CONTENTS

Introduction

SUSTAINING OUR PROGRAMS, SUSTAINING OURSELVES

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Writing program administrators (WPAs) have been using metaphors habitually to understand WPA work since the founding of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) and the *WPA: Writing Program Administration* journal (hereafter *WPA* journal) in the 1970s. As Stephanie Roach (2019) notes in the *WPA* at Forty issue, "metaphor is a productive entry point into how WPAs understand and explain WPA identity. In naming our job as another job, we present . . . [an] argument about who we are" (15). Metaphors comparing WPA work to other occupations appeared often in the journal's first twenty years and helped WPAs establish, maintain, or shift identity, typically in solidarity with labor unions and workers' movements. By the time Diana George's collection *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers and Troubadours* appeared in 1999, lived experience as a site of knowledge-making also informed WPA metaphors, and authors discussed persistent problems like burnout and the continuous push of austerity, of doing more with less. Twenty years later, WPAs continue to define ourselves and our roles with the trope of metaphor as the scope and types of WPA work have expanded (e.g., Adams Wooten, Babb, and Ray 2018; Baker et al. 2005; Charlton et al. 2011; Enos and Borrowman 2008; Ratcliffe and Rickly 2010; Roach 2019).

Metaphors of writing program administration often feature a single person juggling, shepherding, plate-twirling, firefighting, or otherwise taking sole, shared-but-dysfunctional, or shared-and-functional responsibility for negotiating among different stakeholders' urgent, often contradictory demands (George 1999). Not only is this work exhausting and unsustainable (Hesse 2013), it evinces both the performative aspects at any given moment of becoming a WPA (Ratcliffe and Rickly 2010; see Hollinger and Piña, this volume, and Gunter, this volume) and what Donna Strickland (2011) calls the "managerial unconscious"

of composition (3). Pervasive among composition scholars and WPAs who uncritically identify management with capitalism, the managerial unconscious describes a "default stance" of "traditional humanist intellectuals" who tend to "distrust management as, at best, nonintellectual and, at worst, soul-murdering" (2011, 10). With this default stance informing much WPA practice, as Tony Scott and Nancy Welch note, composition has not yet "developed understanding of how labor conditions shape pedagogy, scholarship, and the production of literacy and students' writing" (2016, 6), making the field "vulnerable to new entrepreneurial schemes" masquerading as "innovative" pedagogy (7). We WPAs need metaphors that resist inhumane labor conditions, metaphors like Robyn Tasaka's artisan (this volume) and John Belk's labor activist (this volume). While juggling and plate-twirling refer to performing arts on television talk shows and shepherding and cat-herding suggest pastoral and domestic settings, all of these metaphors index managerial activity—performative and frenetic activity, but no less managerial for being so.

Occupational metaphors mingle with managerial metaphors and mix with metaphors related to other WPA identities and roles. These identities and functions have accreted over the years to include "development" and "advocacy" roles (Hesse 2015, 134). Like Peace Corps Volunteers, WPAs perform (professional) development "to better teaching and learning by bringing advanced practices to classroom villages" while, like missionaries, WPAs also spread the good word about composition studies (we note deeply troubling resonances with ongoing settler colonialism). As advocates, WPAs focus on "resources, working conditions, and expectations," keenly aware of their effects on learning (2015, 134). An activist identity and role can be added to this list: an activist WPA works to shift institutional narratives through collective construction of knowledge and values (Adler-Kassner 2008). This accretion of WPA identities and roles has led to "more work . . . [and] different kinds" of it (Hesse 2015, 134), and to the emergence of more metaphors to describe the new work, identities, and roles.

This collection further expands the possibilities for understanding WPA identities and work by offering metaphors that help sustain our programs and ourselves through composition's (and higher education's) many crises. Whether these crises are within the bounds of human control, such as casualized labor or white supremacy, or beyond it, such as a pandemic or natural disaster, metaphors that generate more sustainable ways of being, doing, and becoming WPAs (Charlton et al. 2011; Hollinger and Piña, this volume) help us respond intentionally

to crises as they (re)erupt. This collection originated as a response to ongoing crises of austerity and racism in writing programs highlighted in CWPA plenary addresses by Nancy Welch and Tony Scott in 2018 and Asao Inoue in 2016. Inspired by the CWPA Workshop's activity on metaphors, this collection focuses on the generative affordances of metaphorical thinking as authors ponder, propose, and research more sustainable metaphors. Sustainability of various kinds has interested composition scholars for decades and was featured as the theme of the 2015 CWPA conference. This collection combines these threads to generate new perspectives and lenses on WPA identities and work that help us navigate amid systemic anti-Black racism (Baker-Bell 2020; Inoue 2016; Perryman-Clark and Craig 2019), bullying (Elder and Davila 2019), and hierarchical microaggressions (Brewer and di Gennaro 2018), to name only a few challenges. We hope WPAs in all stages of their careers find the chapters in this collection generative as we are called to constantly adapt to shifting circumstances.

Since identities and roles interrelate, we are also suggesting a sustainability role for WPAs, a role WPAs perform when they advocate for conditions that sustain programs over time and attend to the health of all inhabitants in a program's ecosystem. We suggest this role hesitantly, wary of adding yet more work and another kind of it, all while sharing Seth Kahn's (2015) skepticism about the term "sustainability." As Kahn argued in his 2015 CWPA plenary, the word smacks of empty institutional initiatives that do more to sustain a dysfunctional, exploitative, toxic status quo than to attend to the health and well-being of all. More work of another, possibly dubious kind in a time when everyone is overworked seems decidedly unsustainable as an ask or a practice. Still, as Jonathan Alexander, Karen Lunsford, and Carl Whithaus (2020) note, "an analysis of the dominant metaphors of a given field of study might yield generative ways of understanding—and perhaps revisioning—a field's theoretical preoccupations and dispositions, primary objects of study, and orientations toward those objects" (106). As WPAs ourselves, we came to experience the challenges Kahn identified and critiqued. We also wanted to change the narrative surrounding our and other WPAs' work by charting new sustainable metaphors that may inspire WPAs and WPA scholars to "revision" WPA identities, work, landscapes, relationships, and performances.

Whenever a WPA plans for their professional future or their program's future—particularly a future for their program when they are no longer the WPA—that WPA enacts a sustainability-oriented identity and performs a sustainability role.[1] In short, many WPAs may already perform

a sustainability role; more sustainable metaphors afford opportunities to deliberately build more sustainable identities. Thus we argue that creating, studying, and reflecting on more sustainable metaphors not only helps us reconsider our WPA work but also shapes our approaches and attitudes toward that work and how we experience both the short- and long-term significance and position of this work.

And yet, as Jacob Babb asks in his chapter, "is WPA work actually sustainable?" Drawing on data from the National Census of Writing, Babb observes that, although "some WPAs . . . have served for more than twenty years, the norm seems to be that most WPAs do not stay in their positions beyond five years." Rhizomatic networks cultivated by WPAs during this relatively short period of time tend to move with them and the work of cultivating a new rhizomatic network (or reestablishing one that has fallen out of use) lies with the new WPA. Further, as the beginning of *Writing Program Architecture* shows, external forces like the decades-old trend of state budget cuts to higher education can unmake successful programs, such as Shevaun Watson's first-year writing program at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire, in the wake of "draconian" budget cuts by the governor (White-Farnham and Finer 2017, 3). Similar blows have been dealt to state funding of higher education in Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Hawai'i, and almost every other state since 2008, resulting in cut programs, dismissed faculty, and soaring tuition (Mitchell, Leachman, and Saenz 2019). And that was before the pandemic worsened these trends and institutions began to dismiss faculty in greater numbers.

Certainly, these funding models are not sustainable; certainly, the increased casualization of academic labor is not sustainable; certainly, the racism endemic to white writing programs is not sustainable. So, as Elizabeth Boquet asked during her 2015 CWPA plenary, "what remains and what sustains" for WPAs? "Who and what," Boquet asked, "sustains us across time in doing the work our institutions call on us to do . . . [and] what remains of us—any of us, all of us—when we are gone, whether on a temporary or permanent leave-taking[?]" (95). To Boquet's questions we add: what practices, attitudes, frameworks, and heuristics sustain a WPA and program in a time when crisis rhetoric informs discursive and material conditions in higher education? What is a more sustainable metaphor? What role(s) might metaphors play for WPA work derived from a more ecological or sustainable orientation toward the world and its embodied inhabitants, given current conditions? The rest of this introduction answers these questions. But first: do WPAs even need more metaphors?

METAPHORS . . . AGAIN?

Far more than any other trope, metaphors dominate WPA identity talk. Stephanie Roach (2019) writes that "it is the nature of metaphor to help us understand something (or part of something) we don't fully understand via something else we more certainly do understand" (14) which gives metaphors "the power to show us something about the WPA position, capture something of how WPAs feel in that position, and imply something about our relationships to WPA work" (15). As anyone who has attended the CWPA Workshop can attest, metaphors both frame our work and reveal values and guiding principles that can be shared and applied in our programs. Moreover, the metaphors we use to describe our work carry not only our observations but their implications (Burke as cited in Alexander, Lunsford, and Whithaus 2020). As such, metaphors can be crucially important to the kind of "intentional" writing program administration advocated by Susan Miller-Cochran in her 2018 CWPA plenary address. This collection argues that WPAs need more sustainable metaphors for the "conflicted, liminal space" we occupy (Miller-Cochran 2018, 107). One such metaphor is Miller-Cochran's rocking chair, which affords listening, compassion, and a way to "lead a writing program without losing your soul," a metaphor that represents both perception and action, or observation and implication in Burke's terms. But Miller-Cochran's rocking chair is an exception, not the rule, in WPAs' talk of metaphors. Like Colin Charlton and colleagues in *GenAdmin: Theorizing WPA Identities in the Twenty-First Century*, we also find ourselves unsatisfied with the "metaphors that permeate our discipline" (2011, 127). We too "want to counter WPA narratives as 'war stories' and 'cautionary tales' with something more productive" (2011, 127), as Courtney Adams Wooten, Jacob Babb, and Brian Ray have done with travel as a guiding metaphor for WPA transitions. Hence this collection calls WPAs to (re)consider the metaphors that have been shaping and influencing our administrative work along critical, generative, and sustainable lines.

This collection also considers the risks of metaphor as a trope. Metaphors can "inadvertently mask differences" and thereby sustain a toxic status quo of inequitable power relations (Ratcliffe 2005, 92). In *Performing Feminism and Administration in Rhetoric and Composition*, Krista Ratcliffe and Rebecca Rickly prefer oxymoron to metaphor for feminist administrators, because oxymoron affords "the ability to keep two conflicting ideas in one's head at the same time and to engage that conflict as a springboard for productive feminist action" (ix). While metaphors are a central trope in this collection, oxymoron's sibling paradox also

emerges as a theme (see, in this volume, Belk; Gunter; Hollinger and Piña). When considered critically, a metaphor's power to erase difference diminishes, though it still remains to some extent and can reify structures of oppression. To take a recent example, in "Administering while Black" Carmen Kynard relates her experiences of being treated by white faculty, staff, and students as "the help," experiences she organizes using the figure of the mammy. Crucially, the racist mammy stereotype is "more than just a metaphor" for her story "but an actual social mechanism that attempts to reproduce a certain kind of labor for black women" that, particularly when Black women are administrators, "brings the academy's antiblackness into stunning view" (2019, 37). Metaphors help us name oppressions, just as they help us name identities and roles, yet when we name oppressions we must be very careful to resist them, as Kynard does, not reify them. Because metaphors are so powerful, they must be handled and adopted with care as WPAs explore new or unexpected ways of thinking about WPA identities and roles afforded by metaphors.

WHY SUSTAINABILITY?

Sustainability is not a new idea in composition (see, e.g., Owens 2001). Is sustainability any more than the least we can do? Is it a sufficiently radical solution to a set of wicked problems? Kahn (2015) argues that the "sustainability trope" attempts to correct for environmental activism, as activism is too radical for corporatized capitalism: "Sustainability sounds more reasonable, more technocratic, than environmentalism and is, therefore, both more palatable and more vulnerable to cooptation" (113). While suspicious of the sustainability trope, Kahn nonetheless asserts that "thinking ecologically and sustainably can help us decide at moments like this [when labor is made casual] what layers of context are how important and to whom" (116). Kahn advocates for an expanded frame of sustainability that "makes room for an activist impulse" toward the health of an ecosystem (117), capturing the sort of sustainability that inspired the compilation of this collection:

> A concept of sustainability that focuses on life-sustaining inter-relations among all the members of an ecosystem is better. A concept of sustainability that isn't framed as defending the status quo from imminent destruction, or heaven forbid as resource management, is better. Ecology in our field is often another metaphor for *system*, one that evokes nature and dynamism and adaptability, but I want to push that one step further. Not only are the people who work with us in our programs and on our

campuses part of complex systems (and understand I mean that very inclusively: students, administrators, staff, all of us), but they're people (and so are we) whose lives and livelihoods often depend on the health of the environment. And it's really easy to lose sight of how connected we are within that environment. (115)

The more sustainable metaphors in this collection foreground connection, dynamism, adaptability, and negotiation with people across the complex local context of any campus to knit together those "life-sustaining inter-relations among all the members of an ecosystem." While only a few authors in this collection explicitly engage environmental ecologies, all consider relations in social and institutional ecologies.

This version of sustainability that works toward the health and well-being of all in an ecosystem implies work toward social justice (as a component of health and well-being). A key aspect of social justice is accountability, particularly the accountability of those with more privilege and power to those with less privilege and power. Sustainability and accountability can go hand in hand, as Kathleen J. Ryan shows in her application of ecological thinking to feminist writing program administration. She asserts that "ecological knowers are situated, embodied, interconnected persons whose recognition of the limits of perspectives positions them to be accountable for what they know and do because they are cognizant of the politics of location and relation" (2012, 78). Each chapter in this collection, whether it issues from an ecological orientation or not, embodies Ryan's ecological knowers, who are accountable to the complex systems in which they reside, survive, and, hopefully, thrive. These ecological knowers must be accountable to systemic racism within writing programs because WPA work "is always and already race work" (Perryman-Clark and Craig 2019, 9)—a fact that is often overlooked or quietly ignored because the "white racial habitus" thrives on invisibility (Inoue 2016, 146). The work toward sustainability and accountability is difficult and constant, yet, if we are invested in the health and well-being of all, it must be done, and done with care and compassion. Metaphors help us envision this work and guide its enactment. We hope that this collection inspires new thinking and feeling among WPAs everywhere so that all of us might work together toward our mutual flourishing.

MORE SUSTAINABLE METAPHORS OF WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

We have organized this collection into three sections—Organic Relationships, Institutional Landscapes, and Performance Crafts—that

showcase the relational, spatial, and performative aspects of contributors' more sustainable metaphors. We note that chapters speak to each other across sections and that a chapter in one section may also emphasize something named in another section, such as a relational metaphor that includes a heavy dose of performance or a spatial metaphor that also relies on relationships.

The Organic Relationships section begins with Lydia Wilkes's revision of the firefighter metaphor in chapter 1, "Revising the Firefighter Metaphor toward Sustainability: Lessons from Indigenous Fire Managers." Wilkes asserts that the commonly used phrase "putting out a fire" rests on a settler-colonial model of firefighting that obscures the many roles, both literal and figurative, played by fire. From a different set of assumptions about the values of land and education, she revises the firefighter into a fire manager, affording a responsive stance for WPAs toward many kinds of fire, some of which need to burn for new growth to occur. Wilkes examines the fire manager metaphor at different scales to suggest one more sustainable way of living with metaphorical fires in WPA work. In a similarly ecological vein, Jacob Babb offers a rhizomatic metaphor in "Seeing the Forest and the Trees: A Rhizomatic Metaphor for Writing Program Administration," in which "WPAs are trees, dwelling in forests of varying sizes," connected by an underground root system. Like tree roots, WPAs are always weaving "the complex web of relationships that [they] depend on to do their work," and this ecological perspective "remind[s] us that our work is far less solitary than it often feels." Cultivating and maintaining rhizomatic relationships with faculty, administrators, students, and the WPA community provides a WPA with the sustenance necessary to make WPA work more sustainable.

In "Light and the Quantum Physics of WPA Work," Andrew Hollinger and Manny Piña offer light "as a metaphor to frame, focus, and understand the work of a WPA." Drawing concepts like indeterminacy, emergence, and complementarity from quantum physics, Hollinger and Piña show that a WPA can never be determined in advance of a situated moment, because WPAs, like light, emerge differently depending on material intra-actions. Playing with light's paradoxical duality as *both* a particle *and* a wave (a configuration that is not possible in classical physics), the authors present their chapter in an unconventional way that performs their argument about duality and indeterminate, emergent, locally contextualized WPA identities. From fire to trees to light, Ryan Dippre considers the ground on which all rests. In "Grounding WPA Work: A Phenomenology of Program Development as a Liminal WPA," Dippre highlights how his jWPA (junior Writing Program Administrator)

decisions were grounded in "the local needs and concerns of students, teachers, and the program," and how he "ground up" observational and interview data to inform his grounded writing program administration. Describing his experience as marked by uncertainty, trust, and mediation as he occupied liminal space as a jWPA, Dippre asserts that his "grounded" metaphor and the practices associated with it have sustained his working life as a liminal WPA.

The second section, Institutional Landscapes, highlights relationships within institutional contexts through spatial metaphors. John Belk's chapter "The WPA as Labor Activist" opens this section with "the literal labor activist . . . as a metaphor that encompasses the WPA's paradoxical orientations toward bureaucracy, management, curriculum, and personnel." Belk traces the foundational principles of American labor—radical collectivity, anti-exploitation, and diversity—as "roots [that] might serve as new key principles" for WPAs. These principles inform a heuristic for facing "the complex and often 'unwinnable' decisions of writing program administration," which he then applies to his work as a jWPA labor activist bound by sometimes contradictory principles and pragmatism.

Chapters 6 and 7 offer mapping practices for WPAs. Katherine Daily O'Meara forwards a metaphor of WPAs as cartographers in her chapter, "Learning, Representing, and Endorsing the Landscape: WPA as Cartographer." O'Meara's metaphor is fitting for WPAs because they always need to "plan for the futures of their programs, teachers, and students" using institutional maps that constantly change. Presenting two mapmaking scenarios from her career as a gWPA (graduate Writing Program Administrator) and jWPA, O'Meara discusses how her choice of metaphor facilitates the understanding of "the complex landscape of a writing program and other institutional writing spaces" and ultimately the development of better work relationships. Christy I. Wenger also employs mapping in her chapter, "Approaching WPA Labor with *Ahimsa*: Mapping Emotional Geographies through Sustainable Leadership." Ahimsa is "a skill of mindfulness" comprising a nonviolent way of being mindful or attentive from moment to moment in a non-judgmental manner. Pointing to the often "unexamined and automatic emotional labor" WPAs perform, Wenger suggests ahimsa as a way to "identify the emotional geographies of their programs in order to create sustainable spaces that invite ongoing self-reflection."

Wenger's emotional geographies resonate with Alexis Teagarden's reclamation of the basement as a more sustainable space than the venerated Ivory Tower in her chapter, "Representing the Basement." Though the basement has been figured as a an undesirable space in

both scholarship and popular culture, Teagarden rejects calls to move out of the basement or scrub it from WPA metaphors and instead suggests that "we embrace the idea of the basement as an inherently sustainable, inclusive space." Embracing the basement as a metaphorical space is ultimately a way for WPAs to "reimagine their program's place in the academy, a space that can help minimize traditional ills of isolation and hierarchy while also promoting the values of community and sustainability." Along similar lines, Cynthia D. Mwenja's chapter, "Interlocking Circles," closes the Institutional Landscapes section with a metaphor drawn from a student practice on her campus of using "circle metaphors to govern their group relationships and dynamics": one closed circle representing the strength of unity and one open circle welcoming newcomers. Circles provide a proactive, responsive space for mitigating conflict among a WPA's many stakeholders. Mwenja invites WPAs to consider themselves in overlapping and interconnected circles with their stakeholders, asserting that "interlocking circles of support" can "enhance our work in practical and sustainable ways."

The final section, Performance Crafts, emphasizes the performative, artisanal nature of WPA work. Robyn Tasaka, a tutor coordinator in a writing center, explores the affordances and risks of an artisanal production metaphor for tutor and instructor labor, training, and advertising. Drawing on Michael Pollan's work, Tasaka positions artisanal production as a sustainable alternative to exploitative mass production in higher education. Tasaka argues that, though this metaphor carries some risks, it affords the sort of self-definition necessary for smaller centers and institutions to distinguish themselves from their larger counterparts. Turning more explicitly to performance in their chapter, " 'Building the Plane as We Fly It': Revising Our Thinking about Our First-Year Experience Program," Rona Kaufman and Scott Rogers reflect on their associate provost's use of the titular metaphor "in moments of structural upheaval or policy change." The metaphor does considerable work for the authors by "reveal[ing] the improvisational nature of our work" within curricular and campus constraints and exposing "the limitations and the risks of our work" even as it also resounds with hope. The thrill and urgency of continually building the plane as they fly it is ultimately a matter of perseverance for the authors because their "institutional lives depend on it." Continuing the theme of improvisation, Kim Gunter advocates for improvisational comedy as a parallel for WPA work in "I'm Just Playin': Directing Writing Programs as Improv." Although improv may appear chaotic, as Gunter notes, its success hinges on rules shared by other performers and on an improv WPA's internalization of those

rules, willingness to play along, and repertoire of past performances. She emphasizes an embodied metic outlook of being present in the now rather than being cowed by precedent. Gunter suggests that the more experience WPAs gain through quick improvisation on the basis of their extensive knowledge of WPA literature and lore, the more effective they will be in their institutions.

Douglas Hesse's afterword, "Sustaining What for Why?," closes the collection by questioning the impetus to sustain WPA positions, work, and identities, and writing programs themselves. As WPA roles have evolved over the past forty years from a relatively accidental role in the 1970s to one sought intentionally by graduate students for the past decade or longer, Hesse worries that the project of "sustaining the construct of program administration," as professionals and professional societies are wont to do, may overtake the goal of "sustaining writers and writing." As he traces the energies, challenges, and metaphorical frameworks that have animated WPAs' livelihoods over the years, Hesse observes that WPAs would do well to follow Robyn Tasaka's lead in this collection and consider WPAs as artisans who rely on craft to produce unique artifacts. Beyond the artisanal metaphor, Hesse argues, lies that of WPA as writer of programs who drafts, revises, decides, collaborates, shares, and much more. Ultimately, Hesse concludes, "sustainability matters because writing matters, because citizens and societies benefit from writing done well and suffer from writing done poorly," and metaphors like those in this book can help WPAs continually strive toward the end of sustaining writers and writing.

NOTE

1. Two collections on WAC/WID (writing across the curriculum / writing in the disciplines) programs and WPA work emphasize program sustainability (Cox, Galin, and Melzer 2018; Reiff, Bawarshi, Ballif, and Weisser 2015) but do not focus on sustainable metaphors or administrative identities.

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