



Loosen Up!

All golfers, whether professional or not, know that things don't always go their way. Sometimes shots don't land where they want them to, sometimes water or sand get the best of them, and sometimes their game is just off. That's why it's important to have empathy and compassion with one's self as a golfer and as an online writing program leader.

We like how Rachael Groner and Tania Islam's chapter focuses on empathy and how administrators can adapt their practices to maintain a sense of empathy and compassion in their writing program community. With hectic schedules, upper-level pressure to produce, and student and faculty issues, sometimes being a program leader can be hard. Groner and Islam's chapter reminds us that empathy is important, and they provide clear strategies and practices to keep an empathic mindset.

Chapter 9. Sustaining Empathy and Community in a Large First-Year Writing Program

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Abstract: The practice of empathy in a writing classroom is not a novel concept. This chapter explores empathy and community as sustainable practices for writing program administrators. We argue that it is the responsibility of writing program administrators to implement sustainable policies and strategies that maintain a sense of empathy and community. We acknowledge that most writing program administrators agree that this is a key responsibility. But aligning with the PARS model and articulating an adaptation of Lisa Blankenship’s “rhetorical empathy” as an administrative stance, we describe insights gained during the COVID-19 pandemic that deepened our practices and understanding of administrative work, and we argue for strategies to assess and seek resources for this work to be sustainable for administrators as well. Our chapter, thus, is a timely reminder to writing program administrators to focus our energies on maintaining and fostering this sense of empathetic community amongst first-year writing faculty.

Keywords: empathy, community, writing program administration (WPA), labor-based grading, faculty development

Empathy is a complex word. It is protean in nature, changing its meaning according to place and circumstance. For the purpose of this chapter, we are defining empathy as the ability to understand, feel, and share the feelings and emotions of another person. In relation to first-year writing program administration, empathy recognizes the heterogeneity of the faculty body and relies on implementing inclusive policies to support instruction. Of course, this working definition does not encompass the enormity of the concept, but it is utilitarian and has helped the authors of this chapter immensely to run the day-to-day administration of a large first-year writing program at an urban R1 university.

Our first-year writing (FYW) program consists of faculty at various ranks and employment statuses, including part-time adjunct faculty, full-time non-tenure-track faculty, Ph.D. and MFA graduate students, and full-time tenure-track or tenured faculty. In a given semester, we have approximately 60 faculty members teaching various FYW courses. As a program, we offer courses in multiple modalities— asynchronous online, synchronous online, hybrid (both online

and in-person), and fully in-person—and we have separate sections dedicated to unique student populations, such as ESL and honors students. But despite the many differences among our instructors and the courses they teach, we have historically built and maintained a community through two main approaches:

3. a consistent schedule of faculty development sessions, and
4. the use of small, instructor-led teaching circles that allow informal opportunities to discuss teaching and share ideas.

In addition, our instructors see each other on campus often because our classes are scheduled in nearby blocks of classrooms, our schedule runs off-matrix (and thus our classes change at times different from the rest of the university schedule), and our faculty office spaces are organized in pods.

While some online and hybrid instructors have always been less able to take advantage of these many points of contact and community because they are not as physically present on campus, our online instructors have almost all been full-time faculty or graduate students who had at least one in-person course and/or were on campus for other reasons. All together, these approaches to build and sustain an empathetic community are consistent with Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle's (2015) virtual community (The Online Writing Instruction Community: www.owicommunity.org) and their PARS approach to designing, administering, and instructing online writing courses. We have adapted the PARS approach for our administrative work as follows: It enables us to maintain a *personal* connection with our faculty, it enhances the *accessibility* of our course materials and teaching tools, and it allows us to be *responsive* to instructors and available to faculty and each other throughout the semester, and combined, it offers us *strategic* and creative ways to support our faculty and our curriculum.

Even though we were confident about our approaches to building and sustaining community, the COVID-19 pandemic challenged us to consider the sustainability of our faculty community and administrative support systems. In 2020, when faculty were suddenly sent home to learn how to teach fully online and when our usual places and opportunities became strained, we realized that we needed to build new approaches to supplement our community and ensure sustainability and empathy, both during the pandemic and beyond. These interventions were geared towards addressing the immediate pandemic-related concerns, and they have now become mainstays in our program and will continue to be reengineered and reconfigured as needed. As writing program administrators, we used the unfortunate opportunity of the pandemic to reevaluate strategies that had worked but now needed to improve. In that vein, we hope our chapter will contribute to ongoing conversations about PARS-inspired writing program administration being flexible and committed to supporting faculty no matter what challenges arise. The pandemic may be our most recent crisis moment, but other crises are certainly coming.

Theory and Practice

The value of empathy and community has been explored widely by composition scholars, and it undergirds the PARS approach. While it would be unwieldy to review the literature in full, we want to highlight a few of the theories that frame our field-specific understanding of these important ideas. Krista Ratcliffe's (1999) practice of rhetorical listening suggests that readers and writers benefit most from listening to others' views without aiming to simply agree or disagree. Through adopting a "stance of openness," Ratcliffe (2005) suggests that rhetorical listening requires us to "question ourselves—our attitudes and our actions—to determine whether we need to affirm, revise, or reject them" (p. 210). Ratcliffe (1999) goes on to say that if we become uncomfortable in the process, "good" because "such discomfort simply signifies already existing problems and underscores the need for standing under the discourses of ourselves and others—and listening" (p. 210). Lisa Blankenship (2019) goes further to suggest that writing instructors adopt a curriculum of "rhetorical empathy" in which we encourage students and ourselves to engage with personal stories and feelings as integral to academic reading and writing, not separate from it. Blankenship argues that we must shift "the focus of rhetoric from (only) changing an audience to changing oneself (as well) and extending rhetorical listening in new directions by accounting for the role of the personal and the emotions in rhetorical exchange" (p.18). In a writing classroom, for instance, a writer should imagine not only what their audience might think in response to their text but what the audience might *feel* when they read it. As Blankenship explains, "rhetorical empathy results in an emotional engagement that can disarm; it asks for vulnerability from the speaker or writer that can, at times, promote it in return" (p. 16). While there may be constraints to rhetorical empathy, such as the potential for emotion to seem manipulative or the ways that being vulnerable is different for those in privilege and power than for those not, it is possible to work through these constraints if we are open to acknowledge and explore their impact. As writing teachers, we strive to teach from a rhetorically empathetic stance.

The scholarship on empathy as an administrative practice, however, is less well developed. There were many calls in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and similar outlets for faculty to be empathetic toward students during the early months of the pandemic. Many of us also received emails from our university employers recommending self-care and suggesting we be generous with our struggling students. While these calls for empathy were well-intentioned, they often felt unhelpful because they failed to recognize that faculty were already working at capacity and had little time and few resources to practice self-care. Further, many of us were already being generous with students and could not incorporate additional labor without a decrease in class sizes or other structural changes (few of which were available). As Kaitlin Clinnin (2020) notes in her article about being a

writing program administrator (WPA) after a local mass shooting that killed and injured hundreds of people in Las Vegas, WPAs may not be trained as emergency first responders, but in a crisis, “WPAs perform similar emotional labor” (p. 137) and are often the ones who send out meaningful emails about the crisis and field questions and concerns that are specific to our instructors and students. Clinnin also notes that she felt responsible as a WPA to model “the response I hoped [instructors] would use with their own students: a combination of empathy for students and clear, logical guidance to support the eventual return to routine” (p.137). We, too, felt an enormous pressure to model what we hoped our newer or less experienced instructors would offer to themselves and their students. We also appreciate the collection in which Clinnin’s chapter appears, the excellent *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration* (Navickas et al., 2020). In their introduction, Kristi Costello and Jacob Babb (2020) trace theories of emotional labor that are most relevant to WPAs and suggest that their collection is intended to begin a conversation about “giving readers tools while also recognizing that the act of negotiating emotional labor is an ongoing process that is not intended to eliminate emotions” (p. 11).

We would also note that publications about online learning have been incredibly helpful, such as Rhonda Thomas, Karen Kuralt, Heidi Skurat Harris and George Jensen’s chapter in *PARS in Practice: More Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors* (2021), which describes how to build community among faculty who are teaching all or mostly online (p. 201, in particular). And, as a program with a large number of non-tenure-track faculty, we often ask and attempt to answer questions such as those posed by Ann M. Penrose (2012) in “Professional Identity in a Contingent-Labor Profession: Expertise, Autonomy, Community in Composition Teaching.” We appreciate her insistence that faculty be treated as autonomous professionals who make many contributions as opposed to treating non-tenure-track faculty as underlings or defining us in the negative by what we are not expected to do, i.e., research. Julie Lindquist’s *Conference on College Composition and Communication* (CCCC) address in 2021 on the isolation of the pandemic has prompted us all to reflect deeply on why a sense of community as writing instructors is so important. Lindquist quotes one of the 2020 CCCC documentarians, Gabrielle Kelenyi, who points out that a constraint many of us have faced is that if we don’t keep working and being productive, we might let down our communities, but of course, as she says, “it’s those same communities who help me get unstuck and regain my confidence” (p. 194). Indeed, being an academic in a writing program is often to navigate multiple communities, all of which are essential to our being and yet which we cannot serve well in every situation. We agree wholeheartedly that one of the best functions of working within a community is getting “unstuck” when necessary, and it is valuable for administrators and faculty alike.

Our Vision for a Sustainable Practice of Empathy and Community

Our main strategies for practicing empathy and creating community in our composition program stem from long-standing policies developed by several WPAs over the last 20+ years but feature a few small innovations and shifts toward a practice of sustainability and rhetorical empathy developed during the pandemic that we will continue in the future to some extent. Our long-standing policies are not necessarily unique and are likely similar to those of many writing programs, but in this section, we highlight what we believe constitutes an administrative practice of rhetorical empathy.

Existing Structures of Support: Faculty Development and Teaching Circles

We have long offered three faculty development sessions each semester to bring our faculty together and encourage ongoing discussion and support for their work in the classroom. Topics range from instructors sharing best practices for classroom activities to presentations by partners from around the institution, such as the writing center or the counseling center, to invited speakers from writing studies to educate ourselves about trends in the field. Full-time faculty are required to attend two of the three meetings, and part-time faculty and graduate students are warmly invited but are not required to attend. These meetings are often social events, in part, which helps us meet the P (personal), and the content orientation of these sessions is also geared toward meeting the A (accessible) elements of the PARS approach. Pre-pandemic, we offered breakfast or lunch as an incentive for participation, and unless a presentation or workshop was planned for the entire time, we usually allowed for at least thirty minutes of each meeting to be time for people to catch up. We wish that we could offer compensation so that our part-time faculty were able to attend; we have been moderately successful at attracting faculty at all levels because our topics are practical and speak to their needs and interests. During the pandemic, when these meetings were conducted on Zoom, speaker permission was duly noted for recording. If we didn't get consent, the FYW administrators would take notes and send an email to the listserv summarizing the event and key takeaways.

In March 2021, we had the privilege of inviting Dr. Lisa Blankenship as a guest speaker at one of our faculty development meetings. She spoke about her book *Changing the Subject: A Theory of Rhetorical Empathy* and how rhetorical empathy relates to hierarchical relationships within the classroom. This session generated robust conversation in which our FYW faculty agreed and posed intellectual challenges to Dr. Blankenship's model, especially junior faculty and teacher assistants (TAs) who already have tenuous "authoritative" positions in the classroom to begin with. As WPAs, we never try to monitor or

mentor our faculties and their opinions during such faculty development sessions. The only community guideline is for faculty to be genial and to disagree (if it comes to that) respectfully. As hosts, we always try to make our speakers feel welcomed, but not at the expense of our faculty's right to question what is being said.

Our other long-standing policy is that all faculty teaching a writing course are assigned to a small (3-5 instructor) teaching circle each semester, and each circle meets three times a semester. This is part of a FYW faculty member's teaching responsibility at Temple, so there is no additional compensation offered for attending these teaching circle meetings. The graduate assistant arranges the teaching circles and collects short reports from them to get ideas for future faculty development sessions and generally make sure that the circles are meeting and staying on track. The first meeting is intended to be a casual opportunity to talk about our syllabi and share anything new or interesting we are doing in our courses. The second meeting is similar but also includes an exchange of one or more student papers for the purposes of discussing our grading rubric in anticipation of the third meeting, which takes place during our finals week when instructors have already collected their students' final portfolios. At the third meeting, we read each other's student portfolios to ensure that grades are similar across sections, to offer suggestions when a portfolio is on the cusp of two grades, and to support each other in evaluating portfolios that are potentially failing. Our instructors always have the final say about their students' grades, but teaching circles allow us to contextualize grades within conversations about the grading rubric and the practices of the program.

Teaching circles are instructor-led, and leadership rotates among circle members throughout the semester to equitably distribute responsibility for the circle's success. This policy has been in place for a long time, since at least 2003, and while there are minor complaints from the faculty about the time these meetings take or about the rare instances in which communication breaks down in a particular circle, such concerns are far outweighed by the benefit of having a sense of community and a place to seek advice when needed. As our graduate assistant in 2020-2021, Tania noticed that informal teaching circle reports were more focused than ever before on being micro-support systems in which instructors were engaging in conversation and a free exchange of ideas. We ask that after each meeting the leader reports back on topics of interest in case we administrators note a pattern or an interest that could lead to a faculty development workshop, and the pattern throughout the pandemic in these reports was: We are collaborating and sharing ideas, and we are glad to have our teaching circles. These teaching circles have also been a meeting place of faculty across ranks, which has further bolstered this sense of community in our program. Junior faculty (new hires and TAs) have always appreciated the opportunity to meet other FYW instructors and engage with them in discussions on curriculum and pedagogy.

No-agenda, Optional “Release Valve” Meetings

In March 2020, we encouraged instructors to do what they could to finish the remaining weeks of the semester by moving teaching circle meetings to Zoom instead of in-person. We also moved the third and final faculty development session online, and thus our usual policies of support were largely able to continue as planned. But even with these supports in place, there seemed to be a need for even more support and community because the campus shutdown was both sudden and uncertain (that is, would we stay online for the rest of the semester, or was it really a two-week shutdown?). We offered an additional level of support by adding fully optional, agendaless, and unrecorded meetings on Fridays via Zoom. Structured as virtual “brown bag” sessions, these Friday meetings were informal, and faculty were encouraged to join in to keep the sense of community alive. As WPAs, we recognized that it was unhealthy for faculty to teach fully online without an opportunity to meet other members of the FYWP and partake in regular social interaction. In fact, there were numerous news items mentioning how “cabin fever” was resulting in severe depression and reduced productivity in working professionals. We did not want our faculty to feel isolated and unsupported. These meetings were, and still are, agendaless open meetings. We usually begin with a simple and friendly “hey, how’s it going?” and then let the conversation flow organically. One can think of the vibe as “fireside chat meets brown bag meetings.” During the pandemic, they functioned initially as a “release valve” where instructors could vent about how difficult it was to flip online and how much they missed having hallway conversations or just a chance to talk to adults other than those in their families or close circles, even if it wasn’t about teaching or our careers. But these meetings also functioned as opportunities for instructors to ask questions or get/give advice or suggestions for best practices, especially related to online teaching and instructional technology.

Sometimes, instructors used time during these “release valve” meetings to critique university policies or what they perceived as a lack of action in supporting students. It was useful to hear those critiques because as administrators, we could bring their concerns to our upper-level meetings at the dean’s office and vice provost levels to provide feedback to central administrators outside of our unit and most likely not in touch with teaching faculty on a regular basis. We also found that instructors offered critiques of our policies and practices as program administrators, and we were open to those critiques and used them as opportunities to become deeply reflective about where and how we could do better. For instance, some faculty voiced concern about our recommendation in the fall of 2020 to use complete/incomplete grading for the process work component of the course’s final grade, such as in-class writing, online discussion posts, and quizzes. Before the pandemic, these elements were assessed as “participation” and tracked by instructors in idiosyncratic and varied ways. Some instructors kept careful notes throughout the semester, some wrote occasional reports for students so that they knew roughly

where this portion of their final grade might stand, and yet “participation” made up roughly 30 percent of the final grade and had the potential to swing a student’s grade up or down by one grade level. As administrators, we felt strongly that it would be more empathetic to convert this grade into something more transparent because so much of the student experience seemed uncertain due to the pandemic.

We were also inspired by ongoing discussions in the field, such as those around Asao Inoue’s 2019 argument for labor-based grading schemes and texts such as Susan Blum’s (2020) *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning*, and we felt that shifting toward labor-based grading was fully compatible with our existing practice of only giving students feedback on drafts during the semester and grading their progress and final drafts in a portfolio at the end of the semester. We communicated with the faculty about these changes in several ways, including sharing a version of the new syllabus with comments in the margins explaining our thinking behind the changes and offering a range of options in those comments if someone wished to adopt some of our ideas but not all, for instance. We also wrote an additional “debate” document in which we invited faculty to write on the document and make comments of their own as an ongoing conversation, and this document remained “live” over several months. Our intention was that faculty should not feel as though they were debating with us but that this conversation was open to all and that they could speak to their peers and generate ideas in real time. We held several meetings in the summer of 2020 when these changes first rolled out to answer questions and address concerns, and we acknowledged that indeed, these changes were significant, particularly for long-time faculty who had developed their own pedagogical systems and practices that could be hard to revise while living through a pandemic.

One of the strengths of rhetorical empathy as an administrative practice is that it allows us to compassionately speak up to the institutional pressures and structural barriers with which all writing programs must contend. Blankenship (2019) is right that the practice of rhetorical empathy will “change the subject of discourse—both the content of discourse and its agent [on both sides], and as a result it holds the potential for bridging difficult rhetorical impasses” (p. 16). That is, we hope that our practices will influence others at the university to act in similar ways, and together over time, we may slowly challenge the institution to become a better place. We strive to be the kind of administrators we would have wanted and often did not have when we were graduate students and in the early years of our career. In our own early years, we raised concerns or encountered institutional barriers and were shut down or marginalized as a result. Ethical leadership must be grounded in the sharing of stories, feelings, and perspectives in order to treat colleagues as respected professionals who will do their best work if they feel supported and heard. But as Blankenship (2019) acknowledges, we should assess rhetorical empathy as a[n administrative] practice by “the degree to which it leaves the door open for future engagement and gradual shifts rather than [to judge whether or not it produced] immediate change” (p. 123).

While we scaled back the number of these optional, no-agenda meetings from eight in the fall of 2020 to five in 2021-2022, they have continued in Zoom even though our campus has largely returned to in-person instruction. They still encompass our feeling of camaraderie and function as a virtual safe space for faculty to freely discuss various issues and concerns that they are facing in their classrooms, and we have noticed that some in-person conversations are now intentionally continued in these virtual meetings, which is a lovely development that demonstrates how multiple spaces for discussion and collegial interaction are necessary. One or two spaces or times for faculty to engage in meandering dialogue are not enough. As administrators, we continue to have no expectations from these meetings except the proliferation of friendship and community in our program.

One-on-One Email Messages

Even though our teaching circles and extra meetings offered many points of contact for faculty if they chose to seek them out, we were aware that our part-time and graduate student instructors might find additional meetings burdensome and that the teaching circles, while useful, might not be as supportive as if they were in person. Early in the pandemic, Rachael (with significant assistance from Tania and the other members of our admin team, Cate Almon and Anne Horn) sent long emails to everyone to share information, invite faculty to ask questions, and urge faculty to discuss ideas or challenges through the program listserv. But we worried that these emails to everyone would not be enough, so our third and final strategy was to reach out individually to faculty members through targeted emails aligned with the P (personal) and the S (strategic) elements of the PARS approach. These emails were casual in tone, written in a spirit of solidarity, and featured an invitation to engage in conversation if the faculty member so desired. We copied and pasted, but we added individual notes where appropriate. For example, if someone had already expressed that they were technologically challenged, we would add a brief reminder that we could set up a Zoom meeting with them to go over how best to use ed tech in their classes.

The director and the FYW advisor split the duty of reaching out to the full-time faculty, the associate director reached out to the part-time faculty, and the graduate assistant reached out to the graduate student TAs. These individual emails opened a one-on-one line of communication where faculty could communicate needs that were specific to them and their situation, such as if they were involved in different or increased caretaking in their homes while also trying to handle their job responsibilities. Though only a few faculty members responded with questions or a need for help, many faculty responded positively to say that they were okay and appreciated the check-in. We felt that these emails were an important initiative that replaced some of what instructors were able to do pre-pandemic by walking into the first-year writing office or finding one of us in the halls or in between classes. We had some concerns about sending these emails, such as whether instructors

would feel targeted in any way (and so we crafted an email that made it very clear that everyone was receiving the same message and that we were not writing only to them). We were also concerned about whether these emails would in any way feel like surveillance or prompt additional work, such as causing an instructor to feel obligated to respond and then spend too much time and energy doing so (and so we included several lines to insist that we would not read anything into a non-response and that no response was necessary). We acknowledge that we could not fully prevent these latter concerns in every case, but we decided it was better to take these calculated risks and reach out than not.

Conclusion and Takeaways

In conclusion, what we are advocating for in this chapter is an empathetic approach to FYW administration by focusing on the *strategic* and *responsive* aspects of the PARS model. These strategies and methods grounded in the PARS model and adapting theories of empathy and community as administrative practices are not necessarily groundbreaking. But they helped us as administrators feel as though our work was intentional, as was particularly important during the pandemic's heightened sense of crisis and uncertainty, and they encouraged us to think deeply about how our existing decentralized, instructor-run program was, in fact, working relatively well and did not need radical reform in order to support instructors and provide an atmosphere in which they and their students could succeed. We plan to continue prioritizing empathy and the sharing of experiences and stories in all our administrative decisions, and we will continue to foster a sense of community in our writing program, no matter what the future has in store for us.

We acknowledge that there are lingering concerns about how feasible it is to practice an administrative form of rhetorical empathy and/or to see community building as central to our jobs as WPAs. For instance, it is important to remember that just as the pandemic has resulted in student disengagement, faculty are also suffering from disengagement and/or disillusionment. Quite a few academics and faculty members at our institution and in higher education in general have begun to question their roles in the classroom, and many of us are exhausted. Further, we are keenly aware of the news that there is an enrollment cliff coming, that students may choose to go directly into the workforce instead of coming to college right away, and that these dynamics might change the conditions of our employment and work. As WPAs, it is vital that we work towards allaying this sense of gloom and doom, and this is where our bold description of this work as "sustainable" may be aspirational, at best. In addition, what we have described here is focused on what WPAs should do, and we have not discussed how WPAs should take care of their own needs in the process. Who will have empathy for the WPA? We suggest that a network of fellow WPAs may be the answer, but when we are all stretched thin, this resource may not be fully available to us, even when we are in most need.

Also, empathy itself is a process attuned to specific readers, writers, and listeners, and it is not as though we can suggest one kind of empathy to fit all situations. Nor can we or anyone suggest ways to build community that work in every program or institution because community and its structure(s) of feeling are, too, specific and contextual. Rather, we envision that our administrative practice of sustainable empathy and community will always be open, flexible, and context-specific. Nonetheless, we hope this chapter offers the following key takeaways:

- We strongly suggest that WPAs let faculty know that rhetorical empathy is a key aspect of your approach, and that your door is open to discuss administrative practices if anyone has questions or ideas for improvement. If you do not already have a policy or set of strategies for instructors on how to touch base with you, developing one proactively is a good idea. It can be frustrating to send missives and receive no or few responses, and we acknowledge the limitations of email communication as unreliable. As we have said many times to our new graduate student teachers, if a message is truly important, we should say it to students at least three times and in three different modes, if possible, and this is good advice in almost any context. For large departments or programs such as ours, we recommend developing a deep bench of communication modes and opportunities.
- Find a safe and meaningful way to allow faculty to speak back to administrators. Our use of a “release valve” set of meetings each semester has worked well, but it may not work well forever, so we also recommend planning for multiple avenues in which faculty can engage with WPAs, especially in a crisis. There are many ways that our faculty participate in the work of the program (i.e., curriculum committees, an executive committee, awards committees), but our recommendation is for something less “work” related and more focused on listening to and sharing in discussions about the feel and experience of teaching in the program. Also, when faculty complain or raise concerns in any venue, listen and take notes that intend to gather impressions without tracking who said what. Then, sit with their complaints or concerns, and reflect on them within your administrative team (if you have one, and if you do not, we suggest building one, even if it is only one additional person, such as an associate director or graduate assistant). If there is an immediate problem to be fixed, do it, but most likely, these complaints and concerns have stories that undergird their existence, and the more you listen to those stories, the more you are likely to have genuine empathy for your faculty and their working conditions.
- Do not spend too much time reinventing the wheel. Once you have good policies and processes in place, conduct assessments and make simple adjustments when necessary. As Mike Ristich et al. (2021) argue, having

good policies in place and avoiding the tendency to administrate reactively makes a writing program particularly nimble when massive challenges such as a pandemic arise. It can be difficult to assess if there is enough empathy or community within a writing program, but we have found that if you ask about these qualities in a safe, open environment supported by consistent, long-term practices of empathetic administration, you'll get useful answers.

- Be kind, always. At the risk of sounding preachy, please remember that faculty members are human beings who apart from teaching the FYW courses also have personal lives and very real, complex needs and wants outside of work. We would not include this in our list of takeaways if we had not been on the receiving end of unkindness more than once. Empathy from a writing program administrator is of paramount importance.
- Lastly, as Clinnin and others in *The Things We Carry* suggest, remember that all of the above is essential emotional labor that should be included in end-of-year reports, merit pay requests, or any other opportunity in which administrators document their work for deans or provosts. This work is as laborious as any other aspect of the WPA position, and it should be recognized and duly compensated. It is easy to say this, of course, and in a time of slashed budgets and worries about the future, it may be a difficult ask of WPAs and their supervisors. Still, we call to normalize the documentation of emotional labor and community building.

The work of a WPA is often challenging, but we have found it easier and more rewarding to align our administrative practices with core values such as empathy and kindness. We hope that this chapter empowers future administrators to adopt similar practices, and we look forward to seeing administrative rhetorical empathy develop within our field and throughout higher education.

Notes

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