thorough critical analysis with detailed recommendations including policy implications such as equitable compensation for the realistic time and energy required of this role, particularly for minoritized scholars. We also encourage engagement with the ACPA Senior Scholars Statement on HESA program coordination, which was endorsed by ACPA, NASPA, and ASHE (see: [Author] 2024). Our findings further emphasize recommendations from these pieces of scholarship such as members of promotion, tenure, and review committees to give full credit for program coordination work, including recognizing the large among of time and emotional labor specific to HESA coordination, and that equitable compensation such as workload adjustment may have a large negative impact on research productivity. In addition to echoing these workplace realities, our found poem and resultant analysis provides additional nuances to the human element in understanding the toll of program coordination to individuals' well-being and personal lives.

Given the holistic student-focused norms of the HESA field (Schuh et al. 2017), participants were held to particularly high standards regarding visible, hands-on, relationship-centered program coordination work regarding responsibilities, ex-

pectations, and time commitments. While this emphasis on supportive student relationships and services is an opportunity for meaningful connections with students that may bring joy, this level of commitment also leads to undue stressors on program coordinator workloads. Our study is important because the need to recruit, support, and retrain effective program coordinators is crucial for the health of graduate programs. Given program coordinator roles such as guiding recruitment, admissions, mentoring, and student support efforts, program coordinators shape the future and vitality of the professional training. We envision this work as a resource that program coordinators can use for contextualizing, communicating, and advocating for increased equity associated with their contributions. Furthermore, the arts-based approach to exploring our research study allows for further humanizing this topic as we seek community and connection via this arts-based approach given its capacity for healing and empowerment (Lou, 2018). With a study focused on the experiences of people who are not always–or perhaps even rarely–prioritized, this approach demonstrates the importance not only of the labor of program coordinators but of bringing multiple approaches and perspectives.

Limitations

Our sample is not fully representative of program coordinators' positional roles and future studies may gather data focused on faculty program coordinators with contingent roles. Additionally, given that our field's faculty are a relatively small scholarly community, participant responses may have been altered by pre-existing knowledge of and relationships with the researchers. Finally, a found poem uses participants' words, which can influence the presence (or absence) of certain information. For example, although the study included men and gender non-conforming people, their comments (distinct from their demographic information) did not explicitly name those identities. Thus, the explicit inclusion of particular identities in the findings does not mean others' ideas are not represented, rather, we invite readers to engage holistically, taking presence and absence of words as opportunities for reflection and consideration.

A Note to Faculty and Academic Administrators Without Coordinating Responsibilities

In alignment with our emphasis on humanizing strategies, we would be remiss if we did not also offer some reflective questions for those who are working with—and likely benefiting from the labor of—HESA program coordinators:

1. How might my expectations and interactions with my program's coordinator be reinforcing oppressive ideologies (e.g., racism, sexism, ideal worker norms)?
2. What tangible service have I given to support the program this year? Semester? Month? Week? Do I volunteer for to contribute outside of required service?
3. How does my engagement in meetings affirm and validate the coordinator's contributions?
4. In what ways do my departmental review and promotion policies (as well as recognition initiatives) acknowledge and value the diverse labor of HESA program coordinators?
5. How can I support my program's coordinator in making progress toward their professional goals?

Conclusion

Ultimately, the final found poem allowed for a narrative to highlight and validate the realities of faculty graduate program coordinators, particularly those with minoritized social identities. Beginning to frame and amplify the negative impact of program coordination on faculty members' professional and personal lives is but a step towards changing the contexts that perpetuate this exploitation. May this poem serve as a tool for other program coordinators to feel seen and empowered

that they too can take steps towards building more liberatory spaces in higher education.

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Table 1. Participant And Position Information

Category	Details
Institutional Carnegie Classification	Baccalaureate College: 1% M3: Master's - Smaller: 6% M2: Master's Medium: 4% M1: Master's - Large: 13% R2: Doctoral - High Research Activity: 23% R1: Doctoral - Very High Research Activity: 42%
Program(s) Coordinated	Master's: 54% Ph.D.: 6% Master's and Ed.D.: 14% Master's, Ed.D., and Ph.D.: 4% Master's and Ph.D.: 16% Undergraduate and Master's: 3%
Workload Classification	Service: 65% Administration: 14% N/A: 9% Teaching: 7%
Rank at Time of Initial Program Coordinator Appointment	Assistant Professor: 52% Associate Professor: 22% Professor: 1% Clinical/Teaching/Non-Tenure-Track: 22%
Current Rank	Assistant Professor: 23% Associate Professor: 36% Professor: 19% Clinical/Teaching/Non-Tenure-Track: 17%
Years as Program Coordinator	Average: 6 years
Mean Weekly Hours (Academic Year)	15.4 hours
Mean Weekly Hours (Summer)	9.8 hours

Compensation For Program Coordination	Monetary ($600-$20,000): 12% Monetary and Reduced Course Load: 16% One Course Release: 22% Two or More Course Releases: 9% Graduate Assistant Support: 1% Summer Stipend: 12% No Compensation: 28%
Formal Rotation of Program Coordination	No Formal Rotation: 89% Formal Rotation: 11%
Race (open response)	White: 67% African American, Asian American, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Jewish, Multiracial: <5% each
Gender (open response)	Cis Woman/Woman/Female: 59% Cis Man/Man/Male: 30% Non-Binary: 1%
Additional Salient Social Identities (open response)	Queer, immigrant, childless, atheist, working class background, disabled, veteran, liberal, Muslim, neurological disorder