

Rachel Gramer
Administrative Philosophy

As a graduate student WPA, I used my visibility as an administrator to model dispositions of openness, encouragement, and commitment. For the benefit of programs, departments, and universities, I think it is vital for administrators to emphasize our continued need for honesty, collaboration, and clarity about our own—and our students’—strengths and needs. As a once-and-future feminist administrator, I strive to enact clarity and efficiency and to create structures for community building—which I see as two effective means of creating sustainable change *within* programs and institutions *for* all participants.

To work toward WPA goals of coherence and assessment, I rely on clarity and efficiency as a means of bringing about positive program change. First and foremost, I think it is vital to communicate clearly and frequently, which has taken many forms for me, including informing the program as a whole (e.g., categorizing and previewing content for our often lengthy weekly email newsletter) and announcing both needs and opportunities in advance (e.g., artifacts for assessment, or professional development events). I also find tremendous value in streamlining existing procedures when possible in order to save time, paper, and effort (e.g., syllabi checks, instructor observations) and in designing new procedures with the same goals in mind. For instance, I led our four-person administrative team in developing end-of-year assessment procedures for our program-wide digital project; and I emailed all instructors complete details after we had introduced the assignment in August, but before students began their projects in September. Efficiency and clarity are especially vital when asking instructors to participate in new aspects of program development that require dedicated attention and timely action. They are also needed administrative traits for communicating with other programs and colleges in the university, whether to assess or request campus resources or to be responsive to shifts in general education or other curriculum.

Further, to work toward WPA goals of enculturation and support, I put community building at the heart of program building because institutions need less hierarchical ways to support collaborative learning and self-motivated professional development. For instance, I introduced teacher profiles as part of our weekly email to encourage instructor visibility, inclusion, and peer knowledge of others. I also led our team in re-structuring teacher observations as conversation spaces, creating a new template for observers and revising the process to insert a face-to-face meeting for instructors and observers in between class observations and report write-ups. In addition to working to improve relationships between instructors, and between instructors and faculty/graduate student WPA observers, I am also committed to community building through mentoring, an invaluable activity frequently touted and too seldom institutionally visible. As one of three mentors to first-semester teachers, I created a “mentoring topics” schedule structured around new teachers’ needs—in the practicum, for their own classrooms, and as students and human beings. In formal and informal mentoring relationships that I continue to this day, I support newcomers and experienced instructors alike by encouraging individual growth, modeling collaborative learning, and valuing active participation. This kind of community building is one instrumental way that administrators can facilitate productive change for writing education campus-wide.

My own strengths as an efficient, clear administrative planner and community builder are most visible in the [Digital Composition Colloquium](#) (DCC), a two-day event I co-designed and facilitated for 35 writing instructors who opted-in to participate in a new “turnkey” digital assignment in response to general education assessment (specific to cultural diversity) and a move toward digital technologies (as part of a future university Quality Enhancement Plan). During the DCC, instructors participated in small group peer conversations, created their own 60-second video, and gathered together to celebrate their efforts. As lead facilitator, I created (and continue to update) a website with resources for instructors and students. Just as importantly, throughout the event, I called on all instructors to draw on prior knowledge of writing and media, to encourage themselves and each other as capable learners of new digital practices and instruction, and to continue to be reflective practitioners, building relationships between their pedagogical goals and methods and our revised Student Learning Outcomes. I continued these practices throughout the year in informal small group drop-ins, one-on-one conversations, and a half-day orientation workshop. For me, the DCC is an example of using administrative power in ways that I would like to continue: to work toward community- and program-building by helping people feel more included, valued, and ratified and, therefore, more likely to contribute to positive change that is invaluable to writing programs, departments, and universities.