

## CHAPTER 10

# NOT JUST TEACHERS: THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF PLACING INSTRUCTORS IN ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES IN AN INDEPENDENT WRITING PROGRAM

**Laura J. Davies**

SUNY Cortland

In many independent writing programs, especially those charged with teaching required writing courses, the program's tenure-track faculty and full-time administrators are outnumbered by contingent faculty: teaching assistants, part-time faculty, adjuncts, and non-tenure-track instructors (for more on contingent labor see Johnson and MacDonald, Procter & Williams, this volume). At some stand-alone writing programs, such as the Thompson Writing Program at Duke University and the University Writing Program at the University of Denver, only one or two full-time faculty or administrators oversee a large number of fellows, lecturers, or instructors who teach the vast majority of required writing courses. This demographic imbalance within independent writing programs is often a consequence of the politics of university budgets, as required writing and other introductory courses have been staffed historically by relatively cheap contingent faculty. Even though there are usually more contingent faculty than full-time faculty and administrators within an independent writing program, the scholarship on independent writing programs has largely prioritized the perspective of the latter. Research on stand-alone writing programs and departments—relatively new academic units in American colleges and universities formed from the late 1980s onward—has mainly focused on the creation and early evolution of independent writing programs' administrative and curricular structures.

These organizational decisions made within independent writing programs, which include everything from tenure and promotion guidelines and administrative reporting lines to curricular governance and budgetary authority, obviously have

considerable consequences for both the students taught in the independent writing program as well as the professional careers of the program's tenure-track faculty and full-time administrators (Crow, 2002; Kearns & Turner, 1997; Kearns & Turner, this volume; Little & Rose, 1994; Maid, 2002). However, an independent writing program's administrative and curricular structures also significantly affect the professional careers and personal identities of its teachers, whether those instructors are non-tenure-track, part-time, full-time, or graduate teaching assistants.

My research on the Syracuse Writing Program looks at the impact independent writing programs have on the professional and personal identities of their teachers (see also Rhoades et al., Schendel & Royer, and Thaiss et al., this volume). When the Syracuse Writing Program was founded in 1986, the three full-time faculty members in charge of the university-wide required writing program created paid administrative positions which were filled by part-time instructors and teaching assistants. These positions, called "coordinators," were an essential part of the Syracuse Writing Program's administrative structure for over 20 years. The coordinators, who were selected and appointed each year, were directly responsible for mentoring, supervising, and evaluating their fellow teachers. The coordinators reported to the full-time faculty and had a voice in administrative and curricular decisions. Although the coordinators had substantial administrative authority, they were still considered part-time, contingent faculty by the upper university administration. The coordinators who were teaching assistants held graduate appointments, and the coordinators who were part-time instructors were most often on three-year renewable contracts.

I argue that the coordinator position and the larger "coordinating group system" that it was part of had significant long-term effects on both the culture of the Syracuse Writing Program and the professional and personal identities of the program's coordinators and teachers. The coordinating group system was first implemented in the 1987–1988 academic year and was a defining feature of the Syracuse Writing Program's administration for nearly two decades. The coordinating group system gave teachers the opportunity to take on administrative roles and responsibilities in the program. Instead of a strictly top-down administration, with a Ph.D.-holding faculty director running the program, the Syracuse Writing Program, largely through the coordinating group system, became more of a "flattened hierarchy" (Plvan, 2011). The coordinating group system helped the program's full-time faculty directors share the administrative responsibilities in the program (similar to the "matrix" described by Filling-Brown & Frechie, this volume, and to Ross' description of "committee" style, this volume). The administrative duties, to a degree, were spread out among several tenure-track faculty, full-time administrators, and teachers in the program. Part-time instructors and teaching assistants who assumed administrative roles had

increased agency in the program, which led to the development of a strong teaching culture within the Syracuse Writing Program, a culture that promoted teaching as a reflective practice and the expertise and professionalism of the teacher-practitioner.

The decision to invite instructors and teaching assistants into the Syracuse Writing Program's administration was not simple. Those teachers who accepted administrative appointments and undertook administrative tasks, such as mentoring and evaluating their peers, sometimes felt a real conflict between their identities as teachers and their responsibilities as quasi-administrators, and that tension played out over time in the recasting and revision of the coordinating group system.

In this chapter, I first explain the methodology I used to study the long-term programmatic and personal effects of placing teachers in administrative roles within an independent writing program. Then, to place my study of the Syracuse Writing Program's coordinating group system into context, I briefly explain the administrative moves that led to the creation of an independent writing program at Syracuse University in 1986. Finally, I explain the reasoning behind the formation of the coordinating group system, its evolution over the first two decades of the Syracuse Writing Program (1986–2008) and this system's long-term effects on the writing program's culture and the personal and professional identities of its teachers.

## **ARCHIVAL AND ORAL HISTORIES AS A LENS TO UNDERSTAND INDEPENDENT WRITING PROGRAMS**

The coordinating group system, though it was a consistent, central feature of the Writing Program, did not look or act the same over the first 20 years of the Syracuse Writing Program, from 1986 to 2006. Beginning in the fall of 1987, the approximately 100 non-tenure-track, part-time instructors and teaching assistants who worked in the independent Syracuse Writing Program were organized into small groups, usually numbering between eight and twelve members. These groups were led by a coordinator, who was also either a part-time instructor or a teaching assistant who taught in the program. Each coordinator, appointed and supervised by the Writing Program's full-time faculty administrators, was responsible for holding weekly meetings, mentoring instructors, visiting each instructor's classes, and writing an evaluation report for each instructor in the group. These coordinating groups also served an important communication purpose in the Syracuse Writing Program: the coordinator both relayed important information top-down from the program's upper administration and also reported instructor concerns and suggestions to the program's director and fellow administrators.

The structure of the coordinating group system (who participated in the groups, how often the groups met, what tasks were taken up by the groups) changed when the needs of both the Syracuse Writing Program and the part-time instructors shifted as the program developed, evolved, and matured. In order to trace how the coordinating group system changed over time and how the system affected both the culture of the Syracuse Writing Program and the professional and personal identities of the program's teachers, I designed a historical study of the Syracuse Writing Program using both archival and oral history research methodologies (see also Johnson, this volume, for a similar methodology).

For the archival portion of my study, I collected administrative documents written about the Syracuse University Writing Program's coordinating group system and the other professional development and evaluation structures created for teachers in the program. The vast majority of the documents—hundreds of reports, letters, memos, meeting minutes, agendas, programs, newsletters, and teaching portfolios—were given to me by the Syracuse Writing Program's first faculty director, Louise Wetherbee Phelps, and other administrators and instructors, notably Faith Plvan and Henry Jankiewicz, who have worked in the Syracuse Writing Program since its founding in 1986. In total, I read, categorized, labeled and scanned 440 individual administrative documents, creating a digital archive.

This methodology I relied on for my study, historical archival methodology, is widely used in Composition and Rhetoric and has shed light on issues relating to writing program administration, most notably through Barbara L'Eplattenier and Lisa S. Mastrangelo's 2004 collection, *Historical Studies of Writing Program Administration: Individuals, Community and the Formation of a Discipline*. What distinguishes L'Eplattenier and Mastrangelo's collection, as well as other historical archival studies of writing program administration (Connors, 1990; McBeth, 2007; Rose & Weiser, 2002; Varnum, 1996), from other archival histories in Composition and Rhetoric is their use of administrative documents—memos, reports, letters, contracts, staff directories, budget spreadsheets—to tell a history of both individual writing programs and the larger discipline. Unlike curricular documents, which showcase the teaching and instruction in a particular classroom, these administrative documents show the archival historian how the program functioned on a larger managerial or systems level. These documents are often not narrative in nature, but rather the fossilized remnants of real discussions, debates, and negotiations that in turn affected how curriculum was imagined and how administrative systems were designed.

Unlike the histories of early writing programs included in L'Eplattenier and Mastrangelo's collection, the histories of modern independent writing programs—those founded in the mid-1980s and later—are not as well documented. Modern independent writing programs, like the Syracuse Writing Program, are rela-

tively new academic units and thus have not been the focus of extensive archival research. My archival study of the Syracuse Writing Program's coordinating group system, a central administrative and professional development structure designed for the program's teachers, shows how historical archival research that relies on administrative documents can shed light on how administrative decisions are negotiated within independent writing programs.

An archive of administrative documents doesn't tell the whole story of how independent writing programs function and grow over time. The perspective of administrative documents is limited, privileging the vantage point of the full-time faculty and administrators who composed the documents. In order to complicate my understanding of the Syracuse Writing Program's early history as an independent writing program, I collected oral histories from twelve people who worked in the program during its first 10 years, from 1986 to 1996. The people I collected oral histories from served as faculty, administrative staff, instructors, and teaching assistants, and though some still work in the Writing Program, others have moved on to other institutions and careers. I recorded the oral histories, which lasted between 45 minutes and an hour and a half, and then transcribed the recordings. In the oral histories, the people I interviewed spoke at length about their personal experiences in the coordinating group system and the other professional development structures that were part of the Syracuse Writing Program's administrative structure.

Together, the archival research and oral histories provide a multi-dimensional history of the role teachers in the Syracuse Writing Program played in the coordinating group system, a professional development and administrative structure that gave part-time, non-tenure-track instructors and teaching assistants certain administrative responsibilities. Although this study is primarily historical in nature, the oral history portion of my methodology lends the research a longitudinal component as well. The archival portion of the study focuses on how the coordinating group system developed and evolved from 1986 to 1996, yet the oral histories I collected in 2011—a decade and a half after the end of the time period of my study—show the long-term effects of this particular administrative system on both the culture of the Syracuse Writing Program and the professional and personal identities of the teachers who worked in this independent writing program.

## **CREATING AN INDEPENDENT WRITING PROGRAM AT SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY**

The creation of an independent writing program at Syracuse University, although prompted by a university-led investigation into the teaching of writing at the institution, was not a strictly top-down decision, nor did it happen overnight.

Rather, through a series of strategic administrative moves, the Syracuse Writing Program evolved slowly into establishing itself as a stand-alone, vertical writing department that manages required writing courses at the university as well as houses both an undergraduate major in Writing and Rhetoric and a Ph.D. program in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric.

Before the Syracuse Writing Program was founded in 1986, the Syracuse University English Department administered the Freshman English Program, the university-wide required writing instruction at Syracuse University. In 1984, the Syracuse University Faculty Senate, spurred by complaints of “problems of literacy and numeracy in the present student body,” commissioned a study and evaluation of both the writing and mathematics instruction at Syracuse University (Jones, 1984, p. 1). The committee organized an external evaluation of the Freshman English program through the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) and spent nearly a year collecting data on the program.

The two members of the CWPA external evaluation team—Donald McQuade and James Slevin—visited Syracuse twice, on September 27 and 28, 1984 and on November 8 and 9, 1984. Their 20-page CWPA external evaluation report addressed the entirety of the Syracuse writing curriculum, which included not only the Freshman English program but a few other upper-division and graduate courses in writing. In their assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the writing curriculum at Syracuse, McQuade and Slevin lambast the English Department and university administration for its negligence of the Freshman English program—for having no professional, intellectual, or collegial contact with the non-tenure-track, part-time instructors who taught in the program—and for its ignorance of contemporary composition theory and pedagogy. McQuade and Slevin recommended renovating the Freshman English curriculum, revising teacher evaluation procedures, and providing resource materials and professional development that would allow the program’s instructors to develop a new, innovative writing curriculum (1985, p. 4–6).

Based on both the recommendations included in the external evaluation report and their own institutional data, the Ad Hoc Writing Evaluation committee issued their final report to the University Senate in April 1985. This report, thereafter known as the Gates Report, named for Robert Gates, the committee’s chair, proposed a radical change to the writing curriculum at Syracuse University. Instead of the Freshman English sequence, the Gates Report recommended that the university adopt a four-year, four-course required writing sequence. The Gates Report also stated that Syracuse University “cannot, either morally or intellectually, defend building such an ambitious program on the backs of grossly underpaid part-timers,” acknowledging that the part-time writing instructors will be responsible for the majority of the writing instruction in

this new university writing program (Gates, 1985, p. 18). However, rather than mandate certain changes to the working conditions of part-time instructors, the report leaves the issue of how to rectify labor issues to the future directors of the Syracuse Writing Program.

Because of the proposed new writing program's "complexity and scope," the report recommended that the new director of the program answer not to the English Department chair but rather to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences or the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (Gates, 1985, p. 17). The report does not formally remove the Writing Program from the English Department. Rather, in its administrative chain-of-command recommendation, it makes the point that university-wide writing instruction extends beyond the jurisdiction of the English Department. When Louise Wetherbee Phelps was hired as the first director of the Syracuse Writing Program a year later, in 1986, she took the report's structural suggestion seriously. Along with Margaret Himley and Carol Lipson, two full-time faculty members in the English Department who moved over to the new Writing Program and were instrumental in the Writing Program's construction and administration, Phelps created *de facto* a writing program independent of English Department curricular and administrative control.

Unlike other independent writing programs, which were established with much debate or out of internal divisions within departments (see Everett, Schendel & Royer, and Lalicker, this volume), the independent Syracuse Writing Program evolved over time into a stand-alone institutional unit. Its independence happened through an alignment of the Gates Report chain-of-command administrative recommendation, the embedded disinterest for writing instruction by many of the faculty in the English Department, and the actions of Phelps, Himley, Lipson, and future faculty administrators, who led the program as if it were an independent academic department, even it was not officially recognized as such by Syracuse University until years later. This independence, as well as the Writing Program's identity not as an academic department but as a more undefined program, allowed the Syracuse Writing Program to experiment both in its curriculum and its administrative structure.

Later in her career, in her 2003 WPA Conference keynote speech, Phelps argued that institutional flexibility is key to designing and re-designing innovative writing programs: "This is the road I advocate for writing programs as transformers: design things that work, but are below the radar, friendly and sprawling, messy and temporary, constantly learning" (2003, p. 26) (see also Kearns & Turner, Schendel & Royer, and Thaiss et al., this volume). The Syracuse Writing Program, beginning in 1986, was a constantly learning improvisational space—not quite an independent department, but also not controlled

by the larger English Department. Many of the choices and systems the Writing Program implemented since 1986, including the coordinating group system, would not have been possible either if the program was inside a more rigid departmental structure or if the program's budget, staffing, and vision was controlled more closely by a traditional department chair, more concerned with the department's vertical undergraduate and graduate curricula than the required writing courses the program managed and the instructors who taught them. The Syracuse Writing Program thrived because it had its own space. This is not a singular phenomenon—Deirdre Pettipiece and Justin Everett have argued that physical and institutional separation from English departments helps independent writing programs establish legitimacy as well as their own cultural and disciplinary identity (2013).

### **BOTTOM-UP: BUILDING A NEW WRITING PROGRAM WITH PART-TIME INSTRUCTORS**

The Gates Report set out a Herculean task for Phelps: transform the antiquated Freshman English curriculum into a four-year vertical writing curriculum. The report offered no real guidance as to how this transformation should occur or how the teachers should be included in the creation of a new curriculum, only that the faculty and instructors should work together as “intellectual peers” (Gates, 1985, p. 19). In the fall of 1986, the Syracuse Writing Program was simultaneously inventing a new vertical writing curriculum and, at the same time, administering the current required Freshman English program courses for 3,000 entering first-year students (Soper, 1986). In its first full academic year, 1986–1987, the Syracuse Writing Program had three full-time faculty (Phelps, Lipson, and Himley) and 86 part-time instructors who were teaching between one and three sections of first-year writing each semester. In addition, graduate teaching assistants from the English Department taught in the Writing Program to fulfill the teaching obligations of their assistantships (Saldo, 1991).

From the beginning, Phelps, Lipson, and Himley resisted creating a top-down, rigid writing curriculum. Instead, they made a conscientious decision to draw on the pedagogical experience of the teachers, who were familiar with the institutional context and the students at Syracuse University. Though Phelps, with the input of Himley and Lipson, was the driving theoretical force behind curriculum for the new required writing courses, she made it clear in her correspondence with the rest of the Writing Program instructors, teaching assistants, and staff that they, beginning with a special task force in the summer of 1987, would be the ones to “write the curriculum’ more concretely (as syllabi, selection of texts, etc.)” (Phelps, letter, February 26, 1987). Phelps saw her primary



curricular responsibility as “creating a *theory-based curriculum*,” or a set of “cues and constraints” to “come alive” through the instructors’ own pedagogical interpretation and experimentation (Phelps, talk, February 13, 1987). Thus, the new writing curriculum at Syracuse University depended on the teachers. The teachers played a vital role: Phelps’ theory-based curriculum could never be expressed, explained, or fine-tuned without them.

The Writing Program’s reliance on and faith in its non-tenure-track faculty derived, in part, from Phelps’ own administrative philosophy, part of which she articulated in her chapter in the 1999 collection *Administrative Problem-Solving for Writing Programs and Writing Centers*. She argues:

Human resources in a literal sense may refer to the number of personnel lines or dollars you have on budget, the types of employees, or the person hours you can tap for some task. But more fundamentally they are the talents and human potential represented among people who work for or with the program. Like any resource, they can be cultivated, expanded, and deployed efficiently and ethically; or they can be squandered, misdirected, underestimated, or diminished. Human capital is a more crucial resource than dollars, technology, or even time. By investing energy, pride, and commitment in their work, people provide the knowledge, imagination, motivation, and skill without which the program cannot use other types of resources effectively, or at all (Phelps, 1999a, p. 82).

Phelps, knowing the “crucial resource” she had in the Syracuse Writing Program’s teachers, gave them intellectual freedom in both the design and the implementation of the new curriculum. The Syracuse Writing Program’s decision to build a “bottom-up” writing curriculum was not only grounded in Phelps’ understanding of the composing process and her commitment to the professionalism and expertise of the teacher-practitioner; it was also a strategic administrative design solution. Phelps, Himley, and Lipson needed the program’s instructors on board with the monumental curriculum shifts that had to happen within one academic year. It would have been nearly impossible, given all the other administrative work they had to do, for these three full-time faculty members to micromanage over 100 teaching assistants and instructors.

Luckily for the Syracuse Writing Program, a large number of the instructors and teaching assistants were on board. Many of the teachers remembered the first few years of the Writing Program as a “big revolution,” “a new world,” or “magic” (N. Hahn, personal communication, January 7, 2011; R. Kirby-Werner, personal communication, January 3, 2011; M. Voorheis, personal com-

munication, February 16, 2011). Molly Voorheis, an instructor who had also taught in the old Freshman English Program, described how she felt:

From the outset, there was a real effort to support the expertise of the practitioner . . . There was also the practical recognition that no matter what the Writing Program thought about it or the university thought about it, writing was built on the backs of the part-time instructors. So rather than fighting it, there was an effort to say, “What can we do for these people? How can we tap into some of the expertise that’s there?” (M. Voorheis, personal communication, February 16, 2011)

Voorheis’ recollection points out that the teachers in the Syracuse Writing Program were aware of the administrative decision to support the individual strengths of the instructors and teaching assistants, strengths that could be culled and used for the program’s benefit.

## **THE COORDINATING GROUP SYSTEM AS A SITE FOR INSTRUCTOR SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONALIZATION**

Although the sudden openness and freedom to design and write their own 15-week first-year writing courses around abstract curricular theories was liberating to some, it was also simultaneously terrifying and confusing to many instructors and teaching assistants in the Syracuse Writing Program. Henry Jankiewicz, an instructor in the Writing Program, described the situation as a “free fall”: the instructors were given quite a lot of independence to write their own syllabi, but many felt the absence of a safety net as they tried to implement a brand-new curriculum based on composition theories many had just recently learned (H. Jankiewicz, personal communication, May 11, 2011). Many teachers, Jankiewicz explained, felt like novices thrust into an authority role.

To address this problem, the Syracuse Writing Program implemented the coordinating group system in the beginning of the 1987–1988 academic year. The coordinating group system was modeled after the more informal instructor-led “working groups” the Writing Program put into place beginning in the Fall 1986 semester. Phelps, Lipson, and Himley singled out certain teachers to serve in the newly-created coordinator position. The coordinators’ job, as described by Phelps, was to “act as mentors and consultants” for the members of their coordinating group, “to promote dialogue within the group and throughout the program, and to advise the directors” (Phelps, talk, May 3, 1987; Phelps, memo, April 20, 1987) (see also MacDonald, Schendel & Royer, and Thaiss et al., this

volume). Ten teachers were chosen to serve as coordinators in the 1987–1988 academic year, and these teachers were selected based on their teaching portfolios and recommendations from the Syracuse Writing Program’s faculty, staff, and instructors. The coordinators were appointed for one-year terms and could be reappointed. The coordinators were given a 1-1 course release from their normal course load for their administrative responsibilities.

It was within these coordinating groups that Phelps envisioned the teachers doing and discussing the work of interpreting the program’s theories and curriculum. The coordinating groups were designed to be forums to support the teachers as they navigated through the new curriculum. In addition, though, the coordinating groups were also seen by the Program as sites for research and discussion, as sometimes, Phelps explained, the coordinating groups would be asked to take up a specific question or problem (The Syracuse Writing Program, 1987a, p. 43). The possibilities for the coordinating groups’ activities were far-ranging:

help teachers solve practical problems of course design and management; try out and evaluate innovative teaching ideas; visit one another’s classes for observation or team work; discuss readings; debate theories; study cases (of individual students, assignments, class activities); write collaboratively; create curriculum plans; compare grading practices; provide feedback to Directors of the Program or initiate discussion of issues in the Program; and whatever else members decide will be useful to the group or to the Program. (The Syracuse Writing Program, 1987a, pp. 43–44).

Much of the coordinating groups’ activities were grounded in the reading and discussion of current composition theory, and so the coordinating groups served as important sites for the part-time instructors’ and teaching assistants’ own individual professional development.

However, the professional development happening within the coordinating groups did not just benefit the teachers alone: the curricular and administrative work taken on by the coordinating groups rippled outward to affect, benefit, direct, and re-direct the Writing Program. Over the years, the coordinating groups helped to produce new assignments and course structures, piloted the use of technology and reflective portfolios in the required writing courses, partnered with other academic units and departments on writing across the curriculum initiatives, and developed a comprehensive teacher evaluation system. In this sense, the coordinating group system played a crucial role in the development of the early Syracuse Writing Program. The program’s administration, led by

Phelps, Lipson, Himley, and others, recognized that the teachers could do valuable and important work for the Syracuse Writing Program, work that would be nearly impossible for the few full-time faculty to complete on their own.

The Writing Program, in asking its part-time instructors to help create new curriculum and administrative structures (such as a teacher evaluation system) through the coordinating groups, had to justify asking its teachers to invest a considerable amount of their time and effort in the program. During the Writing Program's first year, 1986–1987, several teaching assistants and part-time instructors commented on the amount of time and labor that the Writing Program's administration was (Ahlers, 1986; Brown, L., 1986; Four views, 1986). One group of teachers, who met regularly to discuss honors sections of first-year composition, wrote to Phelps on December 12, 1986:

We recognize the value of the Working Groups and the appropriateness of developing a Writing Program that incorporates the ideas of its staff, and we are eager to participate. However, we are expecting forthcoming assurance that, as Part-Time Instructors, most of whom are already serving the University beyond the provisions of our contracts, we will receive appropriate recognition and compensation for this investment of our professional time and effort. (Brown, December 12, 1986).

To answer this concern, beginning in the 1987–1988 academic year, the requirement to attend coordinating group sessions every other week for an hour (or its rough equivalent) was included in teaching assistant and instructor contracts. The coordinators, who invested a substantial amount of energy mentoring the teachers in their group, meeting with administrators, developing topics and choosing texts for the group to discuss and work on, and conducting classroom observations, were paid for their work by being assigned an “administrative section” (Phelps, memo, April 20, 1987). For example, coordinators hired on 3/2 teaching contracts would really teach a 2/1 load, lead a biweekly coordinating group, and serve on the Writing Program's Advisory Council, an administrative committee within the Writing Program. The average per-section rate for a part-time instructor in the 1987–1988 school year was \$1,944, and coordinators were paid a \$300 bonus on top of that for their administrative section (Phelps, memo, April 20, 1987). Coordinators could be reappointed on a year-to-year basis, but the Writing Program also made an effort to rotate as many interested teachers as possible into the coordinator position.

The Syracuse Writing Program's investment in the coordinator position was substantial: it dedicated a large portion of its budget (over \$44,000) to

fund the administrative coordinating sections (Phelps, memo, April 20, 1987). One of the primary reasons for this financial investment was that the coordinators helped ease the administrative burden on the few full-time faculty. The teaching responsibilities of the Writing Program—more than 300 sections of required writing at the university in the 1987–1988 academic year—fell onto the shoulders of the 60 part-time instructors and 50 teaching assistants in the Writing Program (Phelps, memo, April 20, 1987). In order to provide the part-time instructors and teaching assistants with the “intensive instruction and supervision they needed to be expert” in teaching the new studio curriculum in the Writing Program, they needed to be given (and paid for) the time “to do the crucial professional development activities that fall outside teaching Studio courses” (Phelps, memo, October 26, 1987). The coordinating groups, though they did not serve as the only means for professional development in the first years of the Writing Program, were a primary site for professionalizing the teachers.

## **INNOVATION, CONFLICT, AND TENSION IN THE COORDINATING GROUPS**

In the 1987–1988 academic year, all members of the Writing Program—including part-time instructors, teaching assistants, writing consultants, full-time faculty, and administrative staff—were integrated into the coordinating group system. Individual coordinating groups were comprised of different constituencies from the Writing Program, and this commitment to heterogeneity was a primary feature of the coordinating group system.

Many of the instructors who I interviewed fondly recalled the first few years of the coordinating group system. Bron Adam, who had numerous roles in the early Syracuse Writing Program—part-time instructor, coordinator, and administrator in charge of teacher evaluation—remembered the value of the coordinating groups for both the teachers and the program:

At the beginning most of us were excited about [the coordinating groups.] Here was this place where we could talk about what we were doing, where we could share. Teaching is a lonely thing. Teachers want to talk about what they're doing. Not in a whiny way—sometimes to let off steam—but more than that, to get some perspective and some different ideas. . . . Most cases, in a university setting, there's a “fake it 'til you make it” attitude. But we were in a situation where nobody knew, so it was OK. It was OK to say that this flopped, that

I don't know if I'm doing this right, that I don't understand this. That made for a couple years of *real* generativity, a real willingness to experiment and take risks. (B. Adam, personal communication, January 13, 2011)

Adam's positive recollection emphasizes the curricular role the coordinating groups played: the Syracuse Writing Program's instructors wrote their own syllabi based on the curricular theories outlined by Phelps and other faculty directors, and in the coordinating groups, the instructors could "talk about what they're doing . . . to get some perspective and some different ideas." She cites that the first few years of the Syracuse Writing Program was a time of "*real* generativity" because everyone—faculty, administrative staff, instructors, teaching assistants—was inventing together (B. Adam, personal communication, January 13, 2011). The collective invention extended beyond just the required writing courses: the independent Syracuse Writing Program was also inventing co-curricular structures, like a new university writing center and writing across the curriculum initiatives, faculty tenure guidelines, professional development and evaluation structures, and plans for a Ph.D. program in Rhetoric and Composition.

This atmosphere of constant innovation, however, was unsettling to some. The coordinator reports from the 1987–1988 academic year serve as a lens through which to understand how the Writing Program's teachers and coordinators felt about their roles in the newly independent Syracuse Writing Program. Each semester, the coordinator in charge of each coordinating group wrote a report to the Syracuse Writing Program's director that detailed the specific activities, discussions, and challenges within that group. One coordinator report from this year argued that teachers felt that the work of curriculum development, of making abstract principles concrete, was "a burden not properly placed on their shoulders" (Daly & Howell, 1987). This coordinating group, composed of many new teaching assistants, felt "anxiety, uncertainty, and frustration" when trying to negotiate what the studio curriculum meant to them with their very real, pragmatic needs as first-time teachers (Daly & Howell, 1988). Another coordinator's report claimed that "the only common denominator" that teachers shared was "uncertainty" (Hill, 1987).

The challenges of the 1987–1988 coordinating groups seemed to stem from two issues: 1) the groups' heterogeneity and the difficulty of balancing the different needs and constraints of the constituencies within each coordinating group, and 2) the combination of sudden freedom and permission to invent as teachers with little concrete direction to do so (Hill, 1987; Thorley, 1987). As shown through the 1987–1988 coordinator reports, although many of the coordinators were "on board" with the extensive changes in the Writing Program (benefiting

from the face-to-face time they had with Writing Program faculty and administrators in the Writing Program Advisory Council), the coordinators met resistance and critique within their groups. Part of the resistance in the coordinating groups arose from a literature/composition disciplinary divide (see also Everett, Johnson, and Rhoades et al., this volume). The coordinators, although most of them had master's degrees in literature, not composition, were actively reading and talking about composition theory. The graduate teaching assistants, on the other hand, were more entrenched in literature, as their institutional home was the English department, not the Writing Program. Furthermore, the graduate teaching assistants only taught the Writing Program during the first year or two of their graduate studies, so they had less incentive to engage in the coordinating groups than the instructors who were teaching in the Writing Program on a long-term basis. Another reason for conflict in the coordinating groups was an ideological divide: many of the teachers taught in the old Freshman Writing Program, and some of these teachers were happy with a current-traditional pedagogical model and resisted pedagogy based on more recent composition theory (see also Hanganu-Bresch, this volume). Finally, there was a disparity between the needs of new teachers and veteran instructors (Hill, 1987).

The early coordinating groups are interesting sites to observe the struggles of beginning teachers or teachers who are learning to implement a new, unfamiliar curriculum. The reports of the coordinating groups show that the teachers were caught in a layer-cake of tensions. The teachers wanted pedagogical autonomy but also wanted some sort of structure or guidelines through which to shape their curriculum. They were also confused over the overall purpose of the coordinating groups—were the groups designed to encourage bottom-up invention or instead, were they intended merely to enact top-down principles?

The coordinators, who met with their groups on a weekly basis, confronted these tensions head-on. They were, in many ways, the face of the Syracuse Writing Program for the instructors and teaching assistants in their group. Coordinators served as both mentors and evaluators. They were supposed to be both a “master teacher,” providing the instructors and teaching assistants in their coordinating group practical teaching support and advice, and also a quasi-administrator, observing their coordinating group members' classes and writing up classroom observations that were used to evaluate each instructor.

Added to that dual role of mentor and evaluator was the perceived lack of real authority over the coordinating group members, especially over the literature and creative writing teaching assistants who were appointed to their positions not by the Writing Program administration but by the separate English Department (Cayton, Robinson & Smith, 1992, p. 16). English Department teaching assistants constituted about a third of the Writing Program's teachers;

the remainder of the teachers were part-time instructors on one, two, or three-year renewable contracts. The English Department's teaching assistants often openly critiqued the Writing Program's decisions (see also Johnson, this volume). Jankiewicz, one of the first coordinators, remembered the influence some of the English Department graduate students had on their coordinating groups. As he said, "the members of the 'Marxist Collective,'" a self-titled group of graduate students and faculty who subscribed to an understanding of the world based on Marxist theory, "aimed to undermine and disrupt the work of the coordinators" (H. Jankiewicz, personal communication, May 11, 2011). He recalled having a few graduate teaching assistants in his coordinating group who would question and critique the coordinating group structure itself and the pedagogical theories underling the new writing curriculum.

Anne Fitzsimmons, who was a graduate teaching assistant in the English Department and later became an instructor in the Writing Program, also remembered the difficulties the coordinating groups and the coordinators faced in the first few years:

You had all the freedom and excitement and the creativity of inventing a new program, but you're also very vulnerable as a program because you do not yet have a clearly articulated set of goals and practices, and most of the people who are trying to speak to whatever burgeoning goals and practices are there are themselves the most vulnerable members of the academic community (A. Fitzsimmons, personal communication, February 9, 2011).

Fitzsimmons' recollection is important because she speaks to the layers of vulnerability in the Writing Program's administration. The Syracuse Writing Program, a newly-minted independent writing program in 1986, was figuring out its own identity. Then, the coordinators, who were called upon to help the new program write and solidify the new curriculum as well as mentor and evaluate their peers, were also vulnerable from an institutional perspective: though the coordinators were highly valued within the Syracuse Writing Program, they still, on paper, were easily disposable contingent faculty.

The coordinators were given large responsibility for both maintaining the consistency of the Syracuse Writing Program curriculum and also for cultivating a teaching community within the program. However, some coordinators did not want to exercise administrative power to tell instructors what they needed to do (or should not do) in their classrooms (Cayton, Robinson & Smith, 1992, p. 16). The coordinators sometimes felt adverse towards taking on the administrative and evaluative power inherent in their position, especially after the first



few years, when the excitement and newness of the coordinating group system wore down.

George Rhinehart, one of the first coordinators in the Syracuse Writing Program, explained the role the coordinators played in the Writing Program, moving between the instructors and the Writing Program's administration:

My feeling was always my job, yes, was to coordinate, but also to be a liaison in *both* directions. And a lot of my colleagues I don't think felt that way. They felt like it was a liaison in one direction. I felt like it had to be both directions . . . Later on, some coordinators felt it was their job to advocate or protect the part-time instructors. I never felt that way. That doesn't mean I wasn't looking out for them, but I felt that somebody put me in this position and that somebody has got to have my loyalty, and that loyalty goes in both directions (G. Rhinehart, personal communication, February 9, 2011).

Rhinehart points at one of the underlying issues in the role of the coordinator. Part of the difficulty was its "limbo" state: a part-time instructor instilled with administrative responsibility. Even though the heterogeneous make-up of the coordinating groups in the Writing Program seemed to make the argument that everyone—instructors, staff, and faculty—were on the same "team," the Writing Program did not operate as an ideal collective democracy: the directors and other administrators, though they did solicit ideas from all members of the Writing Program, were clearly in charge. Therefore, even when teachers were promoted to the semi-administrative role of coordinator, they felt a strong sense of loyalty to one another. The drive to "protect" each other, as Rhinehart describes, can be traced to the sense of vulnerability contingent faculty feel, even when they are being professionalized, as they were in the Syracuse Writing Program.

Voorheis explained that she often resisted being a coordinator:

There was sometimes, especially when [the meetings] were weekly, that it felt very forced. What to talk about each week became a burden. I didn't want to have that burden, and I didn't want to be the representative of 239 [the main office number of the Writing Program's administration], which it kind of morphed into. Like you were on the other side. (M. Voorheis, personal communication, February 16, 2011)

Voorheis echoes Rhinehart by saying that coordinators felt like they "were on the other side." Even though the part-time instructors at Syracuse University were not unionized at the time (part-time faculty at Syracuse University union-

ized in 2008), some part-time instructors perceived a quiet separation between the non-tenure-track, part-time writing instructors and the full-time research faculty.

Lipson pointed out how hard the coordinator job was for some: “It was a difficult role . . . You had to be willing to take a leadership position and take a tough stance, and some are not willing to do that” (C. Lipson, personal communication, January 13, 2011). For example, one of the coordinators’ responsibilities was to vet teachers’ syllabi. In order to do this work, the coordinator had to feel comfortable critiquing her peers. As Lipson described, many teachers struggled with a leadership position like the coordinator role because it required uncomfortably separating themselves from their peers.

Although many teachers and former coordinators described the “monitoring” role the coordinating groups took on—taking attendance during weekly meetings or scrutinizing syllabi—it’s important to point out that one of the primary reasons the coordinating groups were established in the 1987–1988 school year was to professionalize the Writing Program’s instructors (see also Rhoades et al., this volume). Faith Plvan explained the dynamic between the Writing Program’s administration and its teachers:

The administration in this writing program is larger than you usually see. You usually don’t see this many staff. I think that establishes the administration as something more powerful than it really is in all the negative ways that power gets taken up, despite the fact that many of the staff positions, mine in particular, have features of them that are specifically designed to draw on [instructor] expertise or to support [instructor] expertise or to give [instructors] resources. (F. Plvan, personal communication, January 11, 2011)

Plvan makes an important point: the Syracuse Writing Program has always had a large number of administrative staff positions—assistant directors and staff in charge of teacher evaluation, teacher development, technology resources, and so on—and these positions were almost always filled by former part-time instructors. The positions were in part designed to promote the part-time instructors, giving them full-time positions and benefits at the university. Creating administrative positions like the coordinator role for the instructors was one way the Writing Program’s faculty directors advocated, in labor terms, for the instructors. It’s important to point out that not all full-time, tenure-track faculty advocate better working conditions or professional status for contingent faculty. In their chapter in this collection, Georgia Rhoades, Kim Gunter, and Elizabeth Carroll explain how full-time, tenure-track faculty in their English department

actively resisted greater agency for contingent faculty who primarily taught composition courses, arguing that increasing the voice of contingent faculty would threaten the authority of tenure-track faculty (this volume). Shared authority, like what happened at Syracuse when contingent faculty held administrative roles, is not something that can be taken for granted in independent writing programs.

The coordinating group system was in part developed as a way to administer a large writing program that only had a few faculty administrators—a design solution—but it was a complex system that didn't work perfectly. It relied, as stated in a 1992 CWPA external evaluation of the Syracuse Writing Program, sometimes too heavily on the teachers and coordinators, who, though they demonstrated an invested interest in the Writing Program, were still regarded by the university as part-time, contingent faculty labor (Cayton, Robinson & Smith, 1992). As Kearns and Turner point out, independent writing program at the University of Winnipeg, “independence alone was no panacea” (Kearns & Turner, this volume). The Syracuse Writing Program's coordinating group system was both a success and a failure over its 20-year history. It did give teachers a voice and a platform through which to advance their careers and argue for better labor conditions, but it also depended in part on an asymmetrical power structure. Although the Writing Program valued and advocated for the teachers, the coordinators had no real power in the eyes of the larger university administration. The coordinators had a large degree of administrative responsibility, but they flew under the radar, neither fully recognized by the upper administration and nor given the full compensation that should have accompanied the administrative responsibilities inherent in the position. The Writing Program's administration hoped that the coordinator position could pave the way for greater recognition and compensation, which did happen, but not to the degree the administrators or the teachers had wanted.

## **INFLUENCES ON WRITING PROGRAM CULTURE AND INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTOR IDENTITY**

The oral histories I collected reiterated the long-term impact the coordinating group system had on both the overall culture of the Syracuse Writing Program and the individual professional and personal identities of the instructors who taught in the program.

One of the major accomplishments of the coordinating group system was its ability to tap into the varied experiences and expertise that teachers brought to the Syracuse Writing Program. On paper, the Writing Program looked as if it only had three full-time faculty members during its first year who could

contribute to developing the Writing Program's new undergraduate curriculum. In fact, though, because the part-time instructors and teaching assistants were asked in to participate in an intellectual community through the coordinating groups, the Writing Program was able to draw on the ideas of over 100 thoughtful, experienced teachers.

The part-time instructors brought a particular set of characteristics to the emerging Writing Program. Unlike the full-time faculty, whose tenure lines at the university depended on demonstrating their teaching, research, and service excellence, requiring them to make an intellectual impact both locally at the university and nationally in their field, the part-time instructors were able to focus and dedicate their time locally to the craft of teaching. The part-time instructors, free from the burdens of publication and university service, came from a variety of teaching and professional backgrounds, lending different perspectives to how they imagined their classrooms and how they constructed their writing curricula. As Hahn pointed out,

The real genius of the Writing Program was the recognition that there was that base, the expertise of the instructors. [Phelps] was amazing in her desire to not just professionalize but to authorize those people to speak. It became an unstoppable force through the authorization of the people who were already here. (N. Hahn, personal communication, January 7, 2011)

Phelps often compared the early Syracuse Writing Program to a "Great Group." In the 10th anniversary speech she delivered to the program in 1996 and later published, Phelps explains that the Syracuse Writing Program "chose the Great Group model, where disparate people are drawn together by mutual commitment to a project and became energized by the power of collaboration, because we believed that it is a social structure more conducive to creativity and more successful in the long run" (1999b). Phelps argues here that the creativity and energy of the program was derived from the different ideas and perspectives the teachers brought.

This is not to say that the teachers spoke with a common voice. In-crowd mentalities took hold, angst set in, and some instructors resisted more popular teaching methods and strategies, enduring criticism from their peers in the coordinating groups (C. Lipson, personal communication, January 13, 2011; D. M. O'Connor, personal communication, April 26, 2011; M. Voorheis, personal communication, February 16, 2011). But through both the exhilaration of creating something new and the tension of conflict and disagreement, intellectual energy was at work in the Syracuse Writing Program. The Syracuse Writing Program was able to har-

ness the energy of its teachers by relying on them instead of just managing them. Sometimes, as Writing Program faculty member James Zebroski pointed out, the Writing Program relied too heavily on the teachers for leadership, evaluation, and curricular development, saying “the program was built on the backs of the part-time instructors” (J. T. Zebroski, personal communication, January 28, 2011). Still, though, the Writing Program’s administration took a unique rhetorical position with its teachers, one of two-way conversation instead of top-down curricular and evaluation mandates. The Writing Program *listened*: through the coordinating group system, they paid attention to the talents the teachers brought with them and took note of what the instructors said they wanted and needed (see also Hjortshoj and Everett, this volume, for the value of listening).

This attitude of listening and valuing of instructor expertise fostered a vibrant teaching community in the Syracuse Writing Program. The inventiveness encouraged through the Writing Program especially impacted those teachers who were at the beginning of their teaching careers. Fitzsimmons described how the teaching community in the program affected her: “One of the things that was transformative to me as a teacher was to have such ready access to such fun, creative, spirited, confident people . . . I knew when I was a young, not very good teacher, who the good teachers were” (A. Fitzsimmons, personal communication, February 9, 2011). The teaching culture in the Syracuse Writing Program—made visible partly through the coordinating group system—profoundly affected individual teacher’s growth and their professional identity as teachers, as Fitzsimmons explains. Inexperienced teachers were not isolated; the coordinating group system worked to connect new and veteran teachers, fostering informal mentoring relationships. Having “ready access” to colleagues was critical for teachers like Fitzsimmons: it gave them instant support and camaraderie, two things not always inherent in teaching, which is often a solitary task.

Bobbi Kirby-Werner, who was one of the early coordinators in the Syracuse Writing Program, recalled how that position impacted her development as a teacher:

This whole period was an enormous period of growth for me, recognizing strengths in me as a teacher, a professional, and a leader . . . [Before] I didn’t see myself in the spotlight. I shunned it. I didn’t have a whole lot of self-confidence, but that all changed (R. Kirby-Werner, personal communication, January 3, 2011).

Kirby-Werner describes another hard-to-quantify benefit of the Syracuse Writing Program’s professional development opportunities for its teachers. Through her work as a coordinator and through other opportunities given to

instructors in the Writing Program, Kirby-Werner discovered her own talents and strengths, developing “self-confidence” in her identity as a teacher and a professional. These changes didn’t happen overnight; they are the congregate result of ongoing professional development within a teaching community.

Another way the coordinating group system contributed to the development of a teaching community within the Syracuse Writing Program was in the ways teaching materials were created and circulated through the groups, a phenomenon studied by David Franke (1999). Instructors shared syllabi and assignments, and together developed pilot projects (M. Himley, memo, August 31, 1988; *The Syracuse Writing Program*, 1987b). Instructors discussed composition theories and teaching practices in their coordinating groups, enacted these theories in their classrooms, and then came together again in the coordinating groups to reflect on and evaluate their practices. This demonstrates a cycle of activity in the Syracuse Writing Program: though individual teachers held autonomy over their classroom and their specific interpretations of the Writing Program’s curriculum, there was, through the ongoing conversations in the coordinating groups, a shared sense of pedagogical identity in the Writing Program.

## **THE EVOLUTION AND END OF THE COORDINATING GROUP SYSTEM**

After the first few years of the new Syracuse Writing Program, the program’s part-time instructors became more confident teachers. They were a solid group of veteran instructors, rotating through the coordinator position and other leadership positions offered through the Writing Program. Though there were always new part-time instructors and teaching assistants coming into the program each year who needed targeted support as new teachers, the professional development needs of the majority of the program’s teachers changed. This shift put pressure on the coordinating group structure established in the 1987–1988 academic year. Coordinating groups became more aligned with topic-based inquiries (thinking about a particular course, reading theory, discussing about teacher evaluation). In the early 1990s, teachers were given the option to do a professional development project instead of participating in a weekly coordinating group (F. Plvan, personal communication, January 11, 2011).

The change in the coordinating groups’ efficacy to the Writing Program’s teachers and administration was not surprising, Plvan explained:

We got feedback that some people weren’t finding the coordinating groups as useful as they had initially been. Some people think that all the changes the coordinating groups

went through were a corrective. I never thought of it like that as much as I thought it mirrored the growth and maturity of the program. At a time when people were designing things, and excitement was high, and to some extent anxiety was high in the beginning, you needed those kinds of structures to pull things together. As the Program matured, its need for different kinds of professional development structures matured as well. (F. Plvan, personal communication, January 11, 2011).

Plvan's observation points at the multiple purposes of the early coordinating groups: to develop the brand-new curriculum and quell the anxieties of the instructors who were expected to teach that unfamiliar curriculum. Her argument, that the decreasing effectiveness of the coordinating groups had to do with the growth and maturity of the Writing Program and the instructors, not a sudden futility of the coordinating group model, makes sense.

Rhinehart explained a similar retrospective understanding of the principles underlying the coordinating group system. As Rhinehart remembered, the freedom and authority handed over to the instructors resulted in a "miraculous" first few years, when innovation was happening all across the Writing Program. Rhinehart countered, though, with another point: that high level of creativity was difficult to sustain. As he said, "You can only keep that level of energy for a short time. It is going to stabilize at some point (see also Ross for transitioning from entrepreneurship to promoting stability and longevity in an IWP, this volume). We aren't going to constantly reinvent things." (G. Rhinehart, personal communication, February 9, 2011). Innovation happens through a cycle. The early years of the coordinating groups were especially generative because there was a real task at hand: to create a new curriculum from scratch.

Looking back at the change, Hahn explained that the evolution of the coordinating groups and the program isn't surprising:

It's not a bad thing. I don't see that as the death of anything. Unless you build something that has built-in the ability to change and grow and reinvent itself, forget it—it's dead already . . . What is key is to know what people need and to have an ethos that people need something. (N. Hahn, personal communication, January 7, 2011).

Hahn's argument here, the necessity of having "an ethos that people need something," is important to highlight, because it speaks to the responsibility of writing programs to provide professional development for their instructors. Hahn, in retrospect, wasn't interested in deciding whether the coordinating

group system was “good” or “bad;” the most significant thing about it was that it was there. Its presence at the core of the Writing Program’s administration—and the Program’s willingness to adapt and change it over time—demonstrated a deep commitment to providing appropriate support for the program’s teachers.

The coordinating groups were a central part of the Writing Program’s administration from 1986 through the early 2000s, though the structures governing the organization of the coordinating groups changed during these years. Coordinating groups met less frequently as the years went on, and the level of innovation and excitement within the groups, at least the level perceived by the teachers from whom I collected oral histories, dropped off as well (F. Plvan, personal communication, January 11, 2011; G. Rhinehart, personal communication, February 9, 2011).

The Syracuse Writing Program itself also evolved. It was the intention of the Syracuse Writing Program from its inception in 1986 to expand its faculty and establish a graduate Ph.D. program (Phelps, notes, April 20, 1987). In 1997, the Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Ph.D. program enrolled its first cohort. The introduction of these new graduate student teaching assistants whose institutional home was the Writing Program, not the English Department, created a new dynamic in the Writing Program. The part-time instructors still outnumbered the Writing Program’s own graduate teaching assistants, but these Ph.D. students, who were fully engaged in composition and rhetoric research, added a new perspective to the program’s pedagogical discussions. In 2003, an undergraduate writing minor was added, and in 2009, the first class of undergraduate writing and rhetoric majors graduated. The expansion of the Syracuse Writing Program’s offerings from primarily undergraduate required writing courses to a comprehensive department-like program with undergraduate major and graduate Ph.D. offerings changed the character of the independent Syracuse Writing Program, both for those within the program and those on the outside. Instead of focusing a large part of their effort on teacher development and evaluation, including investing time and money on administrative roles for instructors like the coordinator position, the Writing Program’s faculty and administration were pulled in many directions, needing to construct courses, curricula, internships, and service opportunities suited for their own undergraduate major and graduate students (M. Himley, personal communication, January 10, 2011; C. Lipson, personal communication, January 13, 2011; F. Plvan, personal communication, January 11, 2011). This is not to say that the Syracuse Writing Program’s faculty directors were no longer interested in part-time labor issues, required undergraduate writing pedagogy, or teacher professional development. Rather, the Syracuse Writing Program became more layered and complex, and with limited



resources, such as the small full-time faculty and administration in the Syracuse Writing Program, it is increasingly challenging to devote enough attention to all parts and activities of the system.

Another monumental change that affected the Syracuse Writing Program was the unionization of the part-time and adjunct instructors at Syracuse University in May 2008. The union changed the Writing Program's administrative structure, especially in regards to the coordinator position and other quasi-administrative roles teachers had in the program. Even though the specificities of the coordinating group structure changed in the 1990s and 2000s, instructors were still required to participate in a coordinating group and attend a certain number of professional development seminars or meetings each semester (F. Plvan, personal communication, January 11, 2011). With the new union contract, though, the Writing Program had to remove its coordinating group and professional development requirement from the instructor contracts due to difficulties with fitting the professional development requirement into the language of the all-university union.

The Writing Program continued to sponsor optional workshops and seminars, offering small stipends to the instructors who chose to participate (Plvan, personal communication, January 11, 2011). However, attendance dropped off. Rhinehart pointed out that “the fact is, we have a pretty veteran group of teachers, and we should offer what people need,” which probably is not the same as what they needed in 1987, when the coordinating group system was first established (F. Plvan, personal communication, January 11, 2011).

The move from requiring professional development to recommending it changed the culture of the Syracuse Writing Program, according to some teachers I interviewed. Though these instructors also pointed to other changes in the Writing Program—an increase in the number of full-time faculty, the strong presence of the Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Ph.D. program, the solid corps of veteran, expert teacher instructors, the growing number of instructors who weren't part of the Writing Program in its first foundational years—it is the loss of regular time for teachers to come together and talk about their teaching that is felt most deeply. Donna Marsh O'Connor spoke about the effect of the end of the coordinating groups:

Without coordinating groups, I feel like I'm on my own. I can go and talk to people in these discrete moments, but there's none of the testing of ideas that occurs when teachers get together. I find this great vacuum now. Yes, there's no meeting that I have to go to each week, but on the other hand, there's very little sharing of teacher work. (D. M. O'Connor, personal communication, April 26, 2011).

O'Connor's reaction can be interpreted on two different levels. On one hand, it is a longing for an almost-magical, productive time in the past. The coordinating groups solidified the teachers' understanding of the field of Composition and Rhetoric, supported their growing identities as knowledgeable practitioner professionals, and helped the whole Syracuse Writing Program develop a language and set of values surrounding writing and teaching. On the other hand, O'Connor's reaction points to an underlying desire, and I would argue, a need of teachers to find professional community (see also Rhoades et al., and Thaiss et al., among others in this volume). Having seen the power of this kind of community on her and her colleagues' teaching, O'Connor now notices its absence.

### **CONCLUSION: ON THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF PLACING INSTRUCTORS IN ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES**

In 1991, early in the Syracuse Writing Program's history, Phelps argued that writing programs could be "a positive force of [institutional] change by enacting their own logic: operating experimentally and hypothetically; nurturing a fragile sense of community in talk, text, and collaborative work; and seeking interdependencies where they can find them" (p. 168). The coordinating groups did much of this work, especially in creating a strong teaching community and culture. Placing teachers in the coordinator position, an administrative role in the independent Syracuse Writing Program, was an experiment, but one that influenced both the coordinators themselves and the writing instructors they supervised and mentored.

The coordinators helped the Syracuse Writing Program develop a common language about teaching and writing, one that emphasized the importance of inquiry, revision, reflection, theory, and studio writing practices. This common set of terms—named and published as "Key Words" in the Syracuse Writing Program—assisted the development of a teaching community (Zebroski, 1988, p. 45). These terms were used in the curricular documents and numerous in-house publications the Syracuse Writing Program published, such as newsletters, coordinator reports, teaching guides, and reports on teacher research (Franke, 1999). These tangible representatives of the conversations within the Writing Program showed the flurry of intellectual activity within the Writing Program. The teachers, either serving as coordinators or participating in the coordinating groups, had ownership over the Writing Program's language, curriculum, and teaching theories. The coordinators especially, placed in an administrative role within the Writing Program, had a long-term impact on the Writing Program's programmatic identity, both in terms of how they defined, spoke about, and wrote about its curriculum and in how they mentored their fellow teachers.

The coordinating group system also impacted individual teachers' professional identities. Many of the early coordinators still work in the Syracuse Writing Program, and many moved from the coordinator role to a full-time administrative position in the Writing Program. Other coordinators, inspired by theoretical and pedagogical conversations within the coordinating group system, went on to earn their Ph.D.s in Composition and Rhetoric. Others moved on to other careers. Adam, who left the Writing Program to lead the Syracuse University Office of Faculty Development, named her experience working as a coordinator and instructor in the Writing Program as "the beginning of my thinking about how people become good teachers" (B. Adam, personal communication, January 13, 2011). The coordinator position, then, was a valuable form of ongoing professional development for many instructors who held the role.

Though the administrative documents I archived for this study help us understand how the Syracuse Writing Program's coordinating group system was established, grew, and evolved over two decades, it is the oral histories, I believe, that make a compelling argument about the long-term impact of administrative decisions within independent writing programs, such as creating the coordinator position for part-time instructors and teaching assistants. The construction of a community and a culture, the development of professional self-identity, and the gradual growth of skills and pedagogical sophistication cannot be measured immediately. The net impact of placing teachers in administrative roles, like the coordinator in the Syracuse Writing Program's coordinating group system, is cumulative and ongoing.

The story of the Syracuse Writing Program that I tell here is important for other writing programs not for its *what* (a specific, translatable administrative structure or system) but because of its *how* and *why*. At its core, the Syracuse Writing Program was profoundly committed to its teachers. In other institutions I have taught at, part-time instructors are seen as peripheral members of a writing program, orbiting out in the Kuiper Belt. The Syracuse Writing Program upended that hierarchy and made the coordinating group system, which was led by part-time faculty and dedicated to the professional development of the program's teachers, one of the central engines of the program's theory and practice. The Syracuse Writing Program acknowledged from the get-go that curriculum does not exist outside of invention and conversation, and the full-time, tenure-line faculty who served as the program's administrators deliberately involved and collaborated with part-time teachers in that experimentation and those curricular conversations. The Syracuse Writing Program's commitment to contingent faculty was not just beneficial for its teachers. The choice to include part-time teachers in the heart of the new writing program created a dynamic teaching community that positively influenced the program's other faculty and

students. The Syracuse Writing Program's dedication to and empowerment of its part-time teachers by giving them administrative responsibilities is something other writing programs should take notice of, especially in today's higher education landscape, where institutions are increasingly relying on large numbers of contingent faculty to teach their classes. Contingent faculty are, to use Phelps' language, the most valuable resources a writing program has. A contingent faculty member's ideas, experiences, and expertise shouldn't be squandered.

## REFERENCES

- Ahlers, S. (1986). *Issues raised in group discussion* (Report). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Brown, L. (1986). *Working group report* (Report). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Cayton, M. K., J. L. Robinson & L. Z. Smith. (1992). *Report of the external review team* (Report). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Connors, R. J. (1990). Overwork/underpay: Labor and status of composition teachers since 1880. *Rhetoric Review*, 9(1), 108–125.
- Crow, A. (2002). Wagering tenure by signing on with independent writing programs. In P. O'Neill, A. Crow & L. W. Burton (Eds.), *Field of dreams: Independent writing programs and the future of composition studies* (pp. 213–229). Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Daly, E. & Howell, C. (1987). *In search of genre: A report of discussions in David Franke's coordinating group* (Report). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Everett, J. & Pettipiece, D. (2013). Ethos and topoi: Using the outcomes statement rhetorically to achieve the centrality and autonomy of writing programs. In N. N. Behm, G. R. Glau, D. H. Holdstein, D. Roen & E. M. White (Eds.), *The WPA outcomes statement—A decade later*. Anderson, SC: Parlor Press.
- Four views from the bridge* (Report). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Franke, D. (1999). *The practice of genre: Composing (in) a reflective community* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY.
- Gates, R. (1985). *Final report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review Writing Instruction* (Report). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Halpern, F. (2013). The preceptor problem: The effect of “undisciplined writing” on disciplined instructors. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 36(2), 10–26.
- Hill, M. L. (1987). *Rethinking Studio I* (Report). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Jones, J. P. (1984). *Senate committee on admissions and financial awards: Problems of literacy and numeracy at S.U.* (Report). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Kearns, J. & Turner, B. (1997). Negotiated independence: How a Canadian writing program became a centre. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 21(1), 31–45.
- L'Eplattenier, B. & Mastrangelo, L. (Eds.). (2004). *Historical studies of writing program administration: Individuals, communities, and the formation of a discipline*. West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press.

- Little, S. B. & Rose, S. K. (1994). A home of our own: Establishing a department of rhetoric and writing studies at San Diego State University. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 18(1–2), 16–28.
- Maid, B. M. (2000). Non-tenure-track instructors at UALR: Breaking rules, splitting departments. In E. E. Schell & P. L. Stock (Eds.), *Moving a mountain: Transforming the role of contingent faculty in composition studies and higher education* (pp. 76–90). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Maid, B. M. (2002). More than a room of our own: Building an independent department of writing. In S. C. Brown, T. Enos & C. Chaput (Eds.), *The writing program administrator's handbook: A guide to reflective institutional change and practice* (pp. 453–466). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- McBeth, M. (2007). Memoranda of fragile machinery: A portrait of Shaughnessy as intellectual-bureaucrat. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 31(1–2), 48–64.
- McQuade, D. A. & J. A. Slevin. (1984). *Council of writing program administrators evaluation report, Syracuse University, September 27–28, November 8–9, 1984* (Report). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Phelps, L. W. (1991). The institutional logic of writing programs: Catalyst, laboratory, and pattern for change. In R. Bullock & J. Trimbur (Eds.), *The politics of writing instruction: Postsecondary*, (pp. 155–170). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Phelps, L. W. (1999a). Mobilizing human resources. In L. Myers-Breslin (Ed.), *Administrative problem-solving for writing programs and writing centers: Scenarios in effective program management* (pp. 73–96). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Phelps, L. W. (1999b). Telling the Writing Program its own story: A tenth-anniversary speech. In S. K. Rose & I. Weiser (Eds.), *The writing program administrator as researcher: Inquiry in action and reflection* (pp. 168–184). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann.
- Phelps, L. W. (2003, July). *Administration as design art*. Speech given at the annual meeting of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Phelps, L. W., C. Lipson & M. Himley. (1987). *Teacher evaluation* (Memo). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Rose, S. K. & Weiser, I. (2002). The WPA as researcher and archivist. In S. C. Brown & T. Enos (Eds.), *The writing program administrator's resource* (pp. 275–302). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Saldo, D. (1991). *Writing program budget history: Number of PWIs 87–92* (Report). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Soper, P. (1986). *PTI evaluation meeting* (Memo). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- The Syracuse Writing Program (1987a). *Studio I: Working papers from the curriculum group*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- The Syracuse Writing Program. (1987b). *Reflections in Writing: Teacher Research*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.
- Thorley, S. (1987). *Coordinating group discussion: Studio I: What's really happening here?* (Report). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.

- Varnum, R. (1996). *Fencing with words: A history of writing instruction at Amherst College during the era of Theodore Baird, 1938–1966*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Zebroski, J. T. (1988). Eleven keywords of the writing program. In L. C. Briggs & S. McMillin (Eds.), *Teacher's guide to the writing program at Syracuse* (pp. 45–56). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University.