CHAPTER 4.

PEOPLE KEEP KNOCKING (OR, I HAVE ANSWERED 50 EMAILS TODAY): BALANCING WORK AND RESEARCH AS A WPA

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Abstract. *We examine the challenges faced by writing program administrators (WPAs) balancing administrative work with research obligations. Based on interviews with rhetoric and composition scholars, this chapter identifies how administrative tasks impede writing and scholarly productivity. We highlight the unexpected extent to which WPA responsibilities disrupt research, arguing for institutional support structures to alleviate this burden. We propose strategies for WPAs to navigate these conflicting demands and emphasize the need for broader recognition of the unique pressures on WPAs in higher education.*

We interviewed 20 published rhetoric and composition scholars for an IRB-approved study about their research and writing processes. We anticipated that we would hear about writer's block, the challenges of dealing with academic publishers, and other barriers to a successful scholarly agenda that are known by many of us but not often discussed. However, we did not anticipate that the interviews would lead to this chapter about WPA responsibilities and their surprising effects on research. In the interviews, we asked each participant 11 questions focused on their writing and publishing experiences, with just one question about how they are affected by teaching, service, and other commitments. (See Appendix A for our full list of interview questions and Appendix B for the pre-interview survey we used to gain contextual info). But as we coded the data, separately and then together, a strong theme appeared: the challenges of writing program administration (WPA), especially the challenge of balancing

WPA work with publishable research.[1] Our participants' comments on WPA work had a frequency and an intensity that stood out from the other data we gathered, even in a dataset that yielded insights into graduate student mentorship and the relationships between academic writers, editors, and reviewers (see our articles in *Pedagogy* [Wells & Söderlund, 2018] and *College Composition and Communication* [Söderlund, & Wells, 2019], respectively).

In this chapter, we identify the connections between the WPA case studies in the data and move toward a holistic picture of what makes WPA work especially fatiguing and disruptive to scholarship. Two participants' comments provide great examples. When asked to describe the amount of time she spends on research every week, one WPA participant responded: "There have been times when I was doing administrative work—I remember whole stretches of days going by when I didn't touch anything, like writing or research. I mean that [admin work] takes just a huge dent of time." A different WPA participant responded similarly to the question: "I do not spend time on my research every week at all. I think especially in the last five years that I have had this administrative position, I have really only spent time on research in the weeks if I've had something pressing that I had to do." These comments are representative of many others that explain how administrative roles can lead faculty to set their research aside entirely.

The issue is pressing because many of our research participants noted that rhetoric and composition faculty are often associated with WPA positions, whether writing center directors, WAC/WID coordinators, first-year composition directors, directors of writing majors, or something else. As one participant, a writing center director, put it when describing his own balance between administrative work and research: "being someone in Rhet/Comp, part of what we do is work with other people and administrate things." Given that so many rhetoric and composition faculty take on administrative roles—often in pre-tenure, non-tenure-earning, or even graduate student positions—recognizing how WPA work challenges research productivity matters greatly for our field, even if we have already recognized that fact many times.

Over the rest of the chapter, we support our argument that producing scholarship is uniquely challenging for WPAs by reporting specific trends from the data.

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1   Throughout this chapter, the term *WPA* denotes the distinctive work of writing program administration while the more general *administrator* includes WPA work as well as other administrative roles, such as graduate program director or dean. Further, *WPA* is used to include directors of all kinds of writing programs, including first-year composition and professional writing, writing majors, writing centers, WAC/WID programs, etc. When participants spoke about administration, they were generally referring to WPA-type work, but some participants had held other kinds of administrative positions.

We begin by discussing how participants noted that the scholarly restrictions of WPA work intensify one another. The result is a role that is more draining, more time-intensive, and harder to ignore than other administrative positions: WPA interviewees reported that their work can carry a higher level of responsibility than similar administrative academic positions. Toward the end of our results, we also share findings from participants who had held upper administrative positions, like deanships and chairships. Although we argue that WPA work is particularly draining in comparison with administrative work generally, we also learned from our findings that some of these upper administrative positions can create significant barriers to research time, since such admins cannot put aside administrative work when the buck stops with them. We believe this finding is important for writing studies because WPAs may aspire to such positions and because they may be particularly equipped to manage the challenges given their practice balancing their administrative work with other responsibilities.

We conclude the chapter by offering limited suggestions derived from the data for WPAs who want to improve their experience with scholarship, and we call both for others to advocate for the research needs of WPAs and for more research into this area, specifically in documenting the daily time spent by WPA tasks.

POSITIONALITY

Before proceeding, we provide an overview of our positionality in relation to the topic, as our positions inspired our research, shaped our interpretation of the data, and influenced our suggestions for supporting WPAs' experiences with scholarship. Specifically, we are both professors who serve in WPA positions ourselves: Jaci is an associate professor who directs the Writing Center at the University of Alabama-Birmingham, an R1 institution, and Lars is an associate professor who directs the Professional and Technical Writing program at Western Oregon University, a regional comprehensive. We began this study as assistant professors, when neither of us had tenure, and our friendship and writing partnership started even earlier, as graduate students at Purdue University when we discussed the challenging prospect of publishing research. Our interest in research helped spur our IRB-approved interviews, revealing tips and generating articles that helped us achieve tenure. But what we did not expect was that our WPA positions would be so time-consuming as to slow our research progress, in Lars's case even threatening to derail his tenure goals and influencing a move away from the university where he was initially employed.

While our positions are not identical, we have experienced similar timelines in work and in life: Lars completed graduate school just one year after Jaci, we both experienced moving from our first tenure-track positions to new ones after

a couple of years, we earned tenure only a few years apart at our second tenure-track jobs, and we even became parents within a few years of each other. Our close friendship and overlapping professional and personal experiences have generated lots of great conversations about how faculty roles and expectations shift over time and about balancing research with other responsibilities. For example, we have learned together that research challenges do not end with achieving tenure, as growing service obligations at the associate level cut deeply into research time. As WPAs, we have even experienced getting tapped for perhaps more service obligations than other associate professors, as our administrative work often makes us visible within the university. In a different example, we have learned how parenting responsibilities factor into the balance of faculty life. This is true for all faculty, of course, but we have shared with each other that the physical presence required by WPA work can be especially tricky to navigate as parents who are also trying to fulfill research, teaching, and service responsibilities.

Further, we see our own checkered experience with the demands of WPA work in light of our colleagues at other institutions who are in far more difficult positions: WPAs on limited-term contracts hoping to generate research for permanent roles, WPAs whose workload is unacceptably high because it is ill-understood by their colleagues, and of course WPAs subject to acute institutional discrimination both inside and outside of the university. We feel lucky to have made tenure, and to have supported each other through the process, but we can easily imagine being in conditions that prevented gaining tenure. That is why we wrote this article.

We proceed now to the direct context for our present study, since some of these issues have received research attention in the past.

BALANCING WPA AND OTHER ADMIN WORK WITH RESEARCH: WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

Two lines of research are most relevant to a study of WPA administration-research balance: 1) research about faculty writing practices in rhetoric and composition, and 2) research about writing program administration, particularly the expectations put on WPAs' administrative work and publishing record. Also relevant are position statements in the field, including the Council of Writing Program Administrators' (2019) statement "Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration" and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (2018) statement "Scholarship in Rhetoric, Writing, and Composition: Guidelines for Faculty, Deans, and Chairs." These statements are generally intended to help writing program administrators advocate for their work by positioning it as scholarly and worthy of counting toward academic rewards

like tenure and promotion. The mere need for such statements shows the challenges that WPAs face in balancing administrative work with other expectations, particularly publishing, and in making their case for tenure and promotion.

Rhetoric and composition scholarship in the past 10 years reflects a growing interest in the experiences of faculty writers. This work includes our own articles in *College Composition and Communication* (2019) and *Pedagogy* (2018), Johnson's (2017) and Tarabochia's (2020) articles in *Composition Studies*, Tulley's (2018) *How Writing Faculty Write: Strategies for Process, Product, and Productivity*, and Gallagher and DeVoss's (2019) edited collection *Explanation Points: Publishing in Rhetoric and Composition*. While this list is small, it is significant that the field has seen several articles and books in just the past five years, when previously there were relatively few publications about faculty writing in the field.

Older research about faculty writing and publishing seems mostly concerned with inculcating graduate students into the field's scholarly practices, so it may be more in line with traditional work on helping student writers than more recent work on examining how faculty write. Examples include Roen et al. (1995); Vandenberg (1998); Micciche and Carr (2011); and Olson and Taylor's (1997) edited collection *Publishing in Rhetoric and Composition*. Peer review in the field has also received some attention. This work can be found mostly in two symposia on peer review, one a full special issue of *Rhetoric Review* in 1995 and a shorter, two-article symposium in *CCC* in 2012. The former symposium discussed the changing relationship between authors, editors, and reviewers in the peer review process and how collaborative such relationships should be, while the latter symposium's two articles focus on the peer review process for tenure at most institutions and the effects of writing technologies on publishers' peer review, respectively. This peer review focus differs from the earlier articles' focus on assimilating graduate students into academic writing, but its practice is not on faculty writing practices per se.

Our field's recent interest in faculty writers may have been catalyzed by some universities' increased support for faculty research programs, such as those facilitated by and in writing centers and other programs that rhetoric and composition faculty traditionally administer. Geller and Eodice's (2013) edited collection *Working with Faculty Writers* provides evidence for this assertion. The collection contains 16 chapters that report on faculty writing support programs, many of which are in writing centers, WAC programs, or university-wide initiatives like teaching and learning centers that the chapter author leads. In the introduction, Geller writes, "The emergence of institutionalized writing support (writing centers, writing across the curriculum) for students and faculty shares a history with the emergence of faculty development initiatives and teaching centers" (p. 9). In other words, support programs for student writers and faculty writers have

grown alongside each other. This seems important given that rhetoric and composition faculty often lead such programs, directly in the case of writing centers and WAC programs, and less directly in the case of teaching and learning centers whose faculty writing support they may be asked to consult on.

For the present study, it is interesting but perhaps unsurprising that rhetoric and composition scholars' frequent role of coordinating faculty writing support may have led to an increase in research about faculty writing experiences. After all, most of us want research that will inform the programs we help direct; if those programs help support faculty writers, it makes sense that we would see increased research about how faculty write and what kinds of support they may need. Further, WPAs are commonly advised to keep up a research agenda by publishing about their administrative work, so rhetoric and composition faculty directing programs that support faculty writers may find themselves motivated to research those writers or the resources they have access to. Our own findings reveal that administrator-scholars heed this advice, as many of our participants discussed WPA work as generative for research and publication. Others, however, found it difficult to generate research in their WPA roles due to burnout or other reasons (see findings for more).

WPAs can find many texts that illuminate the challenge of keeping up a research agenda while performing the overwhelming, and often low status, work of administering a writing program, as well as strategies for managing the challenge. Bailiff et al.'s (2008) *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition* discusses women's struggles and successes in the field, and one issue that appears is the challenge of balancing administration and research. In a chapter dedicated to this challenge, the authors write:

> It is no secret that the time and energy required to administer a writing program is time and energy not spent on researching and publishing—often resulting in negative consequences when an untenured WPA is reviewed for tenure and promotion. (p. 119)

Later in the chapter, the authors offer practical advice for pre-tenure WPAs managing this challenge. This advice includes publishing on administrative work as discussed above, educating tenure committees about WPA work, and balancing administrative loads and publishing expectations relative to one another.

Some publications that address the challenges and strategies for balancing WPA roles with a research agenda include the edited collections *The Promise and Perils of Writing Program Administration* (Enos & Borrowman, 2008) and *Untenured Faculty as Writing Program Administrators* (Dew & Horning, 2007), as well as Charlton et al.'s (2011) *GenAdmin: Theorizing WPA Identities in the*

Twenty-First Century. In *GenAdmin*, the authors focus on the generation of WPAs who, like themselves, received specific training in writing program administration. Without denying the challenges WPAs face, the authors consistently consider the opportunities presented by the work, a mindset that may come from how their training positioned writing program administration as scholarly rather than merely managerial. In the book's prelude, Charlton et al. ask, "What are the possibilities afforded to scholar-teacher-activist-administrators in various WPA roles?" (p. xvii). This group may be more likely than others to publish about WPA—indeed, the book *GenAdmin* itself may be evidence of such—since their training pushed them to think of themselves as administrator-scholars even in graduate school, when research goals and interests are forming. Still, the book offers a clear-eyed perspective on the tension we discuss above: the advice given to faculty attempting to balance the demands of administration with publishing, educate others in their institutions about WPA work as scholarly, and avoid burnout may be insufficient or unrealistic for some.

While the publications listed in the previous paragraph are a start, they are dated (particularly important given the more recent challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic) and do not fully address the way faculty WPAs *do* manage their research. In other words, WPAs do publish. We wanted to know how, and the existing scholarship does not drill into the question as clearly as we would like. We were particularly motivated to learn how WPAs research and write because we believe this knowledge could yield better advice for graduate students and pre-tenure WPAs, many of whom may have only been provided general advice to do things like protect their time and mine their administrative work for research questions. Other advice commonly offered to WPAs is to educate others in their institutions about WPA work, particularly tenure committees and department chairs. This advice appears regularly in the publications cited above, and it is also apparent in statements from the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA, 2019) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC, 2018) intended to help WPAs educate others in their institutions.[2]

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2   The MLA also has a report that may help departments improve tenure and promotion processes, "The Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion" (2007). This report contains 20 recommendations, but none specifically address handling tenure cases for faculty with administrative roles. In fact, the recommendations do not acknowledge administration as part of faculty work at all, instead standing by the traditional research/teaching/ service triad. Recommendations include: "Scholarship, teaching, and service should be the three criteria for tenure. Those responsible for tenure reviews should not include collegiality as an additional criterion for tenure" (MLA, 2007, p. 11). WPAs are left trying to fit their administrative work into one of those three buckets. While most of them will view the work as scholarship, they may face tenure committees and departments that view it as service, and this MLA report offers

The CWPA statement (2019) clearly positions writing program administration as scholarly, a positioning that many WPAs must explicitly make to their colleagues who see their work as mere management or service. The statement begins:

> It is clear within departments of English that research and teaching are generally regarded as intellectual, professional activities worthy of tenure and promotion. But administration … has for the most part been treated as a management activity that does not produce new knowledge and that neither requires nor demonstrates scholarly expertise and disciplinary knowledge.

In this statement, the CWPA acknowledges another difference between teaching and administrative work: the former is comfortably recognized as intellectual, where the latter may be viewed as non-disciplinary pencil pushing or service. The statement continues: "… by refiguring writing administration as scholarly and intellectual work, we argue that it is worthy of tenure and promotion when it advances and enacts disciplinary knowledge within the field of Rhetoric and Composition." The writers establish that WPA work is intellectual when it "advance[s] knowledge—its production, clarification, connection, reinterpretation, or application … [and] results in products or activities that can be evaluated by others" (CWPA, 2019). The writers also list and describe five categories of WPA work that fit both criteria: 1. Program Creation, 2. Curricular Design, 3. Faculty Development, 4. Program Assessment and Evaluation, and 5. Program-Related Textual Production.

The statement overall and these categories are relevant to the present study for two reasons. First, the mere existence of the document speaks to the challenges WPA-scholars often face in seeking tenure and promotion, a process that privileges traditional scholarly publishing. Second, the categories make room for different types of writing than traditional scholarly publications. The last category, program-related textual production, suggests that the documents WPAs write frequently should be viewed as scholarly. The CCCC statement "Scholarship in Rhetoric, Writing, and Composition: Guidelines for Faculty, Deans, and Chairs" (2018) also advocates for WPA work as scholarly. The original version of this statement, published in 1987, came before the CWPA statement (first published in 1998) and was initially subtitled "A Description for Department Chairs and Deans."

The addition of "Faculty" to the guidelines' subtitle may imply greater expectations of, or opportunities for, self-advocacy in the tenure and promotion

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no advice for addressing that dilemma.

process. Most relevant to the present study is the CCCC Statement's section "How Writing Program Administration and Scholarship in Rhetoric, Writing, and Composition Are Linked." This section of the statement begins:

> The boundaries between scholarship, teaching, and service are quite porous for faculty members working in rhetoric, writing, and composition. This is because much of what we study is about pedagogy and practice: how writing is taught and learned in courses, programs, and extracurricular sites. This is also because many rhetoric, writing, and composition scholars administer (and study) writing programs of various kinds. …

This section of the CCCC Statement also notes the availability of courses in writing program administration and "increasing attention paid to the ways that programmatic work can be considered scholarship." The existence of the CWPA statement and the section of the CCCC statement discussed here remind us that faculty in WPA positions do face unique challenges. This may be especially true for pre-tenure faculty trying to publish enough to clear the tenure bar. Our study sought firsthand perspectives from faculty writers about their writing and publishing experiences. While we did not explicitly seek perspectives about how WPA work influenced these experiences—though we did ask general questions about the balance between research and other demands—we learned a lot about how our participants thought about administration and research.

METHODS

Our IRB-approved study used interviews to learn about the writing habits and experiences of 20 published scholars in rhetoric and composition. To identify participants, we went to 10 major journals in the field.[3] From each journal, we selected authors who had published an article between 2008 and 2013. We contacted potential participants until we had two authors from each of the 10 journals. While we attempted to create a diverse group, particularly in terms of position and institution, the group skewed toward tenure-track faculty and institutions with higher research activity. Our participant group is a limitation of our study. Future research should investigate scholars who are not on the tenure track and/or who are working in institutions with lower research activity. Future research should also include a participant group that is more racially diverse to investigate experiences of scholars of color.

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3   *College Composition and Communication, Composition Studies, WPA: Writing Program Administration, Writing Center Journal, Enculturation, Present Tense, Computers and Composition (online and print), Kairos, Rhetoric Society Quarterly,* and *Rhetoric Review*

We used surveys to collect demographic and basic work information, such as the participant's job title and publishing histories, which included how many journal articles they had published. See Appendix B for survey questions. Interviews lasted one hour and included questions about the participants' writing habits and schedules, their balance of research with other commitments, their resources used, and their experiences with reviewers and co-authors. See Appendix A for interview questions. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

We used a grounded theory approach to analyze the data. First, we each looked through the interview transcripts separately to identify possible themes. Then we consulted the data together in a videoconference, discussing what we saw and determining preliminarily how we would code the data. Then we returned to the data individually to organize our findings by the themes we decided on, and took multiple passes to calculate the frequency and content of references to each theme. These initial findings that emerged are discussed in our *Pedagogy* article, which focused on preparing graduate students for academic publishing. We identified a theme of WPA work and its effects on research, but that was not a focus of our article. We coded again for our *CCC* article, finding new themes and incidents of helpful comments, especially on the topic of editing and peer review. Finally, for this chapter on WPA work, we reconsidered our previous coding and identified themes together, and we again consulted the data and coded it separately according to what it had to say about writing program administration and research, ultimately sharing our findings with each other and merging them.

In the next section, we discuss the study's findings about the experiences of administrator-scholars in rhetoric and composition.

FINDINGS

Because of our limited sample size and the nature of our interviews (20 interviews of around an hour in length), our findings do not represent a definitive picture of how WPAs' research is affected by their administrative duties, but they identify issues of WPA administration-research balance so powerful that they manifested even in a dataset not initially focused on that issue. Thus, we present our findings as a set of case studies whose overlapping narratives create an outline of how WPA work affects WPAs' research.

You Can't Just Shut the Door (Because People Will Knock)

As discussed in the introduction, nearly all participants talked about administration taking time away from research. These comments were based on either the participants' past or current experiences as administrators or, for a couple

of participants, their sense that they had been productive researchers partly because they had been protected from administrative work. The quotations we share in the introduction are representative of many comments that speak to the time administration demands, as is the following quotation from a participant: "Since that kind of work just takes up as much time as you give to it, it can be a huge distraction to doing research, and it was." This participant had directed a PhD program in rhetoric and writing, but we heard similar comments from many kinds of administrators, including directors of writing centers and first-year composition programs, department chairs, former deans, and more.

Our participants' experiences illustrate potential problems with common productivity advice. Such advice, found in books like Silvia's (2007) *How to Write a Lot* or writing "bootcamps" hosted by university faculty development programs, can sometimes boil down to "just protect your research time." The specific strategies offered may include putting writing time on the calendar, refusing meetings during that time, and/or shutting your office door while writing. One of our first participants, a composition director, showed within the first five minutes of our interview the limitations of the last strategy: she had shut her office door to do the interview, someone knocked, and then the person knocked again until she went to the door to ask them to come back later.

Could the participant have worked from home that day if she had needed to focus on research? Perhaps. However, she described for us a weekly schedule chock-full of meetings that required her presence on campus, so staying home for a day or even just an afternoon simply may not be reasonable for a WPA like her.[4] When we asked how her research time was affected by other responsibilities, the participant responded:

> Well, I could send you my schedule for this week and you can see how it's affected by it because I really don't have any time blocks this week to sit down and write. As you saw at the beginning of this interview, I had people coming in the door, I had to talk to them, I had to shut the door, and it still didn't work. I have a lot of people who come in and want to see me about all kinds of stuff.

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4   Our interviews were conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, faculty members like this participant would of course be more likely to work remotely than at the time of the interviews, and working remotely may be more common for WPAs even post-pandemic. We wonder how this change may help administrators like our participant, as working from home may provide more flexibility and privacy (we hope no one would show up at this participant's home to interrupt an in-progress interview). Of course, working remotely presents its own challenges, so we do not want to make any claims about how it may protect research time for WPAs. We do think this area would be fascinating for future study.

As this participant suggests, a busy administrator's schedule may be filled not just with official meetings but also with less formal conversations that, even if quick, still add up to frequent interruptions that can get in the way of dedicated writing time. This may be particularly true for someone like this participant, who directs a large first-year composition program with dozens of graduate teaching assistants who are brand new to teaching and thousands of first-year students who are brand new to college.

The "Headspace" of Administration

Several participants discussed how administrative work not only takes up a lot of time but also requires a different kind of thinking than research. When asked how research time was affected by other job responsibilities like teaching, service, and administration, one participant remarked:

> Administration made it just virtually impossible even if I had wanted to be writing in the weeks [during the semester]. It's not just the time, it's what it does to your brain, that it is a completely different mindset and skill set. You're not even in an intellectual space for the majority of your waking life. You're in this strange bureaucratic weird space and it's just hard, at least it was hard for me to even get my head where it would be to even read. I couldn't even really read anything intellectual, it's terrible.

Interestingly, the original question was only about *time*, but the participant pushed on the question to note that administrators face challenges beyond the well-documented time limitations. As this participant suggests, they may also struggle to concentrate on research, since administrative work may demand a kind of thinking that differs from, or is even incompatible with, scholarly work. One participant acknowledged common advice to keep up a research agenda by publishing on WPA work and commented that he would like to write about his administrative work, particularly in curriculum development. He also explained that he has not done so because of burnout: "To do so much of that [admin] work all the time, I don't want to then turn around and write a 9,000- or 10,000-word article about it. I'm like, 'I'm done.'"

For these participants, teaching did not seem to distract from research in the way administrative work does. This is partly practical, as participants described teaching subjects that were related to their research, which allowed them to connect research with course prep. When asked about his balance between research and other parts of his job, one participant commented: "[Research time] is mostly

affected by administrative work. The teaching not so much, because often I'm teaching topics or subjects that are related to things that I'm writing. Part of my preparation for instruction in the class entails writing sections of pieces that I intend to publish on my own." Other participants simply noted that teaching did not drain their intellectual and emotional energy in the same way administrative work does. One participant even seemed resentful of how administrative work and service could take away time for research but explicitly said she did not feel the same about teaching, which she views as a central part of her job: "Teaching I don't really count as an intrusion of my writing time because that's my job and really, if I'm going to be a professor, my job is to teach students." While this participant is talking about time and not necessarily "headspace," her perspective of administration as a drain and teaching as a central part of the job seems significant in how she viewed and approached the work in relation to her research.

Importantly, not all participants viewed administrative work as a drain on their intellectual energy, even if they did agree that the work took up a lot of time. Several participants spoke of WPA work as generative for their research in the kind of ways the participant quoted above sees her teaching. One participant talked about how both teaching and administration work into her research:

> I tend to try and teach things that will feed into my research, so I see teaching as really productive and generative in that way. Most things that I have written have come out of teaching, actually pretty directly … It is the same thing with administration. Actually, [an article about WPA work] has come from my own experience as an administrator. I see all these things as very much in relationship and feeding one another. No doubt giving the time is a challenge, but I'm a note taker so if I'm having a problem in administration, I'm usually writing notes about it to myself to say, this is my thinking and this is what is going on so I can come back to it later.

This participant went on to describe a detailed process of how she uses OneNote's feature to keep detailed notes on her administrative work and on every course she teaches. She described using the notes to keep a log of her thinking and generate ideas for conference papers, which she then could turn into journal articles. The participant described her work process: "I try to work really methodically in stages like that and not feel like I have to produce something from scratch all at once but try to build up to it." Keeping consistent notes on her WPA work was a major part of this. While this participant described the most detailed, methodical process of reflecting regularly on her administrative work, several other participants also spoke generally about gaining research ideas from their roles as WPAs.

Of course, we do not want to create a binary between seeing administrative work as an intellectual drain *or* as generative for writing scholarship. Wells, a writing center director of 10 years, feels that it can be both. Wells has published articles and a co-authored book that were certainly prompted and helped along by her experiences in the writing center and her access to writing center data and potential research participants and collaborators. At the same time, Wells has experienced weeks when the writing center demanded such draining bureaucratic work, like budgeting, that intellectual energy for research was nil.

EMAILS, PROPOSALS, AND SOME MORE EMAILS: WHAT "COUNTS" AS WRITING?

If comments about the headspace of administration raised questions about what counts as intellectual activity, other comments raised questions about what counts as writing. In addition to discussing more traditional forms of scholarly writing like books and journal articles, many participants discussed the writing they do as administrators. These findings provide a perfect example of how a research methods foible can have a silver lining. One of our interview questions was, "Please describe the kinds of writing you do most regularly." We had in our minds *scholarly* writing, since that was the focus of the study, but with the general way we worded the question, many participants understandably answered with a broader notion of writing. Our ambiguously phrased interview question garnered great findings about all the kinds of writing participants do in their work, as well as some comments about how this writing compares to more traditional scholarly writing.

The writing of administration, like administrative work in general, simply takes up a lot of time. One participant, a new writing center director, commented: "I'm just surprised how much time email takes up now. … It's funny how something as simple as that is just a time suck." Many participants made similar comments, but the best example came from one of our first participants, a tenured associate professor and first-year composition director at a major research university. When asked about the kinds of writing she does most regularly, this participant responded immediately and emphatically: "Email." Looking back at the transcript, we cringe at our clumsy attempt to redirect and specify that we had in mind more traditional forms of scholarship, like journal articles and grant proposals. Our participant was polite but firm in explaining that she knew exactly what we meant by the question but wanted us to understand how much time she spent on email alone as an in-demand WPA:

> I just wanted to tell you that I sent about 30 emails today. So
> that you understand what it means to be an administrator and

> when you talk about what other things do you write mostly,
> I'm pointing out to you that I still have six more [emails] to
> do, which means I probably write about 50 emails a day. In
> terms of WPA scholarship, I think that's significant.

The participant's last comment is particularly interesting to us, as she suggests that for WPAs, email forms an important part of scholarship. She went on to describe the other types of writing she does, including IRB proposals, journal articles, conference presentations, and grant proposals. She mused that it would be interesting to research the writing life of a WPA. In particular, it would be fascinating to study how WPAs toggle constantly between day-to-day writing like email and research writing like journal articles and conference presentations. We briefly discuss this idea in our conclusion.

Several other participants spoke to the pressure they faced in responding quickly when the emails were about immediate concerns. This is particularly true for administrators who get email not only from their own students but from others' students as well. One participant, a first-year composition director, commented about her research, "It gets pushed aside. It's hard when I have my own teaching responsibilities, and then I'm getting emails daily from instructors, who are having their own issues with their students. I'm getting emails and requests from other people's students." She went on to speak to the immediacy of those emails and the need to respond quickly: "[When] there's email from a student who needs to meet with me like tomorrow, there's an immediacy for those concerns that can't really be brushed aside."

We say more in the next section about the life of upper admins, but being unable to ignore email may be especially the case for administrators who are in charge of whole units or programs. One participant, a department head, spoke of having two instructors come to her the week of her interview with students who had written explicitly of self-harm and suicide. She commented that she simply could not set such issues aside in the name of protecting her research time, as the issues were life-or-death. While the participant noted the same may not be true for "junior administrators" (her words—she seemed to mean anyone in charge of a unit smaller than a department), we could easily see a first-year composition director or writing center director facing similar challenges, albeit perhaps not as regularly due to the smaller size of the programs. Wells, for example, has received emails from student tutors who were experiencing health or other problems that she simply could not set aside in favor of research. Of course, email is only one kind of writing that administrators do regularly. When asked what she writes the most, one writing center administrator responded, "Memos, paperwork, forms and bureaucratic things that universities require for one purpose or another …

there's always a form for something." The same participant also talked about social media posts. Even though she had mostly handed off responsibility for the writing center's social media to tutors, she is still responsible for handling any problematic or poorly received posts. A different participant wrote that when she directed her department's graduate program, "I used to spend a lot of time just writing emails and one-page proposals and that kind of stuff to advance the program." Like these two participants, several others talked about proposals, bureaucratic writing like forms, and memos and other kinds of communication they wrote for tutors, instructors, and colleagues.

Comments about these types of administrative writing were less emphatic than comments about email, but we were still struck by how many participants discussed programmatic documents like proposals. In retrospect, we wish we had asked more follow-up questions about the participants' experiences with these forms of writing. As a follow-up, we did ask the writing center director from the previous paragraph if her writing process differed when writing the administrative documents she discussed versus more traditional forms of scholarship, like conference proposals and presentations, which she also talked about. She responded that she mostly followed the same process but was able to dive into administrative documents a little more easily, since she had more experience with writing them.

When Every Problem Is Your Problem: The Life of Senior Faculty Admins

While most of our participants were either early- or mid-career faculty, we did interview four full professors, all of whom had held a variety of administrative roles throughout their careers. At the time of interviews, two were chairs (one an English department chair, one chair of a large rhetoric and composition program within an English department), and one had been an interim department chair, an associate dean, and the chair of a large rhetoric and composition program. The fourth had developed and then directed a professional writing program. Two participants—the current English department chair and the former interim chair and associate dean—spoke most directly to how senior administrative work could challenge research. We end our findings with these comments because they remind us that the challenges do not end when one achieves tenure and not even when one becomes a full professor.

In fact, the current English department chair we spoke with pointed out that research can become more of a struggle for senior administrators. Junior administrators, she claimed, could generally prioritize their research time, but more senior admins like department chairs cannot because the buck stops with

them.[5] She explained that administrative work simply must take priority in many situations:

> Admin must take preference sometimes. You are in charge, so when a foreign dignitary wants to speak to you or a VP needs you to counsel their child on being an English major, that's what you have to do. Junior faculty can shrug it off because the buck rarely stops there. They are protected.

The participant who had been an interim department chair, associate dean, and chair of a rhetoric and composition program offered similar comments and specified that being a department chair could most challenge research time:

> You've got to just be so draconian in your schedule to do it [research] when you're an administrator. The hardest job in the university is to be a department chair or head depending upon whatever they call it in the university. The former president of [participant's university] who was a person I knew and respected said it was harder than his job because you are the point person for the students, the faculty, other administration. It all triangulates on you. You can't do a half-assed job. You have to do it because every problem is your problem.

This participant went on to talk forcefully about how he always discouraged assistant and even tenured associate professors from being department chairs, as he felt strongly that such a move could hinder their research enough to keep them from becoming full professors.

While these comments offer important cautionary tales about taking on senior administrative work, we are also reminded that rhetoric and composition faculty can serve as important allies when they are in these roles. In talking about his work as associate dean, the participant quoted above described explaining constantly to other administrators how time-consuming writing instruction can be:

> This is the point I keep getting across to administrators. When you are, for example, reading student papers, it is an enormous time commitment and it's exhausting at the end of it. Then after … we do a full set of papers, we're expected to

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5   As we commented previously, "junior administrator" is this participant's term. She seemed to mean those who were directing any program that was smaller than a department. The participant who had been an interim department chair and associate dean also used the term junior administrator and seemed to share this participant's general definition.

> do our best research between 10:00 at night and 1:00 in the morning, when we're exhausted, right?

This participant also described writing tenure and promotion documents during his time as an associate dean. We imagine writing faculty would benefit if more of us were positioned to talk to senior administrators about writing instruction and to advocate for working conditions and tenure and promotion guidelines that serve us best. For that reason, we do not believe the answer to protecting one's research time from administration should come down to, "Don't be an administrator." As mentioned before, that is unrealistic for rhetoric and composition faculty and, as we see from this participant's comments, rhetoric and composition faculty can serve as important advocates as administrators. Instead, we believe what's needed are research productivity strategies that account for administrative responsibilities, as well as strategies for positioning one's admin work as scholarly. In the chapter's conclusion, we turn to these ideas.

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

At this point in the chapter, a reader may reasonably expect us to offer strategies that faculty can use to balance a scholarly agenda with administrative demands. Unfortunately, we cannot offer such strategies. To be more precise, we *could* offer some strategies, but they would likely be suggestions our readers have already heard. During interviews, many participants recounted the very faculty productivity advice we might summarize here, as well as some of the most common advice given to current and future administrators. In our study, we found that common productivity advice, like shutting one's office door, can be impractical for WPAs, and common career advice, like not taking on administrative roles pre-tenure, can be unrealistic for rhetoric and composition faculty who may have trained to direct writing programs.

Still, we do not wish to dismiss common productivity advice or advice about administrative work commonly given to current and future rhetoric and composition faculty. Surely many faculty members benefit from productivity advice in books like Silvia's (2007) *How to Write a Lot* or Boice's (1990) *Professors as Writers*, as well as strategies offered in faculty success programs held by university centers and national organizations.[6] In fact, we have ourselves implemented and benefited from common strategies like writing in small chunks, putting research time on the schedule, and keeping accountable by checking in with a writing partner or group. Additionally, many rhetoric and composition faculty

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6   As an example, visit the website for the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity at https://www.facultydiversity.org/fsp-bootcamp.

have surely benefited from advice to be cautious about taking on administrative work pre-tenure. Even when faculty, like Wells, choose to take pre-tenure WPA positions, they may benefit from suggestions to proceed cautiously and consider how they may need to adjust their work habits to find balance and meet their tenure requirements.

Without dismissing current advice outright, we do wish to discuss how common faculty productivity advice may be limited for administrators, as well as how common advice for current or future admins may be unrealistic for rhetoric and composition faculty. While we cannot offer new advice, we can offer ideas for additional research and points readers may want to bring up with their departments and within our field. All of the sections below are both areas for future research and points for discussion.

The Writing Life of an Administrator

One of the most interesting ideas for future research came directly from one of our participants, who discussed her own all-day balance between different types of writing and suggested that someone should research this experience. We agree. Research could investigate the types of writing administrators do most commonly that are not viewed as scholarly in the traditional sense of journal articles and books. We are thinking here about email, social media and web content, program proposals and reports, and forms and other kinds of bureaucratic documents required by the university. Research could also study the process of administrative writing, like what it is like to shift regularly between this kind of writing and more scholarly forms; investigate how the writing of administration differs from more traditional forms of scholarly writing in terms of process and strategies; and question how common types of administrative writing reflect disciplinary knowledge and experience.

Profiles of administrators' writing lives alone would be interesting in and of themselves, of course, but we also imagine the research would prove directly useful for individuals and for the field. First, this research could help faculty administrators find new opportunities in their everyday writing, including opportunities for teaching and collaborating with students. In one example, it strikes us now that the social media writing one participant discussed doing with her writing center tutors and students could offer a faculty-student collaboration that diverges from the co-authored articles we normally think of. In a different example, many participants discussed writing proposals, reports, and other kinds of program documents that could provide valuable examples for professional and technical writing courses or even projects for student interns.

Care Responsibilities, Research, and Admin Work

We did not explicitly ask participants about parenting or other care responsibilities. Still, several participants, particularly those with children, talked about these demands. Interestingly, many of these participants talked about such demands during the same conversations about administrative roles, possibly because both topics were prompted by our question about balancing research time with other demands.

Some noted the overall positive effect of care responsibilities on their work habits and work-life balance. For example, one participant described how having children motivated her to stay focused during the day so she would not have to work after they came home from school:

> When you have kids, trying to work from 4:00-8:00 [PM]
> is like a nightmare. You don't want to have to do it, so you
> force yourself to be more productive [during the day]. It's like
> having a deadline. Four o'clock is your deadline, and when
> you have a deadline, it imposes a certain sense of urgency that
> makes working more productively during the daytime easier.

However, other participants made different comments. During one particularly interesting interview, a participant laughed at the way a well-known faculty productivity program marketed itself by claiming faculty could learn strategies to avoid working after hours or on weekends: "[They claim] you can do it so you're not working on weekends [because] you're doing the work during the week, yadda, yadda, yadda. I don't think these people have children, but that's another story." As this participant suggests, common research productivity advice may be limited for faculty who are balancing work with care obligations. We imagine that the pandemic has only exacerbated this problem.

Of course, lots of faculty, not just administrators, are caring for others, including children, aging parents, or both. However, what we heard in several interviews is that care demands, like administrative demands, can challenge common strategies for maintaining a research agenda. When a faculty member is both an administrator and a caretaker, the challenges may double. The participant we quote second in the previous paragraph discussed the challenges of being a nursing mother:

> I will tell you when I was pregnant and nursing … that was
> really difficult. I remember having two hours and I have to get
> all this stuff done because I have to go back and nurse. … I
> would go to Starbucks or someplace like that and I would just
> write like the wind for two hours so I could get back and feed

> my baby. I remember that was kind of difficult, but it was also good because I got it done, but it was a challenge.

This participant describes enacting common writing productivity advice: carve out time for research, go somewhere they will not be distracted (or shut the office door), and use that time to focus completely on writing. From the participant's description, one can imagine how difficult this would be for a nursing mother who has a deadline to return to her hungry baby. For an administrator who must balance all of this with meetings, many of which may be on campus, the balance becomes even more difficult. At a different point in the interview, this participant commented about the balance of research with other demands: "I think that you have to kind of figure out what are the constraints that shape when and how you can write. I definitely think that administration and family life affect that."

Her comments remind us that scholar-admin-parents need support and advice that recognizes all the roles they play. Just as future studies may investigate the challenges faced by faculty administrators, studies that investigate the challenges faced by faculty parents may help us develop support programs and advice that better reflect their realities. In particular, we imagine the field may benefit from interview studies that, like our own, attempt to uncover "real" faculty writing experiences, including what strategies they use to cope, but are focused on faculty parents.

ADVICE AND ADVOCACY FOR WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

Participant comments suggest that common advice about protecting research time may be difficult for in-demand WPAs. For example, productivity books and blogs often suggest faculty create a writing schedule and protect it fiercely by, for example, ignoring email and shutting the office door for two hours every day (or an hour a day or two afternoons a week or whatever). We do not question the usefulness of this advice, but participants' comments suggest admins may have trouble setting and sticking to a writing schedule when emails with immediate needs come in so regularly. As one participant comments, some emails simply cannot be set aside, and administrator-scholars need productivity advice that is more attuned to this reality.

Additionally, common advice to simply avoid administrative work pre-tenure may be unrealistic for rhetoric and composition faculty, given that our disciplinary training makes us prime candidates for directing writing centers, first-year composition programs, and other writing initiatives. Instead of being advised to simply avoid administrative work, current and future rhetoric and composition faculty need research productivity strategies that are more attuned to the realities of

WPAs. Such faculty may also need strategies for advocating for their administrative work as scholarly, given how colleagues, non-WPA university administrators, and tenure committees seem to remain ignorant of the subject.

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APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you see as your primary areas of research within rhetoric and composition?
2. How did you learn to write for/publish in our field?
3. On average, how much time do you spend on your research every week and how does that time break down?
4. What resources do you use regularly to complete your research?
5. What types of collaborative writing and research do you do? How does collaborating affect your process?
6. If you're faculty: Describe the tenure requirements in your institution. If you're a graduate student: Describe the amount of published research you anticipate doing at the job you hope to get.
7. How is your writing time affected by teaching, administration, service, other responsibilities?
8. What types of writing do you do most often (ex: grant proposals, conference presentations, articles, etc.)?
9. How do you know you're ready to submit a document?
10. What have been your greatest writing/research successes? What have been your biggest obstacles?
11. Talk about the kinds of feedback you've received from reviewers. What's been most helpful? Most discouraging?

APPENDIX B. SURVEY

1. Where did you attend/are you attending graduate school?
2. What year did you graduate, if you have matriculated?
3. What is the name of your current academic institution and what is your position? (Place and title and/or administrative role, e.g., Wright State University, Assistant Professor, Director of Professional and Technical Writing)
4. How many peer-reviewed book reviews have you published?
   a. a. none
   b. b. 1-2
   c. c. 3-4
   d. d. other_____
5. How many peer-reviewed articles have you published?
   a. a. 1-2
   b. b. 3-4
   c. c. other____
6. How many peer-reviewed books have you published?
   a. none
   a. b. 1
   b. c. 2
   c. d. other____
7. Are you at a tenure-granting institution? If so, are you tenured or unten-ured? How long since has it been you were awarded your last rank, and how long before you anticipate receiving your next rank (if applicable)?