



**Michigan
Technological
University**

Michigan Technological University
Digital Commons @ Michigan Tech

Dissertations, Master's Theses and Master's Reports

2023

The Flight Attendants Of Academia: Liminality, Emotional Labor, And Feminization In Graduate Student Writing Program Administrators

Laura Vidal Chiesa
Michigan Technological University, lvidalch@mtu.edu

Copyright 2023 Laura Vidal Chiesa

Recommended Citation

Vidal Chiesa, Laura, "The Flight Attendants Of Academia: Liminality, Emotional Labor, And Feminization In Graduate Student Writing Program Administrators", Open Access Dissertation, Michigan Technological University, 2023.

<https://doi.org/10.37099/mtu.dc.etr/1619>

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.mtu.edu/etr>



Part of the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

THE FLIGHT ATTENDANTS OF ACADEMIA: LIMINALITY, EMOTIONAL
LABOR, AND FEMINIZATION IN GRADUATE STUDENT WRITING PROGRAM
ADMINISTRATORS

By

Laura Vidal Chiesa

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In Rhetoric, Theory and Culture

MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

2023

© 2023 Laura Vidal Chiesa

This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in Rhetoric, Theory and Culture.

Department of Humanities

Dissertation Advisor: *Dr. Marika Seigel*

Committee Member: *Dr. Patricia Sotirin*

Committee Member: *Dr. Laura K. Fiss*

Committee Member: *Dr. Laura Micciche*

Department Chair: *Dr. Scott Marratto*

For all the gWPAs out there

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| List of Figures | vii |
| List of Tables | viii |
| Acknowledgements..... | ix |
| Definitions..... | x |
| List of Abbreviations | xi |
| Abstract..... | xii |
| 1 Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.1 A Personal Story about Composition | 1 |
| 1.2 Listening to gWPAs: A Project..... | 6 |
| 1.3 Emotional Labor and gWPAs: The Flight Attendants of Academia..... | 8 |
| 1.4 The importance of Writing Program Administration..... | 10 |
| 1.5 The Feminization of Composition: Tale as Old as Time | 16 |
| 1.6 gWPAs as an Affective Community: A Relation of Cruel Optimism | 18 |
| 1.7 Critical Organizational Communication | 20 |
| 1.8 Intersectionality: Not Only a Matter of Gender | 22 |
| 1.9 Chapter Overview..... | 24 |
| 2 Methodology..... | 27 |
| 2.1 Research Design | 27 |
| 2.2 Participants and Sampling Procedure..... | 28 |
| 2.3 Data Collection Method | 30 |
| 2.4 Data Processing Method..... | 32 |
| 2.5 Doing Online Interviews | 32 |
| 2.6 Data Transcription..... | 37 |
| 2.7 Method of Data Analysis and Data Coding Process | 39 |
| 2.8 “Happy Accidents”..... | 43 |
| 2.9 “You’ve got a Friend in Me”: Researcher Positionality..... | 45 |
| 3 The Themes..... | 49 |
| 3.1 Defining the Position..... | 49 |
| 3.1.1 Position Titles | 50 |
| 3.1.2 Hierarchy and Program Structure(s) | 51 |
| 3.1.3 Application Process | 53 |
| 3.1.4 Duties and Responsibilities..... | 60 |
| 3.1.5 Compensation | 61 |
| 3.2 “Unfortunately, I was the assistant director when COVID hit”: COVID-19..... | 63 |
| 3.2.1 A Catalyst for Change..... | 63 |
| 3.2.2 The “Shield” Excuse..... | 65 |

| | | |
|---------|---|-----|
| 3.2.3 | Emotional Experiences | 66 |
| 3.2.3.1 | Stress | 66 |
| 3.2.3.2 | Isolation..... | 67 |
| 3.2.4 | Time Factor..... | 67 |
| 3.3 | “Give [that] mentorship in a way that wasn’t coming from a place of superiority”: Mentoring | 69 |
| 3.3.1 | Being a Mentor | 69 |
| 3.3.2 | Being a Mentee | 72 |
| 3.4 | “[T]o find like-minded colleagues across the country”: Networking as a gWPA..... | 74 |
| 3.5 | “[I]t’s a lot of invisible labor”: Labor | 76 |
| 3.5.1 | Administrative..... | 79 |
| 3.5.2 | Emotional..... | 85 |
| 3.6 | “Boundaries! That’s the word!”: Boundaries..... | 91 |
| 3.7 | “I hope someday”: Hope | 95 |
| 4 | Larger Implications..... | 99 |
| 4.1 | Neoliberalism and Education | 99 |
| 4.1.1 | Establishing the Context | 99 |
| 4.1.2 | A Case for Comparison: Part-Time Faculty and gWPAs | 101 |
| 4.2 | The Larger Critical Issues | 105 |
| 4.2.1 | High Position Informality | 105 |
| 4.2.2 | Patronage & Nepotism..... | 107 |
| 4.2.3 | The Three Types of Exploitation..... | 112 |
| 4.2.3.1 | Systemic Exploitation | 112 |
| 4.2.3.2 | Emotional Labor, or the Labor of Love..... | 114 |
| 4.2.3.3 | Flying the Plane Smoothly..... | 119 |
| 4.2.4 | The Feminization of the Position..... | 121 |
| 4.3 | The Canary in the Coal Mine: gWPAs as a Cautionary Tale..... | 124 |
| 4.4 | Exploring Pathways Forward: First Approaches..... | 127 |
| 4.4.1 | Professionalization of the Position..... | 127 |
| 4.4.1.1 | Standard Qualifications and Duties for the Position..... | 128 |
| 4.4.1.2 | Base-Line Standard Hiring Protocol..... | 132 |
| 4.4.1.3 | The Revised Hiring Protocol | 133 |
| 4.4.2 | Training Practices | 134 |
| 4.4.3 | Career Directions for gWPAs | 138 |
| 4.4.3.1 | Creating the Professional Ladder..... | 139 |
| 4.4.4 | Labor Protection & Collective Labor Movements..... | 142 |
| 5 | Conclusion: Towards a More Just gWPA Position..... | 147 |
| 5.1 | Concluding Remarks: gWPAs as the Flight Attendants of Academia..... | 147 |
| 5.2 | Implications..... | 150 |
| 5.2.1 | Theoretical Implications | 150 |
| 5.2.2 | Practical Implications for Position Improvement | 152 |
| 5.3 | Methodological Lessons Learned..... | 156 |
| 5.3.1 | Everyday Ethics | 156 |

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| 5.3.2 | Coding Rush..... | 157 |
| 5.3.3 | Reflexivity..... | 159 |
| 5.4 | Limitations..... | 160 |
| 5.5 | Future Directions..... | 162 |
| 5.6 | Final Reflections..... | 163 |
| | References..... | 165 |
| | Appendix A: Interview Questions | 174 |
| | Appendix B: WPA Practicum Syllabus | 175 |
| | Appendix C: Copyright Documentation | 182 |

List of Figures

| | |
|--|-----|
| Figure 1. gWPA Professional Ladder | 139 |
|--|-----|

List of Tables

| | |
|---|-----|
| Table 1. gWPA List of Duties Revisions..... | 130 |
| Table 2. gWPA List of Qualifications Revisions..... | 131 |

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by saying thank you to my committee advisor Dr. Marika Seigel for trusting and believing in me. You were such a big influence back in 2017 when I used to watch you lecture in the first-ever Monstercomp section. In less than a semester, my whole academic career shifted, and I discovered my passion for teaching. To Dr. Patricia Sotirin, for the countless meetings, back and forth emails, draft corrections, and reading recommendations. Your passion is inspiring, and it kept me going every time I doubted myself. To Dr. Laura Fiss, thank you for being such an instrumental piece of this project, all your edits, insightful questions, long conversations, and the support you provided are greatly appreciated. Finally, Dr. Laura Micciche, thank you for accepting to be a part of this dissertation committee; it is such an honor to be able to work with you after reading your work in recent years. I could not have undertaken this journey without the four of you.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to everyone in the Humanities department: faculty, staff, and fellow grad students. The chair of the department, Dr. Scott Marratto, former chair Dr. Ronald Strickland and former RTC Director, Andrew Fiss for your mentorship and ongoing support. Additionally, thanks to the dynamic duo, Jackie and Katy Ellenich for all you did for me during my years at Tech.

Thank you to the Engineering Fundamentals faculty Dr. AJ Hamlin, Dr. Brett Hamlin, and Dr. Matthew Barron for our project and all the places it took us.

This endeavor would not have been possible without Michigan Tech's Graduate School support, thank you for granting me a fellowship that supported the completion of this dissertation. Thanks to Dr. Will Cantrell and Jacque Smith while I served on the GSG. Additionally, to everyone on the 2021-2022 & 2022-2023 Graduate Student Government Executive Boards. I learned so much and made so many connections I will never forget.

To my parents, Serrana and Mario, thank you for being my cheerleaders. Your support has gotten me through ten years of school and three different degrees. This is the last one (I promise). The rest of my family back in Uruguay, but also in Chicago, thank you Sofia, for all the bike rides, and Renzo for the amazing Green Day concert.

I am forever grateful to all my friends, but especially Eliana, Lucila, Cristina, Zazil, Gustavo, Ranit, Margaret, Kendall, Basanti, D-Jay. Our conversations, endless WhatsApp chats, travel adventures, get togethers, (non-fatal) car accidents, and overall friendship have made this experience unforgettable and kept me going.

To my partner Kevin, for being there unconditionally during the dissertation writing process. Thanks for your love, kindness, and patience. You keep me grounded. And of course, the Sunderland family for making me feel so welcome and their encouragement.

Finally, to my research participants, the gWPAs: you made this possible. Thank you for lending me your voice and time. This is for you, in the hope of a better tomorrow.

Definitions

Graduate Research Assistant: “A part-time appointment requiring at least one academic degree at the baccalaureate level and awarded to individuals who are enrolled as full-time graduate students. Graduate Research Assistants are expected to assist faculty on research projects. The appointment is generally granted by the department supervising the research activity and is usually associated with a specific research project, grant, or contract. Appointments are made for up to a year with the possibility of renewals”.

Graduate Teaching Assistant: “A part-time appointment requiring at least one academic degree at the baccalaureate level. It is awarded to individuals who are enrolled as full-time graduate students. Graduate Teaching Assistants are generally responsible for classroom or laboratory instruction under the supervision of faculty. Appointments are made for up to a year, usually by the department in which they are pursuing graduate work, with the possibility of renewals.”¹

Graduate Teaching Instructor: For this dissertation, this term serves as a synonym to GTA. The GTI figure is defined on MTU’s website under the teaching assistantships offered: “Teaching Assistantships involve working to assist faculty with teaching (GTA) or being fully responsible for teaching a course (GTI)”². Typically, GTIs are instructors of record and responsible for lesson planning, materials creation, lecture delivery, and grading. As opposed to GTAs who often assist on lecture delivery, oversee labs, or help grade for a faculty member.

¹ Definitions per MTU’s Faculty Handbook, <https://www.mtu.edu/faculty-handbook/faculty/chapter1/s1-6/>

² Definition per MTU’s Financial Services Website: <https://www.mtu.edu/gradschool/financial/assistantships/>

List of Abbreviations

MTU – Michigan Technological University

GRA – Graduate Research Assistant

GTA – Graduate Teaching Assistant

GTI – Graduate Teaching Instructor

RTC – Rhetoric, Theory and Culture Program

WPA – Writing Program Administration

WPAs – Writing Program Administrators

gWPAs – Graduate Writing Program Administrators

CWPA – Council of Writing Program Administrators

Abstract

Writing Program Administration (WPA) is an interdisciplinary field that addresses the management and development of writing programs in educational institutions. WPA entails writing instruction pedagogy, curriculum design, assessment, and faculty development pertaining to the teaching of writing. Graduate students in Humanities and English-based programs typically fill this position which can offer a career trajectory. However, the position is often experienced as demanding, unrewarding and does not deliver on the career-enhancing experience it seems to promise. Historically, this is unsurprising given that the position has been a subordinated role occupied by women in composition. And yet, the troubles besetting contemporary graduate student writing program administrators (gWPAs) positions are complex, involving organizational, gendered, and labor issues. Still the voices of gWPAs are missing from analyses of these issues. Based on a poststructuralist framework, this dissertation performs a thematic analysis of interviews with gWPAs to comprehend the systemic, structural, and rhetorical factors that contribute to marginalization, feminization, and emotional labor burden required for gWPAs.

As neoliberal ideals have permeated deep into higher education, inequities are exacerbated, the burden is put on the individual to improve their professional skillset to acquire and retain different positions. Additionally, the exploitation of liminal positions, those that are tasked with yet unauthorized to exercise significant authority and the demands of and for emotional labor are endemic. The analysis sheds light on what I identified as the main issues of the gWPA position. First, the position is highly unregulated and arbitrary, which leads to wide disparities between the qualifications needed and responsibilities across the board. Second, dynamics of nepotism and patronage tend to develop around the position. Third, it usually involves different types of exploitative practices. And fourth, the position is highly feminized.

While there have been advancements in the position, there is still room for improvements. To address these issues, this dissertation proposes three pathways forward: the professionalization of the position, the creation of career directions for gWPAs and finally, enhanced labor protection and collective bargaining movements. Overall, this project contributes to the revaluation of graduate student labor and a revision of subordinated labor in university writing programs.

1 Introduction

1.1 A Personal Story about Composition

One afternoon, my cell phone was charging on the coffee table when I saw it lit up with a WhatsApp message. It was one of my dearest friends, who is also a graduate teaching instructor (GTI), asking me about something related to our Composition classes– I cannot remember exactly what it was, I just remember answering it quickly and going about my day. But what is the problem with receiving an instant message about a work-related matter? The fact is that I was not the Composition coordinator, or graduate writing program administrator (gWPA), anymore. It had been months since I had stepped down from the position. “To me, you will always be the Composition coordinator,” my friend replied with a smiley face. At the time, I remember I felt flattered, this could only mean that my work was good enough for other graduates to still want me in the position. However, looking back at the exchange, it reminded me that for a while after not being the coordinator, I still received questions from a number of GTIs through my personal communication channels like instant messages or Facebook Messenger, or an occasional phone call. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, I prefer all work communications to remain on my email, during office hours or scheduled meetings. This vignette is one of many examples that led me to consider boundaries (or the lack thereof) and the kind of labor that went into my WPA work during my two terms in the position.

In August 2017, I moved to Houghton, Michigan in order to begin my MS in the Rhetoric, Theory and Culture Program (RTC) at Michigan Technological University. As an international student, I knew nothing about the requirements of first-year writing courses in the United States education system, only that I would be teaching such courses

in order to get my stipend. I got accepted to the program with a research proposal to study South American politics and gender issues pertaining to popular women leaders in the continent. However, little did I know that after Fall 2017, my research interests would take a 180-degree turn. As the semester progressed and teaching became more ingrained into my routine, I noticed that I was investing myself a lot in my teaching, and in return, I got a big amount of satisfaction. Instant satisfaction, may I add. Turns out that I was better at standing in front of the students than I had anticipated.

I credit this mostly to the way I was being educated to teach; that semester would be the first edition of what was termed “Monster Composition”³. When I talk about my first semester of instruction, I often say that we were instructed on how to teach with a “dipping our toes in the water” approach. To me, this was the catalyst for my teaching persona to solidify as much as it did. I had the chance to observe a highly experienced faculty member lecture a large hall of students, to witness how the Composition coordinators helped make all the in-class activities possible while dealing with scheduling and organizing different aspects of the course, which would in turn, be great inspiration for me to become a gWPA. By the end of my first semester, I was sure that I wanted to teach for a living. And I still very much do.

During my second year, I developed my final project to obtain my MS around teaching multimodality in the Composition classroom by conducting a quantitative study

³ For more information, refer to “Monstrous Composition: Reanimating the Lecture in First-Year Writing Instruction.” Seigel, Marika; Chase, Josh; De Herder, William; Feltz, Silke; Kitalong, Karla Saari; Romney, Abraham; Tweedle, Kimberly. *College Composition and Communication*, 71(4), pp. 643-671. Jun 2020.

among GTIs. Based on their responses, I created a set of lesson plan guidelines that would aid them in developing their lessons while still leaving room for creativity and agency in their classrooms. After earning my degree, I was sure that I wanted to continue doing research that had to do with education, in particular, the teaching of Composition, and soon enough, I became interested in Writing Program Administration.

It was a warm Spring afternoon, the semester was over, so I invited a friend for an impromptu picnic at a beach, in a town neighboring the University. I remember swaying slowly on a swing when I asked him if he thought that I would be a good fit for the Composition coordinator position that had been circulating in our inboxes, and if I should pursue it. My friend, one of the most brutally honest people I have ever met, looked up at me and bluntly said “Absolutely, your final project as an MS was about Composition and your advisor is the director of the composition program, it only makes sense.” By the end of the Spring semester, the call for graduate positions was sent to all the students in the Humanities department. The one plot twist that I had not seen coming at that time was that due to unforeseen circumstances, my advisor would be stepping down as the Director of the Composition program and a different faculty member (with whom I was unfamiliar) would be assuming the role starting that fall. Regardless, I applied for the position in May via email. It was not until the start of the Fall semester, when I rejoined the program as a first-year doctoral student, that I found out I had been granted one of the two Composition coordinator spots. There was no welcome email, no pre-semester planning session.

So, there I was, in my first year of my Ph.D., taking three full graduate seminars, an Introduction to Graduate Students seminar, teaching two Composition sections and

working as one of the two Composition coordinators. Citing Charles Dickens in his *A Tale of Two Cities*, fall 2019 to me “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times”. I had obtained the position I was after and that catered exactly to what I wanted to do professionally once I got my degree, while at the same time, some unexpected obligations appeared. At the same time that I was managing all of those obligations, I was also trying to eat healthily, exercise, get enough sleep and maintain somewhat of a social life. Unsurprisingly, halfway through the semester, I was extremely burnt out. I felt anxious, sad, guilty, and tired all the time and developed certain behaviors that were new to me. I would cringe at the sound of a phone notification as I had the feeling that I was on-call all the time—my phone was not my personal phone anymore; it had become a channel of communication for friends, family, and coworkers all the same. I would wake up to check my email in the middle of the night or first thing in the morning, afraid that I was forgetting something or that someone needed something from me. However, I like to think that all these emotions never interfered with my ability to accomplish any of my duties as a GTI and a gWPA.

While far from ideal, my first stint in the position also provided some excellent moments and I would be lying if I said that it did not bring me joy. There is no comparable feeling to me than that of seeing new GTIs taking the first steps in their teaching and feeling more confident in the classroom thanks to the guidance one can provide. I felt great camaraderie in all the moments shared with GTIs, faculty meetings or teaching roundtables where we could exchange ideas, lesson plans and just spend quality time in a learning environment. As much as I was helping train new GTIs, I was humbled by all the amazing knowledge that they brought to our sessions, and I truly came out the

other end with a lot of new learning. Therefore, in spite of some disagreements and hard times during that first year, I knew an extra year of administrative experience would be beneficial for my CV, so I reapplied for a second term. I quickly found out that due to graduate student shortage, there would only be one Composition coordinator during the 2020-2021 academic year.

The second time around, the position was not any easier with the challenge of moving most of our content online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the difficulties included assisting all the different modes that GTIs were teaching in, some did hybrid, some did asynchronous, while others opted for synchronous Zoom sessions. After the seventh week of the semester, the COVID-19 cases spiked, and everyone had to move their courses fully online.

Therefore, Zoom became my main work site. If a Zoom session for a class did not work for one of our instructors, I would have to work with them to solve the issue. If something was not working on Canvas, I would go to take a look and try to fix the issue, so on and so forth. In addition to the already isolating environment that the pandemic was, our Composition Practicum, that space where instructors would meet, grade norm, chat, and occasionally share food over discussions about assignments, was moved to a fully online mode. This caused a further disconnect between the new cohort and the previous generations of GTIs, and I still hear to this day the effects that this lack of contact and interaction had on the 2020-2021 cohort. These are some of the few challenges that presented themselves, but if I accounted for everything that went wrong that year, my dissertation would transform into a novel, which I am well aware it is not.

Almost an entire year after I stepped down from the position, I was thankful for the opportunity of having been a Composition coordinator, because as I hope that it showed in this introduction, I have positive but also negative reasons that motivate this dissertation. However, the more miserable I felt between the Fall 2019 and Spring 2021 semesters, the more I started wondering if others in similar positions were experiencing the same hardships. Therefore, I did what any doctoral student would do: I started researching, trying to read about graduate teaching assistants or instructors that were also Writing Program Administrators, and what their experiences were. While developing my qualifying examinations, I concluded that far from a nuance, comprehensive research had been done at the faculty and staff level, but graduate students' voices rarely ever made an appearance. And when they did, it was some time after graduation or graduate students were spoken for, not directly asked. As I pondered about what could be the cause of this phenomenon and my own somewhat toxic relationship with my previous stints at the position of gWPA, I realized that if I wanted to hear gWPAs voices, I would have to go out and collect them myself.

1.2 Listening to gWPAs: A Project

In this dissertation, I take a look at the experience of gWPAs in order to understand the nature of being (or having been) in this position. When I first began the study, I was highly motivated in trying to understand how other gWPAs were working to perform emotional labor, meaning how they were dealing with their own feelings while trying to keep their fellow GTIs and faculty members content. For this, I engaged in virtual semi-structured interviews with a narrative approach with six gWPAs from

different institutions. As my interviews progressed, while we conversed about the different emotions that one might encounter such as anger, joy, frustration, happiness, or disempowerment, I discovered that while these feelings and emotions were important, so were the themes of boundaries, or the lack thereof, commitment, mentoring and networking.

With critical organizational communication as my disciplinary perspective, my analytic stool has three main legs: the liminality of this position, its feminization through time, and the emotional labor required of a gWPA, how it looks on—and through—our bodies. I look at the intersectional disadvantages of being in the cracks of the organization, in a strange liminal space where we are students, instructors, administrators but also not considered (or paid) as staff or faculty members. While at the same time, we are traversed by other aspects such as our gender, age, or nationality. In this project, I argue for and about positionality. In our programs, our departments, but more broadly in the University itself and how sometimes gWPAs do not seem to have a space allotted for them.

While collecting my data, it became clear that this position, that of gWPAs, often seems to attract certain types of graduate students that share a set of personal and professional traits. First, I strive to understand not only the common traits shared among my sample, but also the personal differences that matter while performing in this position at an individual level. Predominantly, my dissertation is about the gWPAs and their stories, the good and the bad times in the position and what they carry with them from this experience. Entwined with theirs is my story, the one source of inspiration for my project. The story I feel needs to come out and be told as portraying my experience, but

also as a cautionary tale both for future gWPAs but also for my own institution.

Therefore, this dissertation's primary research question is: What are the systemic, structural, and rhetorical factors that contribute to the marginalization, feminization, and emotional labor burden required for the graduate student Writing Program Administrator position? And secondarily, I explore what are the different dimensions and enabling factors of this emotional labor. Finally, I elaborate on possible future pathways that can be considered to allow for a more equitable experience in the gWPA position through a set of practical recommendations for Writing Programs.

1.3 Emotional Labor and gWPAs: The Flight Attendants of Academia

In *The Managed Heart*, a classic study about emotional labor, sociologist Arlie Hochschild defines it as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” Hochschild (1983, p. 7). Meaning, the ability to keep ourselves in check, while helping others with their emotions. Furthermore, Hochschild goes on to say that “emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value,” (1983, p. 7) which in Marxist terms, would turn emotional labor into a commodity. As previously mentioned, this study focused on flight attendants and the emotional labor that this position required proposes that “.... most of us have jobs that require some handling of other people's feelings and our own, and in this sense, we are all partly flight attendants” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 11) as we must confront, one way or another, the requirements and consequences of emotional labor in our workplace (Hochschild, 1983). Thus, I propose the analogy that gWPAs are also flight attendants in the sense that the labor they do has

this emotional obligation component while also occupying simpler tasks which I will call the “handing snacks and beverages” tasks.

There seems to be a somewhat paradoxical contradiction between the necessity of this kind of work and positions but, at the same time, the marginalization and devaluation of the labor itself and those who do it. Oftentimes, in the academic economics value discourse, WPA work is deemed valuable as long as it is “intellectual,” (Horner, 2007, p. 165) meaning that it produces what is commonly recognized as proof of scholarship like university press books or refereed journal articles (Horner, 2007, p. 166).

Writing Program Administration differs from other administrative positions across the university in two ways. In the first place, “WPAs—unlike most other administrators—are doing work (involving curriculum, assessment, placement, and staff development/TA training) that is directly linked to and informed by a growing body of research in their own scholarly field” (McLeod, 2007, p. 9). And secondly, since first-year writing courses are usually a requirement for all the students, “the WPA is in a unique institutional position, answerable not only to the department chair but also in effect to the entire university” (McLeod, 2007, p. 9). Due to the liminality of their position, some scholars have even gone so far as to call WPAs the “unappreciated and therefore disposable wife” (McLeod, 2007, p. 14). For my project, I consider this metaphor of the wife as a subordinate, essential labor, however, not necessarily oppressed. I look at gWPAs labor, who seem to act like “dutiful wives who do much of the dirty work: teaching writing, reading myriad student essays, training TAs and lecturers, administering testing programs” (Schuster, 1991, p. 88).

A primary reason for the contradiction between the necessity of this work and the marginalization and devaluation of it and those who do it is the sheer amount of emotional labor that is required, making the experience of this role particularly difficult. For gWPAs who sometimes act as administrators, teaching instructors, coordinators, programmatic crisis responders (Clinnin, 2020), a peer-who-isn't-a-peer (Brown, 1999), or even unofficial therapists, emotional labor is a constant performance. As Charles Schuster puts it, “[t]hat is the primary function of the composition wives; to maintain the house and raise the children, in this case the thousands of undergraduates who enroll in composition classes” (1991, p. 88).

This is particularly true for junior writing program administrators (jWPAs) who strive to embody “the good WPA,” an idealized figure who “willingly performs an inhuman amount of emotional labor without concern for their well-being. Instead, they constantly put the health of the program, instructors, and students above themselves as a willing sacrifice to the writing program and WPA field” (Adams-Wooten et al., 2020, p. 277). Moreover, for jWPAs, “the effects of emotional labor can be especially malicious” (Adams-Wooten et al., 2020, p. 273). Building on these findings, my research showcases how gWPAs who constantly change hats—sometimes administrators, other times as teaching instructors, coordinators, programmatic crisis responders (Clinnin, 2020), or even unofficial therapists to their peers—perform emotional labor continuously in the position of gWPA and how this affects them.

1.4 The importance of Writing Program Administration

In his chapter of *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers & Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories*, Keith Rhodes opens with a paragraph he titled the

Coordinating Composition song. Rhodes explains that as the fruit of a brief decompression moment while grading papers one night, the song alludes to the main topics that I have tried to elaborate on so far. Despite him characterizing only Composition coordinators, I would argue that it could represent all different types of writing program administrators, including gWPAs:

There is a job in academe/coordinating composition
It's been the ruin of many young prof/And Lord I know 'cause I'm one.
Now my mentor was a rhetor/She showed me the world of 4Cs
But my department chair does not venture there/And suspects it's a social disease.
The only thing a comp teacher needs/Are students, pens, and paper
And the only time she or he is satisfied/Is...well, frankly, never.
Now I've one foot on dismissal/And the other foot on too much work
But I'm going back to my colleagues/Even though they think I'm a jerk.
Oh rhetors, tell your students/Not to do as I have done
To come right out of graduate school/And coordinate composition. (Rhodes, 1999, p. 86)

Sometimes making an allusion of materials, budget or resources in general, “The only thing a comp teacher needs /Are students, pens, and paper,” frequently feeling dissatisfied or how Laura Micciche (2002) puts it, disappointed “And the only time she or he is satisfied /Is...well, frankly, never.,” or overwhelmed “Now I've one foot on dismissal /And the other foot on too much work,” but almost always performing emotional labor: “But I'm going back to my colleagues/Even though they think I'm a

jerk,” writing program administrators have proven to be a versatile figure, a jack of all trades in some way, of Composition or English programs (Rhodes, 1999).

While humorous in nature and relatable (at least in my personal experience), Rhodes informs the reader that the composition coordinator song should be sung to the tune of “The House of the Rising Sun”. This folk song with origins in the English broadside ballads genre which became popular as an African American folk song, does not have a clear authorship attached to it. However, multiple versions of the song have existed, as it has been known to be sang by American miners around 1905 (Matteson, 2006), other renowned artists have recorded versions of it like Joan Baez (1960), Bob Dylan (1961), or one of its most popular versions, released in 1964 performed by The Animals (UK). In addition to its authorship, its meaning has also never been completely clarified by music historians, although there are two main theories they have speculated about. The House of the Rising Sun has two main interpretations. In the first one, the story is about a woman’s prison (I’m goin’ back to New Orleans/To wear that ball and chain); the second interpretation points to a brothel named after “Madame Marianne LeSoleil Levant (which means ‘Rising Sun’ in French)” (*The House of the Rising Sun*, n.d.; Marshall, 2011). Neither of these invokes a positive workplace, although, if we consider the university for the sake of this research, “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” (Foucault, 1977, p. 228). Therefore, if the issue locates itself at the level of the organizational structure, can the figure of the gWPA be compared to that of a sex worker or a jail prisoner and their fates?

Thus, taking into consideration the convergences of the personal and professional in the field, Alice M. Gillam reflects that “While both men and women suffer terrible personal stress as the result of this triple expectation to research, teach and administer, at least men are able to gain tenure more readily, to publish more, and to be more mobile” (Gillam, 1999, p. 71). I propose then that this problem is not only a gender issue but rather it also entails what those in the field who have higher authority positions, consider is valuable work and what is not. As Melissa Ianetta points out in her work about how WPAs develop and frame their scholarly identities, she asserts that “In general, we are scholars first, teachers second, and.... administrators? Well last, if at all” (as cited in DeGenaro, 2018, p. 20).

As much as it is still overlooked, there is no doubt that administrative labor is a vital part of Writing Program Administration, of course, as it depends on it to run smoothly. As this type of work is underappreciated in academia, Patricia Bizzell (1999, p. viii) wonders why it is so complicated to understand that usually, better administration leads to better teaching and learning. Much in the same line, in his “Why Don’t Our Graduate Programs Do a Better Job of Preparing Students for the Work That We Do?,” Thomas P. Miller argues that while talking about “work,” most academics tend to respond by talking about scholarship, but “colleagues with heavy teaching loads and little time to do research” fall into an awkward silence “whenever a colleague passes us in the hall and asks us what we’re working on” (2001, p. 42). As he considers Composition programs “to contain some of the richest sites in the academy for assessing the institutional and ideological possibilities,” writing program administrators tend to spend most of their time doing “crisis management” (Miller, 2001, p. 43). Therefore, it seems

that a good administrator should then be able to perform academic labor (research, publish, attend conferences, and teach) while managing to accomplish their administrative duties.

Even though most of the research and conversations around this topic point to tenured track or similar faculty, where could academia find someone that embodies these three types of labor while doing it so for a reduced payment and in exchange for experience? Enter graduate students into the mix. In addition to Miller (2001), several other scholars have discussed these young professionals and made the point that they either do not get enough education in administrative roles (Long et al., 1996), “that in order to avoid the problems and prejudices we have encountered, we [experienced WPAs] need to ensure they learn what we know before they graduate,” (Barr-Ebest, 1999) and that more positions with elaborated roles should be developed for them (Latterell, 2003). Although again and again, they are considered invisible administrators (Edgington & Hartlage-Taylor, 2007), whose identity and experience should be reconfigured (Phillips et al., 2016). Yet, when do we hear about the stories and struggles of those in these positions from their perspective? The answer is, rarely ever.

After elaborating on Composition and WPA studies and how gender issues are present in both of them, I have tried to demonstrate that it is not only a matter of identifying as a man or a woman WPA but that there is more to the complex situation around them. First, the idea of what is considered work and what is not, this dichotomy between academic and administrative labor, sometimes seems to create an unfair and unjustified gap between those with administrative positions and the ones who do not

possess nor fancy them. And second, the uneven division of this labor depending on if you are a woman or a man. As Gillam (1999) puts it:

Work that resembles the stereotypical private labor of women is dismissed and unimportant as evidence of unprofessional status, while the stereotypical public labor of men --winning battles and running things- is associated with professional achievement and recognition. (p. 68)

In other words, “accurate understanding of the work of graduate students and liminal WPAs are vital for supporting them successfully and offer a heuristic to ameliorate liminality if institutions are forced to develop liminal WPA positions” (Phillips et al., 2014, p. 67). But oftentimes, it seems to be dismissed that “when it’s (administration is) good, it produces better development for everybody” (Bizzell, 1999, p. ix). Therefore, I propose that one way of getting to understand the work that goes into these positions is through talking with those who inhabit and embody them in their institutions.

Although there have been some instances of edited collections like Diana George’s (1999) *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers & Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories*, McNabb et al.’s (2002) “Future Perfect: Administrative Work and the Professionalization of Graduate Students” or Courtney Wooten Adams’s (2020) *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration*, or *Women’s Professional Lives in Rhetoric & Composition* by Elizabeth Flynn and Tiffany Bourelle (2018), generally the stories and experiences of graduate students who are or have been in one of these positions are not told. Or they are told by those who have already graduated and have moved on from the position. As “[g]aps exist between stories told about graduate administrators and many of

the realities they experience” but also “in a disciplinary context in terms of the research conducted and written about writing program administration” (Phillips et al., 2016, p. 86).

Therefore, Laura Micciche observes that “WPA scholarship also provides many examples of the gendered nature of administrative work and the emotional labor it entails” (2002, p. 450). Feminization, in the scope of this study, functions as a way to talk about precarious and liminal labor since it constitutes what the feminine represents, its social attributes, and the subservience character of women’s work. Precarity pertains to feminization since this kind of labor has been feminized for a long time, over thirty years at the very least. And finally, liminality is then a structural position inside the organization, which will serve to look at the critical yet devalued work of gWPAs and understand the structural characteristics of their position. It should be addressed that I look at the concept of feminization and liminality in a different economic time, and several crises later.

1.5 The Feminization of Composition: Tale as Old as Time

Liminality and emotional labor in the gWPA position, I argue, are intensified by the feminization of this role. Historically, composition (and therefore, gWPA positions) have been occupied by women (Holbrook, 1991). In the early 1990s, Sue Ellen Holbrook stated that the division between men’s and women’s work as the composition field was increasingly becoming “associated with feminine attributes and populated by the female gender, a process known as feminization” (1991, p. 201). However, more women employees did not necessarily mean better working conditions, as borrowing Susan Harding’s expression, the strategy of “add women and stir” was never fully effective. As

Holbrook notes, “Women are more abundant in less paid and less-prestigious disciplines of arts, letters, and education,” (1991, p. 204) particularly in English, since for women, “English has been socially acceptable and seemingly pragmatic” (1991, p. 206).

Further metaphors have been used to characterize WPA work relating it to gender. Some scholars utilized military metaphors to define the role of the writing program administrator in a more masculine way, such as Edward M. White who associated “power with male sexual prowess” in the title of his “Use it or Lose It: Power and the WPA” (1991), but also others deployed the metaphors “in describing the behavior of the strong successful WPA”(Gillam, 1999, p. 68). Others evoke certain feelings while working as WPAs, such as disappointment (Micciche, 2002) or advocate for cultivating sensibility in their professional communities (Heard, 2012). Scholars like William DeGenaro, have gone as far as to compare the figure of grunge artist Kurt Cobain, arguing that his “short career mirrored the professional trajectory of some writing program administrators who similarly struggle with the complex, affective dimensions of their labors and ambivalence about their roles as managers and spokespersons” (2018, p. 17). In this insightful take on rock and roll figures compared to WPAs, Genaro implied that it was not hard to empathize with Kurt Cobain’s soul-crushing frustrations he felt “when his life went from playing songs on his guitar and playing punk shows to handling those other tasks demanded of individuals at that next level” (2018, p. 20). As exaggerated as the comparison might sound (and a bit of stretch), after all, DeGenaro compares, “Isn’t teaching a section of comp a little like playing that gig for, say, 20-25 people?” (2018, p. 20).

But when one is a teacher, an administrator, and a scholar, we feel the pressure of being at that next level of preparedness and responsibility. In the words of Edward White, “The only way to do the job of a WPA is to be aware of the power relationships we necessarily conduct, and to use the considerable power we have for the good of the program” (1991, p. 12). This, however, might be more of a theoretical approach since, in practice, things do not seem to happen as such. As it becomes more evident in the Writing Program Administration studies field, there are issues of gender, but those are interlaced with a much bigger one: the division of labor. These two, I argue, tend to enable and exacerbate each other. Nevertheless, they should not be held solely responsible for the nature of the gWPAs positions, but rather, I take them as the starting point.

1.6 gWPAs as an Affective Community: A Relation of Cruel Optimism

As I look into matters of emotional labor, relationships of power and oppression, I also explore affect theory as a theoretical lens. I argue that WPAs can also be seen as an “affective community” in which members, through the promise of happiness, are brought together “by a shared expectation of future comfort” (Schaefer, 2013, p. 4). In her book, Lauren Berlant describes cruel optimism as “a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be *impossible*, sheer fantasy, or *too possible*, and toxic” (2010, p. 94). In other words, cruel optimism refers to “a relation that emerges when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life,

or a political project” (as cited in Schaefer, 2013, p. 4). One way or another, we are all used to wishing for things that we know in advance are bad for us, like cigarettes, toxic relationships, or candy (Hsu, 2019; Schaefer, 2013).

In the same way, WPAs and gWPAs are held together under a similar mechanism. For me it was wishing that the following semester as a gWPA would be easier or that the director of the program would change the way things were planned and executed. But more broadly, gWPAs are held together by the promise of the same crummy job or position after graduating and live in the cruel optimistic relationship that once they become WPAs or directors of a program, things will be different.

In paying attention to affect, we are encouraged “to imagine ourselves beyond the present: even if feelings of exhaustion, indifference, or disillusionment may have been naturalized, that doesn’t mean they’re natural” (Hsu, 2019). For example, when emotional labor is invisibilized or framed as an inevitable part of the writing program administration work, even when this kind of labor is part of different job positions and not others is something that could be contested. As such, “[c]ruel optimism indexes these moments where a body desires and needs an arrangement of the world that is also frustrating and corrosive,” (Schaefer, 2013, p. 7) much in the same way I propose, in which sometimes writing program administrators “induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). Otherwise, when they perform emotional labor.

However, recognized by scholars in the field,

As any current or former WPA knows, affective knowledge is both required and produced through the position, though it is not the basis for promotions or

reappointments, nor is it generally viewed as knowledge that advances and enacts disciplinary knowledge. (Micciche, 2007, p. ix)

Therefore, authorities must pay attention to how to account for this elusive, but still valuable and very much needed, kind of labor.

1.7 Critical Organizational Communication

This dissertation adopts a critical organizational communication perspective to analyze and highlight the relations of discipline and power that affect gWPAs, sometimes leading to exploitation and feelings of marginalization. According to Joan Acker (2006), “All organizations have inequality regimes, defined as loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations.” (p. 443)

Whilst studying what she terms “inequality regimes”, Acker explains that “Hierarchies are usually gendered and racialized, especially at the top. Top hierarchical class positions are almost always occupied by white men in the United States and European countries” (2006, p. 445). As gendered dynamics are insinuated into the conduct and structure of organizations, it comes as no surprise that organizations that are considered to be successful and have effective leadership share gendered characteristics “such as strength, aggressiveness, and competitiveness” (Acker, 2006, p. 445).

As differences in power are essential to class and also linked to matters of hierarchy, some organizations like labor unions or professional associations can intervene to diminish “power differences across class hierarchies” (Acker, 2006, p. 447).

Nevertheless, even these types of organizations have typically been staffed and ruled by white men; consequently, they have not allowed for white women and women of color to

acquire power in the same way (Acker, 2006, p. 447). Acker exemplifies this through the figures of the gendered managers who do not operate with the same visibility and power,

In some organizations, women managers work quietly to do the organizational housekeeping, to keep things running, while men managers rise to heroic heights to solve spectacular problems (Ely and Meyerson 2000). In other organizations, women and men manage in the same ways (Wacjman 1998). Women managers and professionals often face gendered contradictions when they attempt to use organizational power in actions similar to those of men. (2006, p. 447)

Therefore, in this study, I look at the relations among the type of responsibilities that being a gWPA entails, intertwined with the hierarchical position of gWPAs inside the organization and the feminization of that position.

Through the lens of a critical approach, “organizations are viewed as political systems where different interest groups compete for control of organizational resources” (as cited in Mumby, 2012, p. 29). While analyzing the dynamics and situations present in the conversations with the gWPAs, it must be noted that the structure of the labor market, the relationships we have in the workplace, control processes, “and the underlying wage relation are always affected by symbols of gender, processes of gender identity, and material inequalities between women and men” (Acker, 1990, p. 146). Therefore, I draw from this critical theoretical perspective to analyze the Writing Program structures where gWPAs are located with the purpose of shedding a light on how diverse organizational structures affect the labor of gWPAs differently and contribute to the feminization of this field of study.

Situated in the organizational cracks of their departments, the liminality of gWPAs does not allow for them to identify as staff since they do not get their benefits or pay. On the contrary, graduate students qualify as cheap and disposable labor. Still, gWPAs are more than just mere graduate students since, in most cases, they perform administrative work and other obligations as I previously described my duties in the position I used to occupy. Thus, as mentioned previously, I examine the implications of the organizational structure of their departments, work units (Writing Programs), the power dynamics, and relations these gWPAs occupy, and how those affect the amount of labor, particularly emotional labor, gWPAs are responsible for. Moreover, I investigate the differences between the work demands from women and men gWPAs taking into consideration that,

Gender processes, including manipulation and management of women's and men's sexuality, procreation, and emotion are part of the control processes of organizations, maintaining not only gender stratification but contributing also to maintaining class, and possibly, race and ethnic relations. (Acker, 1990, p. 154)

Thus, as control processes maintain intersectional stratifications, I set up to examine how organizational structures keep replicating a gWPA position that carries with it its markers of feminization, intersectional inequities, and subjugations.

1.8 Intersectionality: Not Only a Matter of Gender

As I have discussed, the seemingly liminal and marginalized nature of the gWPA position does not have a singular cause; rather, I propose to look at it from an intersectional lens. In *Intersectionality*, scholars Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, define the concept as something that during the twentieth-first century has been

sometimes inadequately taken up by a plethora of different actors like scholars, activists, political advocates, or practitioners (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 1). In their first chapter, intersectionality is defined as,

...a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences...When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society, are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and themselves. (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 2; emphasis added)

I borrow this analytic tool in order to analyze how the issue of gWPAs lies at the intersection of the division of labor, the disproportionate demand for emotional labor while occupying the position, the program's organizational structures, the liminality of the position, gender issues, lack of formal acknowledgment and training, and an absence of research on certain individuals on the field. Hill Collins writes about conceptualizing intersectionality in three different ways; as a metaphor, as heuristic thinking, or framed around paradigm shifts. For this dissertation, I approach intersectionality as a metaphor since it offers the possibility of "new angles of vision on each system of power, how they cross and diverge from one another, as well as political possibilities," (Collins, 2019, p. 28) and because metaphors can allow "instant sense of understanding, fostering an immediate sense of the formerly unknown in terms of the known" (Collins, 2019, p. 26). As mentioned above, I have employed the metaphor of gWPAs as the flight attendants of Academia or as unappreciated wives. While their labor is a necessity for the program as

gWPAs perform important administrative tasks, mentor incoming instructors, help teach seminars and other similar tasks, they are rarely fairly compensated, both financially and through other kinds of benefits like staff or faculty members receive. This is why my dissertation looks at these complex intersectional disadvantages of liminality, feminization, and emotional labor.

1.9 Chapter Overview

This dissertation tackles the issue of gWPAs and their working conditions through an interdisciplinary analysis employing organizational communication, composition, and gender studies to create a compound perspective. The foundations to understand the gWPA position context, my research question, the significance of the study and the project's theoretical framework have been introduced in this first chapter. In addition, I introduce the kind of issues related to the lack of authority, how the gWPA position is feminized and how this, in turn, supports my argument for the importance and care necessary from the institutions to provide the opportunity to work in these positions in an egalitarian, fair and humane way. This chapter also contains a literature review on the field of composition and writing program administration studies, and why gaining new insights on the gWPA experience can allow for an improvement of the current work conditions and position structuring.

Chapter two addresses and explains the methodology approach utilized on this project, the sample definition method applied, additionally to the data collection, processing, transcription (Mishler, 1991), coding and analysis. I utilize a thematic analysis approach (Riessman, 2008), once the interviews were fully transcribed, to code the different recurring themes that emerged from the conversations with my participants.

To understand and showcase these themes, in chapter three I identify each of them and elaborate on how they manifested in my interviews by utilizing excerpts from my conversations with the participants. This chapter draws from Riessman's Thematic Narrative Analysis to dissect and examine the narratives portrayed in the previous chapter by "theorizing across a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements across research participants, the events they report, and the actions they take" (Riessman, 2008, p. 74). From the conversations with my interviewees, I identify six main themes: COVID-19, mentorship, networking, labor (both administrative and emotional), boundaries, and hope. After discussing them, I move on to consider the larger implications of this research. I analyze how the interviewees' experiences help us understand emotional labor, liminality, and feminization that have been considered in previous studies and the importance of these for people in gWPA positions. I use the concepts and narratives as conceptual, analytic guides or frames to understand emotional labor, liminality, and feminization in the current neoliberal state.

In chapter four I set up an overview to contextualize how neoliberalism has permeated this institution, turning higher education into what we can define as a business. This is the context for addressing the question posed at the beginning of this dissertation regarding the systemic, structural, and rhetorical factors that contribute to the marginalization, feminization, and emotional labor burden required from gWPAs. I then proceed to outline the four main issues I encountered within the position that emerged from the analysis of the themes. Following this, I call the attention to gWPAs being the canary in the coal mine, or what I deem a cautionary tale of exploitation. I conclude the

chapter with a list of suggestions on how to explore pathways forward for the future of gWPAs everywhere.

This final chapter considers the main findings regarding the questions of how to improve the experience of being a gWPA with the intent of making it a more humane and professional position for those that will occupy it in the future. What can we learn from the gWPAs' experiences discussed in this dissertation? I elaborate on the theoretical and practical implications, as well as the methodological lessons learned. The final sections of the chapter consider the limitations of my study and future directions for further research. Current conditions of the gWPA position seem to indicate a high load of responsibilities, with little to no authority. Thus, this project strives to offer suggestions that will allow for these positions to be carried out in a more equitable and humane environment that allows for a well-balanced labor load for gWPAs and administrators of writing programs in general.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

As qualitative research helps us understand the world, society, and the institutions that populate it, it also provides an avenue to do research that “focuses on lived experience, placed in its context;” (2013, p. 239) and the ways that people construct meaning in their environments.

In this study, I examine the contradiction between the importance of the above-mentioned gWPAs and their positions in writing programs. On the one hand, gWPAs are a very important cog in the machine that the writing program is as they perform administrative tasks, mentor incoming graduate students, co-teach seminars, participate in meetings and so much more. The problem with this kind of labor is the nature of it, as many times, while invaluable, it is also invisible and does not possess the “weight” that other accomplishments like publishing an article or presenting at a conference do. However, in my preliminary research, I encountered little to no research on the implications of this labor on those who perform it. Is the position worth the extra work? Are there incentives? How are these positions obtained in each institution? The idea that graduate students who are also WPAs are oftentimes spoken about but not spoken to struck me. Especially as I mentioned above, these positions entail administrative, pedagogical and emotional labor while at the same time, existing in a liminal space and in a highly informal nature. Therefore, I set up myself to get out and talk to these gWPAs, hoping that they would share their stories, anecdotes and maybe, their grievances.

As “everything we study is contained within a storied, or narrative, representation” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 240), I understood semi-structured interviews with a narrative approach as my data collection method to be the opportunity to portray work experiences that we had not heard about yet given that “The goal in narrative interviewing is to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements” (Riessman, 2008, p. 23). Lincoln and Denzin explain that “narrative is a telling, a performance event, the process of making or telling a story” (2003, p. 240). Therefore, I approached interviews in my study “as a negotiated text, a site where power, gender, race, and class intersect” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 239), and where “the most important ethical imperative is to tell the truth” (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012, p. 110). As qualitative research “interprets participant viewpoints and stories;” (Tracy, 2013, p. 5), my interviews became a place for the interviewees to reflect on their experiences, share anecdotes and as a site for hope. While my project is based on the findings that emerged from these interviews, I acknowledge that one of the issues involved in qualitative research is what Catherine Riessman terms the “holy transcripts” character that these conversations can acquire. For this, I reckon that “it is limiting to rely only on the texts we have constructed from single interviews” (2013, p. 26). As interviews are an important source of knowledge, they are but one of many data collection methods of qualitative research (Riessman, 2008, p. 26).

2.2 Participants and Sampling Procedure

When outlining what my pool of interviewees would look like, I tried to find a large association comprised of people who had at least one interest in common, writing program administration. However, I could not just go ask anybody, as my project looks at

a particular person who held or has held a position that entailed, on top of teaching, administrative experience. Once I identified this group of people, I honed in and found the appropriate fit I needed for the interviews' participants. My findings led me to an executive committee where all of those who belonged to it had stepped up in their positions and worked tirelessly for those who were part of the general body.

Given the nature of my study, all the participants I solicited for this pedagogical research project were graduate students at the time of their interview, while simultaneously they had held (or still had) roles that entailed administrative work too. Therefore, by targeting this executive committee, I knew for a fact that they all had at least one research interest in common, writing program administration, while being a graduate student.

In sum, to be considered for the interviews, all interviewees had to fit the finalized specific inclusion criteria:

- Be a graduate student at the time of the interview (or having recently graduated, one year after graduation max),
- occupying or having occupied a graduate student writing program administrator position in the past five years (between Fall 2017 and Fall 2021) and,
- being part of, (or having been part) of this particular executive committee (any time between August 2017 to December 2021).

I first identified approximately thirteen possible interviewees and sent out a call for participation via email during early Spring of 2022. A total of six interviews confirmed their willingness to participate right away and asked to schedule an interview in their second email. Two other participants responded affirmatively on the first instance

but later on ceased to respond to email communications. There was one potential interviewee who reached out to request IRB approval forms and protocols, and after reviewing the documents, they politely declined to participate in the study due to the protocol not specifying for how long their data obtained from the interview would be utilized for (the protocol did indeed, specify this).

Finally, a total of six graduate student writing program administrators participated in the study. In an effort to protect their identities, and following protocol guidelines, I have anonymized their interviews and for the extent of this project they will be named under their interview number, for example, Interviewee One, and so on and so forth.

While I recognize my sample is limited in scope due to its number of participants, I argue that it still offers relevant information, both as a group and individually, as the interviewees have embodied the gWPA position, and also due to their commitment and larger perspective on the role. As I took an interpretive approach that is focused on the constitution of meaning within the field of WPA looking at their experiences, by having the perspectives of six gWPAs, who represented six different institutions, all in different states, including both East and West Coast, as well as the South and the Midwest seemed like a sufficient sample for the purpose of this project.

2.3 Data Collection Method

In order to acquire my data, I conducted 6 semi-structured one-on-one interviews on Zoom during the month of February of 2022. Conducted in a way similar to a conversation, the semi-structured interview is defined by William Adams as:

a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions. The dialogue can meander around the topics on the

agenda—rather than adhering slavishly to verbatim questions as in a standardized survey—and may delve into totally unforeseen issues. (2015, p. 493)

In the case of my research, the pre-planned set of questions allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences as gWPAs, while also providing them with opportunities to reflect on the meaning of these. In addition, there were specific time spaces created for sharing anecdotes, short stories, or any piece of information they deemed relevant to the project's topic. While I place special importance on my interviewees' narratives, my own experience of having been in the same or a very similar position for three years was utilized as an interpretative framework to understand the material I acquired. Having been in a gWPA position gave me a perspective, but one I was sensitive to, and it also became, as seen in chapter one, the main catalyst for my dissertation and where it all got started.

According to Bowen “Just like research questions, sensitizing concepts [device] provide a guide on where to start, deepening perception and analysis along the way” (as cited in Tracy, 2013, p. 28). A couple of times, however, I had to remind myself that my experience and that of my interviewees were different, and that I had to be aware that my interpretation could be clouded by my experience. Therefore, I had to bracket my own feelings and experiences for the sake of my research, while also trying to recognize and acknowledge my own biases, which became a primordial part of my reflexive interview practice. I acknowledge and reflect on this more extensively in the last section of this chapter.

2.4 Data Processing Method

As mentioned above, my data stems from the recollection and analysis of six Zoom transcribed interviews. The process to schedule the interviews was first by an initial invitation email, after some follow up communications, I created a Google calendar invitation with the link embedded for both of us, as a reminder and an easy place to access the meeting's link. Once we were inside the meeting at the expected time, I introduced myself, thanked interviewees for their time and willingness to participate in the study. What followed was reading them their oral consent form and getting their answers recorded for research protocol reasons. All of my recordings went smoothly with no technical difficulties, which made it surprisingly easy to obtain my data.

In total, after the whole cycle of interviews was complete, the six of them accounted for 347 minutes of video recording, and 130 pages of transcript text.

2.5 Doing Online Interviews

As I outlined and drafted the first version of this chapter, and in particular, this section, I immediately thought, "I am going to write about the advantages and disadvantages of doing online interviews on Zoom." But after giving it some thought, I decided that this harsh duality could limit the way I framed online interviews for my project. Therefore, I resolved to adopt the concepts utilized by Oliffe et al. (2021) and I discuss the benefits and concessions of online interviews. Language shapes our way of thinking and viewing the world, consequently I consider that shifting from the term "disadvantages" to "concessions" allows for a less negatively implied character of the word. In this case, "concessions" implies a sort of compromise, the idea that sometimes,

sacrificing certain aspects of traditional methods (in this case, traditional in-person interviews) is needed in order to maximize the benefits. As opposed to “advantage” which implies being in a more favorable or superior position, the concept of a “benefit” is more concerned with “something that produces good, or helpful results or effects that promote well-being” (“benefit,”).

Before I delve into the benefits and concessions of this type of interview, I would like to acknowledge that my data collection method was selected as a result of the times where this project was being designed to be defended in the proposal stage. At the beginning of 2021, as I mentioned before, COVID-19 cases had surged across the country, therefore, for safety, costs, and time-related issues I voluntarily decided to perform Zoom interviews online.

In their study, Oliffe et al. identify several benefits and concessions regarding Zoom interviews. The first and main one cited is the “Reduced Costs to Extend Recruitment Reach and Inclusivity” (2021, p. 4), which in the case of my research allowed for extended recruitment, a more diverse set of backgrounds and reduced my cost vastly. Thanks to being able to do my interviews online, I had basically a null cost since Michigan Tech provides students with a Zoom Pro license that doesn’t have a limit time on meetings while allowing me to chat with gWPAs in six different continental states of the US. Archibald et al. also think about some benefits of Zoom interviews such as the cost effectiveness, but they also bring up “access, [and] time effectiveness” (2019, p. 4). Part of having the interviews in person is not only cost-effective regarding money but also time-effective. It might seem obvious but the time that it would have taken to travel to the location of my interviewees’, set up, spend some time with them and do the actual

interview would have been greater than just the time that it took to contact potential interviewees by email, set up the Zoom calendar invite and interview them. This also connects to the idea of access, since most graduate students have Zoom access via their institutions and for them too, it would be far more sustainable regarding time and recruitment.

Another benefit that comes with Zoom interviews was the rapport, and the ability to build it by being able to see the interviewees' body language, and their location, especially when compared with other interviewing methods of non-visual communication like the telephone or via email (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 4). Related to the idea of rapport comes the last benefit I will introduce which is interviewees' comfort, where Gray et al. illustrate it with an example of their own research as "Participants in [their] study stated they were more comfortable speaking about a personal topic like parenting in a space of their own choosing," where basically "unlike, in-person interviews, participants can participate in their own convenient space, but unlike a telephone interview, they feel personally connected with their interviewer" (2020, p. 1297). Some of my interviewees were either at their homes, therefore I got a glance of their personal space (and some cute pet cameos!) or at some building or space of their school (e.g., outside, in their office) at the time of their interview. While those at home seemed more relaxed and tended to be more vocal and laughed far more, those at their workspaces moved differently and their body language engaged with the space when talking about their duties in the same space where they perform them.

Despite coming with a plethora of affordances, and especially after the recognition of the value and the necessity of Zoom interviews since the beginning of the

COVID-19 pandemic during March of 2020, online interviewing is not a fit all magic solution and comes with a different set of challenges. These are compromises we have to make in order to perform research with this method and still obtain useful material.

When I first approached the development of this section, I considered that the first concession was Oliffe et al.'s idea of "being there different", in which case the interviewer is not able to plan, predict and/or influence where the interviewee will be located at the moment of the interview (2021, p. 4). After further discussion, it seemed important to also consider that we are in different physical spaces both physically and on the screen. Therefore, the idea then switched from being there differently (therefore, space) to that of presence on Zoom, as it is its own space, or Zoomtopia, as I have called it in previous work of mine (Vidal Chiesa, 2021). While being connected to a Zoom call, parts of us disappear or we can completely disappear from the frame, but our presence can still be there if we continue talking. While in real life this is not a possibility, it is also very different from a cognitive perspective. As Watson et al. specify in their study, "participants emphasized their preference for video calls over voice-only calls as a way of enacting ambient co-presence" (2021, p. 3), their findings reported that by doing this type of calls over phone conversations there was a major importance placed on the visual, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Watson et al., 2021, p. 6). However, they did present limitations to digitized communication like the way to form rapport, for example, as their main concession (Watson et al., 2021, p. 10).

For my interviews and protocol, I did not provide or request any specific geographical location, rather let them decide, with the reasoning that one should talk from where it was more convenient timewise but also, comfort-wise. Like the idea of

being there on a different nature, Oliffe et al. also utilize the concept of “choppy purviews”, where certain aspects such as “the range of vision, insight and/or understandings drawn from what is observed while conducting interviews” is still somewhat taken into account at the time of pursuing qualitative interviews (2021, p. 5). While these are certainly a set of concessions I had to make, my recordings did not appear to have suffered significant consequences. However, I do recognize that not being in a room with them, where they might give a glimpse of their everyday life or workspace, does make a difference as we only get to see what they decide to show us on the camera frame. In the end, the result of all online Zoom interviews reflects a curated snapshot of the interviewee’s space.

As I have discussed this aspect about my interviewees, it is only fair that I also recognize the space from where I conducted my research. All my interviews were performed from my personal living space, which helped in the sense of being in my safe space while also allowing me to ensure call quality by adjusting settings such as connecting my computer to the ethernet instead of the wi-fi to make sure my connection would be stable enough, for example.

Finally, I want to point out that I am very aware of the possible “call quality and reliability issues” (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 5) as another substantial concession of Zoom interviews, but fortunately, I did not experience any regarding software, hardware, or even more unfortunate ones such as Zoom-bombing, which I consider a total blessing for the data collection stretch of my study.

2.6 Data Transcription

For the transcription of my data, I utilized the automatic transcription feature on the Zoom application which is one of the many affordances of this online conferencing software. I remember that while conducting my second interview, right after starting the recording, my interviewee cautioned me to activate the auto-transcript feature as they deemed it “lifesaving,” or at least, a good place to not have to start transcribing from scratch. After all the interviews were completed and processed, I manually cleaned them up from redundancies and misinterpretations, correcting terms, acronyms or concepts that the automatic Zoom function could not and that entailed both knowledge of the topic and some humanness.

According to Ellingson and Sotirin (2020), transcription has both a selective and interpretive character and it is an activity used “to transform audio (visual) recordings of spoken language into written texts that are more readily reread, studied, and analyzed using qualitative methods for scrutinizing data” (p. 53). As I cleared my interview transcripts and added some small clarifications between brackets here and then, I did so with the understanding that transcription is an interpretive act (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 241) and “problematic in a fundamental way” (Mishler, 1991, p. 277). For example, I decided when a gesture or their voice tone was important according to what I interpreted from the recording.

Ellingson and Sotirin also explore the idea of making transcripts “through three sets of practices...– mapping, translating, and selecting” (2020, p. 55). First, transcripts can act as maps as they “lead in particular directions; they move researchers toward some places and spaces and away from others” (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020, p. 55). But

transcribing can also become an act of translating, as “People do not process oral speech the same way we read it; we make sense of language in vastly different ways depending upon how our bodies take in the cues” (as cited in Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020, p. 57), however this was modified, or at least happened in a different way when I decided to do online interviews (as noted above). Much like translating a text from a language to another, the question of accuracy resurfaces, to which the authors then claim:

accuracy is a naive standard for quality in transcription; retaining the actual words in written form does not convey the truth of what happened in the (oral) moment (Mishler, 1991). Transcription is better understood as interpretive and translational (Davidson, 2009; Duranti, 2006). (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020, p. 58)

As accuracy and precision are not at all irrelevant, “technical advances in recording equipment and detailed notation systems do not address the analytical and theoretical issues that are inherent in any form of re-presentation” (Mishler, 1991, p. 277).

The last practice to be discussed is selection, as all transcripts are selective: we cannot transcribe every movement, every sound or action that our interviewees perform. The result would be a very convoluted and detailed document that would be complicated to read over and over again while performing the preferred method of analysis. During our transcription process,

We select formats, genres, details, and practices, our choices becoming part of the bonds forged among researcher, data (recordings and transcripts), and world. We necessarily select some details and discard some as not interesting or pertinent enough to include; this is unavoidable. (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020, p. 59)

Therefore, selecting with a critical approach and paying special attention to what gets discarded and what gets included is of utmost importance to ensure a proper transcription, or at least, as accurate as possible, even if the intent to be accurate comes from a naive human standpoint. Thus, I made sure that in every instance where a gesture, look, face expression or tone of voice was relevant to what was being said, I noted it down while recognizing that as “Just like fieldnotes, transcriptions are human constructions, and how they are constructed depends on the goals of the larger research project” (Tracy, 2013, p. 178). Some interviewees deflected through humor or sarcasm when remembering a challenging situation, while others were effusive about remembering rewarding moments in their career.

While taking all of this into account, selecting one of these three sets of practices to build the transcriptions is rarely simple or straightforward (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020, p. 60), and I recognize that it was something I struggled with, not knowing how many gestures were too many or arbitrarily deciding on where to put commas and full stops based on my own perception of their tone of voice, intonation and what I interpreted the interviewee was trying to convey.

2.7 Method of Data Analysis and Data Coding Process

For my dissertation, I decided to approach my data from an iterative and thematic data analysis as my qualitative methods. As I wanted to be able to tell the stories of my interviewees, and talk about their experiences, I also saw the relevance of engaging with past and current literature in the field. In this section, I describe my data analysis and data coding process while fully agreeing with Sarah J. Tracy on her definition of data analysis as “heavy stuff” (2013, p. 184).

According to Tracy, iterative analysis:

alternates between emic, or emergent, readings of the data and an etic use of existing models, explanations, and theories. Rather than grounding the meaning solely in the emergent data, an iterative approach also encourages reflection on the active interests, current literature, granted priorities, and various theories the researcher brings to the data. (2013, p. 184)

My data analysis process, which includes my coding process, evolved and was driven by the main theoretical framework of this dissertation and my main research questions posed in chapter one. After the coding process was completed (not without a big hiccup at the beginning that rendered a month of work in almost no progress), I proceeded to find what themes had emerged. Coding is defined as the action of “labeling and systematizing data” (Tracy, 2013, p. 186), and it can be performed in multiple ways: employing manual approaches like printed materials, and highlighters or colored markers, others prefer to utilize computer-aided approaches which entails using an Excel spreadsheet or other qualitative data analysis software (Tracy, 2013, p. 186).

In the case of my dissertation, I tested atlas.ti and dedoose.com, watched some seminars on how they worked but in the end, decided to take a manual approach. As a person who still carries a (detailed) paper planner in 2023 and is highly visual/color oriented, having all my interviews in a physical format felt like the most appropriate way to go about it. I printed all my transcripts (as single pages to avoid ink build up) and set up to immerse myself in the data.

Tracy suggests a data immersion phase, where the main goal is to “absorb and marinate in the data, jotting down reflections and hunches, but reserving judgment”

(2013, p. 188). And so, I did, I sat with my interviews and gave them a first pass, just looking at them, finding little mistakes like wrong line spacing or syntax issues. By the time I was working on my first pass, or what Tracy terms primary-cycle coding, I still felt like I could hear my interviews speaking. Therefore, I thought I was ready to start my coding, and go look for codes which, put simply, are short words or phrases that capture a “summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for ...language-based or visual data” (as cited in Tracy, 2013, p. 189). Based on Johnny Saldaña’s phrase “open-coding”, Tracy points to the “circular reflexive process that remarks qualitative data analysis” (2013, p. 189).

There were two cycles to my coding process. On my first one, or primary-cycle coding defined as “the initial coding activities that occur more than just a single “first” time”, I set up to find my initial codes (Tracy, 2013, p. 189). These were a mix of descriptive words or concepts that I identified in the data, but also included in vivo codes, “actual words of phrases within the datum itself” (Tracy, 2013, p. 189). While doing this, I had to make a decision on the level of detail that I wanted to incur. Tracy presents two alternatives based on Bazeley’s work, fracturing and lumping. While the former refers to labeling each line of text with a code, the latter entails grouping entire lines or text excerpts “into big general categories” (Tracy, 2013, p. 190). There are clearly differences between the two as fracturing data is far more time consuming, but at the same time, lumping can result in omitting important or insightful information in the transcripts. In the case of my project, I decided on fracturing my data at this first instance, which took about a week and half as most of the days I could only tolerate fracturing one interview.

Here is where everything went (slightly) south. After I was done fracturing data and I thought I was ready for a secondary-cycle of coding, I met with one of the members of my committee and realized I had made some mistakes. I tried to go from a 450-something column of codes on Excel acquired from the first cycle to categorizing them into three more columns, I believed that would provide me with the themes and voila! Research progress. That did not happen. After chatting for a couple hours, I realized that I was making a mistake as I was trying to force my codes into pre-existing categories, I was not allowing the categories and themes to emerge, rather I was trying to force the codes as the glass shoe on Cinderella's stepsisters at the end of the story: they clearly did not fit. So, I was back to square one and a half (I hesitate to say one because after all, my first-cycle coding was done, I had fractured all my data).

The second time around for my secondary-cycle coding where I began to "organize, synthesize and categorize" my codes into interpretive concepts, I set up a table on Word and started by identifying recurrent concepts that appeared in my interviews (Tracy, 2013, p. 194). Once I had those, it was a matter of slowly adding columns to the right. As Tracy depicts it, it's about acting as a journalist where the researcher's aim is to "detail the 'who, what, and where,' not to provide an analysis" of why something happened (2013, p. 189). First, I described how my interviewee was utilizing the word/concept in their interview excerpt, the second level set up for categorizing those concepts and understanding how their experience with it had reflected on their speech (positive or negative, mentor or mentee, career oriented or community builder, etc.), and identifying patterns in their responses. Finally, while working on the third column in starting a process to abstract my data, I found myself going back and forth between the

other two columns and the interview transcriptions but also between my theoretical ideas (and sources). As my second coding cycle reflected the iterative analysis approach that I had chosen for my projects, my preliminary themes started to shape up (I address these in depth in the next chapter).

After this was set, for the analysis portion of my project, I examined the themes utilizing thematic narrative analysis in which “language is viewed as a resource, rather than a topic of inquiry” and “the primary focus is on ‘what’ is said, rather than ‘how’ or ‘to whom’ and for ‘what purpose’” (Riessman, 2008, p. 59). When this method is applied, “Data are interpreted in lights of the thematics developed by the investigator (influenced by prior or emergent theory...)” (Riessman, 2008, p. 54). While working on reconstructing narratives in order to give my gWPAs a voice, and to work on this story about gWPA labor, my study tells stories within stories, also known as embedded stories for interpretative purposes. However, figuring out where to start and when to finalize an interview vignette was oftentimes challenging, proving that “determining the boundaries of stories can be difficult and highly interpretative” (Riessman, 2008, p. 74) as I have discussed previously. I am interested in looking at these small stories in the way that they “function to alter the ways we view mundane every-day events” and can “...indeed accomplish change” (Riessman, 2008, p. 62). Particularly, I was interested in finding what could be modified in Writing Programs to accommodate a more equitable distribution of labor without wiping out these positions or replacing them with adjuncts.

2.8 “Happy Accidents”

In both his famous tv series *Bob Ross: Beauty Is Everywhere* and *The Joy of Painting* the artists expressed “We don't make mistakes; we just have happy accidents”.

During my second-cycle coding data attempt (referred to above), as I was seeing some themes emerge throughout the interviews, I was surprised by a theme I had not considered while designing this study. As the threads became visible and led me to finding patterns in the discourse provided by my interviewees, there was one common thread that caused most of them some level of distress and contributed to heightening emotions and adding extra labor burdens to their already pre-set tasks. COVID-19 emerged as a commonality, a shared phenomenon among all interviewees. It affected all of them in some way, preponderantly negative, therefore I understood that this would become an important concept to understand and read their responses under a different light.

The way my research project was designed took into account some of the COVID-19 pandemic limitations, as most of the planning happened during the Fall semester of 2021 and numbers of cases were skyrocketing in the US and uncertainty was still a big factor. In lieu of this, I planned to conduct online interviews on Zoom, which had some positive aspects such as reduced (basically null) cost and speed up the process of collecting interviews but also some non-positive aspects like the way we engage with the interviewee and how we form our rapport with them.

However, to think that COVID-19 would have an influence on the way I would interpret answers from my interviewees, was indeed a surprise. Overall, I consider this to have been a happy accident and not a mistake or an oversight on my part for not making the pandemic part of my research questionnaire from the beginning. Clearly, while there is some research crisis response on WPA (Clinnin, 2020) there was little to non-pre-existing literature to draw from when considering the COVID-19 pandemic. I recognize

that currently, there are plenty of studies about the first two years of the pandemic published. Nevertheless, this major traumatic event provided context for the interviewees' contingent and/or unforeseen work conditions, mishaps while in the position and of course, some of their frustrations. In chapter three, I delve deeper into this theme and present examples of how this pandemic took a toll on gWPAs and cast a light on the position responsibilities, mostly exacerbating them.

2.9 “You’ve got a Friend in Me”: Researcher Positionality

Qualitative research entails more than just the mere fact of collecting data and reporting back on it, as Tracy explains, “is about immersing oneself in a scene and trying to make sense of it” (2013, p. 3). However, it is important to take into account that all researchers come from different backgrounds, they carry a point of view, previous knowledge, and while “Some people call this ‘baggage’; others call it wisdom” (Tracy, 2013, p. 2).

The idea that qualitative research should be “neutral,” or “objective” has previously been contested, as it “suggests that knowledge-building is best accomplished through measurement devices that are detached from any particular investigator” (Tracy, 2013, p. 228). As my dissertation looks at the positions we occupy as gWPAs in programs, departments, and largely, universities, I introduce here the concept of reflexivity which has been used for qualitative researchers “to legitimize, validate, and question research practices and representations” (Pillow, 2003, p. 178). By utilizing reflexivity and considering my position and that one of my interviewees, the result is an “increased attention to researcher subjectivity in the research process” and try to

understand “how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect [my] data collection and analysis –” (Pillow, 2003, p. 177).

In defining reflexivity, Dewey explains that “to reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock of intelligent dealing with further experiences” (as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 177). On a similar line, Tracy considers self-reflexivity as:

the careful consideration of the ways in which researchers’ past experiences, points of view, and roles impact these same researchers’ interactions with, and interpretations of, the research scene. (2013, p. 2)

Considering the researcher’s “baggage,” their political, religious, and cultural beliefs is paramount for understanding how knowledge is created, and our influences on that process. The contribution of reflexivity to our research process is that by utilizing it as a methodological tool, we contribute to “producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the workings of our social world but also provides insight on how this knowledge is produced” (Pillow, 2003, p. 178).

Matters of how or when to utilize reflexivity have been discussed further, particularly by feminist theory, as researchers argue that “there are multiple places for reflexivity to work and work differently in the research process” (Pillow, 2003, p. 179). One example requires the researcher to develop “reciprocity with research subjects”, in some way, to do research “with” instead of “on” the research subjects (Pillow, 2003, p. 179). In that instance, reflexivity is utilized as a tool to “deconstruct the author’s authority in the research and/or writing process” (Pillow, 2003, p. 179). O’Connor & O’Neill claim that qualitative research that draws on both constructivist and critical

paradigms, “fosters a rebalancing of power in the researcher– participant relationship” encouraging “a focus on marginalized understandings and experiences” (as cited in, Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009, p. 280).

Reflecting on power relationships between me and my participants, I think overall there were two main variables that fostered a good rapport. First, the fact that I (at the time of the interviews) was an ex gWPA myself; therefore, I shared, at some point in time, the position with them. This helped me establish credibility when I understood the terms they were utilizing to speak, I offered an understanding look when they described their struggles with teaching, administrative work, relationships with peers, or our lack of self-prioritization. On top of being an ex-gWPA, I was also a graduate student, which made it easy for us to communicate about our frustrations, challenges, but also the little wins in our professional journeys. Although this sounds like a good contribution in theory, in practice, it made me realize that given my condition as an ex gWPA myself, my research is situated in the perspective of my personal experience and familiarity with the position. Therefore, I had to be very conscious of how I was interpreting their discourse and that I had to be aware of my own biases. In a way, I had to recognize that I had glasses that made me see everything from a gWPA point of view, and in order to be fair to my data, I needed to take them off.

Other than my positionality as a researcher, another factor that I believe influenced our reciprocity was age. As all my interviewees were in their late twenties and mid-thirties, I think that this allowed for our interviews to unravel in a more informal way, almost entirely as friends having a conversation. Oftentimes, I would find myself having to stop the recording so we could keep exchanging ideas on more

mundane/personal matters, some of them offered to grab a coffee if I was ever near, while others offered their support regarding research but also, as a fellow graduate student more in general. All things considered, I believe that the interviewees and I had symmetrical power relationships, only slightly tipped in favor of me, as I was the one posing the questions and collecting the data. As we were all of similar ages, going through graduate school, and most of us working as GTIs, conversation flowed naturally the moment we jumped into the Zoom meetings.

I was genuinely surprised about the ways that they had questions for me, about my experience in the position, and a sincere sense of curiosity about what made me develop my research topic. A couple of them stated during their interviews that they thought that my research was something important, necessary and that they were excited to read it after my dissertation was done (which I know is long overdue). During my interview process, I really strived to accomplish Pillow's (2003) idea about doing research "with" instead of "on" my interviewees; they were significant pillars of my study. On top of sharing their stories, they pointed me to research and articles that I could take a look at, encouraged my project and (unintentionally) expanded the scope of my research as in the case of providing me with a new theme to think about such as COVID-19. For this, I am eternally grateful.

In the following chapters, I present the six themes that emerged from my conversations with the gWPAs and elaborate on them utilizing excerpts from the interviews and the methodological framework proposed in this and the past chapter. The next chapter presents the results of my data analysis, while chapter four will consider the larger implications, the main issues and possible future pathways.

3 The Themes

The following chapter has two main objectives. First, it explores the main findings regarding interviewees' different WPA program structures, applications processes, duties and compensation in order to provide the context in which the gWPA position exists and replicates itself. Second, the chapter introduces the six themes that emerged from the interviews' analysis by utilizing conversation excerpts, thus creating the foundation for the larger implications on chapter four.

3.1 Defining the Position

Writing programs, according to Donna Strickland, “emerged by way of divisions in labor, divisions that separated mental labor, coded as white and masculine, from mechanical labor, coded as white and feminine” (2011, p. 46). While there has been pushback against this division and some progress on trying to redistribute labor in a more equitable manner, still writing programs “function as contradictory sites of (economic) disenfranchisement and (racial) privilege, both drawn along gendered lines” (2011, p. 46). As Strickland goes back and forth between analyzing writing programs and teaching composition, with a focus on the feminization of this labor, both are inextricably entangled. In my project, I am interested in the idea of the position of the gWPA being a feminized and marginalized one because it “tend[s] to preclude...the possibility of women’s seeking employment in jobs that have not been designated as appropriate to women—jobs that tend to offer better pay and more stability” (Strickland, 2011, p. 38) and keeps remuneration low in job positions that have historically been associated to women (Strickland, 2011).

Whilst sorting through and coding my interview data, the first surprising finding was the heterogeneity I encountered regarding the description of these positions. As the differences ranged from position titles, the number of administrative positions in any given institution's program, the application process to become a gWPA or the responsibilities it came with, the gendered nature of the position emerged. The fact that a position is gendered does not entail that man and woman cannot enact different positions but rather that "organizational roles themselves are gendered such that people occupying them have particular expectations placed on them by the organization and those round them" (Mumby, 2012, p. 213). The heterogeneity found in the different aspects of the position seen from a critical organization point of view, seems to be the basis of factors that allow for the development of politic dynamics, subordination, and exploitation to happen around the position. In the following subsections I investigate these characteristics based on the information provided by my interviewees, which I later cross checked with their institutional websites to provide the reader with the differences between the informal and the "official" descriptions of the position.

3.1.1 Position Titles

While all the interviewees had similar positions, with a lot of duties in common, their position denomination varied widely. Some of them were "Assistant *to* the Director", others were considered "Assistant Director" or "Assistant Director *of*" the program. Other titles such as "Graduate Assistant Director" or "Coordinator" were present in the mix. What I found interesting was one of my interviewees defined the name of their position by saying what they felt they were doing in the position, "Assistant to the [Program] Coordinator, *but in reality*, it's acting as an Assistant Coordinator

Position” (Interviewee Six). In other words, they compare their formal title versus their actual authority.

In creating this short list of different position titles, I intend to show two different aspects of why this is relevant. First, this diversity in the titles of my interviewees had to do with each universities’ departmental structure. While some of them worked at their institution’s writing program, others were based in the writing center, however, they all pertained to WPA labor. Second, the fact that there are so many different titles for the position also presents a distinction between the lived authority and the official positional authority. It is questionable that a position with such a variety of titles can hold consistent authority and importance on all different institutions. These differences in how each university decided to label the position (and those who occupy it) started to outline one of my main findings: A conundrum that when being a gWPA one occupies a highly informal and devalued position, while at the same time being of utmost importance to both the program and the department. Furthermore, this does not discriminate institutions and the devaluation of this particular kind of labor is common across the board.

3.1.2 Hierarchy and Program Structure(s)

While titles of the position vary depending on the institution, there is a prevalent hierarchical structure across the programs. As gWPAs do not exist in an academic vacuum, they are (usually) part of the Writing Program or Writing Center administrative team. Those are usually staffed with a figure to whom gWPAs report directly, hence, they carry the highest level of responsibility in the team, and hierarchy. These are typically referred to as Directors or Coordinators and respond to the Chair and other departmental leadership. These faculty members had “actual” authority, which they sometimes

conferred on the gWPA in order to take some decisions or accomplish certain tasks. They are sometimes too, a safe shield for the gWPA, who needs the vested authority to justify their actions or their watered-down authority in certain situations. When chatting about issues of work credit, recognition, and compensation, Interviewee One lamented,

Well, it's the same kind of thing that happens in terms of like so many grad [students], so many Composition programs survive because they can pay graduate students considerably really less to teach the classes and it, I mean, it's a long term criticism that like, lots of folks have had of the system, like I mean, Sharon Crowley, for example, in her book talking about how devalued Composition always is, right? But it's the same thing, and so like, you know, graduate students get paid way less to teach the same classes, and then, we also, when we do administrative work, it [is] paid way less and [we are] overworked to do the administrative work that somebody else gets, you know, full-time job and healthcare for and stuff.

While this interviewee does not focus entirely on the direct superiors like Directors, this is one way in which the interviewees expressed how their work is undercompensated, both financially and in terms of benefits.

Some organizations included office aides that most often took the bureaucratic load off from writing program administrators, although this was not always the case. Then finally, there were the gWPAs: assistant directors, assistant to the coordinator, so on and so forth. In short, my interviewees. Some programs had administrative teams as small as two members or as large as seven members. This, in turn, had an impact on the labor distribution and the type of tasks gWPAs performed. While some keep their focus on the

incoming graduate students and work on developing materials, some gWPAs had heavier and more responsible assignments like implementing a new assessment system or moving the placement testing process in house, most of those courtesy of the COVID-19 Pandemic. I will look into the fact that the difference between the formal position and informal authority, which was sometimes exploited by Directors who could assign work and take credit, or at the very least, could not offer back enough compensation or recognition. I develop on these unusual or out of the norm situations that spun the nature of the labor the gWPAs' were performing that emerged from my interviews later in this chapter.

3.1.3 Application Process

The way in which gWPAs are selected in their institutions varied too but had one main commonality: showing interest, which in turn became a code for one of the job qualifications needed to become a gWPA currently. While some described it as “openly expressing interest” (Interviewee Two), others framed it as more of an action where students who had an inclination for this type of administrative position “had to make it known that you [they] were interested in doing so” (Interviewee Four). In some cases, knowing somebody who had held the position before had granted them intel and early access to applying for the position, or at the very least, knowing when it would become available. Others confessed that demonstrating interest was enough and there was no formal application process, this was mostly due to having a good preceding relationship with the one that would become their direct superior. Word of mouth and having a strong network emerged as key factors in obtaining these positions.

Other than this particular characteristic regarding showing a vested interest in becoming a gWPA, meaning they wanted to run a Writing Center or a University's Writing program as WPA faculty in the future, or due to the fact that having administrative experience is valuable for those in the job market, the application processes were pretty standard. It is worth noting before moving to the aspects of the process, that some graduate students had somewhat of an "uninformed" interest in the position. Perhaps, it might have been the case that "showing interest" was not actually related to the skills required for the job but about willingness to be in a position of (limited) authority, or even to be singled out from other grad students as someone who is willing to do a different job. If this was the case, then willingness, or "showing interest" as described by the interviewees, was a code not for career interests but perhaps, a limited interest in taking an administrative position. However, most interviewees did manifest interest in becoming a full-time WPA or Writing Center Director in the future. This reflected mostly on the questions where interviewees talked about what they wish they had known before applying to be a gWPA, which I include in later sections of this dissertation.

Coming back to the process, the interested student had to write a cover letter, sometimes add a curriculum vitae, and submit it to the director of the Writing Program. In some cases, that also included the authorities of the department they belonged to, like the chair and the director of graduate studies/program. After that, a decision would be made on what some deemed to be some "sort of behind the scenes" decision-making (Interviewee Four) then, the chosen gWPA would be contacted most likely, although this was not always the case. Another sign that points to a reduced, highly informal and

authority-limited character of position was that of [not] being notified of being granted the position. However simple the process might seem, some interviewees (and I) found some hiccups along the way. Interviewee Two for example, remembers an unhappy situation related to paperwork in the position application process,

To illustrate that, last year I was in that, the other position in the graduate program, part of the reason I was in that is [that] I had applied to both, that one and the Writing Center at the time, and then my Writing Center application apparently got lost like just... And the only reason I found out about that was I was catching up with my boss,... about something else, and he was like “Yeah, you know, it was kind of a shame that you didn’t apply to this” And I was like, “What are you talking about?” and like, trying to show them the records, he’s like “Oh shoot!”, and like we only found that out because, just like a social informal exchange. So, there was never a, like “Sorry, you didn’t get accepted [to] this, or like you ‘got accepted [to] this’ kind of thing”. It’s uh...yeah, mostly like luck, emails or texts or like in person interaction kind of, kind of pieces. (Interviewee Two)

In this anecdote the gWPA points to different flaws of the application process, which are mainly issues pertaining to administration and intradepartmental communication. The first flaw discussed was the problem with lost paperwork, which is a complete administrative issue in itself (that does not concern this project) and happens more than it should in institutions. And the second flaw was the lack of communication at the time of appointment or even, if one does not get selected, getting an email at least notifying the person about the status of their application. This is something I experienced

myself as both times I got selected (two years in a row), I found out through either people from other departments pulling me into a “coordinators/assistants project” or the department’s secretary emailing me a few days before the semester started regarding becoming the gWPA and signing a contract amendment. But this was not the Composition Program Director’s fault entirely since the application process had been submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies initially and no one provided a notification.

Ultimately, there were two main aspects for selecting a gWPA: being a good fit for the position and showing interest. Meaning, that qualifications are arbitrary as each Writing Program and Writing Center will have their own. Although, some institutions did have a requirement of X courses taught before being eligible, making these positions available to those in their second year and beyond. Due to the position’s informality, there is no one place (online or in paper) to go and find a “Mandatory Position Qualifications for gWPAs”, and it might not even exist one. Especially since this is a document created internally, it is hard to access as an external researcher. It must be considered that these kinds of job/position ads are not uniquely targeted to the prospective gWPAs. The descriptions are also intended for other important audiences, like the departmental and university administration. Having these position descriptions and requirements helps justify stipends and course releases for graduate students taking on these positions. Being able to create a robust duties list allows WPAs to rationalize asking for more course releases, time and/or money for gWPAs. Thus, the more thorough the list and true to the position, a sounder case can be made in order to hire gWPAs.

Therefore, in order to illustrate one example of this list, I include below the qualifications required when I applied to be the Composition's Coordinator in the 2019-2020 academic year at Michigan Tech.

Preferred Qualifications: Preference given to PhD students. Experience working on the editorial staff of the Portage Review and/or teaching in MonsterComp⁴ is also preferred. (Master's students will also be considered, however, if they have significant interest in or experience with WPA work.)

Duties and Responsibilities include the following:

- Conduct grant research and writing related to writing program administration and curricular development.
- Help to plan, coordinate, and deliver content for the week-long orientation for new instructors.
- Serve as managing editor of the Portage Review, our undergraduate scholarly journal.
- Assist Composition Program Director in coordinating and delivering instruction in MonsterComp as well as assessing outcomes. Support GTIs teaching in the MonsterComp model.
- Assist with and formulate research initiatives related to writing program administration and composition theory/pedagogy.
- Assist with new composition GTI training; help to plan Composition Faculty meetings.
- Coordinate weekly Professional Development sessions during the spring semester.
- Mentor new GTIs.
- Assist with program assessment.
- Assist with curriculum development.
- Support logistics and teaching in MonsterComp.
- Maintain regular office hours for GTI and/or MonsterComp students.
- Attend[ing] weekly Composition Program administrative meetings.
- Coordinate with Marketing the maintenance and updating of Comp Program website.
- Update and maintain Canvas Shared Resource course.

⁴ For more information, refer to "Monstrous Composition: Reanimating the Lecture in First-Year Writing Instruction." Seigel, Marika; Chase, Josh; De Herder, William; Feltz, Silke; Kitalong, Karla Saari; Romney, Abraham; Tweedle, Kimberly. *College Composition and Communication*, 71(4), pp. 643-671. Jun 2020.

- If necessary, take over a Composition class on a short-term basis, especially in an emergency.

As seen in this example, nowhere in there is the consideration of pursuing a career in this area of studies or growing in the position at the institution. While there are no straightforward requirements to maintain graduate student status or GPA, these come implicitly with the position. While the “Preferred Qualifications” are all pertaining to the position-holder, the “Duties and Responsibilities” are mostly oriented towards the needs of the program (institutional needs), while in addition, many seem to be oriented to the professional/personal preferences of a WPA or Writing Center Director. If looked at closely, this list is redundant (which could be evidence of how much effort went into putting it together) and somewhat informative, it does not go in depth describing each task, which can leave room for interpretation of the Director or Coordinator (the “real” authority figure), and consequently, might lead to student exploitation. Therefore, exploitation emerges as a classical organizational communication issue, but all exploitation is not laid out the same. In this case, I will note three different types of exploitation related to my project.

First, systemic, and structured exploitation that is engrained in the position and that keeps being replicated within the Writing Programs and Writing Centers. This tends to occur partially due to the way in which the position is set up. Most programs outline it as a one-to-two-year term, so different graduate students cycle through and take it sporadically. Thus, justifying in a way the fact that they do extra work, but it is only for a limited amount of time (which does not justify exploitation). Second, and not explicit in the position description, is the labor that does not pertain to tangible scholar or

administrative work but rather, what is called labor of love, where gWPAs are in charge of managing their own emotions but are tacitly expected to help maintain the emotions of those around them. Third and finally, pertaining to the idea that students in gWPA positions possess a high level of competence, expertise and are critical to the functioning of the Writing Program or the Writing Center, I argue that much like flight attendants are needed to fly the plane smoothly, gWPAs act as the flight attendants of academia.

While an organization set up solely for the benefit of the employees seems paradoxical, it is undoubted that in most cases, the organization is the one that benefits greatly from those in the position, without providing fair compensation or recognition. As Interviewee One reflects,

So, it was like that...I think was like, it's the exploitation of the institution that...[it]was never the program itself, or the work that I did, or the people I worked with, all of that, I really loved and that's why often I would do more than I should have. But it was the fact that the institution benefited from me, like from exploiting me that, like, [it] is frustrating to look back on now.

In this case, there is a combination of labor of love and appreciating one's own job, hence, engaging in extra work but also, institutional exploitation.

The arbitrariness and high informality of how the position is granted dilutes the professionalism but in addition, often converts the gWPA into acting as the "Jack of all trades, but master of none" of the Writing Program. Not an administrator nor an academic, or an instructor but all at the same time. Unfortunately, this is not only true for gWPAs, but also WPAs. While being a "Jack of all trades" does not have to carry a negative connotation, as it could be a good practice to prepare gWPAs for more

opportunities. As gWPAs gain invaluable experience and knowledge, in both administrative and academic work, professional development or emotional labor training are sometimes not contemplated as a part of their gWPA education. This was the case for most of the programs my interviewees were part of. This lack of training in administration is, again, symptomatic of a problem in academia in general: academics usually do not receive training in administration or management. However, it seems to be the case that this is a big general issue in academia, and not only relevant to WPA work.

3.1.4 Duties and Responsibilities

In this category, gWPAs' responsibilities were across the board. Whereas some provided mentoring for incoming graduate students, performed observations, helped with organization of events, workshops, orientation, and provide direct support to the director, others had to deal with slightly more complicated endeavors such as creating teaching schedules for graduate students, and more heavy administrative tasks related to placement and assessment. This showed a big disparity in the type of work gWPAs engaged in, which was in addition, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. One important aspect not to forget is that a number of these students, while in the gWPA position, kept some (or all) of the regular graduate student obligations such as teaching and of course, advancing their research. These will be expanded on and exemplified with interview excerpts to analyze how does this disparity of tasks and responsibilities contributes to the informality of the position. It is through the examination of position titles, hierarchical lines of authority, application processes and responsibilities that it has become apparent that gWPAs in the position may be vulnerable to exploitation due to their liminal and undefined nature, and to power imbalances.

3.1.5 Compensation

Similar to the previous category, compensation for gWPAs positions varies widely depending on the institution. For some gWPAs, administrative positions are part of their appointments. For example, at Interviewee One's university, each position was paid hourly and accounted for 25% of their appointment (10 hours of work, no health insurance benefits), while 50% was allotted to teaching. Graduate students at this institution must teach in order to get any kind of tuition remission. Thus, Interviewee One worked as an assistant to the director of the writing program and a fellow while teaching to be able to make ends meet and acquire teaching remission.

In the case of Interviewee Two, they had no financial compensation linked to the gWPA position, but they were granted one course release. Whilst this sounds like a good deal, due to institutional policy changes, the incentive was taken away. They explain so in the following passage:

It used to be that there was an incentive for doing them [being on administrative graduate assistantships] where you would get a course release, so as a Ph.D. student you're used to teaching a two-one load. And now across the board, we all teach one-one, so that incentive this kind of gone...

This interviewee was dubious if this new teaching load was just a new rule across the board and that would be it for the graduate assistantships' compensation, or if it was the case that the writing program and the writing center had not found a way to compensate students who wanted to step into these positions. On a similar vein, Interviewee Four reported no additional financial compensation for acting as a gWPA but did make it clear that all students in that position received a course release.

Interviewee Five was perhaps the most distinct case among all my interviewees as in their position, entering the Ph.D. with significant previous teaching experience, allowed them to go for a full appointment as the assistant to the writing program coordinator, or what they called “assistant coordinator” helping the primary coordinator. For them, this was a way to lean into learning about the administrative side of WPA, and somehow “escaping” teaching.

While Interviewee Three and Six did not provide information about the type of compensation their positions granted them, the rest of the examples presented in this section seem to make it evident that compensation for gWPAs positions varies tremendously without any kind of parameters. Once again, this serves as evidence on claiming that gWPAs positions are arbitrary and sometimes, the benefits that gWPAs might get depend on their institution, previous experience, and as I have mentioned before, showing “interest”.

As I elaborate on the subsequent sections of this chapter, I delve deeper into how COVID-19, mentorship, networking, labor, boundaries, and hope emerged in addition to their details. I propose that each one reflects a different problematic that surrounds gWPAs, whose implications I will examine in chapter four in order to provide suggestions on how we can work on making the gWPA a relevant and necessary figure in the organization finding its fitting place in the institutional structure that makes sense in the Writing Program (or Writing Center), regardless of the institution in a humane and equitable manner.

3.2 “Unfortunately, I was the assistant director when COVID hit”: COVID-19

3.2.1 A Catalyst for Change

Framed as a research “happy accident” on my previous chapter, sometimes referred to as COVID-19, others just by referring to it as “the pandemic”, this shared phenomenon became a relevant factor that cast a light on the main labor inequities of the position. Furthermore, as each interviewee talked about the pandemic under different circumstances, COVID-19 became this sort of contemporary zeitgeist that allowed for certain behavior or situations to evolve, as long as they were framed in the pandemic timeline.

A significant number of interviewees saw the spread of the virus and its consequences as a catalyst for extra work, without additional remuneration or benefits in most (if not all) of the cases. In general terms, Interviewee Four recalls in the passage that provided this section’s title, “Unfortunately, I was the assistant director when COVID hit. So, we were all online, so that was a, that was a fun shift to make...”, they said looking away from the camera, in a somewhat sarcastic tone. However, others had to deal with more specific kinds of situations that were thrown their way. While I was chatting with Interviewee Five about their duties in the position, they explained the following,

So, one of the, one of the duties of the writing program coordinator and then that kind of also falls to the assistant is to run, we have a writing program committee, right? Where we have to kind of talk about what, what’s going on in the writing program, what are our needs, what are our concerns. It’s also, assessment is

entailed with that as well, so we work to see what's going on in the curriculum and making changes and adjustments as needed. So, and then it's kind of doing anything that that comes up in relation to the writing needs of the university. So, for instance, over right, right as the pandemic was really taking place... And I don't know that it was related to the pandemic, but also related to other kind of conditions and concerns with pedagogy, our university opted to placement optional.

Along with running the writing program committee, working on curricula development and adjustment, they continued to explain how due to the pandemic (most likely) they were called on to develop an alternative to the conventional placement process for ranking students by their writing competence and slotting them into appropriate classes, which forced them to pivot their department into an in-house assessment.

But making this significance move entails work to set up the new system, So part of, you know, all of a sudden, for, at the end, towards the end of my first year in the position, we were like, "Oh, hey, here's this new thing that we're doing all of a sudden, like it wasn't part of anybody's duties before this," but now placement, and trying to coordinate, you know, graders, how are we grading, what is our prompt, all of the things that are related to placement, fell under the wheelhouse of the writing program as well. And so, just kind of anything that's related to the writing needs of the university can sometimes just fall into our lap on a rolling basis, so it makes it pretty...interesting.

The way in which Interviewee Five pronounced those two final words together with their eyes widening and a pointed expression, made it clear that this surprise duty was

unavoidable at the time, and there was no alternative but to put in place a new system because of COVID-19.

While some gWPAs had some policies changed in their programs due to the pandemic, others recall an overall shift and substantial changes in their day-to-day operations, duties and overall work dynamics due to COVID-19. In the case of Interviewee One, these types of changes came with the addition of an extra set of hands: “Because you know, during the pandemic, we were doing quite a lot, the program changed a whole lot, and so there was a lot...there was enough, there was investment in it, and so they were hiring her on as well to do some work.” Here, they refer to a second student hired to work alongside them in the Writing Program, which was a first for that department. However, including one other person did not work as a magic fix, as a few lines later they mentioned, “And so...like, I think I did a lot of the work, and sort of shaping that position to what it could be, which also unfortunately involves like, really doing a lot more work than I was getting paid for like long periods of time”. If hiring a second person temporarily barely helped alleviate the problem, this should serve as proof that the pandemic then had pulled the lid off a can of worms that we are still dealing with today, and that cannot be solved with temporary fixes.

3.2.2 The “Shield” Excuse

Some gWPAs utilized the pandemic as what I termed a “shield”. While it is true that the pandemic was a huge disruptor for everyone on the planet and truly a historical event, some interviewees mentioned it as a shield against graduating, in part, due to the demands of the position during those challenging times. When referring to the pandemic, Interviewee One recalls,

I mean...I sat in meetings all day for entry level writing stuff, or for other admin stuff and then like, okay, there's two hours left in the day, am I going to spend it writing my dissertation? No, I'm like totally...that's it, I don't want to do anything else, is like, time for a nap, you know?

While some commented on the lack of energy, time or initiative to work on dissertation related activities after being done with meetings and “administrative stuff” as the Interviewee One points to, COVID also came with a higher load of emotional distress.

3.2.3 Emotional Experiences

3.2.3.1 Stress

Interviewee Four expressed “there were a few days, where I was like, wanted to like get some work done, [and] I was just like “I can't, like, I'm tired, like, I need to go pet the dog or like, take a nap.” The pandemic clearly had consequences at the physical but also cognitive level, which showed up in the conversations we had. Personally, I feel compelled to recognize that just as my interviewees do, I also see COVID-19 as a phenomenon that set me behind academically, not only for the extra tasks we had to perform but also due to mental health afflictions that the pandemic inflicted on us. I often think back to my conversation with Interviewee Six when we talked about what was one things they wish that they had known before stepping into the position, and they said,

I wish that I'd...like, known better how to compartmentalize all of those things, so that I wouldn't feel like, I'm, you know, in my sixth year cramming the bulk of my dissertation, writing into three to four months, so that I can graduate on time and take one of these jobs, potentially if I get one.

3.2.3.2 *Isolation*

Whilst exhausting in nature for some, other participants identified that COVID-19 was an isolating factor in their experience as graduate students, and others considered it to be the reason for heightened emotions and source of struggles in their departments, which led to tense or uncomfortable working environments, even when everything was being done online. The position then provided a relief on these matters, as Interviewee Two recalls,

I have a much, you know, stronger relationship with the entire first year [graduate students] cohort of my program as a result of being in this position this year, and I really value that. Because, you know, I'm out of coursework and so I think otherwise, it's a lot harder to, you know, connect with them and that kind of thing would have been a lonelier year.

While the pandemic demanded significantly more from the position, and therefore, the gWPAs that occupied it, there were still some positive aspects like the sense of building community and being in contact with other graduate students.

3.2.4 Time Factor

Finally, a couple of interviewees saw the pandemic as a blurring factor for time, usually generating a chaotic timeline when they were trying to remember experiences pertaining to those years (anywhere between March 2020 and February 2022). For example, when chatting about when and how does the selection process for hiring the following year gWPAs in their institution, Interviewee Two hesitated to answer right away alleging that "Obviously, the pandemic timeline makes everything fuzzy in my head." In the case of Interviewee Six, had a different take on time in relation to both

COVID-19 and the position in general, they explained: “I think there is a pacing to being a [g]WPA, like a timing factor that we don’t always talk about”. They continued,

And so, I think there is very much like that idea of burnout. I think happens because we are constrained by time. The time of the semester, the time of your tenure in the role, time to graduation. Like I’ll, I’ll leave this role at the end at the spring. I’m also writing my dissertation right now; I’m doing research so there’s also time like a restriction on time that I can even devote to the WPA work. So, I think it’s an intangible thing that I think if someone can give you advice about like there are times, where there are, there are moments where time is going to slip from you, and there are moments where something’s going to take a lot of your time. And being able to recognize those and then deal with them differently in the future, or just even just recognizing “this thing got away from me”, “this thing took up more time than I thought” and that’s okay. I think just that aspect of like being flexible and generous, and being forgiving with yourself about the time that you’re putting into things...

Regardless of the way in which each participant addressed COVID-19, the general consensus shows that it was preponderantly a negative environment to work in, and it only highlighted the aspects of the position that inevitably became too difficult to cover up for such as unpaid labor or subordination matters.

3.3 “Give [that] mentorship in a way that wasn’t coming from a place of superiority”: Mentoring

Elizabeth Keller addresses Eble and Lewis Gaillet’s idea of mentoring in rhetoric and writing studies as “often exemplified in the anecdotes and stories of everyday life” (as cited in Keller, 2018, pp. 1-2). Usually considered as an add-on to teaching and research (Keller, 2018), mentoring occupies a lesser space in everyday duties for those in Academia. In this section, I look at the emergence of mentoring, in positive and negative terms, as a way for gWPAs to discuss their labor, but also their expectations. Mentoring emerged as two strongly marked roles, first, gWPAs who acted like mentors for other graduate students, and second, mentee expectations in relation to their direct supervisor in the writing program (who was not always their doctoral or master’s advisor).

3.3.1 Being a Mentor

Interestingly, the first noticeable aspect while analyzing their responses was that when they were reflecting on their experience of being mentors, it was usually associated with a positive perception. Interviewee One saw mentoring as one of the main motives to be in the position:

So, I think for me...It was a combination of wanting to mentor my fellow graduate students, because I knew that was part of the role, learning from our director, and kind of just seeing ‘okay, what actually goes into this program, and the decisions that are made and how we’re designing our curriculum, I wanted to see that, behind the scenes aspect.

Mentoring, in this case, is first and foremost a relationship. This idea of learning the ropes from the director (someone more experienced), alludes to the hierarchy, as having someone you can learn from establishes a relationship of apprenticeship. At the same time, it implies that there is a body of knowledge to be learned which attests to a bona fide status of the role. Claiming to mentor others is a particular type of claim, one that establishes a relation of mentor-mentee, that provides some status. In the case of the gWPAs, I argue that it provides a venue for two things. First, to showcase some of the value of the position in a more tangible expression: by helping others which relates to the idea of a sense of personal reward. And second, the use of the word “mentor” in these positions is a cultural expectation loaded with cultural value, and in time, can become the basis for exploitation.

This interviewee, like others, considered mentoring as a source of reward when remembering an experience with a particular instructor,

Uh, um, so I think when I say I don't have the solutions, I think when you find a moment that eases things for somebody or that helps them. Like “Oh, I could do that in my class!” and they get excited about it, I think those are the moments that are really rewarding, right? (Interviewee Six)

In that vignette, they are referring to a situation where they helped an instructor deal with the topic of their course being politically loaded and how to pivot it inside the classroom, especially taking into consideration student possible resistances. Reflecting on it, Interviewee Six commented,

And so, I think those moments are really rewarding, when you see an instructor like a light bulb go off and the creativity that they find, and why they're in a PhD

program is to feel creative. And they have that moment in their classroom, and they get really excited about it, those are definitely the rewarding moments.

Not everything regarding being a mentor is smooth sailing. While previously, I have mentioned that a number of gWPAs who had positive mentoring experiences associated it with feeling rewarded and as a motivation to remain in the position, at the same time, a few recognized that it was also one of the most time-consuming duties as a gWPA. It sometimes threw off balance the hours put into the position, versus research and personal life-work hours.

This incapability of keeping a healthy balance between work and personal life is often considered by the gWPAs themselves as a “character flaw” when it might actually be evidence of their exploitation. As Interviewee Four exemplifies it in their conversation, “I’m the type of person that likes to, and this is probably a ‘character flaw’ that I should work on, but wants to do everything for everybody else, before I like, sit down and actually get done what I need to do for myself.” This invites the question if the cause for this kind of self-perception is related to insufficient screening for this position beforehand, or that individuals are unconsciously encouraged to take blame on themselves rather than recognizing the structured nature of the stress, pressure, and time demands of the position. This in turn, allows the organization off the hook for changing the structure itself and transfers “the blame” to the individuals. It might seem that this could also be part of a larger cultural problem, and perhaps, gendered too.

3.3.2 Being a Mentee

While being a mentor has been framed as positive in general, there are some other factors that were highlighted as enhancers of a good mentoring experience. To quote Interviewee Six,

I think I'm very fortunate in the mentorship that I've had from the directors I've worked with; in that I never feel like I'm wearing a graduate student hat when I'm in meetings with them. Like, I'm very much, my opinion is valued, what I have to say is important and so, when I'm in those meetings it's kind of, like I'm wearing both hats at the same time, but they're both valued because it's like whatever administrative perspective I have, they're going to hear it and take it.

Interviewee Six poses the idea of wearing different hats (gWPA and graduate student) and all of them being validated and listened to as an example of feeling valued by the main Writing Program Director as both a gWPA and a graduate student (two hats).

However, it should be recognized that having two hats is always a basis for role conflict. For example, deciding which hat we will enact decisions under can bring with it consequences or misunderstandings. Or as Interviewee Six points to "I'm wearing both hats at the same time", which even when valued and taken into account, points to accumulated layers of responsibility and (sometimes) conflicted roles.

In stark contrast with Interviewee Six's experience, when considering oneself as a mentee, most interviewees associated their experiences with a rather negative perception, or what could also be considered a lack of explicit mentoring. A couple of them consider that higher positions in terms of hierarchy, such as directors and chairs, should consider

how they mentor people who step up in these positions, and if they do at all. Interviewee Two had extensive thoughts on the matter as they asserted,

I think we need to talk more about how we're mentoring new people coming into it [gWPA positions] and supporting them. But certainly, in this kind of role, there should be a really active element of mentorship from, you know, the faculty whoever's supervising this kind of piece. Because, like, I think you know sensibly why these positions are created should be to give people professional experience that otherwise they don't have, right? And so, there needs to be a piece around like, guiding and supporting somebody in, in what are new positions to them, and encountering new experiences that you're talking about where, you know, you can run into a lot of traps with them and stuff. And if there's not a person around that you can open [to] and reflect with and talk to, and who takes you seriously and takes your ideas seriously with that, that becomes a lot harder and you also I would imagine without, I have not done a lot of reading on this, but I would guess really reduced results in terms of learning from it as well, like if you're thinking of this as an education opportunity for graduate students, I think it is a reduced position if you're not getting that really like accurate reflection and mentorship opportunities through it.

In this passage, Interviewee Two addresses all the main points like the need for more mentorship from those in a higher hierarchical position, gWPAs' positions being a professional learning experience for graduate students, a chance to acquire administrative experience but how at the same time, how reduced and insignificant the position can be

made to feel due to not receiving proper mentorship, in addition to not have proper authority and power.

3.4 “To find like-minded colleagues across the country”:

Networking as a gWPA

The emergence of networking as a theme was closely related to that of mentoring. Much in the same way, this theme was expressed by each interviewee differently. Most of them mentioned that networking among the WPA sphere allowed them to meet other graduate students who had similar research interests; as Interviewee Three puts it, networking is “[a way to] getting one foot in the door and find like-minded colleagues in the US and beyond, who had the same interest in *nerdy stuff* and who will occupy similar work positions eventually.” As seen in this excerpt, for this gWPA, networking is a career-oriented strategy as they consider the future, but it is also utilized to build community in the present.

Interviewee Four refers to networking as a source of materials, techniques and practices to bring back to their classroom to implement in their teaching, “I wanted to learn. What other people were doing and how I could kind of bring that into my own classes, or even to, back to like, my university.” This interviewee also considered networking as a way to meet others more generally and expand their network, as a professional strategy while keeping the prospects of finding a job after graduation in mind. However, there is a fine line between involvement and too much of it, as they recall among laughter: “My dissertation chair likes to get on me for that a little, like, could we be a little less involved and do a little more writing?” This same interviewee

described it as a segway into acquiring a leadership position on the graduate arm of the main organization pertaining to their field of studies, WPA. They elaborated further as follows,

The first year I was part of the organization, I served as a co-chair for a committee. So, I wasn't really in a leadership position then, I was just trying to like, get my feet wet. And then the second year, I ran for vice chair, because I think it was the current chair then, um [that] reached out to me and she's like "I think you'd be great for this, like you should try running", and I was like "Okay", so I did and. Why? I don't know. But I did know I really wanted to get involved, it's just a big-time commitment. (Interviewee Four)

Similarly, to this idea of networking in order to acquire a position of leadership expressed in the passage above, Interviewee One thought of it as a way to gain recognition in the field while also volunteering. The main gist behind it was that being listed on certain organization's websites helped them put their name out there for others, especially relevant names in the WPA studies field. This interviewee recalls fondly an anecdote where a renowned scholar visited their campus to give a talk and recognized their name thanks to their affiliation to this professional association and their name being on the website.

One of the most nuanced perspectives encountered came from Interviewee Five as they commented on networking as an opportunity to navigate what they deemed the "dual position" of being learners with common research interests (such as WPA studies) but at the same time, scholars generating new knowledge. They explained,

We're supposed to be the one who's expounding knowledge, but to also be the learner and to also be kind of vulnerable in that sometimes, it's difficult, and so having a strong network of graduate students who are interested in the same things that you are, but are also in that dual position, that are in that, you know, "I'm just a learner so I'm still kind of unsure about some things", that kind of support is really helpful, I think. (Interviewee Five)

Networking for Interviewee Five has to do with the complex task of being a graduate student, a gWPA but also a human at the same time in the way that we are still learners and having a safety net comprised of colleagues that offer camaraderie and solidarity if and when we make mistakes.

In this approach, networking for gWPAs is utilized to build community and generate support groups that one can reach out to while in the position, but more broadly, to access while on their academic journey. This somehow unveils the nature of this position, and the intermittent vulnerability that students in them feel. It seems that in order to provide for others, gWPAs need some extra support for themselves, after all, one cannot pour out of an empty cup.

While Interviewee Five considers the gWPA as a person in dual position, I consider that maybe it is not just a duality but rather, being a gWPA is a multidimensional position where we provide theoretical, technical, and emotional support to those around us. This idea is developed further in the next chapter.

3.5 "It's a lot of invisible labor": Labor

As explained in the first chapter of this dissertation, labor has been a widely discussed conversation topic when it comes to graduate students in general for the past

few decades, but this only increases exponentially when it pertains to gWPAs. Going into this project, I thought I had an understanding of the kind of labor that graduate students involved in these kinds of administrative positions perform. However, it was not until I talked to my interviewees and went through the coding process that I truly understood the different dimensions of this work and started to decode how it affected them. Considering labor as a category in general seemed like an approach that would not allow me to display the rich complexity of this theme.

When I termed this theme “labor,” I was first and foremost considering the actual work that gWPAs do in the position. However, this is not all there is when thinking about this population and their duties, labor in this case is also subordinated and exploited. According to Mumby and Kuhn, “Organizations are not objective structures but rather, exist as a result of the collective and coordinated communication processes of its members” (2019, p. 51). As portrayed above, sometimes the high informality of the gWPA position, its process application, screening and selection has made the Writing Program (or the Writing Center) a subunit with its own particularities and challenges inside the umbrella organization of the University as a whole. But organizations are also political sites of power “where meanings do not simply arise spontaneously but are shaped by the various actors and stakeholder interests” (Mumby & Kuhn, 2019, p. 51). Power, in the case of organizations is considered “as the dynamic processes by which various stakeholders struggle to secure and maintain their interests in particular contexts” (Mumby & Kuhn, 2019, pp. 51-52). In the case of my interviewees, it seemed that many times, learning about the position, or even applying to it, had to do with knowing someone who held it previously. Or like in my case, having my advisor (someone in a

higher power position than me) advocate for my work in order to be granted the position for the third time based on my previous experience and performance.

Throughout my interviewees' vignettes, I have so far tried to showcase the paradox of gWPAs being such a necessary position but at the same time, having little to no power and authority. As Interviewee Five considered it, gWPAs enact a lot of what they termed invisible labor, "but the thing is that, like, [when] that labor becomes visible, and everybody's like 'oh shoot!'" The limits to their power and authority are not exclusive to their decision-making abilities in the day-to-day work environment but reflect on their professional and career opportunities as well. Specifically, gWPAs do not have a formal professional ladder, and many times, they lack proper training and mentoring.

In addition, some interviewees manifested that being in the middle, acting as the "go between" or "middle person" (Interviewees Six & Four) with the Director of the program and the rest of the graduate students affected their authority, and positionality as gWPAs in the program. Interviewee Four elaborated a little on the idea when they recalled,

Probably, my least favorite part of that position was feeling like...I was always having to serve as like this sort of intermediary person, and I think often times, and I think part of this, is the nature of the position but, I was often getting complaints from each side.

Similarly, Interview Six reflected on this and described it as "I then become the person they are airing all the grievances to...Like any kind of frustration they have [graduate teaching instructors] with the program, I end up hearing about it". What stood

out regarding this passage is that this same interviewee had manifested previously in the interview that they somewhat felt stuck in the middle but at the same time, but in here, it can be interpreted that being the receiver of grievances and complaints somewhat weighs on them. This is part of what I set out to look into when I refer to emotional labor, which sometimes seems to not be recognized by them, therefore, not addressed while in the position.

While labor was described with many different qualifiers “invisible” (Interviewee Five), “emotional” and “extra” (Interviewee Six) among others, the conversations with the interviewees made it clear that the combination of administrative and emotional labor are at the forefront of writing program administration, where there is a “centrality and necessity of emotion and emotion work” while at the same time we encounter “double binds and cost often embedded in workplace organizations” (Holt et al., 2003, p. 151). In what follows, I elaborate on these two most recurrent types of work mentioned throughout the interviews: Administrative and emotional.

3.5.1 Administrative

One of my main interests when I set out to converse with other gWPAs was to figure out exactly what this position’s actual tasks were in different institutions, since as shown above, there is no one list that everyone follows. While my findings were extremely diverse as shown in the introduction to this chapter, there is one commonality to these positions: they are usually arbitrarily assigned duties that are beyond their level of authority, in such a way that it makes the position seem very informal as there are no clear criteria for hiring protocols, applicant qualifications or compensation. The question that concerns this section is, what administrative responsibilities does a gWPA have?

Generally, gWPAs assist the director or coordinator of their program in tasks that are needed to ensure the proper functioning of it. However, some organizations included office aides or supervisors in order to provide help with administrative tasks such as scheduling of all graduate students' courses, and such. This was the case in most of the institutions but having this person did not always exempt the gWPA from these kind responsibilities.

Interviewees cited answering emails and sitting in meetings as the two most consuming administrative duties, which were common among them all. However, some brought up far more complex duties such as scheduling courses for instructors in the department, managing assessment and working on placement testing for undergraduate students. Some of these were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, creating a higher workload. But much in the same way as in other jobs, the more complex duties and responsibilities only pointed to the parts of the program that were already stretched too thin.

Many of the interviewees were never provided with a contract amendment or any type of document that included their title and/or was signed by a departmental authority. Therefore, it seems appropriate to assume that this position falls under their regular yearly appointment as a graduate teaching instructor. Closely entangled with the issue of not having a clear title to their position is the fact that there is also no official documentation, in most cases, appointing them as such, but also detailing their duties and responsibilities. As Interviewee Two narrates,

It is like, it is in many ways a more informal, really, especially, like again in my context of, like it is unpaid and there is kind of like there was never like a contract

signed around that, it is more like “What do you want to do right now, what do you, what are you doing with this”.

Not having a basic guide on what their duties are, no incentive (such as a course release) and no extra economic incentive, then it becomes an issue of labor solidarity because the collective interests of this position cannot be represented in contract language or negotiations. This high informality and individuation doom the gWPA position to arbitrary arrangements like the one on the last example where it was more a question about what they wanted to do in the position, and less of a matter of what the program needs to work. It seems as if each gWPA finds the positions reconfigured around the immediate demands and their own capacities. This, in turn, can become a recipe for favoritism, bias, patronage, and arbitrariness to gWPAs.

These kinds of situations send the gWPA into a doubly subordinated position: while they are assigned several responsibilities (sometimes informally), they do not get assigned official authority or power regarding this work. This fosters the feeling of a reduced nature of the role that Interviewee Two summarizes in one feeling: Frustration. They responded, “I was frustrated just by like, how kind of reduced the role felt...I did not do a ton in the position last year compared to this one”.

As mentioned before, gWPAs encounter “double binds and cost often embedded in workplace organizations” (Holt et al., 2003, p. 151), the first one of this being the burden of these administrative tasks without any clear nor established authority. For example, Interviewee Four narrates an anecdote where they were caught in the middle after voicing a concern that fell on deaf ears. They commented,

So, again, I, part of my responsibility was being part of like, the graduate student like kind of practicum education course, so the way that they did it was...A month over the summer? I didn't take it, so I don't know how long it was because if you came in with teaching experience, when I was coming in, you didn't have to take it, it's required now. Gotta love it when they stick it to the new people... Um, so they did they split it up, so it was like, learning how to teach composition and kind of like writing pedagogy, and then it was Writing Center stuff so there were two separate classes. So, I was in the one that had to do with writing Center stuff because I was going to be the assistant director [of the Writing Center], that following semester, and I had theoretically, I had like, no say in what got taught on the course because it wasn't my course, I wasn't the instructor of record...

But the Writing Center Director did like, reach out and was like "Oh, if you feel like we should be doing any differently readings and stuff, let me know" and after she shared [it] with me, like, all the things that were planning to teach in the course, there's not a whole lot of Writing Center theory in there... This person was not a Writing Center person? Um, which is fine, but I really thought that the students would benefit from actual like reading, Writing Center theory and things like that. There was some, but I didn't think there was a whole lot. And so, I kind of voiced my concerns and I felt like they kind of went on deaf ears. And the response that we got from the students who took the course was that there was not enough like theory and stuff. So, which in one sense made me feel good because I had accurately identified the problem and actually, provided a solution to the

problem, though again, fell on deaf ears, but we were getting pushback from the students...

Up until now, Interviewee Four talks about a situation where they identified the issue of the lack theory on a syllabus and voiced their concerns to the corresponding people, but they were not listened to. In addition, the problem they had identified came up in student's evaluation comments after taking the course that said syllabus belonged to.

Therefore, while there was indeed an issue, it made the gWPA feel good because they were able to identify the problem of theory lacking on a syllabus, but also, disappointed that these concerns were not considered and showed up on evaluations comments. A good example of the double binds gWPAs operate under. But they continue,

So, then, the director was kind of talking to the, like director above, I would say the Writing Center so like the, like the WPA type of person was like talking to me, and was like "is this the stuff that was really like being taught in the course and stuff?" and I was like "yeah, it was like I advocated for teaching x,y, and z but didn't happen". So that was really difficult in that again, I kind of felt like I was an intermediary, and I also felt sort of like I was being asked to provide information about the course and it almost felt like I was going over like my supervisor's head, which will felt like a really weird position to be in and... At [the institution] there's almost a little rub...between like the writing Center and the Rhet-Comp program...So I was like almost, I was like "Do I side with like, Writing Center administrator? and, like all the things that they're trying to do or do I stay with my department? Like I don't know where to be here." Um, so yeah,

again just being in that like intermediary role, is I think, is probably one of the hardest things about admin positions because it's like you feel like you have to pick a side, but like either side that you pick somehow feels wrong or it feels like for lack of a better word, icky in some sort of way, you feel like you're just dishonoring somebody.

Administrative tasks often impinge on larger structures that have ramifications and conflicting interests, which leads Interviewee Four to the impression that one has to “pick a side”, and no matter what you decide on, you always feel like you are dishonoring the other one.

Moreover, this is complicated further due to the fact that gWPAs are also regular graduate students, therefore, there is more extent for them than just picking one side over the other, but the idea that aligning with the Writing Program might create tensions with the department. This in turn, can have a toll on other areas like mental health, relationships with others in the program like superior and fellow graduate students and general wellbeing.

Interviewee Six exposed a certain similar dynamic in their work environment with their fellow graduate students. The interviewee explains, “I then become the person where they're [graduate teaching instructors] airing all the grievances to” but at the same time, “the other side of that too, is the more time I've spent in a WPA role, the more I understand the restrictions that are our director is in and so when they [GTIs] complain about something I also kind of defend the director and [explain] ‘Here's why this is the way that it is’.” Interviewee Six voices three different ideas converging here: the impression of side-choosing, divided loyalty, and overlapping and competing interests.

Again, this gWPA explained that this is often a hard position to be in, and that in addition to all the administrative work it entailed, it also was a lot of emotional labor.

The type of emotional labor and how it intersects with administrative labor intersect in this case entails a combination of explaining why things are the way they are (in an administrative way), while dealing with emotional implications. Additionally, the idea of “picking sides” or loyalty seems to intersect with the idea of gWPAs wearing multiple hats.

Despite it being critical for writing programs and writing centers to function, administrative work continues to be disregarded as important work which could be a direct correlation with the lack of official recognition for the work and the nonexistent authority vested in the gWPA. Once again, the informality and arbitrariness of the position combined with the downplaying of its labor shines a light on the inequality of opportunities, and lack of education these graduates can acquire in this labor category. This can in turn, impact gWPAs wellbeing and consequently, the emotional labor side of the matter should be explored.

3.5.2 Emotional

But administrative tasks are not the full extent of it; the second tie that binds gWPAs has to do with what the emotional labor costs them professionally, organizationally, and even personally. As defined in the first chapter, emotional labor refers to “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). Recognizing this kind of labor has proven rather hard, especially in academia, where many times this kind of labor is not as valued as what is deemed scholarly or academic work (Horner, 2007).

I return then to a quote from Interviewee Six's conversation, where they made an interesting connection with the pacing of being in the position to a particular kind of work-stress: burnout. They explained,

I think there is a pacing to being a [g]WPA like a timing factor that we don't always talk about. Like I said before there are immediate problems that don't have an immediate solution, and that can really drain you...And so I think there is very much like that idea of burnout. I think it happens because we are constrained by time. The time of the semester, the time of your tenure in the role, time to graduation.

Timing seems to be of the essence in the position, in relation to what can actually be accomplished in the limited realm where the position exists currently. This interviewee had discussed issues like graduate teaching instructors complaining to them about inconsistencies on their training or excessive teaching loads and feeling like sinking (while trying to balance teaching and being a graduate student at the same time). By recognizing that there is only so much the gWPA can do in their term, it seems this interviewee used a strategy of avoidance or deflection to keep burnout at bay.

While some aspects are particular to their status as graduate students, the gendered nature of emotional labor correlates with Holt et al. (2003) findings in study that researched senior WPAs. Emotional labor then,

reveals relational and gendered aspects of writing program administration that, while vital to accomplishment of the job, have generally been deemed unworthy of recognition and reward—women's work, invisible work, or at least *not*

intellectual work—never mind how intellectually demanding, time-consuming and draining it might be. (p. 157)

The study also points to the bifurcation of the mind/body duality given that the primacy of the intellect in academe makes emotion displays suspect as irrational or not neutral, sometimes even, not professional. According to Holt et al. (2003) “Most WPAs embrace a positive notion of emotion work in their roles of teaching writing and training graduate teaching associates” (p. 152); however, this positive notion towards emotion work is not always the case when we put the focus on gWPAs. While conversing with my interviewees, it became clear that the job requires that sometimes we handle our feelings and those of others in the program, especially in distressing times such as the pandemic proved to be, in order to keep “smooth flying” or in our case, the writing program or writing center operating smoothly.

On this matter and particularly in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, I found it interesting that only one interviewee made a direct allusion to it, while the others addressed it mostly indirectly. This does not mean that the rest experienced it less. When asked if being in the gWPA position had affected them in any way or had an effect on their relationship with the other graduate students, Interviewee Six recalled,

There already is an emotional labor to just doing the work for everybody. And so, I think when we meet in our mentoring space, it becomes a space to just talk about that, like you’re saying, you feel like you end up becoming a therapist, and I don’t think I end up being a therapist. I think it just ends up being a space to talk and be really honest, and I don’t feel any pressure to fix that or give an answer or solution because I can’t. I’m one person, there’s nothing I can do. I can be a

friend; I can be a generous space for people to have those feelings. And I can sympathize with it and say like ‘yeah, I know that sucks I feel it too’.

The idea that part of the job is creating these commiserating spaces where students can “have feelings” while in addition admitting their lack of power and authority to change the situations that cause this, is a clear example of what emotional labor as a gWPA is. An interesting observation on the language utilized by the interviewee is the way they expressed “I can be a space”. Therefore, space here isn’t the conference room; it is the person. In other words, creating a space does not mean setting up a meeting time and letting graduate students talk to each other aimlessly. It is a much more intimate and embodied practice, that also means that the gWPA cannot walk away from it. gWPAs then feel like they have to choose sides, but some of them might also feel like they can be a space for others, where emotional labor is the main type of labor performed and can become a heavy weight to bear if proper boundaries are not enforced.

Once again, this is not an explicit requirement outlined in the list of qualifications to obtain the position; therefore, should it really be the responsibility of the gWPA? Many times, I argue that these spaces emerge organically and once they are set, the gWPA is the facilitator. gWPAs then become trapped into being a space for others, where students can be open on their struggles and provide support to one another. Is it fair then that there is an implicit task that emerges and expands depending on the gWPA in the position? Emotional labor manifests in different levels of intensity and multiple situations. When asked about experiences that had made them frustrated in their position, Interviewee Five recalls an experience of dissenting views between them and their direct superior,

So, for instance, I can think of last semester [when] someone emailed me and the coordinator, right? So, this was a message to both of us saying “Hey, I have this difficult situation with a student”, you know, “what should I do about this situation” and that, and I knew how the coordinator would probably respond, and that wasn’t necessarily going to be the same way that I would respond. And so, just kind of emailing that student privately like not so, no, not keeping in the CC loop like “Hey, I know that the coordinator is probably going to say something a little bit different, or might be a little bit more kind of by the books, but here’s my opinion on how you might handle the situation”, right? So sometimes I think that’s...that can be a little bit frustrating, when we have to make decisions of “well, what’s best for the student versus what’s following kind of the university or the or the department guidelines”.

In this case, the gWPA tried to keep the status quo between them and the coordinator, addressing the student’s distress by identifying with the situation. While at the same time, providing the instructor with their own feedback that followed guidelines focused more on the situation rather than the institutional line. Dissenting views between gWPAs and their direct supervisors seemed to be a recurrent situation among the interviewees. While these dissenting views did not trigger direct conflicts often, these situations did ask emotional labor to be performed from the gWPAs in order to deal with the situation at hand to comply with their supervisor, even when they disagreed with the final answer. Thus, having more than one hat creates a base for conflict, where we see gWPAs offering solutions to graduate teaching assistants and instructors, but also having to think about what their supervisor would think and say, and to not disobey their authority. Helping

others solve situations while also maintaining the program's team stability entailed anticipating responses from their directors and addressing situations from their points of view while keeping the former in sight.

Interpersonal relationships and also the porous boundary between personal and professional relationships were among those things that interviewees wish they would have known before taking on the gWPA position. Interviewee One recalled,

I wish, you know, I think the other thing is probably the like interpersonal emotional like collaborative parts of this, that like, I worked with a wonderful team of people and I, you know, see all of them, as friends and all that, but there were, you know, really messy meetings and blow ups and stuff and like hurtful things that we all said to each other and moments that, you know...I think, each of us probably has a moment of time that we regret, or something like that, so how much the interpersonal connection and the emotional side of it can, you know, be a really important factor in how the work is done, and not in a bad way all the time, you know? If you work with people, and you work well with them, you...beautiful things can come so, yeah, I guess that's what I would say.

In this case, the interviewee recognizes the power that interpersonal connections and emotion at work can have an impact on the way labor is performed, both positively (creating things together, collaborating) and negatively (impacting relationships and trying to keep emotions at bay when dealing with situations regarding peers or personal ones). But part of being an academic flight attendant, as I have termed gWPAs before, is ensuring everything runs smoothly, deploying emotions, and enacting emotional performances, when necessary, even when one's own emotions might be in the way.

3.6 “Boundaries! That’s the word!”: Boundaries

Much like Interviewee Five, I have considered that some of the aspects I noted as negative about the position, were actually related to personal character flaws. On the one hand, a lot of these “character flaws” matters have to do with the way in which the position is set up and the contradictions/double binds that disallow autonomy. On the other hand, gWPAs are encouraged to take on the job as a vocation so that they give more than they should because of motivation, passion, ethics, etc. So not necessarily a personal characteristic but something that is encouraged by the position itself.

This issue of “character flaws” makes it about what is wrong with the person themselves, when instead it seems that the position involves considerable pressure to exceed the boundaries of the job itself, and different people manage that pressure differently. For example, the ability to set boundaries between work, personal and academic life is one of those that varies from person to person. By no means do I intend to say that it takes certain kinds of personal traits to become a gWPA, however, there seems to be a pattern in the interviews that leads me to believe that there are really two kinds of gWPAs: those who have firm boundaries and those who do not.

When I was chatting with Interviewee Five about how being a gWPA might affect the relationship with their peers, I mentioned having a problem with boundaries in my position, especially since I was friends with so many of the other graduate students. Interviewee Five perked up a little bit and said, “To a certain extent, yes, my problem is that I have no boundaries!” and proceeded to laugh loudly. We both did. However, they also made sure to explain how their program requested them to keep track of their work hours and tasks “for your [their own, gWPA] own kind of labor inequity” (Interviewee

Five). While this might seem like a gesture towards labor equity for gWPAs to keep control, it can also be related to labor exploitation. If while keeping track of their hours, there is still some work to do, most gWPAs will lean towards completing the work while out of time, which then becomes unpaid labor. This is another situation where the differences across the board affect gWPAs differently.

On the same vein, when Interviewee Four and I were discussing managing being a gWPA, doing research, and teaching, by the end of their response they blurted out a phrase that seemed so apt I made it the title of this subsection, “Boundaries! That’s the word! That’s what I mean” while laughing. I laughed too and agreed with them. Somehow, I believe this speaks a little to the inability of some of us to prioritize ourselves and our work. But, why? What is so noble about this position that some of the students that occupy it stop prioritizing their work and studies in order to pour themselves into being a gWPA? This seems to hint at the arbitrary configuration and marginalization of the position, and how each of them tries to pivot towards the “center,” meaning, making their work seen, tangible and relevant. Although as I have demonstrated before, gWPAs are a foundational component of the Writing Program, there seems to be little attention paid to how to make this position relevant enough to be less of a subordinate position and more into an egalitarian contributor. Maybe it is not about having the gWPA and the WPA be equals, but about making the scope of the position clear and appropriate to a graduate student or apprentice-type role. In other words, how do we choose, educate, and allow graduate students to maintain these positions and in them so they are valued, recognized but not exploited.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, I encountered Interviewees Two and Six, who expressed similar perspectives but still managed to address boundaries differently. For Number Two, boundaries had to do with the “lines” between other graduates and themselves, “I mean, there’s not a lot of blurring lines here because, like, I’m not, I’m not anybody’s manager, like, I’m not supervising anybody”. Therefore, enforcing boundaries was a way to demonstrate how they saw their labor and their positionality in the program. This gWPA seems to be making a comment on their authority (or lack thereof), but this begs the question, if you are mentoring, training, and supporting new incoming graduate teaching instructors, are you not in some way supervising them? It might seem easy to think that gWPAs are supervising the rest of their fellow graduate students since boundaries boundaries being blurred on all sides, as discussed above. Some of this is related to the way in how the gWPAs frame their own authority: having enough but not having too much. On the one hand, there is a temptation to undermine, but perhaps there is also the temptation to overinflate. Perhaps not from a place of formal authority, but with an informal acknowledgement of authority and an educational standpoint. Therefore, this seems to be a way that gWPAs are encouraged to undermine their own authority so as not to overstep the distinctions of hierarchy (like the Director) and the collegiality with the other graduate students.

Interestingly, Interviewee Six had a different take on boundaries as they recalled, I am, I think, I very much am somebody who can recognize the boundaries and limits, and I think that also makes...Uh...WPAs often talk about burnout, right? Yeah, and I think recognizing boundaries helps with that burnout...

For this interviewee, boundaries had to do with two main factors: avoiding burnout and treating the position for what it is: a job. Regarding this, they stated “I see myself first as a colleague and it’s very much a work environment, so I think that’s also maybe, where I differ in terms of setting boundaries is, this is my job and I treat it like a professional environment”. In this case, the gWPA comments on how limiting the work volume and personal investment in the position is a strategy for avoiding possible burnout but to create clear margins where the professional and the personal do not merge.

After comparing these two takes on boundaries I started thinking about the implications that come with them. On the one hand, I considered that it might be the case that a lack of boundaries could be considered as unprofessional, while at the same time, it could foster unhealthy working expectations for others around us. However, academics tend to be often caricatured for overrunning work/life boundaries, which is something that the profession not only encourages but implicitly condones, and even demands. This can be seen in illustrations known by many scholars; such is the case for the comics created by Dr. Jorge Cham, *PhD Comics*, which is a comic about life (or the lack thereof) in academia. Examples of life-work imbalance can be seen in some particular examples, like the strip “Piled Higher and Deeper (PhD)”.

On the other hand, I could not help but wonder if the fact that some gWPAs were able to set such firm boundaries, could be caused by the reduced nature of the position? In other words, is knowing that they do not have the appropriate levels of authority to make an impact in the position the cause of their setting firm boundaries to avoid burnout? Or does it simply mean that these people can prioritize oneself as opposite to their work? And prioritizing their subject position of being a graduate student first, and a

gWPA second. For this section, “reduced” (utilized by my interviewees in our conversations) alludes to insignificant, or unimportant. Perhaps, the difference relies on some gWPAs “working to rule” (meaning, doing exactly what is stated in their list of duties, no more, no less; if they have one) and others understanding this job as a calling, or a vocation.

Regardless, the matter of boundaries seems relevant to the nature of being a gWPA, as the nature of the position itself fosters the different ways that boundaries come into play. Yet again, more so than being a personal character flaw, the lack of boundaries seems to exhibit another feature of neoliberal capitalism where the absence of boundaries, being online and on call at all times seem to be a necessity. But it is not. There seems to be a little perverse pride that can creep into the discourse. For example, pride in meeting ridiculous demands, like being available all day, every day. After all, we are gWPAs, not firefighters. My research in some way strives to find where those boundaries are set and what do they imply. Chapter four will address the implications of these issues in order to promote practices that foster healthier and more professional working environments around the position.

3.7 “I hope someday”: Hope

In Spanish we have a saying: “*La esperanza es lo ultimo que se pierde*”, which roughly translates to hope is the last thing one can lose. While slightly melancholic, I introduce here the sentiment as my last theme pertains to the idea of hope. This is yet another theme that emerged without being expected but traversed most of my interviews in some capacity.

Interviewees used hope to express an affective stance, but that was not the only way in which it showed up in the context of my project. Some expressed hope for changes in the position itself to redress some of the most problematic aspects. For example, Interviewee One hoped that the exploitation of gWPA labor, in addition to the lack of institutional support —“it’s one of those things I hope someday that the field can address”. While some hoped for change in the position, as Interviewee One, others merely hoped about their future organizational positions after graduation. When asked about what they wish could change about gWPAs, Interviewee Two reflected for a second and then said,

And so, I think doing more training around feeling a sense of responsibility towards supporting the people who are coming into it, is really going to help make the decision more rewarding and makes someone feel more prepped to be able to do that.

When asked about how holding the gWPA position might have affected their relation to the other graduate teaching assistants in their programs during their term, Interviewee Three hoped for a somewhat smaller thing, like having done the heavy lifting of fleshing out the position, its duties, and affordances for their successor to step in. They stated,

So, I don’t feel like I’m it really affects my relationship with other graduate students, um, I think that people, because my position was so new, when I first held it that people perhaps see that it’s like kind of becoming more of a fully fleshed out position and what it, what holding this position could afford, at least I hope so.

Something that became clear and emerged with hope, was the idea of care, gWPAs carry on their speech a hint of naivete and vulnerability when they expressed which things they hope change, but at the same time, a passivity when it comes to enacting that change. These positions are infused with responsibilities but mostly devoid of authority and/or power. It is almost as if complying with this subservient nature of the position prolongs the idea of passive hoping for a better position after graduate school, for adding a relevant line to their CV, to acquire administrative experience. But never advancing in their own term as a gWPA, it seems as if everything “better” will happen once they are done with the position, never at the same time, there is no action in order to change or transform the position, but just a passive following the lead of those in higher hierarchical positions. This lack of action then begs the question if becoming a gWPA changes the way that graduate students see themselves: do they see the action of holding this position as a self-sacrifice where being a gWPA implies being a martyr in order to reach a better place, a better position afterwards? Or do gWPAs respond passively by nature to the way the position has been held and enacted in the past? Hope is many times associated with a vague promise of a change of status and increased reward.

“Hope” then signals a realization that the promise of this position cannot be realized given the way the position is set up and experienced currently. Is hope undermining gWPAs agency? In other words, is their lack of initiative for change in the position a signal of passive hoping instead? As most of the expressions of it in the interviews were associated with uncertainty and tentativeness, this seems to be the case. However, hope can also be portrayed as a double-edged sword since change can start with hope and stem from figuring out the things we hope for.

I decided to close this chapter considering hope since it encapsulates a lot of the matters already discussed. We see questions of agency resurface, as the gWPA position may deliver what it promises, or it may not. It brings up questions of exploitation and labor, while at the same time alluding to the devaluing of the work, the lack of institutional support and other organizational issues. Hope emerged as both content and orientation, while some thought about it in a career orientated way, for others it was a statement in itself. Hope introduces uncertainty and tentativeness, always the possibility of getting a better paid job after graduation, receiving more institutional support (someday), not needing an extra year of funding, occupying a more formal position. All of these are just a few examples of things that gWPAs hope for but are never secured. Hope seems to be the code where all the challenges of being a gWPA inhabit, and a starting point from where suggestions or solutions can start to be discussed.

After addressing the themes that emerged from my conversations, in the next chapter I set up to address their larger implications. While the University as we know it is changing in the context of neoliberalism, emergent roles such as gWPAs are becoming increasingly more important. But with the emergence of new roles comes the need for new rules and regulations to protect those in subservient positions. In chapter four, I analyze my findings in order to compile a set of suggestions that can be offered to make sure that future gWPAs have a more equitable and humane work environment to flourish on. As the Spanish saying goes, like my interviewees, I too have not lost hope for a better future for gWPAs.

4 Larger Implications

This chapter discusses the larger implications in relation to the themes identified from my conversations with the gWPAs. I start by providing some context regarding the University as the institution where the themes emerged, but also as a place of change and transformation, particularly since during the past few decades “universities and colleges in the United States have adopted neoliberal practices that are manifest in the management of the academic profession” (Levin et al., 2020, p. 22). The changes impelled by the adoption of neoliberal management practices and values throughout higher education have generated some concerns which I will address as the context for my project regarding the gWPAs. I outline and analyze the critical issues that affect gWPAs while they occupy the position. These issues entail informality and arbitrariness, exploitation, and the feminization of the position. The chapter then concludes with suggestions for future pathways for moving forward towards an improvement of the gWPA role.

4.1 Neoliberalism and Education

4.1.1 Establishing the Context

The topic of the dissolution of the elitist academy and the contemporary crises besetting the University as the institution we know has been studied in depth elsewhere (Giroux, 2002; Mintz, 2021). Universities have in the past decades adopted neoliberal practices “that are manifest in the management of the academic profession, in the actions of both academic managers and faculty” (Levin et al., 2020, p. 1). According to Levin et al.,

university values, and what we refer to as academic logic, are to a large extent antithetical to neoliberalism and managerialism; [and this logic] is incompatible with the traditions of faculty autonomy and faculty governance. (2020, p. 1)

Particularly after major historical events such as the U.S recession or the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, among more contemporary ones, colleges and universities have struggled financially (Giroux, 2002, p. 577). Academic values and logics that are antithetical to the neoliberal practices and managerial mindsets adopted by contemporary universities have tried to fight the corporatization of the university. Regarding the corporatization of the university, James Sledd has described it as “the most tyrannical form of big government” (2000, p. 25), certainly contrary to the lauded autonomy of the professoriate.

Although academic values seem to oppose the neoliberal practices incorporated to higher education and turn the university in a highly antithetical space, those in the university function, rationalize and maintain internally contradictory academic professional identities which compel them to both reproduce and resist neoliberal managerialism:

academics construct understandings of themselves as both resisters of and contributors to neoliberalism, as well as victims and promoters, including what is termed managerialism. (as cited in, Levin et al., 2020, p. 1)

That is, academics both participate in and counteract neoliberal and managerial practices (Levin et al., 2020, p. 1). For example, while they conform to more administrative micromanagement, faculty often rail against the dictates of managerialism in the classroom and in publications.

Summarily, we are left with subjects that engage and resist these managerial practices at the same time, leading to problematic understandings of both their position but also, their labor in the organization.

While true for universities in general, this contradiction is also not new to Composition Studies or to Writing Program Administration. In *The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies*, Donna Strickland explains that administration and business logic have always been present in these fields of study (Johnson, 2012, p. 143). Even so, managerialism as a prevailing ideology has infiltrated everyday life and unlike prior forms of management, it does not respect life/work boundaries and imposes disciplinary measures across the bureaucratic hierarchy. Strickland argues that the configuration of contemporary writing programs “are analogous to the configurations of the corporate workplace; that divisions of labor emerged, as they emerged in corporations, to make work more efficient” (2011, p. 24).

4.1.2 A Case for Comparison: Part-Time Faculty and gWPAs

It is hard to think about organizations such as universities as sites of exploitation, given that they have been held to work towards the generation and distribution of new knowledge have commonly appreciated collegiality and have served as centers of social mobility, (Levin et al., 2020, p. 66). Nevertheless, according to Levin et al. (2020), “universities in the United States can be accused of the use of exploitative practices against part-time faculty (Bousquet, 2008; Cross & Goldenberg, 2009)” (2020, p. 66). While neoliberal managerialism has an impact on all faculty and staff, these authors put the focus on Non-Tenure Track (NTT) faculty, both part and full time. This relates to what the phenomenon of the adjunctification of academia, which is usually associated

with causes such as “instructional budget reductions..., the erosion of tenure and other job benefits, the failure of colleges and universities to keep pace with growing student enrollments, and even the disruptive economic effects of the ‘great recession’ that began in 2008” (Magness, 2016, p. 50). By excessively employing adjunct faculty, particularly in for-profit, higher education institutions in combination with the fast growth of the for-profit sector that began at the end of the twentieth century, there has been an unparalleled growth in adjunct positions available (Magness, 2016, p. 50).

I argue then there are similarities between the case of part-time faculty (preponderantly, adjuncts) and gWPAs. Their shared vulnerabilities to exploitation were recognized by some of my participants. For example, during our conversations, Interviewee One expressed hope for changes in the position itself and made an allusion to adjunct faculty. In regard to some of the most problematic aspects of graduate student exploitation, they stated,

And so, I, you know, it’s like, it’s one of those things I hope someday that the field can address. I think that we’ve moved forward a lot thinking about contingent faculty and labor issues that have to do with that. But I would love to see more attention paid toward graduate student exploitation as well, and not to say that people haven’t done that, they have just, you know, I think there could be more done.

Recently, attention has been paid to the detriments of adjuncting, part-time faculty and contingent faculty. In what follows, I draw parallels between remuneration, work circumstances and job security of gWPAs and adjunct, while sometimes mentioning part

time faculty (for the purpose of my dissertation, these terms are utilized in similar fashion).

First, to return to the correspondences I pointed out earlier between adjunct faculty and gWPAs, it is the case that part-time faculty are paid less (as opposed to full-time faculty) under the premise that they are only hired to teach, while being exempt from research and service duties (Levin et al., 2020, p. 67). Often paid hourly, part-time faculty are typically not paid to “conduct office hours, grade student work, prepare syllabi, meet with other faculty who teach similar classes, or respond to e-mails or texts from students (CAW, 2012)” although, the institutions “do expect them to carry out these activities” (Levin et al., 2020, p. 67). Similarly, the type of support that gWPAs receive, primarily under their main appointment as graduate students, varies depending on the institution. While some are paid hourly (and the gWPA position falls under the same contract), others (such as my case) are under stipends that we earn through teaching, in most cases, First-Year Composition. Also, “part-time faculty express positive emotions about their work”(Levin et al., 2020, p. 68), and they get paid in “personal satisfaction with their work” instead of or in addition to an adequate payment (as cited in, Levin et al., 2020, p. 68). Similarly, the gWPAs I interviewed talked about the personal rewards of their work. But personal satisfaction does not pay bills or student loans.

However, poor or null economic compensation is but one part of the issue. As Levin et al. (2020) continue, “less than ideal work circumstances are a constant in part-time faculty members’ experiences” (p. 68). While resources needed to do their work are scarce, in addition “they face limited support from their colleagues and staff; and, they receive limited or no recognition for the quality of their work (Meixner et al., 2010)”

(Levin et al., 2020, pp. 68-69). Just as part-time faculty struggle with support, gWPAs are questioned about their authority, but in the same vein, they are often not recognized for their quality, and in their particular case, quantity of their work.

Finally, regarding job insecurity, part-time workers and gWPA suffer from it, but in different capacities. While adjuncts face little to no job security due to “term-by-term appointments” (Levin et al., 2020, p. 70), gWPAs are usually in their position to acquire experience and a line in their CV that will allow them to step into a full-time WPA faculty position. There is no expectation of ongoing employment in the gWPAs, as it will end after their term is concluded; it is a position designed to be temporary and have an end date. In the case of gWPAs, there is (at least, a promise of) a change of status, while part-time faculty seem to be trapped in the same cycle. Regardless, both demographics are affected by uncertainty regarding their future that prevents them from flourishing.

Levin et al. (2020) observe that exploitation too follows a recipe: “Limited job security, austere organizational resources, a high degree of work engagement (López Damián, 2017), and a higher than deserved degree of organizational loyalty constitute the ideal recipe for the exploitation of part-time faculty” (p. 71). The authors understand work engagement to be “their appreciation for their job, positive attitudes toward their professional activities, and their own perception of significance of their work at a given university” which becomes a motivator to “perform their job regardless of organizational limitations and obstacles (López Damián, 2017)” (Levin et al., 2020, p. 71). I argue that gWPAs engage in their labor in the same way that Levin et al. profile part-time faculty and their response to their jobs. This position then becomes a form of socialization, defined as “the process by which an organization attempts to influence and change

individuals to meet its needs” for graduate students in the academic world (Kramer, 2010, p. 3). They get exposed to administrative, emotional, and technical labor, and if the amount of labor supersedes what the gWPA can manage, it could lead to feelings of being exploited.

Much like adjuncts, gWPAs seem to be willing to drink the Kool-Aid and endure this position in the name of passion and vocation. I argue that this is all part of a cruel optimism trend that keeps them going, with the promise of a full-time position in a future that is not guaranteed (Berlant, 2010).

4.2 The Larger Critical Issues

Based on the findings exposed in the previous chapter, in this section I outline the four main critical issues that emerged from my conversations with the gWPAs. These issues are mostly related to positionality in the organization, labor, and gender. I analyze these in the contemporary context of higher education as we understand it, but I will emphasize below how some of the issues are also related to the result of the neoliberal ideas permeating the university.

4.2.1 High Position Informality

Something that became apparent and a common factor to all the gWPAs I had a chance to interview is the fact that there was a high degree of informality in the specification and management of the position in different aspects, thus leading to an arbitrariness that has detrimental impacts for gWPAs. Firstly, there are no standard qualifications or requirements set by a professional organization such as the CWPA or the CCC. This, in turn, means that most likely, universities also do not possess such a list.

Consequently, by not having a defined list of qualifications, the position itself can become a “grab bag” of sorts, collecting requirements and preferences for job candidates based not on a standard across universities but on the whims of particular Directors. Once hired, the lack of bona fide qualifications makes it less likely that there will be clear expectations of those in the position.

Second, there are no standard procedures or protocols for the hiring of these kinds of administrative positions within departments, whether it be their Writing Programs, Writing Centers, or any other graduate assistantship. As seen in the previous chapter, most participants were chosen or acquired the position based on knowing their predecessor, having a professional relationship with the faculty member who will be the direct supervisor of the position, or by simply “showing interest.” In other employment contexts, this could be seen as nepotism, favoritism, bias, or sloppiness. Altogether, the lack of clear hiring processes, a detailed set of duties and expectations and an added layer of social desirability provides some advantages for some prospective gWPAs over others and seems to be another recipe for student exploitation.

This problematic also shows itself in the unhappy circumstances that happen related to lost paperwork when applying to the position, like in the case of Interviewee Two, or the extreme variability on tasks, or rather, the addition of new ones as it happened to Interviewee Five when pivoting to an in-house assessment system during the pandemic. It is one thing to be generous and put all hands-on deck, as happened during the COVID-19 emergency, but it is a very different thing to pivot to a whole new assessment program piled on top of previous responsibilities with no additional payment

or benefits. While recognition by peers and superiors is fulfilling, the reality is that kudos do not pay bills.

The lack of formality and excessive arbitrariness that assail the gWPA position leads to further issues that obscure the importance and necessity of this kind of labor. For example, there is the implicit requirement that to acquire or remain in the position, one might need to have some patronage from someone higher on the hierarchy ladder. This in turn, leads to the following critical issue related to gWPAs and their relationships with their superiors.

4.2.2 Patronage & Nepotism

The idea of patronage has historically been associated with more benevolent connotations. In the arts, a patron provided resources for artists to perform (Martin, 2009, p. 3). It has become apparent that it has opportunistically made its way into higher education. In the case of my study, these dynamics seemed to develop in a very innocuous and naïve way; however, this patronage still indicates that there might be some sort of favoritism or inequitable opportunities benefiting certain students over others. Most of the arguments for patronage are extremely complicated to articulate, although, as Brian Martin explains, some of them could point to the reason why some students access gWPA positions before others. For example, the idea that for departments, and programs, more specifically, “insiders are trustworthy. They will support the goals of the organization. They are team players. They won’t rock the boat” (Martin, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, to serve the institution, which benefits from this labor, while also providing opportunities for gaining experience, positions such as gWPAs are usually taken by those who either knew their predecessor, or whose supervisor or advisor (who is someone the

same person) is associated with a position of power. This is by no means the only way to acquire this position, however, it was the most common one among my interviewees.

My last term as a Composition Coordinator of the Writing Program at Michigan Tech officially ended in the Spring of 2021. I had reached the two-year/two-term limit, and I was content with stepping down to focus on my research during the third and fourth years of my degree. However, due to unforeseen circumstances—specifically, a faculty member quitting suddenly—I was brought up again as the Graduate Assistant Director this time, during my fourth (and final) year. How? The faculty member who was asked to step in at the last minute and become Director of the Composition Program for the 2022-2023 academic year was (coincidentally) my advisor. My advisor was aware of my liking and extensive previous experience in this type of position and invited me to join the administrative team once she stepped up. This experience allowed me to acquire a fantastic line on my CV, a small economic compensation, and two course releases for the academic year. Several of my interviewees recounted similar patronage types of circumstances regarding the way that they accessed the gWPA position, and, in some cases, how their terms were extended or renewed.

For example, Interviewee Three was acquainted with their predecessor in the gWPA position, with whom they worked in order to transition after my interviewee was selected to step into their position at the Writing Center:

I applied, and a colleague of mine had it before me, and he was the first person to hold this position, it's fairly new. He held it for one year and then, this is my second year in the position. And so, this spring, and probably just about a month [from now] and we'll start looking for a new person to hold this position next

year. So, it's a one-to-two-year position, you apply and interview for it, with a letter of intent and CV, and then you are selected if you fit what they need.

Not only was my interviewee the second one to hold the position at their institution, but they also had a chance to “flesh out” the position in what could be, in addition to aid in finding their successor.

gWPAs staying longer on the term than they first intended was a more common concept among my interviewees than expected, and this extension of their terms also was related to their relationships with others. In the case of Interviewee Five, they explained how thanks to being knowledgeable and doing a good job in the position, their supervisor would allow for a third year in the position (in the case that it was necessary),

So, one of the, for me, one of the more rewarding [aspects of the position] was I got, this [the gWPA position] in my second year in it, so I kind of called it when, when the call went out for what duties, do you want to do next year? I called up the coordinator, I said “hey, you know, they put the call out, would you want me to sign up again? Like, do you think that this would be something that you would find helpful if I'd stayed in that position?”, there were a couple rhetoric and composition students who are technically like, could be viable to hold the position, but not quite maybe as field or have as much aptitude in an administration and organization, so when the coordinator was basically like, paraphrasing here but, probably not paraphrasing too much he's like “Shit ya, no, like, yes, I would love you to stay on for another year”. Right, so, that was really rewarding and knowing that even though it's not the norm to hold this position for

multiple years, that it's like you know, like let's just keep this train running.

(Interviewee Five)

This interviewee elaborated further on their conversation about the fact that they were looking into getting a full-time job, which would mean they would not need a sixth year in the program and a third year as a gWPA, they recalled,

But something interesting happened at one of the other places that I work with, and they had, their Writing Program, started, their Writing Center director recently just resigned, so I'm hopefully I'm going to put an application in for a full time job, so I may not need the six year funding but he [the director of their program] was like, he said, like "Yes, I'm confident, you know, I think I'd love it great if we could keep this going for another year", so there is an option if I need it.

While many struggle with insecurity and limited terms, this interviewee's circumstances allowed for a safety net in case their plans did not pan out as they were foreseeing. While this type of patronage is positive for the recipient, it has a negative side as well: protecting one gWPA might mean that some other graduate students are being deprived of gaining experience; therefore, it should not be left to the luck of each individual to acquire and retain these positions.

In the same vein, Interviewee Four explained that by having reduced size departments, there is sometimes this idea of everyone knowing each other which seems to lead to more "informal" application processes. They recalled,

It's mostly just got selected, so we have a, I don't know, how many faculty there are, but it's a small enough number and a small enough program that, like, all the

faculty and the rhetoric and composition program know all the students in the rhetoric and composition program. So, I wouldn't say you really apply, um, but you had to like, make it known that that was something you were interested in doing.

Interviewees One, Two and Six reported a more "conventional" application process, although Interviewee Two did mention that after sending their documents for the application, "they [the authorities] sort of, behind the scenes, will select stuff [a gWPA]".

Relying on faculty patronage, intentional or unintentional, can lead to circumstances of nepotism. Even if the rationale behind these kinds of decisions has to do with the idea that these faculty are able to identify suitable candidates for being gWPAs by working closely with them. Therefore, it seems as if there are sometimes questionable, unfair, and inequitable practices regarding selection and renewal protocols that can unintentionally lead to graduate student exploitation. By this I mean that sometimes when there is a solid working relationship built between the supervisor and the gWPA there seems to be a trust in the abilities of the graduate student that can sometimes turn into work overload under the understanding that the student can get things done.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, patronage on a more positive note is linked to mentoring in that sometimes gWPAs are kept in the position because they have a good relationship with their supervisor, who may also be their advisor. Therefore, paying attention and being aware that "there is a disjunction between the ideal mentorship experience and the reality of training in research," some groups and institutions, "have begun to encourage good mentorship practices" (Sciences et al., 1993, p. 60). Fueled by situations like the ones my interviewees experiences, the elusive

definition of mentoring in the scope of graduate education (and beyond) has prompted some institutions to create mentoring specialized programs to formalize these processes and avoid unfair practices like the ones discussed above. These are created to seize opportunities that would otherwise go unnoticed or are wasted potential. Such is the case of Purdue University's Mentoring Improvement initiative where:

The Graduate School is bringing theoretically grounded, evidence-based, and culturally responsive training opportunities to Purdue faculty, postdocs, and graduate students to optimize these critical, mutually beneficial, but sometimes informal and underperforming relationships. (PurdueUniversity, 2022)

While this initiative pertains to mentoring graduate students as students in general, and not as gWPAs, it could serve as a model initiative to implement something similar in other universities, or even at the departmental level regarding Writing Programs.

4.2.3 The Three Types of Exploitation

A large portion of the issues that emerged had to do with classical critical organizational communication problems. This is the case, for example, of exploitation. In the case of my study, I argue that there are three types of exploitation at work, and they all serve different purposes. Below, I delve deeper into each kind with the intention to show why this is inherently wrong and problematic for the gWPA position. It must be noticed that while explicitly divided, there is a certain overlap among them.

4.2.3.1 Systemic Exploitation

In this case, the first type is purely systemic and structural exploitation that is engrained in the position itself and gets replicated every time someone new steps on it and there are no changes made regarding the responsibilities, duties, and benefits for the

gWPA. While my definition of exploitation has Marxist roots, I refer to exploitation as a situation or recurrence where two parties engage, and one takes advantage over the other, denoting an unfair social relationship that is based on asymmetry of power (Young, 1990). This type of exploitation directly services the institution; more specifically, it serves the departments that employ these students. It is understandable that oftentimes departments are constrained by larger structures under the institutional umbrella of the university. However, it should be part of the department's endeavor to fight for the rights and wellbeing of students, within their possibilities given that these may be limited by institutional constraints.

Part of my conversation with Interviewee One about what were some frustrating or constraining moments or situations they went through while in the position, they reflected upon their own exploitation,

And I don't, you know, and I don't want to make it sound like anyone was purposefully, anyone in the program, was purposely doing that [exploiting students], in fact, like our director, my advisor, like, didn't even know that it was happening because I hadn't said anything. And she hadn't like she wasn't paying attention to it, because she was so overwhelmed by everything else, and so, the, like, I finally came out was like "I think I've worked like, a considerable amount more than I've been paid for in this job" and like, I think she was like pretty horrified by that.

But you know, there was like long periods of time, and when I worked for the program where, you know, I felt like I was putting way more into it than I was getting out, and I kind of needed to take some take a step back and like realize

that, like, you know the institution will never love you like [you love] your job, is never gonna love you more than you love it and so, like, I needed to kind of, take like, advocate for myself.

This testimony evidences a sort of naivete and unawareness among administrators about what students' workloads are and how they feel about their workloads. I find it particularly interesting that this person does not wish to point fingers at one single faculty member, nor the department, but the university. Of course, smaller units such as departments are under the constraints of the university, but they should also be accountable for protecting their students, especially such a vulnerable population as graduate students.

This systematic exploitation is also related to the gaps and contradictions related to the actual authority and power vested in gWPAs as opposed to the type of authority and power necessary to make actual decisions and have said virtues while in the position. This is something that Trudy Smoke has defined as being part of the WPA (in general): as "the paradox of the powerless power: having responsibility and little authority, having insider knowledge and being institutionally ignorant, and needed to cooperate and wanting to resist" (Smoke, 1998, p. 93). This paradox applies to gWPAs too, because they are responsible for several tasks and decisions, while not being assigned the official authority for this work, putting gWPAs in a doubly subordinated position.

4.2.3.2 Emotional Labor, or the Labor of Love

Another significant type of exploitation that gWPAs are vulnerable to is the one related to labor of love, or what I have previously defined as emotional labor. While research has been performed on WPA emotional work in the past decades (Adams-

Wooten et al., 2020; Dale & Micciche, 2003; Holt et al., 2003; Micciche, 2002, 2007), the literature continues to expand. While the history of education offers multiple snapshots of the relation between emotion, learning and teaching, there seems to be a dissonance between the importance of the interconnection of those three and the recognition of that complex overlap (Micciche, 2007). As Holt et al. (2003) argues, “Daily emotion work is crucial to accomplishing the goals of literacy widely espoused in higher education” (p. 151) while at the same time “WPAs’ everyday experiences are jarringly discordant with the separation of emotion work from the more valorized ‘intellectual work’ in academic life” (p. 158). Teaching, learning and administrating are not just simple activities to master, but rather, they are “a complex blend of emotional and professional issues that involve a whole person” (Micciche, 2007, p. 98).

As emotion matters “are difficult, dense, subjective personal, communal, socially lived and understood, historical and cultural, impossible to avoid, intertwined with all that we say, think, write, know, withhold, remember and wish to forget” (Micciche, 2007, p. 105), emotion also takes part in the way in which we “develop attachments to others as well as to objects and ideas” (Micciche, 2007, p. 105). Thus, instrumentalizing one’s emotions to conform to job demands is both dehumanizing and exploitative.

I argue that all this research performed in WPAs also applies to those in gWPA positions. The idea that the gWPA barely does any work—answers email, teaches, and helps others with Canvas (or their LMS of choice)—does not account for the totality of the duties they perform. Such disparaging caricatures overlook how draining this type of labor is, considering that “managing emotions of others” is not a typical line on a job description. Even being absent from the extensive list of responsibilities I included in the

last chapter from my institution. Such an absence makes it difficult to appreciate that this is still part of the labor and renders invisible how damaging it can be. As Hochschild (1983) describes it,

Display is what is sold, but over the long run display comes to assume a certain relation to feeling. As enlightened management realizes, a separation of display and feeling is hard to keep up over long periods. A principle of emotive dissonance, analogous to the principle of cognitive dissonance, is at work.

Maintaining a difference between feeling and feigning over the long run leads to strain. We try to reduce this strain by pulling the two closer together, either by changing what we feel or by changing what we feign. When display is required by the job, it is usually feeling that has to change; and when conditions estrange us from our face, they sometimes estrange us from feeling as well. (p. 90)

As I have presented in the last chapter, emotional labor situations varied depending on the institution, size of the Writing Programs or Writing Centers, and a few other factors since each gWPA situation was different, but the one aspect in common was that all of them, at some point, felt like they were performing emotional labor. Some related it to their supervisors. Others talked about the impossibility of compartmentalizing their responsibilities, like Interviewee One who when asked about what they wish they would have known before entering the position manifested,

I wish that I had known, like, how I wish that I had known how draining it would be [To be a gWPA in general and during the pandemic]. Or that I had been better prepared to compartmentalize my different roles, so to be able to

compartmentalize myself as a student and a researcher from myself, as a teacher for myself, as a WPA.

For Interviewee Four, there were things they felt like they could not be prepared for that required constant reprioritizing:

How do you prepare somebody to serve as like that sort of intermediary position where you feel like you have to side with your, like, you know, with the Writing Center? And I don't think I was expecting that much tension. Because, for me, like the field and the department that I was part of like, my interest in the field of rhetoric and composition came from my experience in the Writing Center. So for me, the two are always very connected. So, having to almost, like, separate them was difficult for me? Also, I think time management will always be a huge thing for me. Um it's not that I don't manage my time well, it's that I tend to not prioritize myself in my time management. Um, I said, like I said earlier, I would usually put all my like admin stuff and then I was like "okay, now it's like eight o'clock at night to probably read for class tomorrow", like, or do whatever, so like I'm coming out of Grad school with not a whole lot of publications and stuff because I spent a lot of time doing the more administrative type of things. But I feel like, I don't know, there's always this sort of like balancing act, something has to go.

Therefore, time management, compartmentalization of roles and self-prioritization were all hidden requirements of the position that entailed emotional labor. And finally, Interviewee Six Interviewee Six reported that what they wish they had known had to do with self-compassion:

I think just that aspect of, like, being flexible and generous and being forgiving with yourself about the time that you're putting into things, I think that advice would have been...I don't know that would have made a difference, but it would have been nice to know.

Clearly, there is part of the issue that is related to training and education, but when concepts such as self-prioritization, being flexible and generous with oneself start to arise, there is an emotional side to be explored, that should be better supported by the department, and the institution as whole.

Almost half of the interviewees talked about boundaries, how to set them to avoid burnout, while the other half reported being exhausted, having a lack of boundaries or difficulty in separating and balancing professional versus personal life. Their experiences point to the need for education about work/life balance and emotional strategies to avoid burnout or other mental health afflictions, which could benefit all graduate students in general.

This is of utmost importance in the frame of the current mental health crisis that affects Ph.D. students and candidates (and graduate students more generally). When asked about mental health issues and in relation to PhD education, and whether or not they thought that their current mental health problems had any linkage to their PhD training, 51% responded "Yes, at least partially" (Naumann et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic should also be considered as another factor affecting graduate students' mental health since when asked about their mental wellbeing during the pandemic as opposed to the pre-pandemic period, 76% of Ph.D.'s answered, "It has changed for the worse" (Naumann et al., 2022).

Emotion work, or what I label emotional labor on my dissertation, “reveals relational and gendered aspects of writing program administration that, while vital to accomplishment of the job, have been generally deemed unworthy of recognition and reward—women’s work, invisible work, or at least *not* intellectual work — never mind how intellectually demanding, time-consuming and draining it might be” (Holt et al., 2003, p. 157)

In my suggestions for moving forward with these kinds of positions, I will discuss the idea of incorporating time management skills and self-care training as well as reformulating career paths for future gWPAs in the future.

4.2.3.3 Flying the Plane Smoothly

When thinking about flying an airplane, one of the very first things that comes to mind is the pilot’s expertise, since they are the ones driving the craft. However, once passengers are settled in their seats, there are expectations that flight attendants will manage the passenger’s experience throughout the trip. There would be surprise and discomfort, if once settled, passengers found out that no flight attendants were on board, and that they would have no personal service for the following several hours. This is so untenable that the airlines cannot fly without an experienced cabin crew although their tasks have little to do with the captain’s professional skills.

I have argued previously that this analogy usefully fits gWPAs. Perhaps the main difference is that flight attendants have a place on the organizational chart of the airline, while oftentimes, gWPAs may or may not exist on the departmental roster due to the arbitrariness of the position. Yet, one thing in common is the lack of fair economic compensation, as flight attendants only get paid once the airplane doors are closed,

although some airlines have recently (2022) started to pay for boarding process time (*Delta will begin paying flight attendants*, 2022). However, both flight attendants and gWPAs are necessary in a purely operational manner. As with flight attendants, a high level of competence and expertise are critical to the smooth functioning of the Writing Program or Writing Center. This was evidenced by Interviewee Five when they described moving all placement testing online at the end of their first year in the position:

So instead of requiring students to take the ACT or the SAT, and then that writing test that's embedded in those tests, instead of using those to help determine whether students, excuse me, whether students needed to take our composition course kind of the required composition course, we moved that to an in-house assessment. So part of, you know, all of a sudden, for, at the end, towards the end of my first year in the position, we were like oh "hey here's this new thing that we're doing all of a sudden, like, it wasn't part of anybody's duties before this", but now placement, in trying to coordinate, you know graders, how are we grading, what is our prompt, all of the things that are related to placement, fell under the wheelhouse of the Writing Program as well. And so, just kind of, anything that's related to the writing needs of the university can sometimes just fall into our lap on a rolling basis, so it makes it pretty interesting.

Describing how such an important task "fell into our laps" and the experience as being as "pretty interesting" (which included an expressive face on the Zoom chat with my interviewee) is akin to the work of flight attendants who must respond to unanticipated turbulence in skillful and professional ways.

In the case of gWPAs, this illustrates an unstable working environment and the feeling of constantly waiting for the other shoe to drop. Similarly, Interviewee One was involved in creating a whole new placement system. They remembered as follows,

COVID basically made it so that we had to design a brand-new writing placement system, because our old one was like [a] sit down in person timed writing exam. And so, like that's not going to be possible, right? So, we had designed a new writing placement system, and we had been able to sort of argue for the funds to hire another Grad student to help with like, logistics and data collection and analysis for assessments and so on.

In this case, the situation of having to develop a whole new system pushed their Writing Program to hire another student in order to manage such an unexpected and titanic task that would clearly have been too much for a director and an assistant director in such a limited time frame.

Thus, in the same way that we expect professional service from flight attendants on a plane, faculty and students expect a professionally managed Writing Program that works smoothly and provides them with good instruction. Just as with flight attendants, it makes sense to develop more humane and equitable work environments for gWPAs as a good first step in the right direction for better running programs.

4.2.4 The Feminization of the Position

Organizations, in particular universities, and by extension their sub-units such as departments and programs, are gendered. As sociologist Joan Acker defined it,

To say that an organization...is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and coercion, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned

through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender. (as cited in, Mumby & Kuhn, 2019, p. 213)

While all organizations are gendered, feminization is a particular process of discrimination and exploitation. In the case of my project, I argue that the gWPA position is a feminized one, no matter who is occupying it. Coincidentally though, five out of my six interviewees identified as women, and used feminine pronouns. However, this does not necessarily happen because there are a lot of women in the position but rather, there is a difference between the materiality, cultural traditions and ideology configuring the position.

As I explained through my literature review, the field of Composition has always been a feminized arena. In addition, there has always been a gender discrepancy in authority. For example, some of the responses collected by Sally Barr-Ebest (1995) survey to WPAs in 1992, include expressions such as “One must be all things to all people if you are a female” (p. 59), “Women take responsibility, men take authority” (p. 66), “Women get to do work, men get to plan it” and finally, the one that struck me the most the first time I encountered the article,

Those women who speak up and fight for their program are doubly damned.

‘Women are forced to be agreeable and easy to work with. Women are labeled as ‘shrews’ or ‘bitches’ when they assert themselves’. Women WPAs are required to balance competence with aggressiveness. (Barr-Ebest, 1995, p. 66)

A parallel can be drawn between these responses from almost three decades ago and the ways in which they reflect a lot of the feminized aspects of the contemporary gWPA position. The idea that one must be “all things” is connected to that of being a Jack-of-all-trades but also, under this excuse, being exploited. Or that men are (often) associated with positions of authority, while women get responsibility put on them, for things that happen (good, but also bad ones). Similarly, women doing work and men being the planners coincides with a lot of the responsibilities gWPAs are assigned, as can be seen in several duties on the lists presented in the last chapter and that are updated below. Many times, gWPAs help plan important large events like faculty meetings or training such as the beginning-of-year orientation, and while credit is shared with the Director or direct supervisor, most people may see them as the main face of the program and not the gWPAs who play a key role. Finally, in relation to the last passage, much as women must be agreeable, so must gWPAs who do not have an option other than comply with the work required from them or be labeled inept for the position (which rarely ever happens due to the level of necessity programs have from these graduate students).

Pertaining to this project, too, there is a discrepancy between the authority required to carry out the position, and the actual authority and power vested in gWPAs, which I described utilizing Trudy Smoke’s paradox of powerless power. This is a source of many headaches and frustrations for gWPAs and it encourages an uneven work environment. They are also positioned as subordinate to other more experienced faculty when it comes to helping fellow graduate students and this can invoke feelings of inferiority. Given its subordinate character, lack of authority, and subsequent tendency to feelings of inferiority, the gWPA position exhibits feminization.

Lastly, the feminization of the position also entails assumptions about the type of work that is done in the gWPA positions, and the bodies that are involved in the labor. For example, organizing events, coordinating orders for materials, food, or reserving rooms, has usually been seen as “women’s work,” as usually women have been “confined to the domestic milieu, they are identified with this lower order of social/cultural association” (Ortner, 1972, p. 18). In addition, Sherry Ortner invites us to consider the ratio difference in education, childcare, and cooking where there is a gradual “inversion of the proportion of female to male teachers as one progresses up through the grades” (1972, p. 19). Ortner also proposes that women have a different body but in addition, “a different psychic structure” (1972, p. 20), but these claims did not come without a controversy. To illustrate this point, Ortner borrows Nancy Chodorow’s argument that “the source of the feminine personality lies in social structural arrangements rather than innate differences” (1972, p. 22).

Therefore, it has always been about socially constructed roles and socialization of bodies rather than predisposed physical characteristics. Donna Strickland argues that the differences regarding the division of the types of labor between men and women “are not merely economic..., but ideological and affective” (Strickland, 2011, p. 21). In the case of Writing Programs, this author talks about this “corporate dividing practice” is also at work due to “economic contingencies, managerial logics, and ideologies of gender and race” (Strickland, 2011, p. 21).

4.3 The Canary in the Coal Mine: gWPAs as a Cautionary

Tale

As I was working on the way I wanted this chapter to unfold, it seemed important to address all the issues before moving into the possible pathways forward. One of my committee members suggested in one of our conversations about the data that maybe gWPAs are functioning as a canary in the coal mine. First utilized as a practice in 1911, the British mining industry incorporated canaries in the coal mines as “Canaries, like other birds, are good early detectors of carbon monoxide because they’re vulnerable to airborne poisons” (as cited in Eschner, 2016). The idea of miners carrying canaries underground has been credited to John Scott Haldane, recognized by some as “the father of oxygen therapy” and the practice was retired in 1986 (Eschner, 2016). I propose that in the same ways, gWPAs’ experiences reveal a cautionary tale about the sustainability of these kind of positions.

The neoliberal “responsibilization of the individual” is quite evident in the gWPA position. All responsibility for acquiring new skills that would make them become better workers in the future is put now on the individuals. “Students are made responsible for managing and optimizing their developing portfolio of skills” (De Lissovoy & Cedillo, 2016, p. 1541). Further, as a gWPA, it is tempting to believe that the more work you do (paid or not), the better an asset you will become to the department and the less likely it will be that you are replaced—a tenuous job security at best. Similarly, fashioning oneself as a “jack of all trades” also dangles the illusion of greater job security for a gWPA. At the same time, the idea of an academic position as a “vocation” rather than a transactional relationship serves a neoliberal emphasis on self-fashioning.

Thus, in most cases graduate students exhibit how neoliberalist ideals have permeated higher education and this was really put under the spotlight during the COVID-19 pandemic, where a lot of the inequities became more obvious. With the pandemic, we saw the emergence of the reserve army of labor formed mostly by graduate students and adjuncts, who were pushed to the frontlines of teaching under the idea of collaborating and putting all hands-on deck to help their departments and programs. After all, expecting a pay raise for doing more work during a deadly world pandemic would seem, at least, a little out of place, especially for vulnerable positions such as graduate students that have no other choice. For some of us, particularly international students, we needed to do the work and ideally, not complain about it because causing trouble or offending the institution could end up with your visa being revoked in the worst cases. All of this must be framed in the context of graduate students that are not allowed to join collective movements or unionize, a disadvantage I will delve deeper into in the last section of this chapter.

I argue then that gWPAs might be suffering a collective cynicism (Giroux, 2002, p. 457), to which I add the idea that gWPAS might be under an unconscious collective cynicism, which originally Giroux framed it as becoming “a powerful fixture of everyday life” (2002, p. 457). I found it appropriate to add the unconscious factor, as I have a suspicion that gWPAs are not entirely aware to what extent this position is unfair, poorly structured and managed, and how much this (negatively) affects them. However, in the case that they are conscious and not doing anything to change it, giving up and into the position as is, exhibits a cynical position from ex-gWPAS.

4.4 Exploring Pathways Forward: First Approaches

Throughout this chapter I have first introduced the context in which I looked at my interviews results and data gathered, and how neoliberal ideals have permeated higher education in the past decades. I then outlined the four main issues that affect the position which include the high position arbitrariness, the occasional development of patronages inside programs, the types of labor exploitation associated with being a gWPA, and, finally, the feminization of the position. In this section of the chapter, I start defining possible pathways forward to improve but mostly transform the way this position is considered inside the departments and to restructure it in order to make its significance undeniable.

4.4.1 Professionalization of the Position

The main issue that became apparent was how many times graduate students who agreed to become gWPAs were subject to arbitrary dictates; for example (and depending on their institution): task assignments, the title of their positions, application processes and required qualifications. Additionally, gWPAs experienced compounded issues of inequity and exploitation. These included faculty patronizing certain students (even when they are competent and suitable candidates for the position), gWPAs being exploited in multiple ways and the idea of a feminized position that feels limited and sometimes, neglected when it is extremely necessary to the proper functioning of Writing Programs (and Writing Centers, where appropriate).

4.4.1.1 Standard Qualifications and Duties for the Position

The first recommendation I propose is the idea of drafting both a standard list of qualifications for the position, and a pragmatic list of job duties and responsibilities. On the one hand, behind the idea of a standard list of qualifications is the intent of making this position accessible and granting the opportunity to gain experience to the largest number of graduate students possible. I advance a tentative model that could be implemented to ensure position rotation, while at the same time, guaranteeing there will always be one experienced gWPA training their successor. On the other hand, having a well-defined list of duties and responsibilities provides certain protections to the gWPA as they can hold the program accountable for extra duties (should any appear), and ensure they are sticking to the originally proposed tasks for labor equity purposes.

While admittedly standardizing the position may seem bureaucratic, there are clear benefits. This approach would make gWPA opportunities more equitable as well as facilitate more mentoring and further experience for those involved. A side effect would be the continuity of the writing program personnel allowing for swifter transitions and more assurance that the program will run smoothly.

Arguably, it is complicated to recommend the creation of such lists of qualifications as a simple task considering that departments in different institutions will have particular needs, and more importantly, different constraints (such as course releases available, number of graduate students, so on and so forth). Therefore, this is a call to action particularly aimed at the larger organization/council in the WPA field rather than institutions. The rationale behind this is that if there is a couple of circulating models, that preapproved and considered by authorities in WPA, universities then could utilize those

and do smaller modifications to tailor it to their institutional needs. Is there a risk of each university making changes that could impact significantly on how the position should be carried out? Absolutely. But at the very least, there will be a baseline draft that applies to every graduate student looking to apply for and become a gWPA.

In the case of my dissertation, I work with the lists available at my department since I am very familiar with them, and they were readily at hand. As mentioned above, I propose that, should this suggestion be implemented, there should be a couple of circulating models. The materials presented in this dissertation are just one model, one example.

The following table represents the gWPA list of duties used at my home institution of Michigan Tech, which is among the most extensive and well-reasoned available so I will start with them (see below). On the left are the original duties and on the right are my revisions. Part of the rationale behind my changes has to do with making the duties more accurately reflect the actual responsibilities for gWPAs, in addition to striving for a fairer labor division. This has been done mostly through changing the verbs utilized in the original version, although other changes are present too.

Table 1. gWPA List of Duties Revisions

| Original MTU gWPA Duties List | Revised MTU gWPA Duties List |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct grant research and writing related to Writing Program administration and curricular development. • Help to plan, coordinate, and deliver content for the week-long orientation for new instructors. • Serve as managing editor of the Portage Review, our undergraduate scholarly journal. • Assist Composition Program Director in coordinating and delivering instruction in MonsterComp as well as assessing outcomes. Support GTAs teaching in the MonsterComp model. • Assist with and formulate research initiatives related to Writing Program administration and composition theory/pedagogy. • Assist with new composition GTA training; help to plan Composition Faculty meetings. • Coordinate weekly Professional Development sessions during the spring semester. • Mentor new GTAs. • Assist with program assessment. • Assist with curriculum development. • Support logistics and teaching in MonsterComp. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in conducting grant research and writing related to Writing Program administration and curricular development. • Assist in coordinating, planning and helping deliver content for the week-long orientation for new instructors. • Attend weekly Composition Program administrative meetings. • Assist the Composition Program Director in coordinating and delivering instruction in MonsterComp as well as assessing outcomes. • Assist with program assessment (during the Summer). • Assist with research initiatives related to Writing Program administration and composition theory/pedagogy. • Assist with new composition GTA training; help to plan (and attend) Composition Faculty meetings. • Help coordinate and facilitate weekly Professional Development sessions (Teaching roundtables) during the spring semester. • Mentor new GTAs: be their contact for questions, offer technical and pedagogical support. • Maintain regular office hours for GTA and/or MonsterComp students. • Assist with curriculum development. |

| | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain regular office hours for GTA and/or MonsterComp students. • Attend[ing] weekly Composition Program administrative meetings. • Coordinate with Marketing regarding the maintenance and updating of Comp Program website. • Update and maintain Canvas Shared Resource course. • If necessary, take over a Composition class on a short-term basis, especially in an emergency. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with Marketing regarding the maintenance and updating of Composition Program website. • Update and maintain the Canvas Shared Resource course and make sure everyone gets added to it. • If necessary, take over a Composition class on a short-term basis, especially in an emergency (with an added financial compensation). |
|--|---|

Michigan Tech’s preferred qualifications for the gWPA position should also be more specific to provide a better idea of who can be a good candidate, and who would not. For this, I offer the following revisions. Again, the original qualifications are on the left and my recommended revisions are on the right.

Table 2. gWPA List of Qualifications Revisions

| MTU’s Original Preferred Qualifications | MTU’s Revised Preferred Qualifications |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preference given to PhD students. • Experience working on the editorial staff of the Portage Review and/or teaching in MonsterComp is also preferred. (Master’s students will also be considered, however, if they have significant interest in or experience with WPA work.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preference given to PhD students. • Having participated in MonsterComp as an instructor at least once. • For MS students, be in your second year. For Ph.D. students’ coursework should be finalized, so ideally, being in your third year. • Good organizing and management skills. • Experience working with Google Drive, and Microsoft’s Office Package. • Be proficient utilizing Canvas. <p><i>Optional (but valuable qualifications)</i></p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Good interpersonal skills. ● Experience of working with groups, or service positions |
|--|---|

As can be seen, most of my revisions focus on adding certain skills that were not contemplated in the original list in order to create a more comprehensive candidate profile.

4.4.1.2 Base-Line Standard Hiring Protocol

Similarly, much like in the previous suggestion, this one entails a standardized hiring protocol for gWPAs. Based on the conversations with my interviewees, and in relation with the considerable arbitrariness of the position and how it is granted, having a set protocol recognized by the prominent national organization seems to be another measure towards a more equitable distribution of these positions. Most interviewees commented on at least having to submit some sort of document that ranged from a letter of intent, a curriculum vitae, and/or a letter of recommendation from their advisor. Another factor that varied was who these were submitted to: sometimes it was only to the faculty member serving as the position’s main supervisor, other times (like in my case) it included the director of the graduate studies program which I was part of, or similarly, other authorities in the department. But, in whose best interests is it to screen the candidates for the gWPA position? Clearly, the Director of the Writing Program will want to understand who the candidates are and what each can bring to the position. Having an additional person external to the Writing Program to make the decision could help prevent favoritism and ensure the selection of an appropriate candidate.

In addition to helping prospective gWPAs, this suggestion to improve the hiring protocol could be applied to all administrative graduate positions offered by departments to try and ensure the fair selection of applicants, with the intent of having them flourish in their positions, as opposed to feeling unprepared for the demands of the job which are justified by saying that this is part of the job and how it has always been. We owe it to those who come after us to improve the working conditions, particularly if we understood there to be aspects that could be improved. Resistance to change in organizations is fairly common, however, the idea that something works, therefore, why improve it (until someone complains or something catastrophic happens) tends to put organizations at risk of failure. And so far, we have been failing gWPAs.

4.4.1.3 The Revised Hiring Protocol

What would this hiring protocol look like? I propose the following five steps:

1. Position Credentials and Requirements: Conventions. The Writing Program, together with authorities from the department that houses it (Humanities, English, or whichever was it) should agree on what kind of student they are looking for (at the very least, Ph.D. or MS, and which year) in addition to the duties and responsibilities the position will entail. The final agreement should be specifying which documents will be required from students. Another important piece during this step would be to define the kind and amount of compensation. If there will be none (which ideally would not be the case), this should be specified in the call for applications.
2. Call for Applications: Position Advertisement. Once all the parameters are set, the call for applications should be sent to graduate students' list, but also to faculty

lists. That way, advisors are aware of the kind of labor their advisees might want to take over, while being able to recommend whether or not their students should apply, especially if they had not considered yet or were unaware of the position.

3. **Application Review.** Once the applications are in, they should all be considered equally. This could look like agreeing on a set criteria or rubric for applicants. Plus, making sure that, as mentioned above, there are people external to the Writing Program to have different points of view at the table. If application numbers are large, hold brief interviews for the candidates, allowing them to discuss their work and motives for wanting the position.
4. **Graduate Student Notification.** After a collective decision has been made regarding who will occupy the position for the academic year, send a notification copying everyone and ensuring proper communication of all involved.
5. **Contract Amendment.** Closer to the position start date, the graduate student that will serve as gWPA should sign a contract amendment (or similar document) with a specification of their tasks and the compensation provided, for their own labor equity purposes. This will also act as an official document that proves the work experience of the student the moment they go into the job market.

4.4.2 Training Practices

The third leg of what I propose is professionalizing the gWPA position. This entails improving, or in some cases, incorporating entirely, training practices for graduate students who manifest interest in a more administrative-focused career (whether it be in Writing Programs or Writing Centers). Taking the example of the Humanities Department in Michigan Tech, graduate students are most often prepared for Tenure

Track positions, but those who express an interest in teaching or administrative positions tend to not have as much training in those areas. For those of us doing a Ph.D., we do come out of the program with four years of teaching experience, and if lucky, a couple of administrative years of work experience. However, the discrepancies between an over-emphasis on a tenure-track career track and the more applied interests of the students themselves do not only affect the institution I am part of, but many more.

The idea that most graduate students are taught how to be researchers before professors or administrators is widespread. I do recognize that more and more, departments are trying to incorporate professional development series, opportunities to present past or current research, and some different pathways for those considering a different career direction than a TT line, but these efforts seem unmatched when it comes to WPA education, and administrative work in general. If those occupying the positions feel they are not sufficiently prepared and go in unprepared, how do we expect them to not feel exploited when the semester picks up and they are in the midst of trying to get things done that they never saw coming?

When conversing with Interviewee Two in terms of how to make the position more relevant and significant to all of those who lacked training, they considered,

Something that I would love to see to make these positions more impactful, is [more] training and mentorship. Because, like, if you're, if you're in a role where you're working more with new or incoming students, I think you need to be able to be prepared to, like, support them and, like, take responsibility in that relationship with somebody with more experience.

But when making such claims, I could not help but wonder, what is it exactly that they are asking for? A seminar before their gWPA term begins? Fixed meeting times with their direct supervisor? Extra training and support in other areas? This again could be another sign of how reduced this position can feel due to not having proper training, on top of the problematic of the authority needed as opposed to the actual vested authority.

When I refer to the position feeling reduced or downplayed, this was mentioned often in the interviews. Interviewee Four explained the issue very well while discussing their personal situation:

We actually had a conversation too where we were looking, kind of forward towards me, like, going on the job market and she was looking over at like my CV and stuff, and she's like "You barely have any teaching experience, which you have a ton of, like, admin experience." I have plenty of teaching experience, now I'm rectified that, but she's like "Well you, I mean, as the admin experience is great, but I think you'd like need more teaching experience" so I was like "Okay, but like, I want to be an admin, I like, see myself actually like going." Um, so yeah, I think it definitely gets downplayed in the field in a way that's problematic...Because I think oftentimes, it's like especially,... for Writing Center as I would say too, but especially for Writing Program Administration, where you're literally making the, like, either the Comp program or the Writing Program in general, like run and function, like, so I don't, yeah, and it's not something, I don't think gets prioritized a lot if we're going like, this route to, for, like, tenure [track positions] and stuff.

While only reaffirming Horner's (2007) point about scholarly work versus administrative work and their different values, this situation illustrates how sometimes gWPAs who express a desire to become administrators are slightly disregarded as opposed to those who aim at becoming scholars or full-time professors. Once again, the arbitrariness of the position combined with the downplaying of its labor exacerbates the disparagement of this alternate career track evident in the inequality of opportunities, and lack of education these graduates can acquire in this area.

Consequently, how can this be improved in practical terms? When reflecting on what I would propose, I started thinking about how in Michigan Tech, we need to take a practicum to be allowed to teach a class. During your first semester, you take a Composition practicum which allows you to teach for the remainder of your degree. Similarly, after your first year you are allowed to voluntarily prepare for other teaching assignments by taking practicums in Advanced Composition, Technical and Professional Communication, Public Speaking, Introduction to Literature, and more to widen your teaching portfolio.

Why not, then, create a WPA practicum? It could be started partly in the Composition one (which is mandatory for all first-year graduate students), and then, those who may be inclined to either WPA or Writing Center theory can start approaching these fields during their second or third years in the program. This also allows for the creation of a professional ladder for gWPAs while still being students, which will help them see growth in the position before they graduate and as they enter the job market. As a practical contribution, on my next and final chapter, I outline a syllabus for a proposed WPA practicum, inspired by the Purdue's University "English 680W: Writing Program

Administration” class that started being offered in 1998 by Professor Shirley Rose, and whose website has not been updated since 2007.

While I recognize that the creation of a seminar or practicum is needed in our institution particularly, MTU does currently offer a Writing Center Administration practicum that could serve as a model for a WPA practica. In addition, other institutions do offer similar graduate courses or practicum; a larger effort should be made to make this type of course more widespread in the current curricula to provide graduate students with diverse options.

If we are seeing a constant need for Writing Programs, graduate teaching assistants and instructors and similar positions, why does a class like this disappear from the academic curricula? Thus, my proposition is not entirely novel, but my approach to bring it back with an updated reading list and a more targeted approach is.

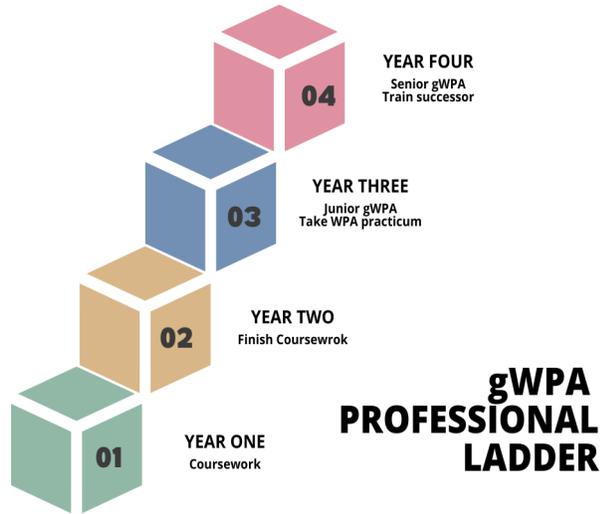
4.4.3 Career Directions for gWPAs

Not directly addressed by my interviewees but clearly dormant between the lines, lies one of the main problems related to the gWPA position across the board: There is no prospect for a career while in this position. Hence, simulating a professional ladder that allows for some mobility and showcases a learning curve and progress in gWPA development seems like a career-focused approach while more adequately preparing graduate students working in these positions. In addition, simulating possible scenarios that might come up once the students graduate and enter the educational taskforce seems like a good practice while they are still finalizing their degrees.

4.4.3.1 *Creating the Professional Ladder*

In relation to what was mentioned above, there are grounds to claim that being a gWPA currently tends to be a dead-end position. By creating a professional ladder, there is an allowance for progression, gaining knowledge and being a learner for the most part of the first year as a

Figure 1. gWPA Professional Ladder



gWPA, and to gaining more experience as a direct mentor to another gWPA during the second one. In addition, this should outline more clearly the kind of authority this position requires, which could be discussed in the practicum (and negotiated beforehand with the department authorities by the WPA/Writing Program Director).

In thinking about how to create a ladder that would work with the degree progression, I considered both MS and Ph.D. students. I crafted a timeline that, while it is attached to linear and adequate process on the degree, also ensures that the department will never be without a trained gWPA.

For Ph.D. students, my recommended professional ladder includes first and foremost, limiting terms to two years per student, and making the position at least two-terms (terms understood as academic years). Further, I recommend restricting the position to the last years of a student's degree program so that the first two years are devoted to completing their coursework (and the basic Composition practicum). The

exception would be if the student has extensive experience with WPA work in their MS or previous professional endeavors.

Therefore, to begin with, a graduate student would apply and get into the gWPA as a Junior gWPA while they take the WPA practicum. Once in their fourth year of the Ph.D. program, candidates would be promoted to Senior gWPA, and the cycle would incorporate a second graduate student as a Junior gWPA. The Junior gWPA would ideally train to become the next in line for the Senior gWPA position. This allows for every student to gain two years of WPA and administrative experience in general, fosters community in the department and the Writing Center, and secures continuity as there is always someone that has been there for at least a year and can pass on their knowledge, even if Directors were to change.

I would like to address that Michigan Tech used to have a similar model to the one I am proposing which was dropped due to lack of resources, therefore I acknowledge that other institutions may have something similar as well.

Some of the drawbacks of this kind of modus operandi for the position include the idea that there always should be at least one, but most likely, two graduate students interested in WPA and in acquiring an administrative position with a two-year term commitment. Another one includes being able to find the resources to allocate the position. This entails at minimum, assuring some financial compensation and granting a course release per student. The latter can conflict with external pressures put on departments, like the case of the Registrar's Office and their request for courses that need to be covered. In the case of Michigan Tech, this tends to happen in the Fall, where sometimes the department and the program would grant the release but the last-minute

need for additional courses to be taught does not allow this benefit. Lastly, another downside is that compensation must be awarded from the department for both the junior and senior gWPA each year. This can be particularly challenging due to the lack of institutional support for departments like Humanities, English, and the like that often see their lines, or funding in general, cut by upper administration.

So far, I have only considered Ph.D. students and candidates on my proposed ladder. For MS students who would like to participate in this dynamic, they could be considered as a secondary Junior gWPA (together with a Ph.D. student) in their final year. They could take the practicum in the same semester as their graduation. Then, after the MS student leaves the institution, the Junior Ph.D. gWPA would move into the Senior position the following year, and they would train a different person that would jump onto the gWPA track as the Junior one (a Ph.D. student in their third year, ideally). In the case that there were no two Ph.D. students interested in the position, the cycle can still be implemented. In that way, there would be a second year MS student and one Ph.D. Once the MS graduates, the Ph.D. that started as a Junior gWPA, moves to the Senior gWPA and a new student starts the cycle as a Junior gWPA, in this case, to ensure continuity this would be a Ph.D. student, not an MS.

By working on this professional ladder, while there are some exigencies to be met, it seems like a win-win situation for all involved, including the department, the Writing Program and the graduate students who want to access these kinds of positions and who are interested in different professional pathways. By restructuring and professionalizing gWPAs' labor, the position can become a more egalitarian and humane

one while allowing students to gain experience and contributing to the program's operations.

4.4.4 Labor Protection & Collective Labor Movements

The final recommendation looking forward is one that, in this case, is geared towards the gWPAs themselves and has already been underway for the past five decades: a call for more robust collective bargaining and labor protection initiatives. This movement started back in 1969 with the University of Wisconsin as the first one to recognize a graduate student union (Singh et al., 2006). This happened at the same time as two other relevant social movements were unraveling: "faculty unions and the student movement" (Rhodes, 1999). Other scholars point to the beginning of the graduate unions movement in relation to the Free Speech Movement at the University of California Berkley (Rhodes, 1999, p. 60). Regardless, the movement has been active and progressing. While the last thirty-five years "have seen successful drives for graduate employee unionization at public universities in the East, Midwest, and the West" (Cary, 2010, p. 151), the unionization process for graduate students "is fraught with legal hurdles" (Singh et al., 2006, p. 57). As if legal issues were not enough, graduate students from private universities face different complications, like restrictions to unionizing depending on the institution. And finally, international students encounter a whole other set of problems since if they were to stop working to go on strike, they would jeopardize their legal immigration status.

These unions tend to argue for their constituents regarding the same issues that lead to unionization more generally speaking. These include "demands for better wages and stipends, decreases in tuition, lowering workloads, better benefits, and more

systematic grievance procedures” (Singh et al., 2006, p. 64). Consequently, as these movements became more frequent and gained traction, other issues such as same-sex benefits, race and gender discrimination started to be addressed (Singh et al., 2006). Apparently, while the advocacy has been continuous, there seems to still be a long way to go.

As I wrote this section, one of my sources dated from the year 2006 claims that “senior faculty can earn an average of \$80,000 per year, while graduate assistant/teacher[s] has the potential to earn from \$5,000 to \$20,000 per year” (Singh et al., 2006, p. 57). Seventeen years later, the stipend has not changed its range significantly. Take, for example, Michigan Tech where the [minimum stipend rate](#) for a Ph.D. student candidate (after passing their Qualifying Examinations and Research Proposal) for the 2022-2023 academic year was \$19,154 annually. The average stipend rate in the Midwest is \$23,234 a year (Klipowicz, 2023). I would like to take this opportunity to also consider that on top of the stipend, at Michigan Tech, graduate students package includes full tuition coverage and 100% subsidized health insurance (this only applies to students on assistantship, not hourly graduate workers). Therefore, since this is a generous compensation for all graduate students, these are benefits that graduate students who are not gWPAs can access. My argument is then that those who act as gWPAs should be considered for additional financial compensation on a regular basis (and not as the result of an arrangement at the time of appointment).

In 2019, the Graduate Student Government presented a [cost-of-living survey](#) report with several takeaways and recommendations for upper administration. Their two main takeaways are first, that most of the stipend money students receive “is spent on

basic necessities and other required payments, leaving little to no money for self-care and emergencies” (GSG, 2020, p. 4). And secondly, that “Across almost all funding types and demographics, students are not making enough for their basic monthly expenses” (GSG, 2020, p. 8). This is not only an issue on the institutional level, but also at the departmental level, where, for example, in the department I belonged to, the call for the 23/24 academic year gWPA does not include any economic compensation and only one course release. This open call for the position was released at the same time I was writing this dissertation. This is but one piece of evidence that there is still a lot of work to be done.

This issue is not in the hands of graduate students alone, but it also involves the university administration. Clearly, with unionization, issues arise for school administrators such as dealing with the National Labor Relations Board or the increased costs to the university due to increased wages and benefits for graduate students (Singh et al., 2006). To this I add the budget changes and restructurings that might have been caused in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who oppose graduate student unionization do so by arguing that “because teaching and research assignments vary by semester, students voting for unionization are those who are currently working as teaching or research assistants, and therefore only a limited number of the total graduate student population present at any given time” (Singh et al., 2006, p. 68). While the variation is accurate, representation is important no matter what.

However, the current collective bargaining movements for unionizing that we are seeing since the beginning of 2023, such as those of graduate students from Dartmouth, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Chicago, Northwestern University and the

University of Southern California (Jain, 2023), are not the same as those that prior generations took part in. Starting around 1980 when President Ronald Reagan was elected, and whose presidency,

helped solidify the ascendance of the subsequent paradigm, neoliberalism, with emphasis on the efficiency of the free market, the need for deregulation and privatization, the reduction of government spending on social services and the replacement of the concept of “public good” with individual responsibility (Greenwood 2009). (Mintz, 2021, p. 81)

In the ensuing years, collective bargaining lost ground while there was an emergence of capital and as neoliberalism settled. The neoliberal paradigm emphasized taking on responsibility and blame and putting the onus on individuals rather than recognizing collective harms and needs, significantly hindering unionizing efforts, and that legacy remains even nowadays. Academia presents us with different types of labor contracts such as tenure track, adjuncting or graduate student teaching assistantships. Nonetheless, and perhaps even more critically, there is a need for better organized and more efficient collective labor movements to ensure the balance of these contracts between capitalists (the university) and labor. Hopefully, the current collective bargaining movements for unionizing that we are seeing since the beginning of 2023, such as those of graduate students from Dartmouth, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Chicago, Northwestern University and the University of Southern California (Jain, 2023) will inspire more graduate student at other institutions to engage in this fight for better labor conditions.

My dissertation focuses on gWPAs, and for this last section I have discussed the collective bargain movement of graduate students in general, because gWPAs are first and foremost, graduate students. In addition, I have noted that all my participants are part of a larger unit inside of the field of WPA, which acts somehow as a collective movement for gWPAs. I argue that by grouping in this way, there is the risk of just helping and advocating for those who are part of the organization, and not those who are outside of it, be it because of choice or plain ignorance of the existence of it. A collective movement of graduate students who act as administrative assistants (of Writing Programs, Writing Centers, graduate programs) more broadly seems like a good place to start to formalize their positions, improve training practices and advocate for creating new career directions post-graduation.

In the following and final chapter, I expose my concluding remarks, the theoretical and practical implications of my project, together with the methodological lessons learnt through this project.

5 Conclusion: Towards a More Just gWPA Position

5.1 Concluding Remarks: gWPAs as the Flight Attendants of Academia

The conversation surrounding graduate students, issues of labor divisions, unfair compensation, and under-preparedness for administrative positions is not a new one (Edgington & Hartlage-Taylor, 2007; McNabb et al., 2002; Miller, 2001; Thomas, 1991). Admittedly, low wages, lack of benefits, and uneven workloads do not uniquely affect graduate students, but as I have introduced previously, adjuncts, part-time faculty and faculty more generally tend to suffer from the same (Levin et al., 2020). This is especially true in disciplines such as writing studies, which tend to have lower wages and lack benefits compared to other faculty, for example, in engineering. Therefore, why are not all adjuncts and graduate students walking out of their classrooms? In recent decades, universities have adopted neoliberal practices “that are manifest in the management of the academic profession, in the actions of both academic managers and faculty” (Levin et al., 2020, p. 1) which “creates” academics that both participate in and counteract neoliberal and managerial practices (Levin et al., 2020, p. 1). Therefore, individuals at the university are positioned within institutional structures and disciplined by these neoliberal practices that they obey, while still finding small places for resistance.

Understood in the context of the rise of capitalism and the settlement of neoliberalism, the gWPA position has become a highly “unregulated” one where arbitrariness and informality foster inequality for graduate students across the board.

Issues with minimal to non-existent financial compensation⁵, lack of benefits, an absence of standard lists of qualifications, responsibilities, or hiring protocols cultivate unequal and unfair working environments that can lead to exploitative circumstances.

Furthermore, the arbitrariness of the way in which the position is allocated to (and kept by) students have cultivated dynamics of patronage and nepotism inside of writing programs, which could deprive some students access to the experience of an administrative graduate assistantship. Therefore, we are in the presence of a position that is very volatile, inconsistent, and highly neglected. At the same time, this position is necessary for programs to be able to run smoothly, with gWPAs providing support to the director/coordinators of the program, helping with mentoring incoming graduate students, and acting as an administrative aide for the program. Yet, the gWPA position lacks structure and support.

Being exploited in the position, intentionally or inadvertently, can look different depending on the program circumstances, as seen by the different working conditions and experiences exhibited by my interviewees. While systemic exploitation seemed to be present in most settings, the idea that labor of love is necessary to perform this position emerged from the conversations with my participants but was absent from every and any list of duties and responsibilities or job posting. Exploitation can also be as simple as operational exploitation, where a gWPA is necessary for the effective functioning of the Writing Program, just as much as a flight attendant is needed for a flight to go smoothly.

⁵ Financial compensation here refers to money assigned to the gWPA for the labor, in addition to the rest of the compensation package all graduate students receive which includes tuition and reduced cost (or free) health insurance.

The analogy is apt that gWPAs are the flight attendants of academia, performing routine “provide snacks and serve beverages” tasks such as answering emails and scheduling meetings, but also more complex responsibilities such as providing technical, pedagogical, and emotional support to those around them. Many of these exploitative circumstances affecting this position can be traced back and explained by considering the feminization of the gWPA role. Instructional practices that are collaborative, student-centered, and nurturing are “marks of feminization” (Lauer, 1995, p. 276). This feminization of the position, which is completely independent of the number of women in the position, also amplifies the “powerless power” (Smoke, 1998) nature of being a gWPA.

Much like airline pilots on strike during the current year, we have also seen airlines starting to pay their flight attendants their money’s worth. After the evidence presented on the statistics shared on chapter four, it seems that academia would do well to start paying attention and restructuring the way that graduate students are compensated, their benefits and recognition. While Michigan Technological University has been working on these types of problematics, striving for stipend raises and promoting research on how to provide different types of recognition among GTIs and GTAs, efforts should be multiplied. It is a matter of time to see if projects like this will help foster awareness and bring gWPAs (and all graduate students) improved working conditions, fair compensation, and proper recognition. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that a lot of the issues that affect graduate students, particularly those that occupy gWPA positions, are actually symptoms of much larger systemic issues rooted in the foundations of academia

that will not be solved by one dissertation or two, but rather more radical measures in the near future.

Another apt analogy is gWPAs as the canary in the coal mine, a cautionary tale of what can happen if we do not start paying attention to inadequate labor division and its consequences. The issues that affect adjunct labor seem to be prescient markers for the weakening of the labor contract in academe more generally. Tenure has become under fire, and other elements eroding academic freedoms and autonomy are examples of why these issues are not confined to gWPAs and adjunct faculty—their plight is the canary indicating the toxicity of current trends for academe more generally.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Theoretical Implications

This dissertation contributes to the ongoing conversations pertaining to graduate student labor, writing program administration, composition, gender studies and emotional labor. The project has demonstrated the utility and value of a particular conjunction of concepts that together address issues of labor exploitation and gender including emotional labor, liminality, and feminization, which allowed for elaborating on new insights regarding the experience of being a gWPA currently.

Organizational communication as the overarching framework has provided a way to show how all organizations are fundamentally gendered and inequitable, but in addition, infused with power. The organization's being gendered implies that "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and

feminine” (Acker, 1990, p. 146). The dynamics at play surrounding the gWPA position, where women have historically been the ones’ teaching writing is part of history and how liminality works until present day. This is where feminization becomes insightful and shows how the organization has worked towards the inequitable work structure that it keeps replicating. The gWPA position exhibits noticeable gendered dynamics pertaining to authority and responsibility, even nowadays. The gWPA is then a feminized figure that inhabits the cracks of the organization while providing fundamental support for the functioning of the Writing Program while at the same time, suffering from lack of proper authority, decision making and recognition.

Employing emotional labor as an analytical concept opened the possibility to look at the labor performed by gWPAs in a way that differed from the classical administrative/scholar work dichotomy. While absent from position descriptions and not built into any job duties and responsibilities list, gWPAs deploy emotional labor almost daily in their exchanges with fellow graduate students, interactions with superiors and communication with external people. Emotional labor is exploited as necessary but unremitted labor, thus performing emotions that are not sincerely felt can affect a moral quandary. Whilst gWPAs are not explicitly expected to maintain even keel and emotional equilibrium of the program on a regular basis, they might be doing so already. For example, by creating what one of my interviewees defined as “commiserating spaces”, a (sometimes) physical space where fellow graduate students can vent their frustrations, feel listened to but also, keep on learning how to become better scholars.

Considering concepts belonging to affect theory, I draw on Lauren Berlant’s cruel optimism which she defined as “a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of

possibility whose realization is discovered either to be *impossible*, sheer fantasy, or *too possible*, and toxic” (2010, p. 94). I argue that through cruel optimism, the gWPA experience can be explained as something other than subjugation and subservience. Rather, cruel optimism in this case is the idea that the position must be endured with the promise and possibility of a brighter, better future after graduation thanks to having this experience under their belt and a line on the CV. However, this future is always a possibility but never a guarantee.

While enduring a marginalized and subjugated position such as the gWPA in exchange for the possibility of a better future might seem absurd, supported by concepts from Giroux (2002), I have argued for the idea that gWPAs might be suffering from an unconscious collective cynicism. At the risk of oversimplifying, this collective cynicism might prevent gWPAs from realizing how oppressive, exploitative, and subservient the gWPA position can be and the negative consequences this can have on their professional and personal lives. Far from blaming the lack of initiative to change aspects of the position on the gWPAs themselves, I acknowledged that this inaction and passivity might not be due to lack of interest but rather, unawareness or an obedient response to larger systemic issues that cannot be fixed by those in the position, but that require change enacted by upper administration.

5.2.2 Practical Implications for Position Improvement

The main practical implication of this project is related to lack of professionalization of the gWPA position, which entails a lack of training in WPA. Therefore, to counteract this reality, I propose the development and implementation of a more robust gWPA training. As noted in the previous chapter, while this is not a novel

concept, it seems to be the case that WPA curricula has diminished in universities during the past few decades. However, there are currently some options available for those interested in learning about WPA including (but not limited to) those in [NC State University](#) or [Saint Cloud State](#). At my own institution, the Michigan Tech Writing Center also offers a graduate student practicum to those who want to learn about this alternative space and engage in Writing Center theory.

For the purpose of my dissertation, I follow the model that the department of Humanities uses for graduate student practicums, which are short courses that are usually seven weeks long⁶ to train students in how to teach different courses. These courses are worth one credit and are typically covered by the department as a credit overload in regular semesters (Fall/Spring). Otherwise, the practicum can be taken as one credit during one of the two summer tracks. This would make the practicum accessible, both financially but also timewise, as it would allow the student to keep advancing with their regular full credit load. Ideally, the practicum is to be taken during the first semester when the gWPA is in the position, meaning, when they are junior gWPAs in the system I am proposing.

It should be noted that this practicum would also be open to those who do not wish to occupy the position immediately but might have an interest in administration or WPA more generally. Both the practicum syllabus and schedule, together with the proposed bibliography, submitted with this dissertation are adaptable templates for what a course like this could afford for those who are interested in alternative career directions in

⁶ Except for the composition pedagogy practicum, HU5931 which lasts fourteen weeks.

academia, in this case, in WPA. The sample syllabus presented in this project (see Appendix B) has been created based on previously taught course syllabi. Additionally, the course description, learning objectives and schedule were formulated through prompts in the novel AI tool ChatGPT after a preliminary round of manual course design, and edited by hand for the final version. All of this, in combination with materials from the course “English 680W Writing Program Administration” taught by Professor Shirley K. Rose, and additional digital contents. These materials aim at contributing to the practical actions possible to address some of the issues that emerged in this project.

After taking this course, students will be able to:

- Discuss the historical development and theoretical foundations of WPA.
- Apply administrative basics to writing program management.
- Analyze and address challenges in WPA.
- Promote work/life balance and well-being.

These learning objectives have been created considering aspects mentioned in the interviews regarding what kind of knowledge gWPAs wish they would have known before occupying the position. The practicum considers both theoretical and practical knowledge, therefore it includes heavier reading-based modules like learning the basics of history and development of the WPA field, but also more practical skills-based modules like strategies and practices of self-care and well-being.

Coupled with these learning objectives, the three main core assignments strive to offer the gWPAs opportunities to explore and learn while they are engaged in the first year of the position. The assignments include a program assessment report, where students will be asked to perform a surface level assessment on the Composition Program

to find what aspects they believe need adjustments or improvement. The second assignment entails the creation of a personal wellness plan where (after reading theory) the students will consider what kind of strategies they can implement to keep a better work/life balance. The last assignment is a reflection paper where they will be encouraged to research and consider possible future career directions in the field of WPA. In addition to these, there will be weekly discussions where graduate students will converse about the weekly readings provided on Canvas, with the additional goal of fostering community among students with similar research interests.

The seven modules proposed for the course respond to several of the issues with the gWPA position raised throughout the dissertation. The course starts with an overview of the basics including theoretical foundations and historical development of WPA. Module two delves into curriculum design and development, frequent tasks gWPAs engage with. This is followed by an introduction to Writing Centers, with the intention of exposing graduate students to both WPA and Writing Center theory so they can experiment and see where their professional interests lie. The next module has to do with organizing and allocating resources, where students will read about strategic planning, grant writing and funding opportunities. Again, all of these are tasks that usually the gWPA assists with (as seen on the gWPA responsibilities list in chapter 4). Six is probably one of the most important modules of the practicum as it pertains to work/life balance and the importance of well-being. Finally, module number seven is based on the analysis of case studies in Writing Program Administration to expose students to possible challenges that administrators face and how to work through them.

The content and formatting of this practicum is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive as to what could be in a course geared towards graduate students who express interest in WPA. As I have established before, this syllabus is but one example and there are several other aspects of WPA that due to space and time, I have left outside but can be included in this emerging syllabus. For example, readings and considerations of feminist WPA, politics and economics of WPA or the Writing Program Administrator as a researcher, to name a few. It is not only an opportunity but also an affordance of the practicum, that the program, department, or institution have the task of identifying what their students' needs are and tailoring the course to fit them.

5.3 Methodological Lessons Learned

5.3.1 Everyday Ethics

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) consider that there are two dimensions of ethics: procedural ethics and “ethics in practice.” While the latter pertains to “seeking approval from a relevant ethics committee to undertake research involving humans”, the latter has to do with “the day-to-day ethical issues that arise in the doing of research” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 264). Having addressed the procedural dimension of ethics processes before starting the data collection, that is, when seeking approval of Michigan Tech’s IRB, throughout the writing of this dissertation, I found myself often worried about the small ethical dilemmas “in practice.”

Regarding these ethical dilemmas “in practice”, one of my main worries related to the way in which I portrayed my interviewees. First and foremost, because I had occupied the same position, I was aware that I had some baggage while processing my data and

writing my analysis. And secondly, when writing about people like my interviewees, who are in subservient or exploited positions, there is a tension between critiquing the inequities in their narratives and giving proper respect to their portrayals. Part of my fear stemmed from not wanting to portray my participants as naïve or gullible but rather insisting on their vulnerability and how many times they had no other option but to act accordingly to the circumstances. Looking back after this dissertation was finalized, my respect for my interviewees increased as they did not justify their exploitation, but they managed it each in their own way and made it through.

In what follows I consider the two main methodological lessons learned as a researcher on this project. I first discuss a little misadventure I went through while coding my data, and second, reflect on my positionality as a researcher.

5.3.2 Coding Rush

When I set up to start coding the interview transcriptions, I did what is usually a first pass to “fracture” data, which is basically extracting line by line a word or concept that would encapsulate the content of the line, in order to obtain codes. As I had six interviews that were anywhere between twenty to twenty-five pages long, the process took close to a week (considering that I was still occupying my position as a gWPA which entailed administrative work plus close mentoring with the first-year graduate students).

After the first pass, I went back for a second pass, but this time I decided to organize my concepts into a spreadsheet on the computer. Here is where I must do a mea culpa: due to the fact that when I was starting this project, like any other person, I had my own preconceptions of what the gWPA experience was. This led me to read my data in a

particular way; however, as Lynn Butler-Kisber asserts, “In qualitative inquiry, no apologies are needed for identity, assumptions and biases, just a rigorous accounting for them” (2018, p. 19). In my mind, creating a table where I would find five or six themes, to then fit all the rest of the codes in between as a matrix turned into a complicated and overwhelming process. Shortly after embarking on this endeavor, I realized it was not as linear and my data was “not fitting.”

In my conversation with my committee member shed light on the issue that in trying to put back together my data as somewhat of a puzzle, I should have been categorizing. Instead of trying to fit into boxes, I should have been trying to find the commonalities that emerged from the data. By jumping into creating such a strict matrix that I thought would provide some answers, I skipped the stages of the coding process where one describes what is in the data, analyzes the findings to later abstract them into themes. Once I stopped trying to fit into such strict margins, I was able to “dialogue” with my data following the aforementioned steps and finding my way to what would eventually become my themes for analysis. If I compared my research to a kid’s assembling toys, during the first weeks of my coding process I was trying to fit the square shape into the circle shaped slot.

While my mistake slowed the coding process, it still taught a valuable lesson. Part of what rushed the process and led me to try and fit codes into categories had to do with preconceptions of what I wanted to find, or at least, what I thought I would find. It was not until I sat with my data, and considered my biases and preconceptions that I could start to unravel the findings of my research. Specifically, this happened when I allowed data to speak and did not force it into checkboxes. Therefore, the lesson learned is

twofold. First, that data should not be rushed into logical forms or spoken for. And secondly, one should always take the time to consider who we are as researchers as we all bring beliefs, experiences, and biases that are usually not articulated. Therefore, what needs to be interrogated and accounted for is “what perspectives are brought up to the work and why we see things the way we do” (Butler-Kisber, 2018, p. 19).

5.3.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity tends to be understood as “involving an ongoing self-awareness during the research process which aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge within research in order to produce more accurate analyses of our research” (Pillow, 2003, p. 179). Throughout my process, I have tried to constantly document in small snippets of this project, the way in which I constructed meaning and knowledge, keeping in mind my positionality. When I proposed this project, I had been out of the gWPA position for a semester and had taken some time to process my experience of the past two years. The outline of the study was influenced by my learning but also by the pitfalls of having been a gWPA. Motivated by a somewhat selfish impulse, I wanted to figure out if others were facing similar challenges with the same number of resources as the ones we had at MTU and the composition program. Once I had a chance to converse with my participants, I tried to find pathways to help improve the position and experience for gWPAs to come.

As this dissertation is being finalized almost two years after the proposal, I consider Lynn Butler-Kisber’s idea that who we are as researchers, or what is called our researcher identity, changes constantly throughout time, just as our everyday identity

does (2018, p. 19) . During this research process I have tried to be what Luttrell (2000) calls a “good enough” researcher, who is:

a person who is aware that she or he has personal stakes and investments in research relationships; who does not shy away from frustrations, anxieties, and disappointments that are part of any relationship; and who seeks to understand (and is able to appreciate) the difference between one’s self and another. (p. 515)

I had personal stakes and investment since I wanted to find justice regarding some unhappy experiences I had while in the position and that were related to the way in which it is structured.

Part of being a “good enough” researcher is “not to get mixed up between one’s fantasies, projections, and theories of who the ‘others’ are and who they are in their own right” (Luttrell, 2000, p. 515). This was one of the main challenges for me personally as when I started talking with my interviewees, I realized our experiences were different, and most of them did not suffer from the exact same ailments on the surface level. However, once I started reading between the lines and analyzing their stories, I was able to encounter common ground that affected us all. I had to come to terms and accept my mistake of going into the interviews to try and find that they had the same experiences as I, caused by one of my blind spots, having been a gWPA, and the emotional and intellectual involvement I had with my research. As Wendy Luttrell (2000) puts it, I hope the many times I recognized my mistakes compensated for them along the way.

5.4 Limitations

This project had, like any other, several limitations. The first, and most important one, has to do with the way in which the sample was determined. While my interviewees

covered a wide range of institutions and geographic locations, the scope of the research is still limited due to all of them belonging to the executive committee inside of the graduate arm of the main council of the field.

The second limitation has to do with the size of the study's sample. It should be noted that while I received around a 70% response rate from the initial communication asking for participants, around 50% of those contacted agreed to and completed an interview. Thus, the views and perspectives shared on this dissertation come from a group of people that had similar interests and work objectives. Furthermore, this group of people also engaged in uncompensated labor by being on said executive committee, which might have an influence on their views and perceptions. The fact that most gWPAs are not in this committee and do not have these experiences is both a limitation for my study but has also been the basis for several of my recommendations, partly because I knew the answer of my interviewees would provide insights on the gWPA experience. A more exhaustive and participatory study aimed at general body members of this council would be useful to gather more information on the experience of gWPAs across the country.

The third and final limitation is related to timing and location. At the moment that the proposal for this dissertation was being written (Fall 2021) and presented, the United States was experiencing the highest COVID-19 rates of spread and contagion, which led to the decision of this study being set up online to conduct interviews on the digital platform Zoom. Addressed in my second chapter, there are peculiarities to conducting these types of interviews that while I believe did not directly impact the responses, having conducted the interviews in person would have allowed for a different set of notes

and observations to complement the conversations. But due to constraints of time, health safety and budget, conducting research online seemed like the most appropriate mode.

5.5 Future Directions

This dissertation utilized conjoined theories to analyze the gWPA experience and provide new insights on exploitation, betrayal and promise in the position. In the future, this model, together with its critical organizational communication theoretical framework, could be utilized to dive deep into the working experience of graduate students in different fields that might be affected by similar challenging gender, labor division, or authority issues, among others. Moreover, this kind of research could also apply to other contingent labor populations such as adjunct faculty to study how power, authority, gender, and emotional labor are exercised in these positions with the goal of gaining new insights. This could illuminate possible disparities not considered by previous research with the intent to improve working conditions for these marginalized and vulnerable populations in academia.

As the final section of chapter four addressed collective bargaining movements and unionization of gWPAs, further development of this research would expand on the possibilities and conditions for such movements to emerge. For example, what would be the possibility of organizing roles with such short-term stints on the position, how do international students fit in a unionized position, and what kind of protections can these unions afford while coming to an agreement with their institutions? Additionally, it would be interesting to study the features of successful collective bargaining movements, to identify what features could be extrapolated to future collective bargaining strategies.

5.6 Final Reflections

A colleague of mine once said that graduate students do research on “what is wrong with them.” The more conversations I have with graduate students, and the more dissertations I read, I am almost fully convinced that this is the case. The motivation to write this dissertation stems from the rough experience that I had during the first year I occupied the gWPA position in the composition program. As I have described in different parts of this dissertation, there were challenging moments, but I also carry with me very fond memories, and the knowledge I acquired in all the different areas.

My bittersweet experience during the first two years in the position, in conjunction with the dissenting views between me and the program director at the time, troubled me for a while. However, I decided that it was just part of being in that position, which meant that if I wanted the experience that came with it, I had to put up with all the negative aspects of the position without questioning it. Writing this project has been, partly, a way to exorcize those demons and make peace with the experience. It was not until my last semester of course work when I encountered Sally Bar Ebest’s “Gender Differences in Writing Program Administration,” that the troubling comments and stark statistics hit close to home, and fully prompted the research that became this dissertation.

I hope that the discussions that unraveled in this project contribute to the discourse around graduate student labor, administrative work inside of academia and alternative professional directions for those in the composition and WPA fields. Like Cheryl Glenn, “I am hopeful, but I am not naïve” (2018, p. 212). While I had a far better and more humane experience the third time around as a gWPA, part of it had to do with being at the right place at the right time and knowing the right people. I was very lucky.

But I believe all current and future gWPAs deserve a good experience that is not based on being lucky, but rather, on being valued as a professional.

References

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations. *Gender and Society*, 4(2), 139-158. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/189609>
- Acker, J. (2006). Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations. *Gender & Society*, 20(4), 441-464. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206289499>
- Adams-Wooten, C., Babb, J., Costello, K. M., Navickas, K., & Micciche, L. (Eds.). (2020). *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration*.
- Adams, W. (2015). Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews. In J. Wholey, H. Hatry, & K. Newcomer (Eds.), *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation* (Fourth ed.). Jossey-Bass. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171386.ch19>
- Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using Zoom Videoconferencing for Qualitative Data Collection: Perceptions and Experiences of Researchers and Participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1609406919874596. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596>
- Barr-Ebest, S. (1995). Gender Differences in Writing Program Administration. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 19(3), 53-73.
- Barr-Ebest, S. (1999). The Next Generation of WPAs: A Study of Graduate Students in Composition/Rhetoric. *Writing Program Administration*, 22, 65-84.
- benefit. In. *Merriam-Webster*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/benefit>
- Berlant, L. (2010). Cruel Optimism. *The affect theory reader*, 93-117.
- Bizzell, P. (1999). Foreword. On Good Administrators. In D. George (Ed.), *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers & Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories* (pp. vii-ix). Boynton/Cook Publisher.

- Brown, J. A. (1999). The Peer Who Isn't a Peer: Authority and the Graduate Student Administrator. In *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers, and Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories* (pp. 120-125).
- Butler-Kisber, L. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry: Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives* (Second Edition ed.) <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526417978>
- Cary, N. (2010). *No University Is an Island : Saving Academic Freedom*. NYU Press. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=305580&site=ehost-live>
- Clinnin, K. (2020). And So I Respond: The Emotional Labor of Writing Program Administrators in Crisis Response. In C. A. Wooten, et al. (Ed.), *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration*, (pp. 129-144). UP of Colorado.
- Collins, P. H. (2019). *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Duke University Press.
- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020). *Intersectionality*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Dale, J., & Micciche, L. (Eds.). (2003). *A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion & Composition Studies*. Portsmouth, NH : Boynton/Cook, 2003. <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910739979302121>.
- De Lissovoy, N., & Cedillo, S. (2016). Neoliberalism and Power in Education. *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-532-7_155-1
- DeGenaro, W. (2018). Kurt Cobain, Writing Program Administrator. *Writing Program Administration*, 42(1), 17-36.
- Delta will begin paying flight attendants for flight boarding time.* (2022). The Associated Press.
- Edgington, A., & Hartlage-Taylor, S. (2007). Invisible Administrators: The Possibilities and Perils of Graduate Student Administration. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 31(1-2), 150-170.

- Ellingson, L. L., & Sotirin, P. J. (2020). *Making Data in Qualitative Research : Engagements, Ethics, and Entanglements*. Routledge.
- Eschner, K. (2016, December 30, 2016). The Story of the Real Canary in the Coal Mine. *Smithsonian Magazine*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/story-real-canary-coal-mine-180961570/>
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Pantheon Books. <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/999495361202121>
- Gillam, A. M. (1999). Taking it Personally: Redefining the Role and Work of the WPA. In *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers and Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories*. Ed. Diana George. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers.
- Giroux, H. A. (2002). Neoliberalism, Corporate Culture, and the Promise of Higher Education: The University as a Democratic Public Sphere. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(4), 425-463.
- Glenn, C. (2018). *Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope*. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Gray, L., Wong, G., Rempel, G., & Cook, K. (2020, 05/20). Expanding Qualitative Research Interviewing Strategies: Zoom Video Communications. *Qualitative Report*, 25, Article 9. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2020.4212>
- GSG. (2020). *Report on Graduate Student Cost of Living*.
- Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, Reflexivity, and “Ethically Important Moments” in Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(2), 261-280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360>
- Heard, M. (2012). Cultivating Sensibility in Writing Program Administration. *WPA: Writing Program Administration-Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators*, 35(2).

- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Holbrook, S. E. (1991). Women's Work: The Feminizing of Composition. *Rhetoric Review*, 9(2), 201-229.
- Holt, M., Anderson, L., & Rouzie, A. (2003). Making Emotion Work Visible in Writing Program Administration. In L. R. M. Dale Jacobs (Ed.), *A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion & Composition Studies*. Boynton/Cook Publishers.
- Horner, B. (2007). Redefining Work and Value for Writing Program Administration. *JAC*, 163-184.
- The House of the Rising Sun*. (n.d.). <https://www.songfacts.com/facts/the-animals/the-house-of-the-rising-sun>
- Hsu, H. (2019). Affect Theory and the New Age of Anxiety. *The New Yorker*, 18.
- Jain, K. (2023, April 23, 2023). Wave of Graduate Labor Movements Sweeps the Country. *The Brown Daily Herald*.
<https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2023/04/wave-of-graduate-labor-movements-sweeps-the-country>
- Johnson, J. M., & Rowlands, T. (2012). The Interpersonal Dynamics of In-Depth Interviewing. *The SAGE handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft*, 99-113.
- Johnson, K. (2012). Untitled [The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies, Donna Strickland]. *Composition Studies*, 40(1), 143-146.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43501822>
- Karnieli-Miller, O., Strier, R., & Pessach, L. (2009, 03/01). Power Relations in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative health research*, 19, 279-289.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732308329306>

- Keller, E. (2018). *Rhetorical Strategies for Professional Development: Investment Mentoring in Classrooms and Workplaces* (First ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351246187>
- Klipowicz, C. (2023). *Graduate student stipends in the Midwest are falling behind the rest of the country*. Higher Ed Dive.
<https://www.highereddive.com/news/midwest-graduate-student-stipends-falling-behind/643431/>
- Kramer, M. W. (2010). *Organizational Socialization : Joining and Leaving Organizations*. Polity.
- Latterell, C. (2003). Defining Roles for Graduate Students in Writing Program Administration: Balancing Pragmatic Needs with a Postmodern Ethics of Action. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 27(1-2), 23-39.
- Lauer, J. M. (1995). The Feminization of Rhetoric and Composition Studies? *Rhetoric Review*, 13(2), 276-286.
- Levin, J. S., Martin, M. C., & López Damián, A. I. (2020). *University Management, the Academic Profession, and Neoliberalism*. State University of New York Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Denzin, N. K. (2003). *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief* (Vol. 2). Rowman Altamira.
- Long, M. C., Holberg, J. H., & Taylor, M. M. (1996). Beyond Apprenticeship: Graduate Students, Professional Development Programs and the Future (s) of English Studies. *WPA-LOGAN-*, 20(1/2), 66-78.
- Luttrell, W. (2000, 12/01). “Good Enough” Methods for Ethnographic Research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 70.
- Magness, P. W. (2016). For-profit universities and the roots of adjunctification in US higher education. *Liberal Education*, 102(2), 50.
- Marshall, M. (2011, April 9, 2020). *A Brief History of the “House of the Rising Sun”*.

- Martin, B. (2009, 07/01). Academic Patronage. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 5, 3-19. <https://doi.org/10.21913/IJEL.v5i1.478>
- Matteson, R. L. (2006). *Bluegrass Picker's Tune Book*. M. Bay Publications. <https://books.google.com/books?id=WTv6wAEACAAJ>
- McLeod, S. H. (2007). *Writing Program Administration*. Parlor Press.
- McNabb, R., Mountford, R., Diller, C., Oates, S. F., Willard-Traub, M. K., Jukuri, S. D., Duffey, S., Feigert, B., Mortimer, V., & Phegley, J. (2002). Future Perfect: Administrative Work and the Professionalization of Graduate Students. *Rhetoric Review*, 21(1), 40-87.
- Meixner, C., Kruck, S. E., & Madden, L. T. (2010). Inclusion of Part-Time Faculty for the Benefit of Faculty and Students. *College teaching*, 58(4), 141-147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2010.484032>
- Micciche, L. R. (2002). More than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work. *College English*, 64(4), 432-458.
- Micciche, L. R. (2007). *Doing Emotion*. Portsmouth NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Miller, T. P. (2001). Why Don't Our Graduate Programs Do a Better Job of Preparing Students for the Work That We Do? *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 24(3), 41-58.
- Mintz, B. (2021). Neoliberalism and the Crisis in Higher Education: The Cost of Ideology. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 80(1), 79-112. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/ajes.12370>
- Mishler, E. G. (1991). Representing Discourse: The Rhetoric of Transcription. *Journal of narrative and life history*, 1(4), 255-280.
- Mumby, D. K. (2012). *Organizational Communication: A Critical Approach*. Sage.

- Mumby, D. K., & Kuhn, T. R. (2019). *Organizational Communication: A Critical Introduction* (Second Edition ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Naumann, S., Matyjek, M., Bögl, K., & Dziobek, I. (2022, 2022/12/22). Doctoral Researchers' Mental Health and PhD Training Satisfaction During the German COVID-19 Lockdown: Results from an International Research Sample. *Scientific Reports*, 12(1), 22176. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-26601-4>
- Oliffe, J. L., Kelly, M. T., Gonzalez Montaner, G., & Yu Ko, W. F. (2021). Zoom Interviews: Benefits and Concessions. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, 16094069211053522. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211053522>
- Ortner, S. B. (1972). Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture? *Feminist studies*, 1(2), 5-31.
- Phillips, T., Shovlin, P., & Titus, M. (2014). Thinking Liminality: Exploring the (Com) Promising Positions of the Liminal WPA. *WPA: Writing Program Administration-Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators*, 38(1).
- Phillips, T., Shovlin, P., & Titus, M. L. (2016). (Re) Identifying the gWPA Experience. *WPA: Writing Program Administration-Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators*, 40(1).
- Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, Catharsis, or Cure? Rethinking the Uses of Reflexivity as Methodological Power in Qualitative Research. *International journal of qualitative studies in education*, 16(2), 175-196.
- PurdueUniversity. (2022). *Mentoring Improvement Initiative*. <https://www.purdue.edu/gradschool/mentoring/index.html>
- Rhodes, K. (1999). Mothers Tell Your Children Not to do What I Have Done: The Sin and Misery of Entering the Profession as a Composition Coordinator. In *Kitchen cooks, plate twirlers and troubadours: Writing program administrators tell their stories* (pp. 86-94).
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Sage.

- Schaefer, D. (2013). The Promise of Affect: The Politics of the Event in Ahmed's The Promise of Happiness and Berlant's Cruel Optimism. *Theory & Event*, 16(2).
- Schuster, C. I. (1991). *The Politics of Promotion*. Boynton/Cook.
- Sciences, N. A. o., Engineering, N. A. o., & Medicine, I. o. (1993). *Responsible Science: Ensuring the Integrity of the Research Process: Volume II*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/doi:10.17226/2091>
- Singh, P., Zinni, D. M., & MacLennan, A. F. (2006, 2006/03/01). Graduate Student Unions in the United States. *Journal of Labor Research*, 27(1), 55-73. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12122-006-1009-9>
- Sledd, J. (2000). Return to Service. *Composition Studies*, 28(2), 11-32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43501459>
- Smoke, T. (1998). Collaborating with Power: Contradictions of Working as a WPA. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 21, 92-100.
- Strickland, D. (2011). *The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies*. SIU Press.
- Thomas, T. (1991). The Graduate Student as Apprentice WPA: Experiencing the Future. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 14(3), 41-51.
- Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. John Wiley & Sons (UK). <https://books.google.com/books?id=RI6cwgEACAAJ>
- Vidal Chiesa, L. (2021, March 11). *Zoomtopia: Teaching in a New Fragmented Normality* [Roundtable]. Northeast Modern Language Association, Online.
- Watson, A., Lupton, D., & Michael, M. (2021). Enacting intimacy and sociality at a distance in the COVID-19 crisis: the sociomaterialities of home-based communication technologies. *Media International Australia*, 178(1), 136-150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878x20961568>

White, E. M. (1991). Use It or Lose It: Power and the WPA. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 15, 3-12.

Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (REV - Revised ed.). Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc4g4q>

Appendix A: Interview Questions

IRB Approved Interview Questions

- Tell me about your job.
 - Tell me about your obligations as a gWPA and what that means to you.
 - Why did you volunteer to be a gWPA in your department/program?
 - Why are you part of the CWPA Graduate Committee?
 - What are your goals for addressing the gWPA position as a member of this committee?
-
- In what way (s) does this position affect your relationship with other graduate students
 - Tell me about your feelings about this job.
 - Tell me about your most rewarding moment as a gWPA
 - Tell me your most difficult experience as gWPA
-
- Give me an example of a difficult decision you've had to make while in this position.
 - Tell me about a time when an upper-level decision or a policy change held up your work.
 - Can you give me an example of when you came up with a clever way of motivating a graduate teaching instructor?
-
- Tell me about a time you got angry or felt discouraged while in the position.
 - Tell me about a difficult situation with a supervisor.
-
- Tell me about one thing that you wish you would have been prepared better for prior to or while in this position?

Appendix B: WPA Practicum Syllabus



**Michigan
Technological
University**

Course Syllabus⁷

HU1234 – Writing Program Administration Practicum
College of Science and Arts
Fall 2023

Instructor Information

Instructor: Jane Doe, PhD, Associate Professor
Office Location: 123 Walker Arts and Humanities Center
Telephone: Office (111)222-3456
E-mail: jdoe@mtu.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

Course Identification

Course Number: HU1234-R01
Course Name: Writing Program Administration Practicum
Course Location: To be announced
Class Times: To be announced
Prerequisites: HU5931 Composition Practicum

Course Description/Overview

The Writing Program Administration (**WPA**) Practicum is designed to provide graduate students with an immersive and practical learning experience in the field. Through a combination of theoretical study, hands-on activities, and real-world case studies, students will develop a comprehensive understanding of the fundamentals of writing program administration, including its history, administration basics, and the critical importance of work/life balance.

This practicum will delve into the historical development of writing programs, tracing their evolution from traditional composition courses to the multidimensional programs of today. Students will examine the theoretical

⁷ The course description, learning objectives and schedule in this syllabus were formulated through prompts created for AI tool ChatGPT after a preliminary round of manual course design. This is also complemented with materials from the course “English 680W Writing Program Administration” taught by Professor Shirley K. Rose, and additional digital materials.

underpinnings of WPA, considering various pedagogical approaches, curricular designs, and assessment strategies. By analyzing historical trends and current practices, students will gain valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities that writing program administrators face.

A central focus of this practicum will be the practical aspects of writing program administration. Students will engage in activities such as designing writing courses, creating assessment rubrics, and developing resources. They will also explore the administrative dimensions of program management, including grant writing, funding opportunities, and strategic planning. Through these experiential learning opportunities, students will acquire the necessary skills to effectively lead and support writing programs in academic settings.

This practicum also recognizes the importance of work/life balance for writing program administrators. Students will explore strategies for managing competing demands, fostering a supportive work environment, and advocating for well-being. They will engage in discussions on self-care, time management, and developing healthy boundaries, which are crucial for maintaining long-term professional fulfillment and success.

The Writing Program Administration Practicum aims to prepare graduate students for leadership roles in WPA, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives necessary to thrive in this dynamic field. By the end of the course, students will have developed a comprehensive understanding of the field and the ability to critically analyze and address the challenges faced by writing program administrators today.

Course Resources

Course Website(s)

- [Canvas](http://www.courses.mtu.edu) [www.courses.mtu.edu]

Required Course Text

- All required readings will be provided to students via Canvas

Course Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Discuss the historical development and theoretical foundations of WPA: By examining the evolution of writing programs and exploring various pedagogical approaches, students will gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical context and theoretical frameworks that shape writing program administration today. To demonstrate their knowledge, they will be able to discuss WPA theoretical foundations.

- Apply administrative basics to writing program management: Students will develop practical skills in areas such as curriculum design, assessment strategies, grant writing, and strategic planning among others. Through hands-on activities and real-world case studies, they will learn how to effectively lead and support writing programs in academic settings.
- Analyze and address challenges in WPA: Students will critically analyze the challenges faced by writing program administrators, including issues related to faculty development, student support, program assessment, and institutional dynamics. They will develop the ability to propose innovative solutions and implement strategies to address these challenges.
- Promote work/life balance and well-being: Students will explore strategies for managing the demands of WPA while prioritizing personal well-being and fostering a supportive work environment. They will develop skills in self-care, time management, and setting healthy boundaries, enabling them to maintain long-term professional fulfillment and success.

Grading Scheme

Grading System

| Letter Grade | Percentage | Grade points/credit | Rating |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------|---------------|
| A | 92% & above | 4.00 | Excellent |
| AB | 91.9% – 88% | 3.50 | Very good |
| B | 87.9% – 80% | 3.00 | Good |
| BC | 79.9% – 78% | 2.50 | Above average |
| C | 77.9% – 70% | 2.00 | Average |
| CD | 69.9% – 68% | 1.50 | Below average |
| D | 67.9% - 60% | 1.00 | Inferior |
| F | 59.9% and below | 0.00 | Failure |
| I | Incomplete; given only when a student is unable to complete a segment of the course because of circumstances beyond the student's control. | | |
| X | Conditional, with no grade points per credit; given only when the student is at fault in failing to complete a minor segment of a course, but in the judgment of the instructor does not need to repeat the course. It must be made up by the close of the next semester or the grade becomes a failure (F). A (X) grade is included in the grade point average calculation as a (F) grade. | | |

Grading Policy

Grades will be based on the following:

| Course Component | Points |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Discussions | 180 |
| Program Assessment Report | 300 |
| Personal Wellness Plan | 120 |
| Final Paper | 400 |
| Total Points | 1000 |

General Guidelines

Students are expected to submit all assignments by the specified due date and time as indicated in the course syllabus or by the instructor. Timely submission is essential to ensure proper evaluation and feedback.

Late Submission. Late assignments will be subject to penalties as outlined in this policy. Students are encouraged to communicate with the instructor in advance if they anticipate any difficulties in meeting the assignment deadlines.

Late Assignment Penalties

- Up to 24 hours late: 10% deduction from the maximum attainable grade.
- More than 24 hours late: An additional 5% deduction per day, up to a maximum of 50%.

Weekends and Holidays. In cases where the deadline falls on a weekend or a university-recognized holiday, the assignment will be considered on time if submitted by the next business day following the weekend or holiday.

Exceptional Circumstances. In exceptional cases, such as medical emergencies, family emergencies, or other unforeseen circumstances beyond a student's control, students may request an extension. The instructor will review such requests on an individual basis and may grant an extension without penalty, provided sufficient evidence is provided to support the claim. It is the student's responsibility to communicate with the instructor as soon as possible regarding their situation.

Course Policies

We are all members of an academic community where it is our shared responsibility to cultivate a climate where all students/individuals are valued and where both they and their ideas are treated with respect.

Therefore, I expect you to:

- Conduct yourself in a professional and respectful manner during all class meetings and class-related activities.
- Listen to and respect the viewpoints of others, even if you strongly disagree with them.
- When you do voice disagreement, do so in a civil manner.
- Come to class meetings having done the readings and writing assignments assigned for the day and being prepared to discuss them, participate in draft workshops, and/or conduct group work as the case may be.
- On days that are allotted for group work, we expect you to be prepared to work in the virtual classroom for the entire period.

If you continue to disregard this policy, disrupt the class dynamic, or don't come to class at all, your overall course grade may be lowered. If you're having any type of difficulty with coming to class, your Internet connection or not being able to get a quiet environment to attend class, please let me know, and let's work on it together.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Rules

Michigan Tech has standard policies on academic misconduct and complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. For more information about reasonable accommodations or equal access to education or services at Michigan Tech, please call the Dean of Students Office at 906-487-2212. More information is also available from the Syllabi Policies webpage.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, which Michigan Tech defines as "knowingly copying another's work or ideas and calling them one's own or not giving proper credit or citation," is a violation of the academic integrity policy.

In this class, we will discuss the practical and ethical aspects of source attribution so you can learn how and why to avoid plagiarism in your academic work. It is crucial that you take care to acknowledge the sources of your written, audio, or visual material in this and other classes. Instances of plagiarized work will be handled according to university procedures, which include reporting the incident to the Office of Student Affairs. For more details on academic integrity, please review the [Academic Integrity Policy of Michigan Tech](#).

University Assessment

Student work products (exams, essays, projects, etc.) may be used for purposes of university, program, or course assessment. All work used for assessment purposes will not include any individual student identification.

Diversity Statement

Michigan Technological University is committed to a diverse and inclusive community of and for scholars that is conducive to excellent teaching, innovative research, and the personal and intellectual growth of its students, faculty, staff, and alumni. This commitment is based upon the mutual and respectful exchange of our perspectives, personal experiences, and ideas that enhance the quality of our learning, interactions, and worldview.

Diversity encompasses the differences that we each bring with us through our individual backgrounds, which include race, ethnicity, religion, color, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, height, weight, genetic information, socioeconomic class, marital status, disability, and veteran status.

Equity and inclusion encompass overcoming obstacles to access along with the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity in our various communities (intellectual, social, and cultural) to increase one's awareness, knowledge, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact. The principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion must work together to facilitate full engagement in University life.

Michigan Technological University strives to build upon this keystone of diversity, equity, and inclusion as a foundational piece of our university. We challenge the members of our community to engage differences as strengths in order to continuously improve campus culture and to develop an exceptional and diverse community that ensures equality of access, opportunity, participation, and representation for all.

Course Schedule (WIP)

| Week | Topic | Assignments Due |
|-------------|---|--|
| 1 | <i>Introduction to Writing Program Administration</i> | Discussion #1 |
| | - Historical Development of Writing Programs | |
| | - Theoretical Foundations | |
| | - Overview of Administrative Basics | |
| 2 | <i>Curriculum Design and Development</i> | Discussion #2 |
| | - Designing Writing Courses | |
| | - Developing Assignment Rubrics | |
| | - Case Study: Effective Curriculum Models | |
| 3 | <i>Writing Center Management and Support</i> | Discussion #3 |
| | - Role of Writing Centers | |
| | - Staffing and Training | |
| | - Collaborating with the Writing Program | |
| 4 | <i>Program Assessment and Evaluation</i> | Discussion #4 Program Assessment Report |
| | - Approaches to Program Assessment | |
| | - Data Collection and Analysis | |
| | - Strategies for Improvement and Growth | |
| 5 | <i>Organizing and Allocating Resources</i> | Discussion #5 |
| | - Strategic Planning | |
| | - Grant Writing and Funding Opportunities | |
| | - Resource Allocation Strategies | |
| | - Collaboration and Conflict Resolution | |
| 6 | <i>Work/Life Balance and Well-being</i> | Discussion #6 Personal Wellness Plan |
| | - Importance of Work/Life Balance | |
| | - Strategies for Time Management | |
| | - Importance of Diet/Exercise/Sleep | |
| | - Promoting a Supportive Work Environment | |
| 7 | <i>Case Studies in Writing Program Administration</i> | Discussion #7 Final reflective paper |
| | - Analyzing Real-World Challenges | |
| | - Proposing Solutions and Strategies | |
| | - Career Directions for Graduate Students as WPAs | |

Appendix C: Copyright Documentation

Figure 1 in Chapter 4 was created by me to illustrate what the gWPA Professional Ladder would look like. duction to the figure.

Table 1 in Chapter 4 includes on the left column the original list of duties/responsibilities pertaining to the gWPA call for applications at the Humanities department of Michigan Tech. On the right column, I present my revisions to the original list.

Table 2 in Chapter 4 includes on the left column the original list of qualifications to apply for the gWPA position at the Humanities department of Michigan Tech. On the right column, I present my revisions to the original list.