

Beyond Management: The Potential for Writing Program Leadership During Turbulent Times

Casie Fedukovich,
North Carolina State
University
& Sue Doe,
Colorado State University

Grounded in the authors' dissatisfaction with academic leadership after the 2016 presidential election, this article complicates the idea of the WPA-as-manager by introducing the framework of feminist, transformational, and intersectional writing program leadership. As writing program administrators, the authors identify the problems with calls for civility and neutrality post-election, particularly as these calls came down to the many non-tenure-track faculty and graduate students teaching first-year writing.

The authors introduce two methods of moving beyond writing program management to include greater attention to community engagement and leadership post-Trump: through revising curricula and course materials and by diversifying professional development opportunities. WPAs may find themselves in a rare moment where the pedagogical approaches for which we have long advocated—attention to marginalized voices, representation of complex arguments grounded in material realities, validation of the rhetorical import of non-academic texts—are immediately practicable as a condition of civic engagement. Curricula and course materials may convey these commitments beyond the classroom. Further, the authors address the need for greater attention to professional development for faculty, particularly

focusing on addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. They discuss two professional development resources beyond individual campus resources: the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) and the University of Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR).

By grounding this renovated image of the writing program administrator as a writing program leader, situated theoretically in leadership studies, the authors extend the work of scholars who see the WPA as a site of radical advocacy.

In the days following the 2016 presidential election, writing program administrators (WPA) often became important forces for ethical, feminist-informed action due to questions that emerged about free speech, an increase in hate incidents on campus, and classroom dynamics reflecting assumptions about liberal campus culture. Graduate teaching assistants (GTA) and composition faculty often found themselves in the crosshairs of thorny classroom conversations and the target of ridicule for having classrooms that provided safe spaces or refuge for so-called “snowflake students.” As teachers attempted to continue the long tradition of composition’s valuing of diverse perspectives through reading and representing varied voices, ranging from the political to the academic to the public and grassroots, they needed structural support to confidently enact free and fair discussions in their classrooms.

We believe such support might be offered by recasting the position of WPA as campus leader, reflecting a positionality more deeply engaged than past scholarly narratives about the management of programs would suggest. To that end, we argue for a revision of the WPA to something new, here the “writing program leader,” in order to more fully embrace and renew loyalties of writing programs to principles of democracy, equality, and social transformation both within institutional contexts and beyond them. By connecting the transformational potential of WPA work with academic constituents—faculty, graduate students, the students in our many classes, and institutional colleagues—we suggest an approach that exerts greater attention to social justice and deeper community engagement. We encourage WPAs to engage in forms of intersectional

leadership that embrace the critically relevant discussions of our times. Through this leadership position, we propose two areas where program leaders might demonstrate engagement: through published curricula and ongoing professional development.

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP, LOCAL CONTEXTS

For Casie, a WPA living in North Carolina, as Republican Donald Trump was elected president, Democrat Roy Cooper was elected North Carolina's governor. Cooper stepped into the role vacated by Republican Pat McCrory, the controversial governor responsible for HB2, the so-called "Bathroom Bill" that explicitly targeted transgendered citizens. Many people on Casie's campus felt that, despite their distrust and outright fear regarding national leadership, they could trust their local leadership to protect the most vulnerable citizens. Yet even as she and colleagues clung to Cooper's win, Casie met in offices and hallways to "rescue mentor" (Reid 2010) struggling faculty and GTAs. She found one GTA crying in a cubicle, distraught that one of her first-year students had worn a "Grab her by the P***Y" shirt to class the day after the election. An upper-administrator at Casie's university circulated an email on November 9 detailing campus support services and events and included this statement: "Please do all within your power to encourage respectful dialog and support colleagues and students in need." Later that week, another email circulated encouraging faculty to "find a balance in your various roles as instructors, as advisers and mentors."

Two-thirds of the way across the country in Colorado, a purple state, the scales had tipped slightly toward blue, and on the land grant campus where Sue works as WPA, reactions to the Trump victory reflected the political divisions of the state. The Diversity House opened not just its doors but its wide swath of yard for people to gather and reflect, while across campus, a few student groups erected mock walls on the free speech plaza. Threatening hoaxes emerged: A GTA teaching first-year composition found herself facing an unknown student in her class. The student stated that he had just been absent for many days but now was returning to challenge the liberal reading list. A new, non-tenure-track instructor became the target of an email hoax in which a person, claiming to be a student, reported to central administrators that the instructor was conveying

despair over the election and wasting valuable class time. While both events were quickly found to be ruses, the damage was still done, the vulnerability of untenured teachers and the emboldening of people with malicious intent revealed. On Sue's campus, as with Casie's, university administration issued a statement within a few days of the election results. It read in part:

There are people on all sides of the political spectrum who have been hurt and made afraid by the stinging political rhetoric and stereotyping that have been hurled back and forth during this election cycle. We are better than this, and I ask that we call on our "better angels" to reach out to one another with kindness and understanding. If you choose to discuss personal politics in the workplace, please be mindful and respectful of others in the room. (Frank 2016)

Statements like these attempted to encourage faculty and staff toward civility, but their neutrality sanitized the deep emotional and psychological pain experienced by many students and teachers as across the United States, campuses struggled with how to respond to demands for free speech when free speech was mostly being used as a weapon against the most vulnerable. How were faculty to stand in front of students, many of whom felt insecure and afraid, and conduct "business as usual"? And was it not a tall order to lay the responsibility for conducting civil discourse at the feet of non-tenure-track faculty and GTAs who were more often in the classroom than tenured faculty, not only in writing classrooms but across campus, given increased reliance on contingent labor? Yet when Casie asked to quickly organize a time for faculty and GTAs to gather and talk about their experiences after the election, including the opportunity to brainstorm about how to uphold pedagogical expectations, she was advised that university resources, including email and space, could not be used for "political purposes."

CHALLENGES OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

In these early tumultuous days after the election, academic administrators often managed discontent by assuming a neutral political stance with a goal of restoring order. These campus leaders, generally at the provost, president, or chancellor level, were

called upon to speak through official emails, university websites, or campus public relations offices. We have examined many of these pronouncements and found them remarkably similar. Meanwhile, as WPAs, our own responses to official leadership emails post-election were framed in the context of the daily demands of writing program administration, but in our experience, neutrality and a “business as usual” tone only exacerbated the difficult situations we handled and felt disrespectful to our students and faculty, many of whom were facing significant challenges.

Emerging scholarship on communication and rhetoric after the election supports our on-the-ground perceptions of these official statements from university leadership. McNaughtan, et al.’s (2018) study of 50 election responses from presidents at flagship universities found that university leaders were thrust into a complex web of audience expectations and time constraints. The statements, overall, sought a neutral tone grounded in “the importance of unity, civil dialogue, and university values” (13). The authors recognize that university presidents were called upon to respond quickly, to dutifully engage in “sense making” for multiple audiences—faculty, students, staff, donors, other administrators—in order to “help members in the institution make sense of change and uncertainty when encountering an internal or external event” (2). This research helps frame the communication Casie and Sue have observed from campus leaders and grounds the leadership practices we propose here as potentially influential alternatives within writing program administration.

So it is into this chaotic, dangerous—and yes, kairoitic—moment that we now step, urging WPAs like ourselves to undertake the necessary work of leveraging our leadership influence as WPAs and to seek out learning ourselves in order to pass new learning along to others. In the days and weeks after the election, as many university leaders spoke in generalities very different from our daily teaching and administrative lives, student advocates on our campuses—mostly from student affairs—stepped boldly into advocacy of marginalized students and wondered aloud why faculty and classrooms weren’t doing the same. At a time when both guidance and reassurance felt necessary, we often felt no clear support for ourselves even as others looked to us, but it was at this moment that we realized that leadership

needed to come from us, just as it was coming from academic affairs. As WPAs, we needed to more fully step into leadership roles so that we might help our teachers educate as they wished, but also so that we could educate others as to our teachers' vulnerability. To do this, we realized, would require additional training for ourselves and others.

A SHORT HISTORY OF WPA LEADERSHIP MODELS

WPAs have long labored under expectations reinforced by the last element of the title, administrator, with managerial expectations reaffirmed in published scholarship: as "boss compositionists" (Sledd 2001) who oversee "composition droids" (Nelson 1998); "faculty-managers" (Klausman 2016); and "lower-level management in the managed university" (Bousquet 2002, 496). In broader academic literature on academic labor and administration, WPAs have been drawn into the discussion about "academic middle managers" and lumped in with deans, provosts, and other out-of-touch administrators who willingly, for their own security and advancement, concede to and carry out the demands of the neoliberal corporate university. Marc Bousquet's (2002) "Composition as Management Science: Toward a University without a WPA" presented some of the assumptions held about WPAs as complicit in hastening the journey towards the fully corporate university: "It is not clear that 'lower management' represents a particularly strong standpoint for individuals 'advocating' change to upper management. Indeed, despite the occasional exception, the opposite would seem to be the case" (497). More recently, Tony Scott and Nancy Welch (2016) have suggested that labor trends in composition presage higher education's future, as public funding continues to dwindle and the adjunctification crisis deepens. For Scott and Welch, WPAs are essentially canaries in the coal mine for broader trends and urgencies in university systems, a characterization that does little to suggest the agency and potential importance of WPA insight and approach. Even the subfield of femadmin has come up short. In their review of the literature, Laura Micciche and Donna Strickland (2013) note, "it's no surprise that feminism never really gained momentum in WPA scholarship or practice, both of which have been largely guided by instrumentalist thinking" (171).

Yet as far back as 1995, Barbara Cambridge and Ben McClelland encouraged a reconsideration of the WPA from the “central symbol of writing on campus” to a partner, encouraging WPAs to think beyond their individual programs to create visible allies (1995, 157). And in 1998, Jeanne Gunner, writing out of the milieu of the social turn, identified the WPA as “English Department Agent,” a “liaison figure” who may support oppressive power structures but who, with deep reflection, may become “the site at which radical, reformist theories and calls for action can be (re)directed into pedagogic and curricular forms” (1998, 154). Ten years after Gunner observed that WPAs focus too heavily on “nuts-and-bolts practical language that cannot serve as the purveyor of social change” (154), Linda Adler-Kassner (2008) proposed the image of “the Activist WPA” who would speak out against the consistently negative portrayals of college students and their writing in popular media, arguing that the process of storying could better communicate the intense work of teaching writing and the complex notion of literacy. Additionally, Donna Strickland’s (2011) monograph *The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies* recognized the schism created between ethical writing program administration and institutional demands. Her materialist history embraced an alternative form of leadership through an “operative approach” that boldly integrated broader “audience participation” (121), or working alongside/with so that WPAs might contemplate new visions or futurities instead of worrying about traditional outcomes. In this view, leadership goes well beyond “the instrumental questions of how to ‘get things done’ to include questions of the ethical and political consequences of doing so” (121).

As WPAs who labor under many titles, we believe the current moment is exigent for the WPA’s exertion of expertise. WPAs can be more influential than how we have been constructed and how we have constructed ourselves; an enhanced sense of leadership potential must first be admitted and embraced by the WPA herself, but then it must be conveyed with greater clarity throughout college and university systems, starting with classrooms. In this way, we envision the WPA as a powerful symbol of local leadership during insecure times, especially when campus leadership higher up the chain falters or fails. Here, we wish to make clear that we are not arguing for WPAs, whose workloads tend to expand as resources decrease, to

take on even more arduous tasks. Instead, we propose a framework for WPA action that uses transformational and intersectional leadership as a methodology for addressing current, pressing needs. In so doing, we seek to reduce the petty managerialism of the WPA and counter misunderstanding of the roles we fill and the values for which we stand.

We acknowledge that the very notion of “leadership” is something that many in the field distrust, given its association with hierarchy and business-military-industrial models (Davies 2018). Yet many WPAs go on to fill other institutional leadership roles, as department heads, deans, and directors of centers, even as they eschew the important institutional leadership they could be exercising while serving in WPA roles. In illustration, many of the contributors to Courtney Adams Wooten, Jacob Babb, and Brian Ray’s (2018) recent edited collection *WPAs in Transition: Navigating Educational Leadership Positions* have taken up the challenge of leadership, from the perspective of the WPA. For instance, Laura J. Davies (2018) defines two styles—collaboration and command—that can be enacted dynamically so that WPA leaders become rhetorically nimble actors who work to understand the stakes of their leadership decisions.

Building upon this idea, we contend that WPA work can be further reconceived as a crucial form and source of campus leadership that engages deeply with social justice issues within and beyond the institution, without the WPA ever leaving the writing program for higher places in the institutional hierarchy. Such an approach responds to Tom Miller and Joddy Murray’s (2017) call, post-election, for rhetoric scholars to “reconsider leadership as an integrative frame for what we study, what we teach, and what we need to be doing in the foreseeable future” (448). This call suggests a way forward despite the philosophical wandering in higher education leadership since the 2016 election.

We extend these discussions through the frame of locally defined, feminist, transformational leadership that utilizes institutionally supported pathways for engaged change. Leadership, as we call for it to be reimaged here, need not belong to or originate from those at the top of our universities. Indeed, as Sue and Casie experienced, top

leaders are often far removed from the on-the-ground, face-to-face work that makes up our daily lives. We argue that leadership can be built from the ground up, as students themselves are demonstrating in many locations, but it might also reflect the leadership that WPAs (and other “middle-managers”) are capable of embodying and enacting. We argue that by reconstructing the WPA into a transformational leader guided by feminist principles, we can add value by deepening the social contract among advocacy, students, and our individual educational missions. It is into this gap that the WPA-as-leader and writing instruction more generally can step, offering the kind of inclusive curricular and pedagogical leadership that is needed. In this article, we frame several pedagogical initiatives to meet these leadership needs. We then explain the theoretical grounding for this leadership work.

RESOURCES FOR INTERSECTIONAL WRITING PROGRAM LEADERS

Writing programs led through an intersectional feminist approach may take many forms, influenced as they are by local conditions and individual program leaders. We intend for the following recommendations to extend the community-building work we do as program leaders and to leverage the high-touch, wide-ranging influence we already encourage in our composition courses. While we recognize that many of us doing the hard work of teaching and program administration continue to feel unmoored in the current political and social milieu, we are reminded of Adler-Kassner’s (2018) Activist WPA, who looks for opportunities to “build relationships, develop and disseminate messages, and engage in other positively based work to change frames around writing and writers” (79). While Adler-Kassner’s goal is, in part, to change the stories we tell about writing on our campuses, we’re envisioning a broader application of that work to encourage program leadership that explicitly encourages social justice and coalition building during turbulent political times.

Each WPA will need to look to her own campus and broader community to find her best resources. This will mean looking not only to programs that address such issues, such as schools of education, student affairs offices, vice presidents for diversity, and programs in women’s and ethnic studies, but also to the people in our midst who experience intersectional bias themselves and know

it firsthand. In short, to become part of a university leadership team that presumes to undertake such efforts, much less to claim oneself as a WPA intersectional leader, will require a commitment to learning from members of our communities, a commitment to the kind of engaged scholarship that community literacy scholars participate in daily. Perhaps most importantly, we will need to learn from students themselves since they often encounter the university as an oppressive force, rather than a source of empowerment, and too often have had to work to develop independent resources in resistance to the curriculum. WPAs might begin by connecting with the kinds of specialized centers that serve student groups such as the offices of Asian Pacific, Black/African, Native, LGBTQ, disabled, veteran, and adult learners. Part of intersectional leadership involves understanding that we are part of a university that is culpable as well as aspirational, so we must work from the ground up to show students that we are willing to learn from them and their advocates.

We propose the following resources and approaches in support of an intersectional leadership initiative in writing program administration, though we do so tentatively because we understand that contextual factors always constrain and guide WPAs' actions. That is, those responsible for leading writing programs may do so without the clarity or support of a formal title or may lead writing-focused courses not organized into a coherent program. They may work in administrative structures in which responsibilities are shared. They may labor without the security of tenure. They may be beholden to strict oversight from department heads, deans, or other campus administrators. Yet we remain hopeful that the work we propose may shift from writing program administration to intersectional writing program leadership in ways that are scalable to individual programmatic demands, even as we also understand that any set of recommendations that invoke curricula and professional development also implicate discussions of labor, security, and risk. These are areas where we believe more scholarly attention is needed. Yet because power sustains itself through complex material and discursive relationships, the curricular and faculty development we share next must be infused with community-engaged pedagogies. We recommend the following guiding questions as we think through these interventions:

1. How do we make our curricula maximally responsive to the needs of our students along political and economic spectrums?
2. How do we step up to be inclusive pedagogical leaders whose curriculum and pedagogy reflect our commitments to equality, inclusivity, and open and respectful discourse?
3. How do we engage inclusively in the creation of our new materials and approaches?

REVISING CURRICULA AND MATERIALS

Since we find ourselves in a rare moment when pedagogical approaches we have long advocated—attention to marginalized voices, representation of messy and complex arguments grounded in material realities, validation of non-academic texts—are immediately practicable as a condition of civic engagement, we first recommend the integration of changes to that which is highly visible: published curricula, which includes assigned reading and writing. Published curricula provides a blueprint for teaching and documents our approaches. Such curricula should aim to integrate new ideas brought to us from social justice communities, while decisions about curricular changes might be judged by the degree to which the pedagogy being forwarded reflects enhancement to representative and democratic approaches to the teaching of writing. Here we focus on just three areas where we might engage this work initially—1) at the level of introductory information on the course, including icebreaker activities to engage classrooms, 2) in regard to new visions for assigned reading and writing, and 3) with new discussion strategies informed by theories of intergroup dialogue.

First, syllabi can and do send an initial signal, conveying support (or lack thereof) for our diverse campus communities. This starts with listing and recommending a broad swath of support services on campus, reflecting the diverse needs of students. Syllabi should also (see “Examples”) be made fully accessible (Jones 2016), and, as suggested by materials from Iowa State University and the University of Michigan (“CommonGround”), can communicate the objective of creating an inclusive classroom environment through direct reference to it. Communicating and demonstrating an inclusive classroom begins with these earliest messages we send, including

how we manage accommodations for disabilities, how we prepare students for difficult topics—as in, if we provide trigger warnings or not—and how we model the use of personal pronouns by providing our own. In the early pages of our syllabi, we can also convey any principles of community or other institutional documents, such as diversity and inclusion plans, that have been developed to signal the university's commitment to an inclusive environment.

In the early days of class, published curricula can make a concerted effort to commit time for students to get to know each other through activities that ask about background and beliefs. Such activities need to be carefully designed, of course, and should be sequenced mindfully with an opt-out option provided. Questions can be developed to help students see how their own and others' incoming experiences and traditions influence values and beliefs associated with course themes and concerns. Such efforts might be undertaken over the course of several early days and/or returned to at the start of each new assignment or unit. They do not need to take long, but student knowledge of one another is an essential part of the content, not divorced from it, and efforts undertaken early often help to forge relationships and establish that all student voices are valued. Such efforts can also lead to the establishment of a short list of agreed-upon classroom rules or guidelines, where students and teachers work together to determine the "rules of engagement" in the class, which can be returned to later if the need arises.

Second, we can undertake more a more committed integration of texts from diverse sources and also integrate new exigencies for assigned writing. With the increased use of custom readers in composition courses, we might infuse a more robustly inclusive set of topics and authors. For instance, at a land grant institution with an interest in environment and sustainability, there could be new texts regarding the human dimensions of debates over limited natural resources. A revised reader might take a case study approach, integrating texts about the South Dakota pipeline or the Flint, Michigan, water crisis and feature writing by community-based activists and officials who are working in public genres such as blog posts, news articles, and governmental declarations.

We might also expand the range of writing we assign, since the time seems right to revisit the ways in which we ask students to make arguments, explore how they support those arguments, and query their perceptions of their responsibilities as citizens. A pedagogical shift could involve revising course writing outcomes to explore more examples, in both number and complexity, of civic and popular rhetorics. Such an effort would go some distance toward putting into practice values that we hold, particularly in regard to the rhetorical value of all texts—including formal and informal, popular, civic, and scholarly. Teaching popular texts, such as tweets or other forms of social and popular media, might hold deep potential for interrogating the construction of identity and for addressing the ways that arguments are built in the public sphere—including the ways they sometimes fail. Drawing on community discourse, students might interview members of the community to obtain additional insight into perspectives. In turn, such a move to privilege civic and popular texts would invoke discussions of free speech and its boundaries, a conversation in which many of our students, faculty, and communities are already involved.

Such a move suggests the third pedagogical area we discuss here, that we might also revitalize discussion approaches and invite new forms of response and dialogue. In one illustration that we have witnessed across multiple campuses, students discuss the case of a student group that graffiti's a shared campus "free speech" space with support for victims of a hate crime, while a second group follows to cover the first message with hateful language and images. Discussion might then directly address the ways that civic discourse circulates throughout our daily lives and constitutes a great deal of the media our students consume. Pedagogical interventions, such as discussion undertaken in light of similar events, might explore the concept of "freedom of speech" in action. The writing classroom could then engage in intergroup dialogue approaches such as those recommended by the University of Michigan, around which we will say more later as we discuss faculty professional development. Campus community members, such as university counsel and legal support, as well as advocacy groups could be invited into the discussion to describe how they see the issues. Even community members from outside the university could be brought in to engage in discussion and dialogue alongside students, staff, and faculty, as could bloggers or at least the

posts of bloggers from discernible and distinct political groups, thus demonstrating “Brandeis’ dictum of ‘more speech’ that allows us to respond without punishing” (Lawrence 2018). These efforts would engage in the kinds of community-engaged pedagogy we value in composition.

Framing free speech in such a way—as a dynamic, constantly refreshed conversation that is not only worthy of the first-year writing classroom but a necessity of it—fits well within the scope of the goals of composition instruction while also placing composition and student writers at the center of some of the most important intellectual debates of our day. Students can be presented with a range of opinions and concrete ways to become part of a real conversation rather than engaging merely with the kind of fictionalized ones we so often devise in our classrooms in order to simulate topical discussions. And while the teaching of civic and popular texts may feel risky at a time when many faculty teaching first-year writing do so under insecure contracts, the time is opportune for revisiting deeply held assumptions about what constitutes appropriate texts for reading, writing, and discussion in first-year writing.

NEW PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR BOTH FACULTY AND WRITING PROGRAM LEADERS

The process of “leadership for improved teaching and learning,” argues Amy Rupiper Taggart (2018), is an “action-oriented pedagogical leadership mindset” (167 and 157). Framed within her own leadership journey, Taggart contends that WPAs are particularly well prepared to be pedagogical leaders, through the field’s encouragement of the scholarship of teaching and learning and its discussions of the confluence of pedagogical and administrative theories. Recognizing, as Taggart does, that “pedagogy is... not just what happens in a single classroom” (167), we also identify faculty professional development as an area where intersectional writing program leadership should occur. As Casie and Sue—and likely many other writing program and other campus leaders—experienced, the weeks after the election created urgent situations with students and faculty that we were compelled to address. Reaching outside of our programs became necessary in order to support faculty and students in meaningful ways. We found that as program leaders, seeking

counsel from unexpected allies prepared us for the challenges we would face.

We particularly found support and encouragement in campus resources that engage in diversity training and reflection, and we urge others to engage these offices at their local settings. Among those we found helpful were the various offices of institutional equity, diversity and inclusion, and student affairs; centers for leadership and civic engagement and multicultural affairs; women's centers; and LGBT centers. Contacts with these campus resources led to professional development opportunities that we took advantage of and subsequently passed along to others. These opportunities ranged from workshops on reporting sexual harassment and violence to workshops on intergroup dialogue, facilitator training for dealing with hot-button topics and difficult conversations, immersive social justice institutes, and faculty-specific classes on inclusive pedagogy. In the months following the election, first, as our faculty encountered student needs and second, as we encountered faculty needs, we found we needed help and as we reached across campus for assistance, even as other offices looked to us for leadership, we found that our allies and our skills grew. In the process of trying to survive and thrive, we discovered new resources and new allies we didn't know we had. This process started by learning all that we didn't know we didn't know.

Two well-established resources provided structure and methods to meet these needs in the weeks following the 2016 election: The National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) and the University of Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR). NCBI maintains chapters internationally, in fifteen U.S. cities and through twenty-three campus affiliates, including Casie's campus. Chapters are comprised of "a team of grassroots leaders who represent a broad cross-section of their community" (National Coalition Building Institute n.d.). Campus affiliates offer workshops to "educate students and employees about issues of discrimination, harassment, prejudice, and diversity" (National Coalition Building Institute n.d.). In August 2017, Casie hosted two NCBI workshop leaders who presented "Teaching in Turbulent Times," a workshop that addressed some of the concerning events our faculty and students had faced: overt racism and homophobia, threats to safety, and questions from faculty

about when to reach out to campus police and other contacts, such as the counseling center. In addition to workshops, the NCBI hosts and trains faculty and staff to serve as outreach leaders. These trained participants lead workshops and “intervene when tough conflicts arise, either between campus groups or between the campus and surrounding community” (National Coalition Building Institute, n.d.). Campuses and communities may request to become campus NCBI affiliates and city chapters. Because the affiliates and chapters are grassroots—that is, initiated and maintained by people in the communities in which they operate—they maintain local values and reflect local concerns.

On Sue’s campus, largely due to a politically engaged new associate provost, a commitment was made to create a relationship with the University of Michigan’s Intergroup Dialogue, which offers trainers who come to campus for three-day intensive workshops. These workshops, which invite faculty of all ranks, address faculty capacity for dealing with classroom dynamics that are often damaging to many students. The Intergroup Dialogue is promoted by the University of Michigan’s Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR), described as a “social justice education program” that offers a model for what social justice work might look like as supported through a campus unit. Founded over 30 years ago, the IGR is “committed to helping students, and those who work with them, pursue social justice through educational engagement, practice, and pedagogy.” IGR is a sophisticated, institutionally supported schedule of courses with an attached credential that hosts on-site workshops, including the workshops scheduled on Sue’s campus. They also offer a model for student-led peer mentoring, called “CommonGround,” described as “one way that student organizations, residence halls, Greek life, academic courses, and other campus communities can request programs that raise awareness about social identities (race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.), prejudice, stereotyping, power, privilege, and oppression” (University of Michigan, n.d.). The IGR model is robust, as it provides theorized practice to students in their undergraduate and graduate courses of study and then reflects that training back into the communities they wish to affect. On Sue’s campus, the IGR workshops have also led to home-grown faculty development led by the vice president for diversity and the women and gender equity commission. While the IGR process may be too

complex or expensive to replicate in many writing programs, IGR's attention to facilitating intergroup dialogue between undergraduates provides a model for our work in first-year writing. In particular, their new "working paper series" provides research on the process of developing pedagogical approaches for group dialogue. These papers could be integrated into reading circles, faculty discussions, and other sites where professional development takes place without the benefit of on-site external consultants.

We acknowledge that these two resources are not specific to writing programs. But until such time as the dearth of specific support for writing program faculty is addressed, our campus allies and programs like NCBI and IGR can provide writing program leaders with promising approaches for supporting the complex challenge of intersectional leadership through curriculum and professional development.

LEADERSHIP STUDIES: HOW OUR PROPOSED INITIATIVES ARE GROUNDED AND REFLECT CURRENT NEEDS

Our community-engaged pedagogical project emerges from a theoretically informed writing program leadership position, informed by current modes of thinking in management science and leadership studies. Scholars in leadership studies, for instance, define two primary leadership styles: transactional and transformational. Where transactional leadership, as it sounds, exchanges "rewards for compliance," transformational leadership seeks to provide a role model of ethical action, "high standards," and fairness (Lott 2007, 23). Natalie Porter and Jessica Henderson Daniel (2007) summarize four major characteristics of transformational leaders: inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (249). These characteristics stand starkly against descriptions of task-driven, reactive frameworks for writing program administration. In comparison, transformational leaders are presumably positively oriented visionaries who see beyond present challenges to encourage their audiences toward gradual success. They also challenge their own and others' thinking by moving beyond contextual givens, always testing the boundaries of their circumstances for possible areas of improvement.

Despite this optimistic description of transformational leadership, transformational leaders may well “create common aspirations geared toward performance enhancement” (Fine and Buzzanell 2000, 140) through which leaders encourage productivity and become instruments of labor. Transformational models may therefore have represented a way of leading different from traditional transactional models, but still, as Bernice Lott (2007) points out, they “have been developed primarily by non-feminist men, [who] still present the leader in ‘heroic’ terms, and are focused on individuals rather than groups” (23).

Feminist-informed leadership goes some distance toward addressing the shortcomings of masculinist transformational leadership. In fact, scholarship on feminist leadership emerged as a counterpoint to public-sector leadership models that “reveal ‘masculine’ conceptions of aggressive use of power, decisiveness, and rationality of purpose” (Rusaw 2005, 385). Porter and Henderson Daniel (2007) write, “feminist leadership is transformational in nature, seeking to empower and enhance the effectiveness of one’s team members while striving to improve the lives of all stakeholders” (249). They use the acronym VALUES to organize the elements that make up feminist leadership:

- Vision that is transforming, effectively communicated, and courageously executed,
- Action that is collaborative, community focused, and respectful,
- Learning that is empowering, reflexive, and lifelong,
- Understanding of power and boundaries issues that strive to empower,
- Ethical practices that promote inclusiveness, integrity, and responsibility,
- Social constructivism that informs one’s practice of leadership. (250)

These key words—vision, action, learning, understanding, ethical, and social constructivism—define much of the mission and value statements for writing programs and the administrative philosophies of many program administrators. Further, many of these characteristics appear across our discipline’s femadmin texts:

collaboration, respect, empowerment, and inclusion. The imperative to communicate one's transformative vision and courageously execute it situates the VALUES rubric firmly in the area of leadership, as we recall Fine and Buzzanell's (2000) criteria. Leadership is visionary and responsive as it strives to gradually push boundaries, while administration is workaday, practical, and reactive as it strives to maintain order, coherence, and status quo.

After the election, feminist-oriented WPAs were called to fill the gaps left by other institutional leaders who themselves were constrained by their positions. Many of the events on our campuses post-election demanded an ethical response going much further than managerial and administrative models typically admit. What was needed was leadership informed by feminist models, particularly as these models address issues of inclusivity, respect, and power. However, we recognize that the term "feminist" is incomplete and historically has operated as exclusionary. Intersectional feminism, in contrast, recognizes feminism's exclusionary history, calling attention to the complex and overlapping interplay of multiple identity frames and access to power.

As a term, intersectional feminism shot to the front of national public discussion after the Women's March on Washington on January 21, 2017, although the theories of intersectionality have been around much longer. (Crenshaw 1989; Hill Collins 2015). Sierra Brewer and Lauren Dundes (2018) have explored the March's aftereffects through interviews with twenty young African-American women. Only two of the twenty women interviewed attended the March, the others citing financial and time constraints and fears of police brutality while marching. The researchers conclude that while the March "seemingly had the potential to unite women across race," the African-American women interviewed "did not see the Women's March as a part of the feminist movement" as "the March was perceived as a means to protest the election rather than a way to address social injustices disproportionately affecting the lower social classes and people of color" (49 and 54). Other identity categories—sexual identification, ability status, class, age, and including especially the intersection of these categories—influenced the ways that March

participants could experience the event, or if they were empowered and invited to experience it at all.¹

The failure of the Women's March to address the multiple, complex concerns of a diversity of women illustrates for us as WPAs the critical embodied need to operate from an intersectional leadership framework. To date there has been little documentation of intersectional leadership approaches in the leadership literature, including the literature associated with higher education administration. One large meta-study of intersectionality's presence in public leadership research described intersectional approaches as "sorely lacking" (Breslin, Pandey, and Riccucci 2017, 175). Yet well-conceived intersectional writing program leadership might include visible demonstration of antiracist pedagogies and inclusive practices. Such efforts would counter mainstream literacy training that, as Amy Wan's (2014) archival research demonstrates, has too often functioned as gateway to U.S. citizenship and narrowly defined measures of success in economic and individualistic terms.

We find alternative visions of literacy efforts in the work of Frankie Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young (2017) in their collection on antiracist pedagogy in rhetoric and writing. Their monograph suggests several ways forward in various writing studies contexts, for instance, through anti-racist WAC programs, graduate education informed by discussions of race, and contact zones reimaged in contexts of free speech and white supremacy. Their work suggests how we might launch new lines of inquiry for improving our classroom spaces in writing studies. Taken as a whole, Wan's (2014) work might be said to describe the problem while Condon and Young's work (2017) suggests a number of viable pedagogical solutions.

Intersectional scholar Patricia Hill Collins (2015) describes the challenge associated with defining intersectionality as "a knowledge project whose *raison d'être* lies in its attentiveness to power relations and social inequalities" (1). Intersectional awareness involves attentiveness to the ways that race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ability, and age interact as "reciprocally constructing phenomena" (1). Hill Collins suggests that the knowledge projects resulting from intersectional approaches are ripe for application as critical praxis

(2015, 5). While Hill Collins (2015) calls for heightened awareness of the ways power and privilege affect diverse people unevenly and unfairly, the question of how a leadership project reflecting intersectionality and situated in the WPA context might work requires some reconstituting of her six provisions of intersectional analysis, which she describes this way:

1. marginalizing factors co-mingle, rather than exist alone or in isolation,
2. when power intersects with several of these factors, it multiplies in effect,
3. social inequalities are broadly felt by those living in any and all of these identities,
4. the effects of these features vary across context,
5. diverse people occupying these identities will undertake efforts that reflect their clearest needs,
6. power and politics will tend to uphold dominant narratives and mainstream values (14).

A WPA aspiring toward intersectional leadership would need to be cognizant of all of these concerns. She could be encouraged by the ways in which the field of rhetoric and composition already seeks to enlarge students' sense of rhetorical, if not actual, agency and engages students with topical issues and deepening awareness of varied perspectives. Similarly, she can draw on composition's long tradition of active-learning approaches in which students construct and constitute knowledge for themselves. Instruction in writing, in its many forms, platforms, and designs also provides opportunity for the expression and performance of student inquiry and discovery, through which students can exert their own rhetorical agency. These features of established composition pedagogy suggest a rich environment in which transformational and intersectional leadership might be practiced so that students—and here we mean *more* students and in particular, *diverse* students—can flourish. Yet with this opportunity comes a parallel responsibility for the aspirational WPA intersectional leader to come to terms with histories of the field and shortcomings in preparation. While the WPA may be well positioned to draw upon existing writing pedagogy to take the curricular lead in terms of the conduct of classes, she must also grapple with certain

challenges of knowledge—owning up to her own implicit bias, for starters—and undertaking committed professional development in matters relating to diversity, inclusion, and new and renewed valuing of non-dominant discourse practices. That said, writing program administrators hold transformational and intersectional leadership promise for at least three reasons: First, because WPAs often interact directly with writing faculty, a single WPA's reach is wide ranging. One professional development event, for example, could effect a small change that influences tens of faculty and hundreds, even thousands, of students. Second, writing program administration's fraught history with feminism has found new resonance post-Trump, especially as we spend our work days (and nights) counseling vulnerable faculty and providing support with our limited budgets and time. Third, WPAs can and must use the power available to them to influence what goes on in classrooms, helping faculty undertake the difficult work of creating intersectional classrooms where the curriculum provides the tools for mainstream success, as well as the tools for disruption of the status quo so that marginalized persons and discourses might thrive.

The potential for intersectional leadership to influence our writing programs is as diverse and innovative as the individual WPA who leads them. WPAs, we believe, are in a unique position to design writing programs that more deliberately focus on inclusion, diversity, and civic engagement. Community-engaged writing pedagogies, which we illustrated earlier through curricular and professional development interventions, could be part of these designs.

CONCLUSION: LOCAL LEADERSHIP, INTERSECTIONAL AIMS

The weeks following the election demanded deep reflection from both Casie and Sue, through conversations with colleagues and students and through a process of determining what good we could do through our writing programs. Ultimately, we sought and found local allies in institutional resources whose missions are to support students, from student affairs to counseling and health to the diversity office to disability services to international programs. We also found assistance in external resources such as NCBI, IGR, and a host of others. We found common cause in supporting students through difficult times and continue to collaborate across our varied expertise to communicate across and beyond the boundaries of our programs.

Further, by working together to envision productive conversation among students and faculty, we can provide a positive image of campus leadership that innovates in the face of crisis.

In such ways might faculty learn new skills for inviting diverse voices into the composition classroom and positively support their students, even as they are supported first by their writing program leaders. The concerns we met in the weeks following the 2016 election have not diminished. They have only complicated and intensified in many ways, as we still work to fill the gaps created by most campus leadership.² Their statements of neutrality and bland encouragement in the weeks following the election put the burden of maintaining civil discourse squarely on the backs of some of the most insecure faculty on our campuses: graduate students and non-tenure-track faculty. We see a revision of the position of WPA to writing program leader as holding great potential for the ways in which the discipline of writing studies sees the WPA role and in the ways our institutions consider its innovative potential. In turn, by visibly and consciously moving from a reactive approach to an assertive one grounded in feminist transformational leadership, informed by intersectional awareness and directed at inclusive practice, writing program leaders can establish new credibility on our campuses while taking every opportunity available to us to point out the vulnerabilities of our programs and our teachers. In such ways will we add to the list of positive titles that WPAs hold as change agents, as radical activists, and as visionary leaders working on behalf of students and faculty.

The current moment provides an opportunity for WPAs to grow towards an identity that complicates and enriches our potential. In the context of the Trump era, which has created unforeseen battles and exigencies, we have new reason to divorce from the neoliberal impulses that have plagued the field and can step more fully into intersectional leadership, aligning our practices with our deepest values and strongest convictions.

WORKS CITED

- Adler-Kassner, Linda. 2008. *The Activist WPA: Changing Stories about Writing and Writers*. Louisville, CO: Utah State University Press.
- Bousquet, Marc. 2002. "Composition as Management Science: Toward a University without a WPA." *JAC* 22, no. 3: 493-526.
- Breslin, Rachel A., Sheela Pandey, and Norma M. Riccucci. 2017. "Intersectionality in Public Leadership "Research: A Review and Future Research Agenda." *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 37, no. 2: 160-182.
- Brewer, Sierra, and Lauren Dundes. 2018. "Concerned, Meet Terrified: Intersectional Feminism and the Women's March." *Women's Studies International Forum* 69: 49-55.
- Cambridge, Barbara, and Ben McClelland. 1995. "From Icon to Partner: Repositioning the Writing Program Administrator." In *Resituating Writing: Constructing and Administering Writing Programs*, edited by Joseph Janangelo and Kristine Hansen, 151-59. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann.
- Condon, Frankie and Vershawn Ashanti Young. 2017. *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*. Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado and The WAC Clearinghouse.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, special issue: Feminism in the Law: Theory, Practice, and Criticism, 139-168. Chicago: University of Chicago Law School.
- Davies, Laura J. 2018. "Command and Collaboration: Leading as a New WPA." In Wooten, Babb, and Ray 2018, 188-203.
- Dickson, Marcia. 1993. "Directing Without Power: Adventures in Constructing a Model of Feminist Writing Program Administration." In *Writing Ourselves into the Story*, edited by Sheryl L. Fontaine and Susan Hunter, 140-153. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Fine, Marlene G., and Patrice M. Buzzanell. 2000. "Walking the High Wire: Leadership Theorizing, Daily Acts, and Tensions." In *Rethinking Organizational and Managerial Communication from*

- Feminist Perspectives*, edited by Patrice M. Buzzanell, 128-56. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Frank, Tony. "The Election, November 9, 2016." Accessed 8 August 2018. <https://president.colostate.edu/speeches-and-writing/the-election-november-9-2016/>.
- Gunner, Jeanne. 1998. "Among the Composition People: The WPA as English Department Agent." *JAC* 19: 153-65.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. 2015. "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas." *Annual Review of Sociology* 41: 1-20.
- Iowa State University. n.d. "Examples of Inclusive, Professionalism, and Mutual Respect Statements for Your Syllabi." Accessed December 5, 2018. <http://www.celt.iastate.edu/2017/05/03/inclusive-classroom-faculty-development-workshops-summer-2017/>.
- Jones, Jason B. 2016. "Make a More Inclusive Syllabus with Tulane's Accessible Syllabus Project." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 24, 2016.
- Klausman, Jeffrey. 2016. "Out of the Ivory Tower and into the Brand: How the New Two-Year College Mission Shapes the Faculty-Manager." In *A Critical Look at Institutional Mission: A Guide for Writing Program Administrators*, edited by Joseph Janangelo, 77-91. Anderson, SC: Parlor Press.
- Lawrence, Frederick M. 2017. "The Contours of Free Expression on Campus: Free Speech, Academic Freedom, and Civility." *Liberal Education* 103, no. 2 (Spring). Accessed November 20, 2018. <https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/2017/spring/lawrence>.
- Lott, Bernice. 2007. "Introduction to Part I: Models of Leadership and Women: Reconciling the Discourses on Women, Feminism and Leadership." In *Women and Leadership: Transforming Visions and Diverse Voices*, edited by Jean Lau Chin, Bernice Lott, Joy K. Rice, and Janis Sanchez-Hucles, 19-34. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.
- McNaughtan, Jon, Hugo Garcia, Ian Létora, Sarah Louis, Xinyang Li, Alexis L. Croffie, and Elisabeth D. McNaughtan. 2018. "Contentious Dialogue: University Presidential Response and the 2016 US Presidential Election." *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*. 1-17.
- Micciche, Laura R., and Donna Strickland. 2013. "Feminist WPA Work: Beyond Oxymorons." Review of *Performing Feminism and Administration in Rhetoric and Composition*, edited by Krista

- Ratcliffe and Rebecca Rickly. *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 36, no. 2: 169-76.
- Miller, Thomas P., and Joddy Murray. 2017. "Reimagining Leadership after the Public Turn." *College English* 79, no. 5: 435-50.
- National Coalition Building Institute. n.d. "Welcome to NCBI at NC State." Accessed November 19, 2018. <https://oied.ncsu.edu/divweb/ncbi/>.
- National Coalition Building Institute. n.d. "Where We Are." Accessed November 19, 2018. <http://ncbi.org/where-we-are/>.
- Nelson, Cary. 1998. "English, Vanguard of the Fast-Food University." *Solidarity: A Socialist, Feminist, Anti-Racist Organization*. Accessed August 8, 2018. <https://solidarity-us.org/atc/74/p849/>.
- Porter, Natalie, and Jessica Henderson Daniel. 2007. "Developing Transformational Leaders: Theory to Practice." In *Women and Leadership: Transforming Visions and Diverse Voices*, edited by Jean Lau Chin, Bernice Lott, Joy K. Rice, and Janis Sanchez-Hucles, 245-63. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley and Blackwell.
- Reid, E. Shelley. 2010. "Managed Care: All-Terrain Mentoring." In Ratcliffe and Rickly, 125-42. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Rusaw, Carol. 2005. "A Proposed Model of Feminist Public Sector Leadership." *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 27, no. 2: 385-93.
- Scott, Tony, and Nancy Welch, eds. 2016. *Composition in the Age of Austerity*. Louisville, CO: Utah State University Press.
- Sledd, James. 2001. "On Buying In and Selling Out: A Note for Bosses Old and New." *Interchange: A response to Joseph Harris and Michael Murphy, College Composition and Communication* 53, no. 1: 146-49.
- Strickland, Donna. 2011. *The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies*. Carbondale, IL: NCTE.
- Taggart, Amy Rupiper. 2018. "Reseeing the WPA Skill Set: GenAdmins Transitioning from WPA to University Pedagogical Leadership." In Wooten, Babb, and Ray 2018, 153-167.
- University of Michigan. n.d. "Inclusive Syllabus Language." Accessed December 5, 2018. <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/2017/08/24/inclusive-syllabus-language/>.
- University of Michigan. n.d. "What is CommonGround?" Accessed November 20, 2018. <https://igr.umich.edu/programs/information>.
- Wan, Amy J. 2014. *Producing Good Citizens: Literacy Training in Anxious Times*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Wooten, Courtney Adams, Jacob Babb, and Brian Ray, eds. 2018.
WPAs in Transition: Navigating Educational Leadership Positions.
Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.

NOTES

- 1 Yet even as we write this, we are conscious of the limitations of our perspectives as two white women who have walked in the privilege of our whiteness for our whole lives. We are aware of the problematic nature of our positionality when arguing for an intersectional approach to WPA leadership when so much of WPA history has been about gatekeeping and preserving dominant modes of discourse. We want to state that we see our role as using the opportunities and privileges afforded us to build awareness of the intersectional bias experienced by people of color and other marginalized groups to seek continuous learning in ourselves and others and to approach our own development, particularly as we are taught by our colleagues of color, with gratitude, humility, and a commitment to learning.
- 2 Dr. Tony Frank, the president of Sue's university, is a notable exception. Frank is a university president whose development as an intersectional leader has been documented rather fully since 2016. Among other things, Dr. Frank, who is stepping down from the CSU presidency in 2019 but will remain chancellor, championed the principle of transparent reporting of bias, from which a straight line can be drawn to last year's widely circulated news story of two Native students who were kicked off a campus tour because the parent of another student felt they looked suspicious. He also famously wrote after a series of hate crimes on campus, several of which were antisemitic, "A Nazi is a Nazi is a Nazi." See these links for the news stories:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2018/05/06/after-native-american-bias-incident-college-says-those-against-diversity-can-go-elsewhere/?utm_term=.d57f9637aa41

https://gazette.com/news/a-nazi-is-a-nazi-is-a-nazi-colorado-state/article_574a00c0-1f4f-5464-965d-a0006a37e9c6.html

Casie Fedukovich is Associate Professor of English and Director of First-Year Writing at North Carolina State University. Her research explores teacher preparation, writing program administration, and academic labor and has appeared in such journals as *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, *Composition Studies*, *Composition Forum*, and *Workplace: A Journal of Academic Labor*. She teaches courses in Composition Theory and Research and Teaching College Composition.

contact: cjfeduko@ncsu.edu

Sue Doe holds a BA from Knox College, an MA from the University of New Hampshire, and a PhD in Educational Leadership from Colorado State University. She is Associate Professor at Colorado State University, where she teaches courses in Composition Pedagogy, Autoethnographic Theory and Method, Reading and Writing Connections, Research Methods, and Workplace Literacy. She does research in three distinct areas—academic labor and the faculty career, writing across the curriculum, and student-veteran transition in the post-9/11 era. Coauthor of the faculty development book *Concepts and Choices: Meeting the Challenges in Higher Education*, she has published articles in *College English* and *Writing Program Administration* as well as in several book-length collections. Her recent collection on student-veterans in the Composition classroom, *Generation Vet: Composition, Veterans, and the Post-911 University*, co-authored with Professor Lisa Langstraat, was published by Utah State Press (an imprint of the University Press of Colorado) in 2014.

© 2019, Casie Fedukovich and Sue Doe. This article is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). For more information, please visit creativecommons.org.