

## Call for Proposals

### “Learning on the Bones”: (Un)Becoming Writing Program Administrators

Editors: Casie Fedukovich, Joyce Inman, Paula Patch, and Sherry Rankins-Robertson

Writing program administration roles are not simply administrative. They often build on and become both personal and professional identities. They shape how we understand our labor, our authority, our institutional and disciplinary belonging, our academic lifecycle, and even our physical and mental wellbeing. Scholarship on affect in writing program administration has largely focused on persistence: overcoming obstacles, generating strategies for survival, and presenting transformative narratives. This edited collection offers opportunities to discuss the complex identity negotiations that come with *stepping away* from Writing Program Administration.

In “Becoming a Warrior,” Louise Wetherbee Phelps writes, “What I had yet to learn, on the bones, was the circuit of devaluation that runs from women in general to women’s work to composition as a feminized discipline and back to the concrete institutional project—the writing program as an enterprise, and its people” (297). To learn something “on the bones” is to experience it as embodied knowledge. This collection intends to supplement and complicate existing research on the persistent writing program administrator with counter narratives of rage, grief, betrayal, and regret that balance narratives of joy, confidence, and gratitude. We invite authors to discuss how these challenges help WPAs mark personal and professional boundaries and chart a path forward from writing program administration.

While scholarship in the field includes discussions on writing program administration (WPA) lifecycles--*GenAdmin* (Charlton et al., 2011), *The Things We Carry*, (Wooten et al., 2020), *Toward More Sustainable Metaphors for Writing Program Administration* (Wilkes, Mina, and Poblete, 2023), and *Making Administrative Work Visible*, (Graziano, et al., 2023)—we have not fully examined the consequences of moving on from WPA work. Many existing collections address becoming and flourishing as a WPA. We open space to explore what it means to discover the process of unbecoming. What factors lead WPAs to step away from program administration? What identity negotiations might they confront in making that choice? What consequences might they endure, accept, or embrace? How do they restore relationships and repair health compromised by the commitment of time and focus that administrative work has demanded on their bodies and minds? How do we envision our academic lives without the writing program administrative work that we’ve been educated and/or socialized to embrace? Are some of us better off in spaces outside of writing programs and writing studies, and how and when do we discover the offramps available to us?

We invite submissions that make connections between individual stories and scholarship to complicate the ways leadership positions in writing studies are viewed within and outside of the discipline and to explore what happens when individuals leave WPA work—sometimes for positions situated more firmly within understood academic faculty and leadership genres and at other times for good.

We offer the following list of questions as starting points for reflection and response:

- Many WPAs ultimately move into/advance into other administrative roles. How does WPA work prepare individuals for these types of more recognized and “legitimized” administrative roles? Which skills and priorities associated with WPA work are we most likely to take with us into these spaces, and how might this alter those spaces?
- What brought us to join the labor forces of writing program administration? What did we hoped to achieve, what did we gain, and where are we going? What scholarship offered a guide for entering and exiting these roles for you?
- How does WPA work influence identity, and in what ways does this affect the ability of WPAs to “move forward” from the work? Why does this specific work seem to define the individuals who

- choose it? How do we negotiate the complex identity formulations associated with the work of being WPAs, the stigmas associated with being “former WPAs,” and the process of “unbecoming”?
- By choosing composition as an area of study, are we automatically also choosing WPA work? What do the assumptions made about program administrators and their impact say about our discipline? About the evolution and scope of writing studies graduate training and graduate education? What are the implications for preparing graduate students to understand WPA work through both a practical and theoretical lens is valuable?
  - To what extent does starting one’s career as a WPA affect the ability, bandwidth, and/or opportunity to shift gears and choose different paths? How does being untenured in these roles at the start of our careers influence our trajectories? What are the lessons learned?
  - How do WPAs serving in non-traditional faculty roles navigate the process of moving on? In what ways does academia consider WPA work in and of itself to be contingent?
  - WPA work influences both our professional and our personal relationships; in what ways do we witness our lives, health, positionalities, and relationships affected? How do we determine when work relationships should be severed or sustained?
  - What role does the WPA community play in establishing mentoring relationships? How do these relationships sustain us? How do we recognize when our work begins to affect our relationships, and what steps do we take to address these effects?
  - While all professional positions can experience burnout, WPAs seem to be at particular risk for overwhelm; what is it about these positions and the ways they are conceived that lead to what some might see as professional or personal collapse?
  - In what ways does WPA work affect our physical and mental wellbeing? How might we better address the relationship between the professional and the self? What is the effect of post-WPA moves on our wellbeing?
  - What are rewards and costs to moving on from the WPA life? There are benefits and risks to all of our professional choices, but how and why does WPA work specifically affect us as individuals, professionals, spouses, parents, and friends?
  - What are the differences between stepping back from WPA work to pursue other avenues in higher education and in retiring from WPA work? How might we consider opportunities for moving on and moving up from WPA work? How can the completion of a term be seen as a job well done rather than an act of quiet quitting?
  - What factors lead WPAs to move on from WPA work by choosing to return to faculty? How does the academic community tend to view this choice? How might we situate the act of moving on as one of collaboration and wellness?
  - What does it look like to encourage future and current WPAs to think about “succession plans?” How can we support one another in making the change we want to make in our programs and also step away feeling proud of the work we have contributed to move forward toward our next steps?

We invite writing program administrators at any stage in their lifespan to join this collection as an act of wellbeing and mentoring for the next generation of scholars to offer pathways through the (un)becoming of the writing program administrative life. We welcome abstracts (up to 500 words) to be sent to [learningonthebones@gmail.com](mailto:learningonthebones@gmail.com) no later than 11:59pm PT on May 31, 2026.

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**Collection Editors:**

Casie Fedukovich, North Carolina State University

Joyce Inman, University of Southern Mississippi

Paula Patch, Elon University

Sherry Rankins-Robertson, University of Central Florida