

CONCLUSION.

A TOOL KIT

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Administrative work is human work. And the rhetoric and composition administrative work we do is personal: our bodies, minds, identities, positionalities, emotions, values, and experiences shape and inform our work. Because this work is human and personal, this collection makes space for contributors to bring the personal to the theoretical with real stories and practical recommendations. Unfortunately, living and working within systems and networks often have dehumanizing and disembodiment effects, and we would be remiss in our efforts to create change if we ignored the human side of rhetoric and composition administrative work.

However, systems are not just disembodied machines or structures that form and force the humans working within them. Systems are ecosocial and cannot function without the human actors. Because the humans working within the system are crucial to how the system functions, our collection focuses on the (often fraught) intersection of human beings, systems, and networks. In this case, we focus on rhetoric and composition administrators because they are some of the people who can resist, reshape, and reframe the systems and networks. These administrators are critical to how higher education systems and networks will run. They are also critical to creating lasting, meaningful change within a system. Rhetoric and composition administrators—whether they are writing center directors, doctoral students who have administrative roles, non-tenure-track faculty serving on composition program committees, or writing across communities program directors, among others—are doers integrally involved in the doing. Because rhetoric and composition administrators integrally work within program, department, and university systems, they can shape and impact change work in ways that faculty, staff, and students cannot (see Lemke, 1995). Consequently, while we, the editors and contributors, use systems-based lenses to examine administrative roles within organizational structures, we equally emphasize the responsibilities of the human actors in creating meaningful change within higher education, writ large.

We can become change agents who experience, listen, understand, and identify inequity and inequality within the systems and their corresponding networks. Inevitably, when we come to realize how and why higher education systems and networks are not working the way they should, it is because we have noticed a problem—a way that things should not be. As Bruno Latour (2005) wrote, “[A]ction should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled” (p. 44). This node, knot, or conglomerate is unraveled through the collection’s authors’ theory and practice. As bell hooks remind us, “Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing toward this end” (*Teaching to Transgress*, 1994, p. 61). Therefore, this collection serves as a place for rhetoric and composition administrators and scholars who wish to promote practices that work to dismantle problematic systems and networks that impede change. Furthermore, we intersect systems and network theories with change making and DEIBSJ because these varying and complex efforts cannot be separate from conversations about systems and structures. We extend Lori Patton and Stephanie Bondi’s (2015) work, who said

Allies for social justice recognize the interconnectedness of oppressive structures and work in partnership with marginalized persons toward building social justice coalitions. They aspire to move beyond individual acts and direct attention to oppressive processes and systems. Their pursuit is not merely to help oppressed persons but to create a socially just world which benefits all people. (p. 489)

These oppressive structures could include, but are not limited to, shortsighted curriculum design, lack of agency for administrators and faculty, meaningless assessment methods, and biased hiring and promotion practices. With this purpose of highlighting problematic systems and networks—and inviting readers to once again examine how systems and networks stifle change-making efforts—so rhetoric and composition administrators are called to see where they can be change agents in their own systems and networks.

THE CONTEXT IN WHICH WE WRITE

With a focus on systems, networks, and change, we would like to pause, here, and acknowledge the space into which this collection has come to fruition. While, as we noted, the collection call came into being shortly after CCCC’s 2018, the drafting process has taken us into the heart of some incredibly turbulent transnational times. We were deep in this collection when we continued

to bear witness to atrocities enacted by figures of authority across the nation on Black folk. For many, the mass-media reckoning of White supremacist systems was too long coming and has resulted in too little, others have begun to reevaluate the roles they play in all systems and networks—from religious systems to workplace systems to family systems to political systems, among others—for the first time. As well, we wrote and researched through the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, where we and the authors saw and experienced broken systems and networks in action. We watched and experienced the breakdown in educational systems, the isolation mount, disinformation campaigns flourish, mental health reach a breaking point, and death tolls rise. We also continue to bear witness to the atrocities and war crimes across the globe, and the fears of nuclear war once again being bandied about in the press.

It is in these contexts and lived experiences we, as editors and contributors, work, and we cannot help but reflect on the ways we contribute to broken systems and networks and where we are resisting them. And while the authors do not necessarily take up these transnational topics explicitly in their chapters, many of us recognize the harm and pain inherent in the systems and networks around us and these experiences and feelings necessarily underpin the writings found herein.

TOOL KIT: ADDITIONAL WAYS TO CREATE CHANGE IN CONVERSATION AND ACTION

While we believe it is important to acknowledge these devastating, crumbling, and broken systems that continue to shape the field's thought processes, research, and recommendations, we also are committed to providing avenues for hope and change that continue to amplify the good work taken up by collection contributors. As readers have noticed, this collection contains diverse genre conventions, and our conclusion is no different. Therefore, in line with the collection's mosaic of hybrid genre conventions, this conclusion offers readers additional ways to examine the systems, as well as care for and expand the self.

We highly recommend that all conversations about changing systems and networks include some form of recommendation, way forward, or thing to try. One feature of this collection is problem-solving, which is why we asked all contributors to offer a recommendation or strategy for readers. We have all personally experienced the demoralization that comes with talking about the systems and networks that impede our change-making administrative efforts without any accompanying naming of agency or without recommendations for ways forward. Therefore, we strongly advocate for readers, whether they are students, staff, or faculty, to be encouraged with ways to move forward, whether that includes setting workplace boundaries, collaborating on writing and research,

or encouraging additional dialogue with other programs and departments. This tool kit offers readers a selection of frameworks, recommendations, and further reading to help enact change in their programs, departments, universities, and communities.

HAVING CONVERSATIONS AND REFLECTING: CREATING CHANGE WITHIN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES

While there are many ways administrators can help change the landscape of administrative work within established systems and networks, the first step is to talk about how systems and networks shape and define the work program, department, and university administrators do. The more we can normalize and prioritize conversations around systems and network theory and influence, the easier it will be to find colleagues who are willing to be change agents alongside us. We draw from Sara Ahmed, bell hooks, Wonderful Faison, Frankie Condon, M. Remi Yergeau, Lou Maraj, Carmen Kynard, and many others in the following conversation starters and action items.

These conversations and actions about systems and networks can include, but are not limited to:

- Assign decolonized, anti-hegemonic readings and work in undergraduate and graduate courses about systems and network theory alongside readings about organizational DEIBSJ and change-making writ large. Enact collaboratively built structures that exemplify these models.
- Offer regular program professional development that includes conversations about how the program can dismantle oppressive systems and support new ways to further change efforts, including teaching, hiring, promotion and tenure, tenure lines, budgets, outcomes, and strategic planning, among others.
- Start a book club with readings about the changing face of higher education, neoliberalism, systems, organizational leadership and management, or other topics that introduce participants to the ways systems and network language impede or promote change efforts. Work collaboratively to name how these theories are applied in local contexts.
- Encourage discussions about the systems and networks that shape your program, department, college, and university during committee meetings and department meetings. Collaboratively name whether these practices are inclusive or exclusionary, equitable or unjust, and plan ways forward to amplify or dismantle.
- Listen to, amplify, and center the expertise, experiences, and knowledges of BIPOC and/or historically minoritized individuals in

rhetoric and composition work writ large. Assist in centering these differing knowledges and maintaining the space to amplify local and national work, from the ground up, into practices, perspectives, materials, and structures.

EDUCATION AS BRIDGE-BUILDING: HOW TO MOVE TOWARD CHANGE

As readers make decisions about what conversations to have and with whom, we offer a nowhere near exhaustive selection of readings that have shaped some of our understanding of administrative work within systems and networks. These pieces have changed our perspectives, helped us see our agency in new ways, and confirmed the personal and professional work we must continue to do. Readers may want to start here:

- Charles Bazerman and David R. Russell's *Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives*.
- Stuart Brown and Theresa Enos' *The Writing Program Administrator's Resource: A Guide to Reflective Institutional Practice*.
- Natalie Dorfeld's *The Invisible Professor: The Precarious Lives of the New Faculty Majority*.
- Wonderful Faison and Frankie Condon's *Counterstories from the Writing Center*.
- Kristie Fleckenstein's *Embodied Literacies: Imageword and a Poetics of Teaching*.
- Genie Nicole Giaimo's *Unwell Writing Centers: Searching for Wellness in Neoliberal Institutions and Beyond*.
- Holly Hassel and Cassandra Phillips's *Materiality and Writing Studies: Aligning Labor, Scholarship, and Teaching*.
- Mays Imad's *Transcending Adversity: Trauma-informed Educational Development*, published in *Educational Development in the Time of Crises*.
- Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Antonio Damasio's *We Feel, Therefore We Learn: The Relevance of Affective and Social Neuroscience to Education*, published in *Mind, Brain and Education*.
- Rebecca L. Jackson and Jackie Grutsch McKinney's *Self+Culture+Writing: Autoethnography for/as Writing Studies*.
- Alexandria L. Lockett, Iris D. Ruiz, James Chase Sanchez, and Christopher Carter's *Race, Rhetoric, and Research Methods*.
- Sharon James McGee and Carolyn Handa's *Discord and Direction: The Postmodern Writing Program Administrator*.
- Staci M. Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig's *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration: From the Margins to the Center*.

- Rebecca Pope-Ruark's *Unraveling Faculty Burnout: Pathways to Reckoning and Renewal*.
- Bessel van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*.
- M. Remi Yergeau's *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*.

Readers might wish to reach out to their local communities for readings, experts, and programs designed to assist bridge-building to continue learning from and building upon the wood work local folx are already doing.

ASSESSING ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS: CREATING MEANINGFUL LABOR AND EQUITY CHANGES

As many of our contributors have written, change making starts inward with ourselves. It is incredibly difficult to create meaningful change if we are not in alignment with our professional and personal values, priorities, and needs. One way to create change for ourselves and for others is through renegotiations of our job descriptions and work allocations. As we have written elsewhere (2023), rhetoric and composition administrators can enact change by examining the documentation—job descriptions, annual evaluation materials, program budgets, tenure and promotion requirements, contracts, department bylaws, etc.—that inaccurately represents, minimizes, or undermines the realities of their work. Examining program, department, and university documentation may result in:

- A reallocation of FTE percentages, including teaching, research, service, and administration.
- An updated job description with responsibilities during the academic year and summer.
- A proposal to the dean or provost for additional funding, resources, and support.
- A revision of annual evaluation documentation and requirements.
- A memorandum of understanding (MOU) or other official renegotiations for the program administrator(s).

LISTENING AS A LOVE ETHIC: LISTENING INWARD AND OUTWARD FOR SYSTEMATIC CHANGE

At our various institutions and communities, in our differing and layered positionalities, we believe Kyende Kinoti's (2020) work on listening is particularly

poignant and offers readers a framework to learn how to listen to themselves—what they and their bodies need—and listen to others. Kinoti, ruminating on hook's (2000) *All About Love: New Visions*, wrote,

In a colonized system we see that the love ethic breaks down when we choose not to listen to those at the center of their own lives, instead, the prevailing voices are those of experts or donors who are far removed from the truth and experiences of communities they claim to serve. Love is absent when we hold that certain groups possess a monopoly on knowledge even when that knowledge is about another's life. (2020, para. 5)

Listening with love within administrative contexts encourages us to develop relationships with and across agencies/actors from a variety of academic and administrative communities and systems. Listening changes the conversation from one that relies solely on self and existing structure to situating the rhetoric and composition administrator within an ecosocial structure of human and nonhuman actors. Listening with love to systems, networks, and people offers the administrator a tangible way to engage in identifying the gaps, the in-between, and the silences that result in broken systems and people. As Kinoti further argues, “The next time you are planning a program, or collecting feedback, or analyzing the outcomes of your work, embrace the love ethic in your process. Respect that the individuals you serve have agency and expertise within their lives. Listen to them deeply and authentically. See how your and their lives are intertwined” (2020, para. 8). Rhetoric and composition administrators may wish to apply this ethic with an emphasis on time, place, culture, and actors/agents to allow for a critical look at the micro and macro embodied practices that form sustainable change-making opportunities and practices. We also suggest readers might apply systems and network theories as an effective form of rhetorical listening to ourselves in ways that move us toward meaningful and sustainable action in our own lives.

Readers might consider journaling answers to Krista Ratcliffe's (2005) rhetorical listening questions within administrative situations and contexts to better understanding when and why they stop listening to themselves and others. Readers might start with these questions:

- In what administrative context/issue, do I stop listening to my gut desire or need and why?
- In what administrative context/issue, do I automatically react with a guilt/blame logic and why?
- In what administrative context/issue, do I start feeling excluded and why?

- In what administrative context/issue, do I focus solely on differences and why?

These reflective questions become fact gathering tasks in which we slow down and ask questions about our reactions and *why* they are happening. Once we better understand ourselves and our reactions, we can move forward to create change within ourselves, our communities, and within the systems and networks around us.

ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CREATING CHANGE FROM WITHIN

There are many online and in-person professional development venues that may help rhetoric and composition administrators align their values and ideologies with the realities of their work and work environment. Readers might explore these resources for their own personal growth which will, in turn, help them develop the skills and knowledge to work towards systematic change at the different levels of administrative influence, such as at the program, department, or college level. We recommend also seeking out resources which speak directly to the locality and experiences of the reader in order that this interaction might be best poised for success.

- The American Psychological Association's Center for Psychology and Health (<https://www.apa.org/health>)
- The Berkeley Well-Being Institute (<https://www.berkeleywellbeing.com/about.html>)
- The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family (<https://www.thebowncenter.org>)
- The Centre for Organization Effectiveness (<https://tcofe.com/about/>)
- Happiness Studies Academy (<https://www.happinessstudies.academy/abouttalbenshahar/>)
- The Internal Family Systems Institute (<https://ifs-institute.com>)
- The Mindfulness Institute (<http://www.mindfulnessinstitute.ca>)
- The Trauma Research Foundation (<https://traumaresearchfoundation.org>)
- The University of California—San Diego Center for Mindfulness (<https://cih.ucsd.edu/mindfulness>)
- The University of Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations (<https://igr.umich.edu>)

As this collection has explored, administrative work is often both deeply personal and highly systemic. Contributors have used storytelling, case studies, research, reflection, and theory as a way to identify, problematize, and name the

administrative work they do within existing disciplinary, social, institutional, and personal systems and networks. To create lasting, meaningful change, rhetoric and composition administrators—as people and as administrators—have to examine the existing systems and networks in which they live and work. It is no easy task, as we have to pay attention and listen, ask “why” questions, discover and form connections, and allow for knowledge to move organically through the networks.

CONCLUSION

Whether you decide to have dialogue and discussion through committees, classes, meetings, professional development, or reading groups, we encourage reflection, for you and for others, on how systems and networks shape the work you do and the work you want to do. To close this collection, we offer a few final reflection questions that might shape the conversations you want to have or need to have. These reflection questions can be used to examine your own ideologies, values, beliefs, and actions, or they can be used to start or drive conversation:

- How do systems or networks inform or impede the change you want to make within your program? Who do you need to get to know or what do you need to make these changes? What changes might you need to make to further these efforts?
- How do documents, textbooks, syllabi, websites, and bylaws further the established systems and networks in your program and department? Do you and others need to examine the language in these artifacts to examine what systematic changes you can make through language?
- How do processes and protocols further the established systems and networks in your program and department that slow down or stifle change-making efforts? Do you need to form a program task force or program committee to create new processes and protocols that support social justice?
- How do program, department, and university leadership unwittingly (or wittingly) support systems and networks that impede social justice efforts, such as equitable hiring practices, clear and consistent evaluation promotion guidelines, appropriate and professional behavior, and workplace boundaries, among others. Do you need to examine your own role in furthering systems and networks? Might you bring up your concerns about existing systems and networks with colleagues, in committees, and in meetings?

If you feel stuck, such as not having colleagues who are interested in or willing to examine the existing systems and networks with you, what collaborative relationships might you develop across the institution to find like-minded faculty, staff, and graduate students? Does your campus have a teaching and learning center where you can broach these conversations? Or, perhaps, a student support office on campus would be open to your ideas. Or maybe the faculty and staff you have met in cross-campus committees would be interested in discussing the college and university's systems and networks. We encourage you to branch out and take your conversations across campus for encouragement and support, if needed.

Like the systems in which we work, this collection offers a network mosaic of *praxis*-based chapters to untangle the complex, ongoing process of building, dismantling, and existing in larger higher educational systems when one participates in change-making work. We absolutely believe we can create systemic change, and our contributors do too. Let us create that change together.

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