LEADING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY: NAVIGATING PERSONAL AND
COLLECTIVE CRISES AS WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS (WPAS)

By

Ethan Voss

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Rhetoric and Writing — Master of Arts

2024

ABSTRACT

Writing program administrators (WPAs) continue to lead their programs and serve as a crucial support structure for their instructors, graduate teaching assistants, first-year students, and other extensive campus-community stakeholders. In an effort to better understand the role WPAs play, this study explores how WPAs, particularly in times of personal or collective crisis, respond to and navigate particularly precarious situations in ways that provide the support their constituents need and desire while also maintaining their mental and emotional well-being.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Writing program administrators (WPAs) continue to lead their programs and serve as a crucial support structure for their instructors, graduate teaching assistants, first-year students, and other extensive campus-community stakeholders. In an effort to better understand the role WPAs play, I am interested in exploring how WPAs, particularly in times of personal or collective crisis, respond to and navigate particularly precarious situations in ways that provide the support their constituents need and desire while also maintaining their mental and emotional well-being. Through my study, I aim to learn more about the processes involved in leadership development and crisis navigation, recognize and draw attention to the difficult work of WPAs and campus leaders during times of volatility and vulnerability, and contribute to burgeoning scholarly conversations at the intersection of leadership studies, crisis management, and writing studies.

<u>Study Exigency</u>

Throughout my years as an undergraduate and now graduate student, we—as a society—have endured several hardships inappropriately dubbed once-in-a-lifetime events. From situations stemming from political upheaval to social, cultural unrest as a response to injustice and inequity to health crises brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, I've watched people across the globe respond to these situations in a multitude of ways as they look for solutions to these wicked problems that have affected so many in distinct

and diverse yet communal ways. From my perspective, these situations and experiences have culminated in a general feeling of instability from the constant disruption to our standard, often taken-for-granted daily routines, assumptions, and ways of being, leaving me feeling small and helpless as an individual. In awe, I watch the people that step up in these moments of uncertainty, trying to take notes and observe their leadership behaviors, values, and ways of navigating these crisis situations to best prepare myself to lead in future, inevitable crisis situations I find myself and my community facing. Though I'm reminded of feelings of helplessness in these moments, they serve to motivate my deserve to occupy positions in the future that put me in direct contact with my constituents and stakeholders as a way for me to check-in, offer support and genuine care, and work to resolve—or at least alleviate—the difficulty, feelings of helplessness, and volatility of a given situation or circumstance.

     As I reflect on my own experiences in crisis situations, I can't avoid the feelings of panic, fear, and deep sadness for the events of February 13th, 2023. At Michigan State University, an active shooter killed three undergraduate students and critically injured five others. To my horror, I quickly realized the devastating severity of the situation from the influx of messages from local friends, colleagues, and peers and friends and family hundreds of miles away. In the days that followed, I expressed my feelings of sadness, anger, frustration, and grief in a variety of ways, witnessing the reactions from our

campus community at large. Unfortunately, this wasn't my first time; for quite a few of my students and peers, it wasn't theirs either. When I walked into my first-year writing class on only our second day back, I assumed the only position I knew: that of a writing instructor and a human being. Throughout the rest of the semester, nothing ever felt like it "returned to normal," nor did it feel like a "new normal." Instead, everything constantly felt off. I did my best that semester to ensure my students felt supported, which required me to consistently step back and readjust. I knew my students were struggling in different ways, so I couldn't hold them to a set standard, and it seemed impossible to push the class forward collectively. In fact, I've often said that that semester felt like teaching twenty-four independent studies.

In these moments of uncertainty, I looked to my teaching circle and truly recognized the importance of building these deeper connections with other teaching faculty. My interactions with other faculty members teaching first-year writing helped to validate my experiences, gave me opportunities to vent my frustrations, and allowed me to get advice on how to proceed from seasoned faculty. As the number of questions and concerns I had for my students spiraled, I couldn't help but constantly observe, check-in with, and inquire about various navigation responses from department and institutional leaders as they, too, struggled to support their supports, faculty, and staff. As a hopeful WPA, I looked to Dr. Lindquist as a model for leadership, but I ultimately found myself asking: What *could* Dr. Lindquist do?

Given this situation and the countless previous examples, I started to imagine a future where I was the individual that people looked to in these types of situations. Therefore, this study is wholeheartedly inspired by my desire to better understand the labor of this relationship work and how I *could begin* to understand how to possibly navigate an inevitable future crisis situation and manage the feelings of frustration, inadequacy, fear, etc. associated with grappling with these wicked problems. Of course, these major crises (i.e. global pandemic, mass shooting, etc.) are the obvious kinds, but other types of crisis and high-stakes situations are common in and around institutions, too, and demand attention and problem-solving from WPAs.

Ethan's Story

My interest in writing program administration has emerged from my genuine love of first-year writing; my desire to motivate and support first-year students; and my dedication to overseeing, guiding, and supporting instructors. First-year writing, to me, has always been about connecting with the students to not only support their academic progress and need to develop and hone their writing skills but also to discover their identities as writers and individuals, build confidence in themselves and their abilities, and establish connections to their campus community in ways that give them space to grow and develop as individuals. Beyond the students themselves, first-year writing programs are supported by a large population of adjunct or teaching-focused faculty who traditionally teach multiple sections of first-year

writing throughout a given academic year. Behind these individuals is a wealth of knowledge and experiences teaching writing and supporting a majority of the undergraduate university community. In an effort to support these individuals, I want to devote my career to building community amongst these teachers, sharing in their spaces and offering resources and support in productive and healthy ways, standing in their corners to cheer on their successes and lifting them up in times of need. This, to me, is the true work of a writing program administrator, and I desire to do the work.

As a graduate student, I have experience working as the First-Year Writing (FYW) Graduate Assistant at Michigan State University. In my role, I assist the Director of First-Year Writing, providing administrative and pedagogical support for our program's graduate teaching assistants, teaching-focused faculty, and first-year student population. This experience, coupled with my previous experience as an instructor of record for our first-year writing course, has immersed me in the work, theoretical landscape, and positionality of a writing program administrator. Through these efforts, I've also explored various institutional settings to better understand programmatic and institutional structures that affect the work of WPAs within their specific contexts. My experience as a WPA, I believe, is an asset for my study because I am able to better connect and therefore understand my participants' experiences, develop collegial rapport, and analyze the data from the cultivation of a shared lens. However, as cisgender, white man, I know my

identity affords me privileges that certainly not how every WPA receives or

experiences, so it's important that I recognize my privilege, purposefully seek

out and uplift different experiences and perspectives, and work to make WPA

work and higher-education administration in general a more equitable space.

Writing Program Administration, Emotional Labor, and Crisis

Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) play a pivotal role in coordinating, shaping, and supporting effective writing programs across a variety of institutional settings. The origin of writing program administration is deeply rooted in the emergence of first-year writing and the rapid influx of student enrollment in American colleges and universities post-WW2 to "coordinate the ever-multiplying sections of freshman English" (McLeod, 2007, p. 58). Though these positions are "numerous and varied," depending on a variety of institutional factors, WPAs are primarily responsible for developing course content and curriculum; supporting instructor pedagogical development; managing department budgets and programmatic assessment; and handling staffing and instructor evaluations (McLeod, 2007, p. 4). As part of their efforts effectively coordinate and lead their programs, WPAs are responsible for "navigat[ing] the murky waters of institutional hierarchy where decisions to create any sort of change are seriously constrained; where daily existence requires pragmatic, sometimes morally problematic decisions, and where one's ability to act . . . is seriously compromised" (Micciche, 2007, p. 84). Blackburn (2022) elaborates on this aspect of the work by emphasizing the difficulties of navigating the "political work of defending their programs and sometimes even our field" from budget cuts or institutional constraints (p. 2). As a means to negotiate these constraints and oversee a wide variety of stakeholders, including instructors, graduate teaching assistants, first-year

students, campus officials and administrators, WPAs must coordinate, develop, and "sustain their commitments and programs by connecting with others, approaching administration as a dynamic, nonlinear process" (Stenberg & Minter, 2018, p. 646).

Mastracci, Newman, & Guy (2010) define emotional labor as "the expression of one's capacity to manage personal emotions, sense others' emotions, and to respond appropriately" (p. 6). Emotional labor is intricately connected to the relational work of WPAs as it "involves [providing] care, mentoring, or nurturing . . . others; . . . building and sustaining relationships; . . . resolv[ing] conflicts; [and] managing our display of emotion" (Caswell, McKinney, & Jackson, 2016b, p. 59). Warnke et al. (2020) argue that much of the emotional labor of WPA work involves "navigating change and finding the fine balance between respecting and hearing feelings and concerns related to change . . . while still moving toward innovation and evolving student and program needs," given programmatic and institutional constraints (p. 44). Navigating this balance often requires WPAs to "take the emotional hit for the inevitable frustration" voiced by programmatic stakeholders around a variety of conditions, ideas, or topics (Warnke et al., 2020, p. 45). As Hochschild (2012) notes, this aspect of the job is "seldom recognized, rarely honored, and almost never taken into account" (p. 153), which may lead to burnout, mistrust, disconnectedness, and anxiety in WPAs (Mastracci, Guy, & Newman, 2014). Because of the intensity of these working conditions, several edited

collections in recent years have emerged as a means to better recognize the

emotional labor of WPAs and offer more collegial support (Wooten, Babb,

Costello, & Navickas, 2020; Graziano et al., 2023).

Because much of the work involves engaging in and managing

emotional labor, the concept of empathy emerges as an essential tool in

WPAs' efforts to create and maintain social relationships and improve

attitudes toward other individuals (Artinger, Exadaktylos, Koppel, and

Sääksvuori, 2014; Riess, 2017; Whitford and Emerson, 2019). In the original

psychotherapeutic context, Rogers (1951) notes that being empathetic means

setting aside personal views and feelings to better understand another's

perspective without judgment. Within the study of composition and

rhetorical theory specifically, empathy emerges in scholarship addressing the

use of empathy as a rhetorical tool to "help writers reach audiences different

from themselves by imagining . . . their audience's motives . . . [to] increase

the chances that . . . [they and their audience are] open for further

engagement, listening, and learning" (Blankenship, 2019, p. 15-16). According

to Blankenship, using rhetorical empathy allows individuals to interact and

engage with difference and affects the way writers interpret information and

write, which posits that writing is an emotional, interactive process.

Blankenship extends Rogers' definition and recognizes empathy as "an

epistemology, a way of knowing and understanding" (Blankenship, 2019, p. 7).

Therefore, enacting empathetic praxis involves acknowledging emotions and

being vulnerable to create space to engage the cognitive and the emotive (Arnold, 2014). It's important to note that empathy, as central as it is to WPA work, is a contested concept, however, with respect to cultural diversity and equity.

Moreover, a crisis situation "physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, its existential core" (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992, p. 15). These situations often inflict widespread physical and emotional effects that require unusual procedures or emergent responses or actions to "ensure the immediate safety and security of students, faculty, and staff and to address long-term physical, logistical, mental, and emotional needs (Clinnin, 2021, p. 12). In these collective moments of precarity, WPAs must serve as "programmatic crisis responders and perform [even more] unrecognized emotional labor in this role" beyond the typical day-to-day emotional labor that the role requires (Clinnin, 2020, p. 133). This type of relational, contextual support "vicariously exposes WPAs to the traumas of our students and faculty" (Blackburn, 2022, p. 2), which negatively affects and overwhelms WPAs' efforts to maintain their own personal and emotional well-being during larger social, economic, and political crises, which are especially magnified for WPAs with marginalized identities (Carter-Tod, 2020; Perryman-Clark & Craig, 2019).

Methods

This study, approved by Michigan State's Institutional Review Board (STUDY00009920), is a situated examination of three writing program administrators' experiences, backgrounds, definitions of crises and crisis situations, and navigational responses related to crisis management within their institutional roles. This study utilizes qualitative, narrative inquiry to critically examine and analyze their stories in recognition of the notion that we are—as humans—innate storytellers who lead storied lives that are individually and socially co-constructed (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In an effort to cultivate, collect, and share the lived experiences of my research participants, I rely on narrative inquiry as a means to understand "the meaning people have constructed; that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). This constructivist, narrative inquiry methodological framework "assumes that reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single, observable reality" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 3). This mutual sharing of stories and experiences and guiding methodological framework, therefore, allows for a more holistic, in-depth exploration into the lives of the participants, detached from theoretical knowledge or guiding assumptions, positioning the participants as agents of their stories while offering authentic, subjective, and contextual insights toward a nuanced understanding of the guiding research questions.

I selected this interview style and study method to critically examine and learn about the specific lived experiences of my participants to better understand the work of WPAs, the situations they find themselves in, and how they best navigate uncertainty, taking into account their differing positionalities, backgrounds, identities, and experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). To account for these nuanced differences, my interview questions, therefore, were never meant to be rigid and instead were meant to be "guiding" in an attempt to extrapolate emergent themes, meaning, in particular, that some questions were skipped over if a given response seemed to already address it and additional follow-up questions and conversations emerged in specific moments. The interviews adhered to a consistent protocol of standard interview questions while also permitting conversational moves in response to the ongoing dialogue in an effort to trace the paths of the narratives as they unfolded (Creswell, 2009).

Guiding Research Questions

1. How do WPAs respond to and navigate personal and collective crises affecting their stakeholders[1]?

2. What conditions, circumstances, or institutional structures impede or support their efforts to lead within these personal or collective moments of uncertainty?

---

[1] While a better understanding of FYW's stakeholders could warrant its own study, here I define stakeholders as FYW instructors, first-year students, graduate teaching assistants, and members of the extensive campus-community.

3. How do WPAs manage their personal well-being in particularly traumatic or urgent situations?

<u>Study Design</u>

I crafted a recruitment form through Microsoft Forms to share across the WritingStudies-L listserv in an attempt to recruit participants from a variety of institutional backgrounds, considering the size of the institution, its geographical location, and its level of research activity. Participants were selected on a first-come, volunteer basis with respect to the above consideration on institutional variation. Additionally, the three participants were selected based on extensive WPA experience. My study defined a veteran WPA as someone who had occupied the director position or an equivalent role within an institution for at least five years. A veteran WPA did not have to be currently occupying said role to be considered, nor did they need to hold a WPA role at a singular institution for the duration of their tenure.

The interviews were recorded using Screencast, audio transcribed using Screencast's functionality, and uploaded to Microsoft OneDrive. Once all of the interviews are audio transcribed, because of the potential for the participants to share sensitive, identifiable information, I shared the interview transcripts with each respective participant, relying on the technique of member checking, to ensure credibility, accuracy, and confidentiality (Birt et al., 2016). Upon participant validation and my initial reflection on the data, I

then scheduled an additional hour-long, semi-structured and conversational interview with each participant via Zoom to ensure clarity and to address follow-up questions relating to their initial responses in an effort to gather more in-depth information related to my research questions (Creswell, 2009). These interviews were also recorded using Screencast, audio transcribed using Screencast's functionality, and uploaded to Microsoft OneDrive. The second round of interviews offered additional space for me to address questions that emerged from my prior review of the initial transcripts, allowing my research to hone in on specific moves and stories that each WPA enacted and experienced. During both interviews, I offered my own personal accounts of situations or experiences I've had in my own leadership roles as a means to connect to, support, and validate their narratives, strategic moves, and emotions. This conversational method of interviewing, I believe, helped cultivate deeper connections between me and my interviewees, prompted additional probing questions on my part as the researcher, and even served as a recall tool of sorts for the participants to remember and therefore offer additional information or thoughts related to their experiences and the research questions.

Then, looking at all of the transcripts, I coded my participants' responses, emphasizing the non-generalizable themes that emerged from the interview data. In an effort to cut down the amount of content in the coding process, I reviewed my handwritten notes and interview transcripts

and highlighted key terms, phrases, and shortened responses that directly related to the research questions. I recorded each key term, phrase, or shortened response in a Google Sheets document, organizing the selected responses based on the following codes using a deductive approach to in-vivo coding: Definition of WPA Work & Leadership; Trainings & Mentorship; Definitions of Crisis and Challenges; Navigating Crises and Challenges; Maintaining Emotional Stability and Well-Being; and Community, Connectivity, and Relationship Building. Once I organized the selected codes from the transcripts, I printed out each document and further color-coded each line to organize my content around various subcategories that make-up each code. These subcategories were also identified by hashtags (e.g. #HiringWoes, #FacultyCare) as a way to organize similar information while outlining each section of the discussion section.

Round #1 Interview Questions

1. As a veteran first-year writing director, how do you define your role as a leader, and do you feel like you have the space and/or capacity within your role to *successfully* / *effectively* fulfill your stated responsibilities?

2. What training and / or mentorship experiences did you receive to help prepare you for your role? What leadership practices, if any, were modeled for you?

3. What are the gaps between your training and / or mentorship experiences and your lived experiences?

4. How would you define what constitutes a personal or collective *crisis*?

5. What moves (e.g. sharing campus resources, engaging in one-on-one conversations with TAs and faculty, etc.) do you make to support your affected stakeholders within personal or collective moments of uncertainty?

6. What procedures, policies, or structures are in place within your program, department, and institution to navigate crisis situations?

7. As a leader, how do you manage (e.g. meditation, conversing with colleagues or friends and family members outside of the academy, prioritizing time spent away from work, etc.) your personal well-being in particularly traumatic or urgent situations?

Commentary on Interview #1 Questions

The first question of the qualitative interview seeks to uncover how First-Year Writing Directors define their role as a leader in an effort to recognize role variability across distinct institution types. My intention is to avoid operating under a set of assumptions that identify and define writing program administration in rigid, concrete terms that overlook the contextual influences that heavily influence the scope and parameters of the work across different space and programmatic contexts. This question, too, enables the participant to identify and draw what they've identified as the boundaries to their roles and how they self-identify within their roles in an effort to begin parsing apart how my participants understand the parameters of their work and how these

parameters influence their decision-making process(es). These boundaries—whether explicit or implicit—also offer a view of the institution's hierarchical structure, providing insight into important institutional relationships, structures, and policies.

The added italics on the terms "successfully" and "effectively" is a purposeful rhetorical move that strives to situate the participants and elicit their felt sense of these larger dynamics at play that impact their leadership capabilities and decision-making process(es) while creating an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their praxes in their habituated states. Additionally, because much of the literature recognizes that WPA labor often goes unrecognized, I wanted to create an opportunity for my participants to feel heard and understood in their roles, working to validate their lived experiences and labor-intensive pursuits, while recognizing the often limited institutional support and resource accessibility often necessary to fulfill responsibilities. Therefore, my first priority as a researcher and interviewer was to establish viable relationships with my interviewees as a means to better connect with and understand my participants' experiences and establish working relationships moving forward. This particular framing of the question at the beginning of the interview stage, I believe, also set the tone for the interviews by offering up a critical lens by which we as interviewer and interviewee could then peel back some of the layers.

The second and third question of the first interview aimed to uncover the participants' training and mentorship experiences in an effort to better understand what—if any—guidance or preparation they received before assuming their respective roles. Through these questions, I hoped to examine to what extent the participants felt prepared to take on their respective leadership roles to illuminate possible gaps in their training or mentorship experiences. These gaps are particularly beneficial because they offer crucial suggestions for graduate programs that look to identify what experiences are crucial for developing future WPAs and leaders. Additionally, inquiring about leadership practices offered opportunities to identify the participants' either explicit or implicit views and understandings of leadership, which connected to their understandings of their roles and responsibilities as programmatic leaders and provided insight into their individual professional and personal boundaries.

After gathering some of the preliminary information regarding my participants' backgrounds and experiences, the fourth question explicitly dives into my participants' working definitions and understandings of personal and collective crisis situations. By "collective crisis," this question refers to crisis situations experienced by all members of a given department, program, or institution, whereas what constitutes a "personal" crisis refers to the personal situations WPAs face that impact their work as well as situations that impact individual instructors. Additionally, though somewhat more

implicit, this question is also meant to surface what participants *don't* define

as crises, whether personal or collective, to establish a distinction between

everyday difficulties or challenges and actual crisis situations. For my

research, both aspects of this question are particularly important to develop

an elaborate, more comprehensive understanding of defining elements that

make a situation a crisis situation compared to typical stressful challenges

that make-up the highly relational work of WPAs. Though I am more

interested in defining and identifying crisis situations in an effort to explore

navigational responses, I am also interested in these day-to-day stressors as

well to better understand the WPA role itself more clearly.

The fifth and sixth questions seek to understand and examine various

approaches to crisis management and navigation, exploring the explicit

moves of the WPA for given crisis situations while also attempting to

recognize the various institutional procedures, policies, and structures that

may support or inhibit one's crisis response. This framing shed some

perspective on what the participants articulated as "tried and true"

navigational responses versus what actually played out in a given moment of

uncertainty. Through these efforts to reexamine their respective

responsibilities, this question also purposefully refers to an ambiguous,

unidentified "affected stakeholders" as a means to collect information on who

the WPA—whether implicitly or explicitly—deems their constituent, providing

further insight into their defined role as well as articulating who the bulk of

their crisis navigation work directly impacts. This question also maintains the clear distinction between "personal" and "collective," recognizing that approaches differ based on whether all the affected individuals are facing a crisis, a select few, or only the WPA themselves. Moreover, the purpose of the latter question is to provide additional context, highlight specific response mechanisms that stem from university-wide requirements, and recognize that the hierarchy and therefore power and authority attributed to the WPA varies widely depending on the institution type and size, the WPAs tenure status, etc. Therefore, it was important for me to understand 1) how WPAs are or are not supported by upper-administration in their specific contexts, especially during moments of large-scale collective crisis, 2) what institutional guidance, procedures, or policies are in place if any, and 3) how connected the WPAs feel to their larger institutional structures and department or programmatic offices.

As the concluding question, the seventh question asked my interview participants to discuss how they manage their personal well-being in particularly traumatic or urgent situations. As a guiding reason for my interest in this study, it was important to me to understand how they manage their personal well-being in an effort to recognize key avenues for support and learn how to better prioritize my own personal self-care as a developing WPA. Beyond my genuine curiosity embedded in this question, this particular framing of the question aims to recognize the difficult labor of writing

program administrators, attempting to serve as a reflectional experience for my participants to possibly (re)evaluate the ways in which they support themselves while also validating their experiences and their need to practice self-care. It's through this question in particular that I, too, felt like I was able to practice some of the relational work of being a WPA by caring about and emphasizing their need to practice self-care, seek identities outside the institution, and maintain their well-being, building on and connecting to my participants' active desire to foster community through their active participation in my research and leadership development.

Round #2 Interview Questions

1. Walk me through a specific story related to crisis management within your role as a WPA.
    a. What happened? How did you know it was a *crisis*?
    b. What initial steps did you take? What influenced you to make these choices?
        i. What does it mean to "check-in" or "talk to" your faculty and students?
    c. How do you gauge whether a response has been effective or not? What feedback (formal or informal) did you receive, and how did it alter your response?
2. What did you learn from this response? (What did you learn about yourself, your constituents, and / or the nature of WPA work?)

3. In terms of your day-to-day work, what shifted? What did you make more time for / less time for?

4. What's an example of a time where your initial crisis response was / felt inadequate? How did you grapple with this feeling or response from your affected stakeholders?

5. Substantial literature exists around trauma in our field and in other disciplines, would you use this term to describe anything you've told me during our conversations?

<u>Commentary on Interview #2 Questions</u>

The idea behind the first question—and subsequent follow-up questions—of the second round of interviews is to emphasize what's at the core of narrative inquiry: the story. Relying on information gathered in the first round of interviews, I decided to have my participants walk me through a particular story of crisis, starting with identifying and defining the crisis moment as *crisis* before illustrating their emotions, initial responses, and navigational routes and techniques. When constructing these follow-up questions, I was particularly concerned about gathering information that helped me understand and pinpoint the details involved in navigating an actual prior crisis situation. Recognizing the possibility for vague responses, I implored my participants to dig further by asking probing questions geared toward clearly defining moves like "check[ing] in" or "talk[ing] to" faculty and students. As part of this framing, and as a benefit to my participants, I also looked to

develop this space for active reflection on their moves and experiences, particularly as a means to determine how time and space to reflect on a particular crisis response(s) influences their planning for possible future scenarios while creating space for my participants to surface what navigational moves they made that *didn't* seem to work effectively. This latter component of the second interview also sought to gain insight into the ways my participants solicit stakeholder feedback and gauge effectiveness.

The final three questions of the second interview protocol aimed to identify the day-to-day shifts in WPAs' work responsibilities and decision-making processes behind said shifts when WPAs must work to navigate these particularly challenging situations. This question serves to recognize the adaptability of WPAs, validate WPAs' experiences navigating their working conditions and their decision-making processes, and better understand what tends to fall away while WPAs are required to fully step into their service roles. Through this question and the following question inquiring about grappling with feelings of inadequacy from a given response, I ultimately wanted to surface the often conflicting feelings of needing to prioritize programmatic needs over personal projects while recognizing the challenges of feeling like a given response is inefficient, motivated by my own feelings in my role(s) where I've personally felt like I wasn't able to definitely resolve or alleviate issues. These questions, I believe, also helped set the stage for deeper discussions on the emotional labor involved within the role and the need for

WPAs to practice self-care, fostering a larger conversation on the topic of trauma. This final question, motivated by much of the literature on writing program administration connecting trauma to the concept of emotional labor and WPA work, aimed to connect my study to previous qualitative studies on writing program administration and identify how WPAs self-categorize and define the effects of their work on their long-term psychological well-being.

Results & Discussion

<u>Overview of Participants</u>

Through my study, I recruited a total of five participants through the WritingStudies-L listserv, ultimately selecting and interviewing three veteran WPAs. These participants were selected because they occupy a wide range of WPA positions across a variety of institution types, agreed to participate throughout the entirety of the data-collection phase, and met the established veteran criteria.

<u>Participant #1: Brad</u>

Brad is a program coordinator at a small community college in the midwest. In their role, they oversee a pool of roughly 13-14 adjunct faculty members and work closely with their dean to coordinate programmatic efforts. Brad has approximately ten years of experience as a first-year writing program coordinator, and they've spent the bulk of their career working in the community-college system. In addition to their role, they are also currently working on their doctoral degree.

<u>Participant #2: Alice</u>

Alice is a tenured first-year writing director at a mid-sized R2 university in the northeast. In their role, supported by an administrative assistant, they oversee scheduling; curriculum; professional development; and assessment efforts and support the efforts of approximately instructors and graduate teaching assistants. Alice has a total of nine years of professional experience as a

first-year writing program director in addition to their experience as a graduate assistant director.

<u>Participant #3: Joseph</u>

Joseph is a retired, former first-year writing director at a R2 institution in the midwest. In their role, supported by an administrative assistant, they oversaw assessment and curriculum efforts, professional development and faculty training, and scheduling processes to support roughly thirty instructors and graduate teaching assistants. Joseph has approximately twenty years of experience as a first-year writing program director.

<u>"You Need to be the Switchboard": Defining the First-Year Writing Director Role</u>

All three of my participants acknowledged several responsibilities associated with their roles. Notably, each participant articulated staffing and scheduling as their main responsibilities. As part of this work, all three noted that they must account for and adapt to course additions or cancellations in response to fluctuating enrollments and schedule changes based on instructor preferences and availability. In addition to course scheduling and staffing, Brad, Alice, and Joseph also are responsible for meeting with instructors about student complaints, developing and teaching curriculum, negotiate and adhere to university policy, foster a legitimate shared purpose and teaching community, advocate for writing on campus, and manage programmatic assessment and annual evaluations. To effectively serve in

their roles, therefore, Joseph noted that their main overarching goal is to "listen and step back and get input from all the stakeholders in my program" in an effort to "articulate and balance" best practices. Brad furthers this sentiment by acknowledging that they recognize the position requires them to "figure out how to do things" and "know how to work within the system" to effectively lead, coordinate, and facilitate their programs and the teaching of first-year writing across campus.

Throughout my interactions with my participants, similar to classroom teaching, contextuality emerged as a defining characteristic or theme of the work of writing program administrators. While Alice and Joseph serve in more traditional director roles at their respective institutions, Brad notably acknowledged a distinction between their current position as a program coordinator in comparison to a more traditional director role. While Brad still holds the coordinator position, Brad noted that they weren't considered a "supervisor." Because of this positioning, Brad noted that they had a lack of power and authority, underlining the difficulty of having responsibility without power. Instead, in their role, they serve to support their peers and offer advice while encouraging their peers to check-in with other authoritative figures, namely the dean. This lack of power, coupled with the fact that Brad's coordinator position is also not responsible for facilitating instructor professional development, highlights a distinction between WPAs serving in community-college settings compared to their university

counterparts. This understanding of Brad's role particularly stands out because it offers a better understanding of the types of possible WPAs roles that exist, which can support our training and mentorship efforts for emerging programmatic leaders.

Notably, all three of my participants made a deliberate effort to clarify that they do, despite the challenges and frustrations associated with their respective roles, enjoy serving as WPAs: "I do want to say, like, as frustrating as it is, I do love being a WPA." This deliberate emphasis from my participants to remind me—and possibly themselves—that they do enjoy their work emphasizes the intensity of the role and highlights my participants' motivating desire to support their colleagues and function as servant leaders. The overarching themes of adaptability and maintaining balance and productivity underscored the day-to-day work of my three participants and their intentional efforts to serve a "switchboard" that receives, organizes, synthesizes, and communicates information filtered through institutional and programmatic policies and decisions and field-specific guidance and theoretical frameworks.

"A Lot of Trial By Fire": WPA Training & Critical Mentorship

Throughout this section of my interviews, my participants articulated a wide range of training and mentorship experiences. Noticeably, all three of my participants noted that they received little training throughout their experiences in graduate school. Brad, as a current graduate student, noted

the most training throughout their graduate studies, completing a course dedicated to writing program administration. Throughout their degree, Brad has gained experience as a teaching assistant in conjunction with their work experience as an adjunct faculty member at their community college. While they were able to study writing program administration in one of their graduate seminars, they gained practical experience working as a writing program coordinator under the direction of the previous WPA in their position who had occupied the writing program coordinator role for fifteen years. They shared the position responsibilities Brad's first two years as a writing program administrator, which offered valuable guidance and mentorship. However, Brad argued that much of their learning was "a lot of trial by fire just learning on the job."

Unlike Brad, Alice also emphasized that while they gained experience as a graduate assistant, they did not receive any coursework in administrative work. However, Alice also gained practical experience before stepping into the WPA role as a faculty member. During their graduate coursework, Alice served as the graduate assistant director of the first-year writing program. Specifically, in their role, they received both training and practice in facilitating the pedagogical development of the instructors within her program; however, Alice noted that they did not get any training on more of the logistical work of being a writing program administrator: "I did not get any training on doing things like how do you schedule? How do you deal with

fluctuating enrollments?" Though Alice acknowledged the difficulty of providing this type of training for hopeful writing program administrators, like Brad, they noted the difficulty of developing these skills and responding effectively to these needs, recognizing that a majority of this training comes from experiencing these needs first-hand in the role. These various needs, along with the inconsistency of changing leadership, are largely contextual factors that make-up the bulk of the work of a writing program administrator, yet because there's little to no active training in these areas, it heavily impacts the ability and effectiveness of new and incoming WPAs.

Joseph voiced many of the same background and training experiences as Brad and Alice; however, they did not serve as the graduate assistant during their graduate studies, nor did they take coursework in administrative work. Instead, Joseph gained experience as a writing program administrator before formally stepping into a WPA rolen at a larger institution by working at a small college where the role was traded off between department faculty. Through this experience, Joseph relied heavily on their predecessor who served as their mentor and role model. Recognizing their need for additional training, Joseph requested the opportunity to go to the WPA Workshop, which they described as a "boot camp for WPA . . . [that] gets you up to speed with what the issues are and how to deal with them." In fact, all three participants spoke at length about the impact of their informal and formal relationships with other WPAs and community-oriented spaces as the

sources of the bulk of their on-the-job training. The participants highlighted their active membership in the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the WPA listserv, and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) as crucial spaces for training and support from other WPAs.

While my participants articulated a wide range of training and mentorship experiences, emphasizing the lack of a consistent training curriculum for emerging WPAs, they also divulged what they wished they had learned or trained for before entering their respective roles. Notably, all three of my participants discussed many of the personnel issues related to their roles and responsibilities, noting the difficulty of effectively dealing and interacting with faculty, programmatic staff, university administrators, and graduate assistants. However, Joseph in particular recognized the difficulty of developing these training materials, suggesting that "nothing really prepares you for personnel issues." Alice elaborated on the difficulties of researching and understanding much of the contextual information related to programmatic, departmental, and institutional policies and operating procedures, including conducting annual reviews for faculty based on varying definitions of teaching excellence; understanding contract language, union policy, and department seniority; and comprehending consistent and emerging department needs.

"A Fire We Have to Put Out": Defining Crisis Situations

Throughout my conversations with my participants, they regularly defined crisis situations as complex, multifaceted issues that require constant adaptation and an immediate response that is acute and time-bound. As a defining component, as Alice noted, these crisis situations are usually "intimately linked to tragedy" and constitute an "overthrow of what's going on" with no clear sense of how the situation is going to play out or how to control and mitigate the possible consequences. Because these crisis situations often happen suddenly—students or faculty members get sick or pass away, campus shooting incidents occur, COVID-19 pandemic shuts down the world—they lack clear and consistent warning signs and therefore time to prepare and plan ahead. Joseph elaborates on this understanding by adding that the effects of these crisis situations are "something that affects you emotionally and psychologically to the point where you cannot either do your job efficiently or live your life fulfillingly."

Notably, Alice extends their definition and understanding of crisis situations by drawing a clear distinction between crises situations and everyday challenges or "high-stakes situations" associated with WPA work. These challenges, like struggling for resources, finding qualified instructors, ensuring other instructors' classes run, and handling negative student evaluations, while "endemic to WPAing," are distinct from shocking, often tragic crisis situations in scope and severity because, unlike actual crisis

situations, they are expected challenges that have clearly laid out processes or planned procedures to guide navigation and response efforts. As Alice asserts, "It's not a crisis [if] it happens every year." In making this distinction, Alice recognizes that universities regularly rely on crisis rhetorics to "justify all sorts of bad decision making . . . that seems to run against the values of the university," acknowledging that these attempts to rationalize drastic, often alarming changes have become standard operating procedure.

"You Can't Ignore a Crisis": Navigating Crisis Situations as WPAs

The goal of crisis navigation for WPAs is to recognize and respond to the pressing needs of the individuals within their collective programs. Joseph summarizes this overall aim by suggesting that his ultimate priority is to "get [instructors] into a position where they can start to think about how their students are going to be." As part of these efforts, Brad, Alice, and Joseph noted the importance of relaying information clearly and effectively, offering clear expectations and updates to policy changes, and collecting as much input and information as possible to make informed decisions that effectively support their stakeholders. To gather necessary information, all three participants spent extra time in office hours, responded to emails, scheduled additional meetings and one-on-ones, and visited faculty offices to get a pulse on student needs and responses. Because this work is difficult, dynamic, and ever evolving, all three participants also highlighted the importance of avoiding positioning themselves as therapists and being

honest about their limitations and inability to immediately resolve or eradicate a particular crisis situation, acknowledging that they, too, can be "freaked out" and require time to process their emotions and focus on their wellbeing.

As guiding moves, Brad, Alice, and Joseph emphasized the importance of recognizing that one must act, relying on past experiences to guide a particular crisis response in addition to the information received from university officials and program leaders and stakeholders. Through their efforts to collect and decipher specific information related to a crisis situation, Alice notes that the challenge becomes determining what to say to faculty, what to say to students, and what support to offer in a timely manner, knowing everyone is impacted in different ways. This need to effectively and efficiently communicate with faculty, students, and staff, Alice adds, requires a reliance on one's rhetorical skills and an awareness of one's "overall tone . . . [to cultivate] ethos or respect or leeway." Beyond these programmatic communications, Brad, Alice, and Joseph also emphasized acknowledging people's trauma, sharing counseling resources and services, hosting faculty development sessions that support trauma-informed teaching guidelines and principles, and creating space for programmatic reflection, reminding faculty that they ultimately have to make the best decision(s) for them and their students.

In response to these crisis situations, all three of my participants articulated their desire to first seek out additional support from friends, family, and department or programmatic staff to effectively navigate and respond to these situations. Ranging from conversations with their dean, department chair, and their assistant director or program coordinator to their interactions with various instructors and students in their program, Brad, Alice, and Joseph acknowledged the importance of collectively workshopping and brainstorming strategies and plans to move forward. In developing their programmatic response(s), my participants, in their respective moments of crisis, enacted and shared various institutional policy changes and procedural updates from their university, which typically emerged in the wake of a current or prior crisis experience, citing a lack of pre-prepared materials and plans. Beyond their campus communities, my participants also relied heavily on their connections to other WPAs in the field, particularly those that had experienced or navigated similar crisis situations within their own specific contexts.

<u>"The Show Must Go On": Maintaining Emotional Stability and Personal Well-Being as WPAs</u>

WPAs must grapple with a variety of programmatic and relational needs while also attempting to maintain their own emotional stability and personal well-being. From situations that range from losing faculty suddenly to receiving "really, really mean emails" from faculty, WPAs are often expected to

shoulder much of the emotional labor and move through collective or personal crises or challenges quickly, often lacking time or space to adequately process their emotions, manage their own well-being, and focus on personal matters. All three of my participants, for example, discussed the difficulty of finding adequate time to pursue research opportunities and complete other necessary work, like developing classroom curriculum and responding to student writing, within their respective roles. Therefore, as a defining characteristics of WPA work, based on my interactions with my three participants, it seems the work of a WPA is always necessarily unfinished; it's been normalized to an extent to perpetually find yourself in a constant state of behindedness, which forces WPAs to find clever ways to adapt to the challenges associated with their roles to effectively complete and manage their respective responsibilities. As part of these efforts, WPAs must seek alternative avenues to support their well-being, develop resilience, and prioritize efficient workarounds to meet their urgent day-to-day demands. Interestingly, while my participants recognized the importance of practicing self-care themselves, even encouraging me to find various avenues of support, they noted that they, too, find it difficult to prioritize their well-being, given the pressing demands of the job. In fact, Alice shared that they, too, are still learning how to take care of themselves though they've occupied their role for almost ten years. This confession, of sorts, indicates that many individuals that pursue these various roles are driven by a motivation to

support others, even at the expense of their own well-being. Therefore, because the demands of the job are intense, one needs to be dedicated to practicing and maintaining their well-being to succeed in their WPA role. As Joseph acknowledged, "First . . . [you] take care of yourself to the point where you can act."

In an effort to practice self-care, my participants acknowledged relying on their relationships with colleagues, assistants, fellow WPAs, and other professional organizations as well as making time to see and talk with friends, family, and other members of their community outside of higher education. Beyond these crucial relationships, my participants articulated a range of interests they enjoy in an effort to explore and emphasize alternative facets of their identities and take meaningful breaks from their professional lives. including doing yoga and meditations, getting out in nature, using breathing techniques, exercising, repeating personal mantras, spending time reading, cooking for friends and family, and planting in their garden. Joseph also acknowledged their decision to regularly meet with a counselor to address their personal trauma while working to forge ahead and support their constituents and stakeholders. Notably, each participant also acknowledged that they typically turn some of the issues they're grappling with into writing projects or publications, which stems from their desire to reflect on and move through issues in effective ways and pursue tenure possibilities while also demonstrating their desire to share their experiences with other WPAs.

Through this understanding of their work as difficult and labor

intensive, my participants also recognized and highlighted key insights linked

to effectively serving in their respective capacities while maintaining their

personal well-being and emotional stability. For example, Alice noted that

they've worked over the years to establish simple, consistent approaches to

feedback and labor-based grading practices to withstand an inevitable loss of

time due to their WPA role, which Alice argued has resulted in fewer emails

from their students and removed weekly logistical emails from their to-do list.

Though streamlining various structures in an effort to reduce these often

intense feelings of falling behind can be useful, they also take time,

experience, and practice to develop. Therefore, to best navigate these

situations and fulfill one's obligations efficiently and effectively, WPAs must

adapt quickly, recognize there are things they can and cannot control, be

honest about their limitations, let things go, and "figure out what's being

done because it matters versus what's being done because it feels like it has

to be done."

As part of maintaining their emotional stability and well-being, all three

of my participants voiced the importance of allowing oneself to express their

feelings and emotions related to their work experiences and personal lives.

Grappling with and being in touch with one's emotions, especially for WPAs

doing this type of highly relational work, can serve to remind WPAs to take

some time to collect themselves and revisit a given issue at a later time,

which can help WPAs avoid miscommunication and other interpersonal issues. This recognition that "you shouldn't not be human" also serves to remind my participants that they, too, are "fallible" individuals who aren't always going to know or make the right decisions or have "nerves of steel" in particularly difficult situations. Reminding oneself of one's limited humanity seems to function as a means for my participants to maintain their stability in particularly challenging situations, helping to curb some of the difficult feelings of inadequacy in their respective roles. In fact, as my participants suggest, in particularly intense situations, though it can stem from feelings of helplessness, recognizing that you can't position yourself as anything other than a writing instructor or writing program administrator can be freeing.

"We Are All Working Together": Community, Connectivity, and Relationship Building

As an overarching theme of my research, the role of a WPA is highly relational, community-oriented, and devoted to establishing and maintaining functional interpersonal relationships. As a supportive role, my participants identified as their core responsibility the need to be "a champion of the department and champion of the faculty" and "do what's best for the students and . . . advocate." Their strong desire to establish and play an active role in their community, embracing their collective identities as writing program administrators, is cultivated through their personal recognition of themselves as beneficiaries of community as well as their desire to recognize their

stakeholders and constituents as humans deserving of empathy and a supportive community. As Brad noted:

> " . . . we're not just putting warm bodies in a room; we're not just staffing. We're not just dealing with, you know, issues. We're building relationships. We are working together. We're trying to support people through very difficult times." (Brad)

This particular attention to care is demonstrated through their efforts to maintain "camaraderie" and faculty well-being within their respective programs and department spaces. As leaders, all three participants voiced a strong desire to support, maintain positive relationships with, and "do what's right" by their programmatic faculty. From visiting their colleagues' offices to reaching out to share what's going on in each others' classes to providing professional development support, WPAs actively enact and serve as crucial support structures and strive to embody faculty care, ensure well-being, encourage their faculties' interests, and enact coalitional support. In terms of scheduling, my participants recognized the difficulty of teaching as an adjunct faculty member, working to develop appropriate schedules that "fit their needs," offer enough sections to make it "worthwhile," and allow them to occupy teaching positions in other spaces. As Brad noted, they ensured their adjunct faculty "worked two days a week as opposed to every day that way they could maintain positions elsewhere." Coupled with a considerable amount of attention to course scheduling preferences, my participants also

emphasized the importance of planning and leading effective training for their instructors to ensure they feel supported and "have the information and knowledge and tools they need to teach their classes" while knowing they can turn to the WPA as a crucial support structure.

However, Brad notes that this camaraderie has waned in recent years since the COVID pandemic, given the rise in online instruction and remote or hybrid work environments. As a lasting effect of the pandemic, though WPAs seek to remain connected to the members of their respective programs, Brad in particular articulated feelings of "disconnect" because fewer members of the department are physically present on campus. Going further, Alice also noted the difficulty of serving in an "asymmetrical" role as WPA, recognizing the "teeny tiny wall built between me and [my colleagues]." This power imbalance effectively separates the WPA from their instructors in the program, leaving the WPA often feeling siloed within their respective role, which serves to cultivate their desire to engage with other WPAs in meaningful ways to support their programmatic, identity, and leadership development. While the highlights of this highly relational work are the opportunities to engage with "all the wonderful people that teach first-year writing," individuals in the WPA role must also grapple with the difficulty of losing faculty to better offers or, in intense situations, illnesses or death.

Besides the individuals that teach within the respective programs, WPAs seek out the support from their chairs and deans to different degrees,

primarily dependent on the hierarchical structure of the given institution.

Brad, for example, as a program coordinator in a community-college

environment, noted more direct interactions with their dean, given the

limited hierarchical structure that exists between their coordinator role and

upper administration. Alice and Joseph, however, discussed at length their

reliance on their assistant directors.   In fact, Joseph referred to their assistant

directors as their "left and right arm" and articulated that they "never made

any difficult decision without consulting two people" in their program.

Moreover, Alice emphasized that they rely on their assistant director or

program coordinator as a means to collect information from the instructors

themselves, given the hierarchical nature of their positionality. They noted

that their instructors are "more likely to be candid" with the program

coordinator or assistant because "they see the program coordinator as one of

their own."

Furthermore, my participants highlighted the importance of

supporting and training emerging leaders and WPAs in their respective

capacities and establishing connections across a variety of spaces as a means

to seek out guidance, mentorship, and scholarship; support for pressing

personnel, curriculum, or policy issues; and reflect on their values, work, and

experiences. Notably, for example, as a response to their own campus

shooting crisis, Joseph relied heavily on their WPA community by reaching

out on WPA-oriented listservs as a "lifeline," receiving "hundreds of responses"

from around the world offering support and advice on how to navigate the crisis situation. In addition to relying on other WPAs as a means to navigate crisis situations and challenges associated with the role, my participants indicated their active participation in CWPA and CCCCs as a productive form of support and as spaces to build relationships with other WPAs. Additionally, these spaces provided valuable moments for my participants to "articulate . . . and balance" the input from their stakeholders with the field's best practices and maintain well-being through "sanity checks" and opportunities to vent. As a core motivation, Brad also articulated the importance of using their "networks to make [them] better able to serve those around [them]."

The active relational component of WPA work emphasizes the importance of establishing and maintaining these community spaces and relationships while also recognizing a need for WPAs to actively collaborate, seek out joint solutions, and create opportunities to process and reflect on their experiences and the emotional labor associated with their role. As part of the relational aspect of this work, I was positively struck by my participants' desire to actively reflect on and share their experiences with me, a newcomer to the role and field, which further highlights the importance of relationship building in this role. From Alice offering a quick "welcome to the field" to all three participants talking about the joy they've experienced in their roles, my participants encouraged my decision to actively engage in these conversations, spaces, and scholarship, working to share the difficulties

associated with the role in an attempt to inform and better prepare me for

these roles but not deter me.

Limitations & Future Research

Though focusing on these three specific interviews has allowed me to critically examine the stories of my participants in meaningful ways, my methodology and study design also functions as a limitation as the scope of my project is narrowed to only three veteran WPAs whose experiences cannot account for the vast experiences of all WPAs across varying institutions. Additionally, though this study has offered key insights into the work of WPAs, it's crucial to note that none of my participants identified as someone with a marginalized identity. WPAs with marginalized identities have historically indicated how their positionalities impact their work and their ability to navigate through and around institutional structures, which can negatively impact one's ability to serve in their respective roles, shifting how they identify within the role itself and altering the way they opt to navigate personal and/or collective crises and institutional structures (Perryman-Clark & Craig, 2019).

This "limitation" opens up the possibility of a couple of follow-up research projects oriented around writing-program administration, leadership development, and crisis management within university contexts, focusing on a more large-scale study of first-year writing directors across a multitude of institutions, WPAs with marginalized identities, or WPAs more broadly, including writing center directors, writing across the curriculum coordinators, etc. In addition to different adaptations of this research study, future lines of inquiry include:

- How can newly appointed faculty and graduate students studying to work as WPAs and/or campus administrators best prepare themselves academically and professionally to navigate these precarious situations as leaders? Specifically, how can we train emerging WPAs on personnel matters?

- Throughout my efforts to investigate terms and definitions related to crisis response, management, and navigation, it seems it would be helpful to develop models for communicating with stakeholders and constituents as writing program administrators based on how experienced WPAs have dealt with similar situations or issues.

- Echoing Clinnin (2021), it's crucial that WPAs work to establish crisis management procedures and processes to effectively navigate these situations with their campus stakeholders: What procedures are most useful for WPAs to adopt and/or create? How can WPAs cultivate crisis-management resources and programmatic plans to mitigate the negative effects of emergent crisis situations?

- Additionally, to further stimulate connections between current and experienced WPAs, how can professional organizations like CWPA, WPA-GO, or CCCCs better facilitate mentorship opportunities between emerging and experienced WPAs?

- Who are the defining stakeholders and constituents associated with first-year writing programs? What are their needs and perceptions of first-year writing?

Conclusion

Because writing program administrators (WPAs) continue to lead their programs and serve as a crucial support structures for their constituents, to better understand the situations WPAs find themselves in, it's important to explore how WPAs respond to and navigate particularly precarious situations in ways that provide the support their constituents need and desire while also fully recognizing their own limited humanity. Through this study, I've interviewed three veteran WPAs with a range of institutional experiences, learning more about the processes involved in leadership development and crisis navigation; the interpersonal, relational work of writing program administration; and the work of maintaining emotional stability and well-being. This study has the potential to inform the development of current graduate students and new and emerging WPAs in the field while acknowledging and validating the difficult, sometimes impossible situations WPAs find themselves in while also offering insights into the ways other WPAs have navigated similar situations.

As I look to my future post-Michigan State University, I am especially grateful for the support I've received from my committee members and the opportunities to engage in the day-to-day work of writing program administration. I've enjoyed the opportunities to observe and learn from Dr. Lindquist, and I've appreciated all the opportunities to grow as a programmatic leader through efforts to lead and participate in hiring,

pedagogical development and critical mentorship, and assessment efforts

while working with some incredible people. My work throughout the past

year as the graduate assistant for first-year writing, my interactions with my

interview participants, and my experiences in community spaces like

WPA-GO have affirmed my desire and decision to pursue this type of work,

and I am eager to continue to learn more about writing program

administration, leadership development, and crisis navigation.

REFERENCES

Arnold, K. (2014). Behind the mirror: Reflective listening and its tain in the work of Carl Rogers. The Humanistic Psychologist, 42(4), pp. 354-369. doi:10.1080/08873267.2014.913247

Artinger, F., Exadaktylos, F., Koppel, H., & Sääksvuori, L. (2014). In others' shoes: Do individual differences in empathy and theory of mind shape social preferences? *PLoS One*, *9*(4), e92844. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0092844

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation. *Qualitative Health Researc*h, 26(13), pp. 1802-1811.

Blackburn, J. (2022). Writing program administration embodied: Public-facing performativity in times of trauma. *Composition Forum*, 50.

Blankenship, L. (2019). *Changing the subject: A theory of rhetorical empathy*. University Press of Colorado.

Carter-Tod, S. (2020). Administrating while black: Negotiating the emotional labor of an African-American female WPA. In Wooten, C. A., Babb, J., Costello, K. M., & Navickas, K. (Eds.), *The things we carry: Strategies for recognizing and negotiating emotional labor in writing program administration* (pp. 197–214). Utah State University Press.

Caswell, N. I., McKinney, J. G., & Jackson, R. (2016). The working lives of new writing center directors. University Press of Colorado.

Clinnin, K. (2020). And so I respond: The emotional labor of writing program administration in crisis response. In Wooten, C. A., Babb, J., Costello, K. M., & Navickas, K. (Eds.), *The things we carry: Strategies for recognizing and negotiating emotional labor in writing program administration* (pp. 129-144). Utah State University Press.

Clinnin, K. (2021). In the event of an emergency: Crisis management for WPAs. *Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators*, 45(1), pp. 9–30.

Connelly, F. M. & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. Educational Researcher, 19(5), pp. 2-14.

Connelly, F. M. & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J. Green, G. Camilli, & P. Elmore (Eds.), Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research (pp. 375-385). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Third edition. SAGE Publications.

Graziano, L., Halasek, K., Hudgins, R., Miller-Cochran, S., Napolitano, F., & Szymanski, N. (Eds.). (2023). *Making administrative work visible: Data-driven advocacy for understanding the labor of writing program administration*. Utah State University Press.

Hochschild, A. R. (2012). The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling. University of California Press.

Mastracci, S. H., Guy, M.E., & Newman, M.A. (2014). Emotional labor and crisis response: Working on the razor's edge. Routledge.

Mastracci, S. H., Newman, M. A., & Guy, M.E. (2010). Emotional labor: Why and how to teach it. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 16(2), pp. 123–141.

McLeod, S. H. (2007). Writing program administration. Parlor Press.

Merriam, S. B. & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation (4th ed.). Jossey Bass.

Micciche, L. (2007). Doing emotion: Rhetoric, writing, teaching. Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Pauchant, T.C., & Mitroff, I.I. (1992). Transforming the crisis-prone organization: Preventing individual, organizational, and environmental tragedies. Jossey-Bass.

Perryman-Clark, S. M., & Craig, C. L. (2019). Black matters: Writing program administration in twenty-first-century higher education. *Black perspectives in writing program administration: From the margins to the center*, pp. 1-27.

Rogers, C. R. (1951). Client-centered therapy, its current practice, implications, and theory. Houghton Mifflin.

Stenberg, S., & Minter, D. (2018). "Always up against": A study of veteran WPAs and social resilience. *College Composition & Communication*, 69(4), pp. 642-668.

Warnke, A., Higgins, K., Sims, M., & Sherman, I. (2020). You lost me at "administrator": Vulnerability and transformation in WPA work at the two-year college. In Wooten, C. A., Babb, J., Costello, K. M., & Navickas, K. (Eds.), *The things we carry: Strategies for recognizing and negotiating emotional labor in writing program administration* (pp. 37-55). Utah State University Press.

Whitford, D. K., & Emerson, A. M. (2019). Empathy intervention to reduce implicit bias in pre-service teachers. *Psychological Reports*, *122*(2), pp. 670–688. doi:10.1177/0033294118767435

Wooten, C. A., Babb, J., Costello, K. M., & Navickas, K. (Eds.). (2020) *The things we carry: Strategies for recognizing and negotiating emotional labor in writing program administration*. Utah State University Press.