

Persistence, Coalition and Power: Institutional Citizenship and the Feminist WPA

Abstract: This essay investigates the concept of feminist institutional citizenship at the site of writing program administration work. Building from O'Meara's notion of "agentic perspectives" this project sought to identify practices, perspectives, and modes for increased agency in labor-conscious frameworks. Here, we detail a series of conversations and reflective moments between two feminist-identified practitioners at different career stages as they explored their shared concerns related to institutional change and labor equity. The essay argues for coalitional, collective work as a means for accessing agency and creating sustained institutional change based in intersectional and material analyses of power and labor.

keywords: institutional citizenship, writing program administration

Anicca Cox received her doctorate in rhetoric and writing from Michigan State University where her research focus was on labor-equity, using materialist feminist research methods. Her other work includes studies on non-tenured faculty and academic freedom and editorial practice related to non-tenure track faculty scholarship. She is an assistant professor, division head and writing program administrator at Methodist University, a small liberal arts college in the Southeastern U.S.

Dr. Rachel Riedner is Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences at the George Washington University where she is Professor of Writing and of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Her publications pursue interests in analysis and critiques of gendered labor, global capitalism, and state, power, a transnational feminist commitment to building solidarities across geographic locations, and an interest in rhetoric and writing as a means of feminist activism.

Introduction

This essay looks at the concept of feminist institutional citizenship at the site of Writing Program Administration (WPA) work from a labor-focused lens. By focusing on agentic or agentive capacity building in program administration (we'll use the terms interchangeably) that moves toward achieving feminist institutional citizenship, we hope to offer to others a set of considerations for institutional change work.

Institutional or academic citizenship as conceived by Bruce Macfarlane engages work within "five overlapping communities: students, colleagues, institutions, disciplines or professions, and the wider public," each of which WPA labor engages (1). We examined the concept of institutional citizenship at the nexus of *feminist, labor-oriented* WPA work, and we did so by way of a series of recorded conversations that were a part of a graduate seminar curriculum in Anicca's doctoral program at Michigan State University. Rachel was then the Executive Director of the Writing Program at George Washington University. That inquiry helped us sensemake our own feminist and labor-conscious approaches to WPA work from our respective social and institutional locations. Our relationship building was both cross-generational and cross-institutional. Taking these conversations as a starting point, the goal of this essay is to conceptualize two aspects of this work—agency and reflection—one a feminist modality or practice (reflection) and one an objective (agency), as related to feminist institutional citizenship.

Here we take up agentic perspectives from Kerry Ann O'Meara's 2015 essay, "A Career with a View: Agentic Perspectives of Women Faculty," which she defines this way: "Agentic perspectives are a way of viewing a situation and one's role in it to advance goals. Typically, agentic perspectives emerge as a response to barriers and opportunities" (333). Our conversations focused on the barriers we faced, but more importantly to us, they uncovered potential organizational strategies a WPA might employ in service of persistence, coalition and power—elements we consider to be well in line with feminist and labor-oriented praxis. Specifically, our own readings of feminist theory, and particularly activist feminism, provided a framework for thinking about these values and practices. As Kristine Blair and Lee Nickoson note, feminist traditions often involve "engaging and disrupting dominant structural systems" (3). We saw our work together as a form of relationship building located in that understanding. As such, our conversations helped us to consider how our cross-generational and cross-institutional scholarly relationship might work to deepen our feminist agencies and to help us understand the terrain of feminist institutional citizenship. We did so from the stance that, as the Combahee River Collective explains, "we see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (n.p). This essay argues for attention to such practices for those who seek to build agentic, feminist institutional citizenship by centering labor consciousness and collective action, and it mirrors the ways historical and contemporary "labor feminists have fought for the interests of...women...both within the feminist and the labor movements" (Boris and Orleck n.p.).

Feminist Methodological and Theoretical Frames

We understand institutions as places where systems of uneven power—gender privilege, white privilege, able-bodied and cisgender privilege (and more)—are constantly instantiated. We recognize that feminist WPA work must contend with all of these constraints and the work often can seem filled with insurmountable systemic conditions. As we engage with a wide variety of colleagues and students with diverse needs and desires, approaching our work as feminist, institutional citizens can provide one model of working toward change through persistence, coalition and power. Even as we know WPA work is rife with "wicked problems" based in hierarchy, class division and whiteness, we believe, as O'Meara outlines, "it is possible for faculty to craft alternatives to grand narratives through their framing of contexts and their role in them." (332). We acknowledge that navigating that work takes time to reflect which our conversations provided.

Lasting for an hour between Rachel's children's school drop off and Anicca's writing center hours, that is, sandwiched between different labor commitments, our conversations uncovered shared experiences and perspectives. To start, both of us shared an affinity for feminist standpoint theory that grounds feminist politics in links between experiences and political perspective. Feminist standpoint theory asserts that "social situatedness is at issue" and enables an understanding of that situatedness as a tool for bringing to light the various ways systems of power affect individuals and groups (Harding 9). Shari Stenberg further notes that a hallmark of feminist work in writing studies specifically is "the use of personal experience as a site of knowledge" (47). Through our conversations—dialogic, relationship focused, and inquiry based—we sought to do just that: to uncover some of the commonalities of our own experience about gendered labor by telling our work stories together and to further locate them in larger institutional and political discourses to map moments of agentic potential.

Our conversations foregrounded how material conditions such as productive (waged) and reproductive (unwaged) labor contribute to institutions (Riedner 122-3). Silvia Federici defines reproductive labor as "the work that produces and reproduces labor power," or, the labor that builds the conditions for "capitalist accumulation" (Prec. Labor n.p). The work of using reflection as a feminist tool was to bring a focus on creating solidarity and to move away from a purely individualist framework. Without a move beyond individualist thinking, we run the risk of an inability to connect with those who are different from ourselves. By discussing our work in this way, we moved toward

our objective: to consider ways to build relationally *within and across* institutional, career, and other differences. However, because institutional scenarios are highly contextualized, specific, and dynamic, our methodology of reflective dialogue and narrative work primarily acted as a tool to identify institutional places of agentic potential, and to extend O'Meara's call toward agentic perspectives for woman identified faculty rather than to simply map institution specific actions.

Because the WPA figure is so often archetyped into a singular administrative agent, we find that engaging these types of important conversations is vital to expand understandings of WPA praxis beyond one person's labor. Over time, our work became less interview, and more working *through and across* ideas with one another. This vehicle of extended conversation and relationship building began to take an organic form into structures of mentorship and care, so crucial to understanding how to work effectively in ethical ways. However, as we will detail in the following section, that mentorship was less concerned with career advancement or disciplinary mentorship and more concerned with mapping places to become agentic participants in institutional change. We did so because we both value the incredible feminist work in our field that has considered models of mentorship *and* want to extend it to consider how those relationships might be a vehicle for change beyond individual experience and potential.

As the weeks progressed, we worked reciprocally in our knowledge sharing. We moved from description and analysis of experience, to reflections on the principles and values that guide our choices and our histories and we began to reflect on the links between the personal and the political and structural. Particularly, we thought about how our mutual experiences with labor organizing could help us as WPAs to account for identities, experiences, and standpoints to strategically address the dynamics of institutional power. This means we are oriented toward a feminist approach to scholarship and administration that takes into account the heterogeneity of women's institutional experiences (Anzaldúa; Mohanty; Royster).

We acknowledge that it is a precious opportunity to be able to deeply listen to someone week after week over the course of an extended time period and hope that our discussion renews a call to that kind of intentional practice between feminist practitioners. We see listening practice too, as other feminist practitioners do, as a methodology for "self reflection," "theorizing experience," and to "listen to those who experience the world differently than ourselves" (Blair and Nickosen 14). Reflective practice, as Kelly Concannon et al. explain, works as a "feminist intervention strategy to make meaning" in either research or community settings (157). As such, we recognize the debt of gratitude for intersectional and Black feminist approaches to feminist coalition which call for listening work as a means of discovery, empathy, and capacity building for solidarity and self-awareness (Combahee; Lorde and Rich).

Our *thinking through* allowed us to learn by way of the sharing of experience from and with another feminist practitioner and affirmed a set of principles we carry about feminist, labor oriented WPA work: that it utilizes analyses of power, compassion, collective action, and strategic thinking. We began to conceive of what feminist institutional citizenship looks like over the course of a career as we sought to understand administrative movement at the sites of programs and institutional mission. Finally, we mapped places where feminist institutional citizenship and its praxis was present in this work, as it intersects with labor, program design, and institutional change.

Feminist Mentoring as Starting Point

After our initial conversations in the fall of 2018, we easily conceived of our shared work as a mentoring space. We did so because we quickly identified a shared interest in feminism grounded in labor consciousness. We discussed writing together but also realized we were curious about how others might perceive these kinds of relationships first. We then assembled a group of feminist mentorship pairs we know through our professional networks to present a panel at the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference in 2019. Our co-panelists told the stories of their unfolding relationships where professional identity, networking, scholarship, and friendship were fostered between pairs

alongside preparation for future academic appointments (for the mentee). They spoke of the ways their relationships were emotionally supportive and how they built that support. Further, they had important insights into the gendered nature of the academy and the intricacies of cross-racial/cultural mentorship relationships. But somehow, even as we identified ourselves as being inside a type of mentoring relationship, we didn't seem to be doing much of, or exactly what, they collectively described. As we listened to our brilliant and generous co-panelists, we came to a shared realization: we didn't fit with these pairs *somehow*. But why?

We believe the models of feminist mentorship, like the ones our co-panelists shared, are vital ones. Feminist mentoring has wide-ranging impacts in writing studies, and academia in general, including the ways it may address a number of persistent problems related to power. As one example, Ana Milena Ribero and Sonia Arellano note, it can increase success, persistence, and representation for women of color in the discipline. Working to push beyond white, middle-class models of professionalization, Ribero and Arellano problematize our notions of feminist mentorship and assert practices from their own lived experiences that are instead rooted in a range of activities from anti-racism to kinship, and tangible support that connected them across their personal and professional lives (335). Kathryn Gindlesparger and Holly Ryan also delineate the practice of mentorship as serving the purpose of both "advancing ourselves as experts in the field" to "developing our professional identities" (56). In addition, Pamela Van Haitsma and Steph Ceraso provide a valuable model for "horizontal" mentoring which mirrored *some* of our own experience in its contrast to more traditional "power-laden, vertical mentoring dynamics" (211).

However, our relationship didn't unfold around encouraging one another's professional advancement or scholarly identity. So, while we are indebted to the discourse around, and the transformative work of, feminist mentoring both peer-to-peer and cross generationally, we position ourselves and this work in a gentle contradistinction to it. Meaning, where some feminist mentorship for example takes the shape of allyship concerning gendered, raced or time bound experiences related to scholarly trajectories, or offers tools and strategies for success within the discipline, our relationship was focused on developing feminist institutional citizenship.

As such, we seek here to extend conversations in writing studies on feminist mentoring beyond a practice for personal survival or professional advancement to feminist mentoring as a site for institutional change work. We considered specifically how to build equity in institutions as citizens of them who are concerned particularly with feminism and labor at the site of WPA work. We then align our discussion with, and as an extension of, the 2019 contributions of Jennifer Heinert and Cassandra Phillips, Michelle Payne, and Eileen Schell in the *Peitho Journal: Special Cluster on Gendered Service in Rhetoric and Writing Studies* where the authors examine feminist WPA work and institutional participation. Those works account for some of the complexities and inequalities of participation for women WPAs across both their waged and unwaged labor (Federici, Rev. Pt. Zero) as they engaged in institutional change work by calculating for the benefits of that commitment as well as its challenges. For us, our cross-generational/cross-institutional relationship became a viable space from which to imagine how to shape and transform our institutional locations toward more equitable configurations through reflective work and agency building.

Reflective Practice from Feminist Locations

Our reflective practice came in several forms (notes, a seminar paper, a conference presentation), but primarily was constructed through a series of recorded conversations focused on inquiry, relationship building, and reflection. We saw ourselves as engaging feminist praxis as two women-identified labor conscious institutional workers and we took as a mutual understanding for this practice, something that Chandra Mohanty explains: where gender has meaning and consequences in institutions and where "interwoven processes of sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism are integral parts of our social fabric" (3). However, as with all social locations, our perspectives here are limited. In our case, our lived experiences and perspectives do not emerge

from the “margins” (hooks), but rather from a privileged racial and gender majority in our own discipline, namely white, cis-gendered women.

Individually, our ethical commitments emerge from our histories in the labor movement, and from those experiences we draw our values as institutional citizens. Foundational to those ethics are practices of persistence, coalition and (analyses of, building of) power—captured in the title of our article. These criteria align to both materialist and intersectional feminist theory and practice, to whom we owe intellectual debt specifically to working class, feminist, transnational, BIPOC, trans, and disabled scholars, researchers, organizers, and activists (Ahmed; Anzaldua; Comba-see; Crenshaw; Ebert; Federici; Hill-Collins; hooks; Kabeer; Kynard; la paperson; Lorde; Mohanty; Nicolas; Royster; Smith). We are additionally indebted in our understandings to scholarship specific to feminist WPA work (Ratcliff and Rickly) and with work devoted to understanding the embodied, social, lived complexities of WPA work (George).

We clearly recognize gendered labor as an aspect of institutional citizenship. We also recognize the complexity of two white women administrators working to enact practice informed by transnational and intersectional feminist theory. But, we believe the effort is worthwhile even if our own embodied experiences reside in racial privilege. The implications of not doing so are far riskier. Therefore, we focus on how to build a vision of feminist WPA work, centered on co-constitutive and non-hierarchical, reflective and agentive practice. Ultimately, our project was aimed at constructing feminist models for advocacy, and systems and structure changes in higher education, especially in writing programs. This feminist approach foregrounds material and intersectional commitments to labor, that is, building horizontal, coalitional practices within institutional structures where the goal is to build labor equity.

By reconsidering selections of our own dialogue, we work to make visible our experiences and standpoints in relation to institutional structures and values as well as our efforts of persistence and coalition building. In the following two sections, we include a few extended portions of our recordings together with interpretation and analysis to demonstrate how the feminist process of collaborative reflection helped us identify what agentive practice might look like in feminist, labor-centered WPA work. Here you will mostly see Anicca’s voice, reflecting on the conversations and their meaning for her, while Rachel’s original reflections in our conversations provide the foundation for that sensemaking.¹

Reflection Toward Coalition, Persistence and Power.

In our first conversation together I (Anicca) asked Rachel how she came to be in her current role as a WPA, program director and dean. She said:

I’m probably one of the few people who got their PhD at GW and stayed. I was studying women’s rhetorics basically with a focus on post-colonial feminist rhetorics, so I was reading a lot of Chandra Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak.

I was reading lots of Marxist feminism. So, Marxist feminists coming out of Italy, like Sylvia Federici, so I was thinking about feminist critiques of political economy and how that intersects with rhetoric and how rhetoric creates the ways in which women are embedded and a part of particular kinds of political economies in capitalism. So that’s my sort of intellectual history.

¹ We have chosen to highlight excerpts from our original dialogue in italics and Anicca’s later sensemaking and reflection in single spaced text written in first-person to provide contrast to the sections where we speak together as authors in the larger body of the text using “we” as the authorial voice and double spaced prose.

In listening to this recording, I hear moments where I laugh and interject. I hear myself express how happy I am that we get to do this project and tell Rachel that if she has any recommendations for me, I can make those texts foundational to my (then) future dissertation. What strikes me now in listening is how enthusiastic I was. My own program had little in the way of thinking about political economies and capitalism and the ways in which feminist critique and action might provide an answer to the gendered aspects of systems of power. Because I was and am particularly interested in institutional work and change at the site of writing programs, the reflections she offered on her intellectual history gave me an immediate sense that I would be able to build a praxis for my own ethical commitments to labor in academia from these conversations. Her reflections on her history made me think there was a place for me and my work.

She continued:

I was teaching in a writing program that was at that time a part of the English department and then the writing program left, and I was hired full time. Those early years were difficult. We were all new and we had no protection. If you have senior faculty, you have protection. Eventually, one of my colleagues was hired as the executive director. He was the leader for a while and that created some stability, and he was someone who could represent us outside the university. You know, I like the model of the autonomous collective but at a university, it's really hard. You need a representative.

This conversation would foreground much of what we discussed and helped me form a set of questions for my own future work. How does a representative act on behalf of others? What are the ethics of that? How is that kind of role a site from which to build power in our work? It was critical to hear the stories of how Rachel does her work as a part of a collective project. That was reflected in the story she told about her own position in coming to direct the writing program:

I was asked if I would step into the executive director position. I was an interim for two years and then I convinced the dean's office to turn it into an elected position, instead of an appointed position. And that was for me, extremely important for the program because if it's an appointed position, the dean's office can bring in just anybody, like someone who is tenure-track but doesn't know anything about writing. I was able to demonstrate that we have scholarly chops, and wisdom within the program, and then I was elected by my colleagues as the chair. But, it took a lot of figuring out how we needed to make ourselves in the university in places where people didn't understand what we are doing.

So, for me, the work has been the emotional, strategic, and political labor of creating the university writing program as a community in itself, and it is a community that is situated in the university and respected within the university. That took 15 years.

Here, I saw her able to clearly name the types of work that it takes to be an institutional citizen who thinks about power, about the ethics of leadership, and the emotional investment that it takes to do so. Part of that is her unusual trajectory as a WPA. She directs a Writing in the Disciplines (WID) program in the university where she received her PhD and where she is a full professor and associate dean of undergraduate studies, but a non-tenured one. I was struck by how her story pushes back on some WPA scholarship from our own field, which advocates "institutional departure" as one possible intervention to unacceptable working conditions for women WPAs (Yancey 143). Instead, Rachel's orientation to her work appears in close relationship to her long-term commitment to the geographical area, its surrounding community, and the university community itself.

This approach is mirrored in organizing work where long-term commitments to place, to community and organizations often provide the foundation for lasting and meaningful change. I (Anicca) reflected at the time:

We talked about—feminist time, academic time, and these different scales of time. Many people are dealing with ‘classic’ WPA issues of these intractable institutional challenges, especially pre-tenure. In contrast, your work has unfolded over this long trajectory where progress has been made in terms of how you work across campus, how you work with your colleagues, how you build coalitions with colleagues laterally and vertically. A typical WPA narrative says that institutional challenges are terrible, and you just sit with this terribleness all of the time and it’s just sort of unsolvable? In that regard, your story is different.

As our discussion continued, we came to understand an agentic practice that leads to success is rooted in understanding the importance of working across departments and units to harness collective power, something Anicca was prioritizing in her graduate program as she did WID work, community-engaged scholarship, and where she served in her graduate student labor union. For Rachel, this cross-unit interaction was especially important to the work of remedying the problem of part-time, adjunct employment and precarity more broadly.

Even as Anicca now finds herself in somewhat different circumstances—she is newly an assistant professor and WPA on the tenure track in a small, liberal arts institution—she continues to map those questions about power, collective determination, and leadership onto her work. Much of that practice involves cross-unit collaboration and making sure that labor concerns are at the fore in an institution that has never considered closely the relationship between teacher working conditions and student learning conditions. For example, in Anicca’s new position, she has been tasked with leading a group of three other faculty in building a first-year writing program “from the ground up,” devising placement and assessment processes, redesigning a degree program, and fostering a culture of writing across the small campus she works in.

Anicca has been able to practically apply many of the strategies she learned in discussion and reflection with Rachel, beginning with a focus on the institutional mission of care and support of students to make arguments for labor-equity in staffing. That includes advocating for higher pay, for full time hires, and paying members of her department for professional development, a new practice there. It has also included relationship building with the registrar, student retention and persistence offices, advising, the office of institutional research, the DEI office, and faculty in her own college to build responsive, dynamic approaches to teaching and administration that build on her colleagues’ expertise but do not exploit it.

Finally, our reflective work was bi-directional. For Anicca, at that time, our work helped her get perspective on her own graduate program and commitments within it, as well as her relationship to a larger institutional structure. Listening to Rachel helped Anicca understand that institutional change work is a worthy and possible endeavor, which came in opposition to some of the WPA literature she was studying. For Rachel, who was on a sabbatical semester and was removed from the day-to-day challenges of her life as an executive director, it was an opportune time, she felt, for a series of structured reflective moments in her work after two decades at GW. She reflected that our conversations were:

tremendously helpful, particularly because they took place just after I’d been promoted to full professor. Being promoted to full for me was a moment of relief because I’d finally reached a milestone in my career and can now relax a bit. I hadn’t had the time to think about my WPA work in a systematic way because usually I am just too busy DOING it. Conversation [with you], and our shared feminist ethos of care, helped me begin to articulate a vision for what I am actually doing.

Because we shared the language of labor organizing, which is adept at recognizing and building worker power, we were able to use that as a conversational site for building understanding, both of our own past and present experiences and to foreground our next steps in our institutional work, Anicca's on the job market and Rachel's moving into a new administrative position. As Rachel articulated,

If I think about institutional power, how does the work that I do link up with, and interact with and push at that power? My strategy is feminist but also based on a labor analysis. Over the past twelve weeks, we have articulated the feminist politics through our conversations. The feminist methodology that we've employed is not just you listening to me, but it's drawing out our knowledge of feminist institutional citizenship through conversation that reveal shared interests and experiences.

Mapping moments for Agentive Practice and Perspective

O'Meara's feminist approach to the study of women faculty demonstrates how they enacted agency in their work in response to what she describes as pervasive "gendered organizational practices" that exact more service and care work from women faculty and how they took up individual agency both in perspective and action to maintain their career trajectories in the face of institutional barriers (331-59). Our work extends O'Meara's discussion by suggesting that collective practices are a more effective model of feminist institutional citizenship. Feminist institutional citizenship seeks to move beyond individual actors and entails building relationships and capacity within and across institutional spaces to support colleagues who are balancing multiple obligations such as teaching, mentoring students and colleagues, administration and service, care work, and research. As a concept and a practice, it recognizes such labor and brings this recognition to institutional discussions, relationships, and policies (Riedner). In other words, feminist institutional citizenship values waged labor and labor that is unwaged because it is gendered and racialized (Federici Prec. Labor; Kabeer). We believe this kind of knowing is a distinct marker of feminist institutional citizenship, and is more important than ever, in both institutional and political contexts.

O'Meara notes how agency theory points to building an understanding of how "the framing of situations is a necessary precursor to actions taken" (333). True to our shared experience in labor organizing, we used our conversations to consider how principles of lateral, collectively oriented, persistent, coalitional approaches might better help us understand feminist praxis in WPA work. In what follows we discuss two of those sites or nodes where we mapped agentive practice: program/institutional structures, and institutional mission. We consider how orientations toward persistence, coalition and power (building) are effective toward building institutional change at these two nodes.

Program/Institutional Structures. Our recorded sections on program/institutional structures included discussions of the persistent difficulty of hierarchies of rank and pay and the role of managerial workers like WPAs. We did so because we both understand that material and social conditions impact our discursive and epistemological ones (hooks). Part of what we uncovered, primarily by first examining how Rachel's work is structured, points to a reconceptualization of the role of various faculty designations, the agency they have and how their work must unfold creatively and in coalition. By considering the union organizing practice of "power mapping" as a tool, we began to understand how that might be applied to our feminist institutional citizenship work:

AC: How do you think WPAs can do this work even if they themselves are vulnerable?

RR: People familiar with union organizing talk about strategies where they may not be able to intervene in the center of institutional power but seek to create different forms of power through coalition building. In this model, institutional and political change takes place when workers organize collectively. WPAs may think that they are not in a position of authority to challenge centralized, institutional power directly, but institutional power can be created through organizing.

Our conversations were particularly timely because I (Anicca) was encountering much of this in my own union and programmatic contexts. Graduate unions, (I was at the time helping bargain a contract for ours) for example, tend to be bold in their organizing tactics and often bargain for issues beyond contractually stipulated areas of concern (wages, working conditions, benefits) to include advocacy work aimed at improving the social conditions of graduate education. Institutional labor structures dictate a separation between student workers and student learners but in coalition, graduate unions are able to intervene in some of those distinctions for shared gains and my conversations with Rachel had a direct impact on the strategies I took while at the bargaining table.

Additionally, Rachel and I found we both track these collectivist practices to feminist theory and practice. For me that was developed in my experience in feminist political education spaces. It was informed in readings of the work of the Combahee River Collective and feminist historians like Angela Davis, as well as a relationship with a founding member of one of the earliest feminist-artist consciousness raising groups (Wilding). In addition, it arises from my awareness of activist or collective groups like the Lesbian Avengers (Dixon). Making sense of the connection between that kind of collective organizing and WPA work, I noted:

I'm starting to see that too, (the value of collective action) because we're doing things like power mapping, and union trainings as a group and thinking about alliance and how to be strategic and I thought, wow, I really could have used this when I was a WPA. The relational place is more natural to me, but the strategic piece is really valuable. And I had no idea how vulnerable I would be as a graduate student; I was unprepared for that.

Anicca's work was in a graduate student context concerned with wages and healthcare amongst one academic rank, but Rachel was fighting for labor protections in such a way that much of her approach to coalition happens at the curricular and program design level. At GW, the WID program functions by departments or programs receiving support from the writing program to develop their own notions around effective writing. This orientation is part of how Rachel has enacted her understanding of feminist institutional citizenship, valuing the expertise of a broad range of stakeholders, and coming into coalition with them. Rachel takes that work out laterally and upward across the institution and administrative channels by acting as a communicative node across campus. The work of coalition helps her in power building as well, especially as regards the working conditions of faculty. She explained:

Right now we are trying to stabilize working conditions for part-time faculty, and that's really hard, that's university wide, well that's in the college. Some others have gotten involved. A thing I've gotten really good at is being collaborative across departments. If you have a problem with part-time faculty, don't just go to the dean's office, go to the dean's office with five other chairs.

That work necessarily takes time. Persistence over time was another key feature we identified to the work of a feminist institutional citizenship and WPA work within institutional structures and mission. Together, we drew from our understandings of labor theory, like solidarity unionism (Lynd), and political action contexts, like the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment and (some of) the women led suffrage and abolition movements. Collective approaches and persistence over time in feminist frames are critical to increasing agency. This collectivity exists in a complex history, however, as Angela Davis demonstrates, where solidarity in feminist and labor movements are so often fractured by diverging class allegiances and divides between working and middle class/upper class movements as well as by chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and ongoing, contemporary racist violence. Nonetheless, solidarity over working conditions over the long term has and continues to

be a powerful place for change work, fraught as it may sometimes be.

Rachel was an organizer for the UAW in the 1990s and explained in our first conversation:

Union organizing helped me more than anything to take a collaborative approach to institutional citizenship. The skills learned in organized labor are about strategic thinking about institutional power—working from an awareness of institutional power structures, democratic decision-making practices, solidarity and capacity building, utilizing people’s unique skills and abilities, and organizing groups toward action and reflection.

Akin to the union practice of “door knocking,” Rachel has been effective through persistence. That work has included persuading others to understand the value of writing in disciplines, but also in other areas of university citizenship like advocacy and pushback built through multiple, repeated, conversations with partners over time. Rachel explained that her work in relationship and coalition building as well as her awareness of the constant need to question hierarchies and power structures are rooted in that feminist, agentive practice of persistence over time.

Our conversations helped me (Anicca) make sense of my own union experience as a site of institutional change. Though different in some ways, in that I was negotiating a contract directly, I began to understand how taking a long view of improved working conditions for graduate students might yield the beginnings of change that would continue through partnership, coalition and collaboration on campus. Specifically, our union bargained for social justice gains, like language justice, supports for undocumented GTAs and pedagogy support for BIPOC GTAs. As a graduate student worker, envisioning change across the long-term presents a significant challenge as GTAs are non-permanent.

Bargaining beyond “bread and butter” concerns for workers is rooted in an understanding of collective liberation, knowing that individual progress alone is never sufficient toward that end. Negotiating and organizing from that *stance* of persistence, I came to learn from Rachel, increases agency, and is based in the collective good, over time. Specifically, this kind of agentive practice involves a consideration of the generations of workers to come and can inform every level of effective decision-making.

So much of this work is grounded in relationship building. Relationship building, as Eileen Schell argues, is emotional; it is work that requires constant outreach, listening, communicating, and empathy – as she puts it, “leading through presence as well as understanding” (322). As Ribero and Arellano demonstrate so well, relationship building is a feminist practice in institutional contexts that takes place in response to very real social and structural barriers, labor hierarchies being both. As such, as a non-tenured faculty leader, Rachel’s position necessitates a commitment to speak up, a willingness to listen and take the lead, and the initiative to find creative ways to work with others to push back against institutional practices. For Anicca, in her previous WPA position, much of her time was spent building relationships with non-tenured faculty (against the advice of a department chair), many of whom noted that the tenure stream faculty rarely, if ever, acknowledged their existence or work. Those relationships in turn built capacity for professional development of non-tenured faculty, improved curriculum and improved student outcomes. Such approaches, we argue, embody feminist institutional citizenship because they subvert institutional hierarchies.

For Rachel, her feminist, collective approach is achieved by relational practice in this way:

constantly communicating what we do, why it is valuable and getting people invested by building relationships with them. Communicating constantly with administration and everyone possible, getting feedback from people a lot, developing long-term relationships and incorporating their feedback into the work we do.

Because she views knowledge and expertise as shared, as built in ways that foster participation, she explained that much of her success has come by building actual, deep friendships with colleagues. Institutional citizenship of this kind opens up a space for to not only theorize but to practice these orientations and when triangulated to notions of standpoint (Harding et al.) and communication across difference, is a part of the work of feminist institutional citizenship.

Institutional Mission. We identified institutional mission as a site from which to orient to direct action for improved working conditions in a feminist WPA framework. In her research on women graduate union leaders, Anicca knew organized labor helps universities make good on their promises of liberatory education (Cox, *forthcoming*) and the two of us discussed what that means specifically in writing programs. As a rhetorician, the arguments Rachel constructed in her efforts to improve stability for non-tenured faculty (contract length, increased pay) involve appeals to the institutional mission of quality education, explaining that long-term commitment on the part of the institution to its teachers, has a positive influence on student learning.

Specifically, Rachel understands the incongruity between GW's notions of global excellence with its unfair pay of part-time labor. She characterized the then president's attitude as a "dismissive [of] full-time faculty concerns about part-time faculty salaries." She noted those "include[ed] our concern that GW's over reliance on part-time faculty impacts our curriculum and impacts student learning." Her feminist and labor oriented rhetorical approach enabled her coalition to make arguments to solve the problem based on the collective good. She did so by demanding GW be faithful to its mission of excellent education provided to enhance global citizenry, and by arguing that competent and promising teachers cannot stay at GW given the low pay standard. This work represents our model of feminist institutional citizenship because it understands and acts from the interrelationship of ideals and values to groups of people sharing a collective purpose.

So, when a provost then unilaterally decided to shorten term faculty contracts for five to three years, Rachel pursued strategic pushback from a faculty governance body and through coalition building across tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty. In an alliance she's built persistently both formally and through friendships, she and her colleagues were able to persuade upper leadership to restore some five-year contracts. This is both feminist and agentive work. She sees the long-term benefits of exercising coalitional power together in lateral ways that impact vertical structures within the university. Simply put, she said, demonstrations of worker power and solidarity have long-term effects on faculty working conditions.

These tactics, drawn from union organizing, build power over time through the construction of relationships in which employees feel like they have a voice, and where there is mutual support. Feminism engages similar strategies and tactics; the dismantling of patriarchal power structures can take place over time and requires collective action.

Concluding Our Conversations

Important critiques of higher education institutions address corporatization and the infiltration of corporate interests, inequitable wage systems, structured, gendered, and racial inequalities, and lack of recognition of the contributions of staff and those who work in service to higher education (Payne; Riedner). Laura Miccichie, for example, documents a "culture of disappointment in academia and its ever-widening scope" (qtd. in Payne 280). While our sensemaking acknowledged challenges and injustice we face in our work, we see the hope presented by a feminist approach of using listening and relational action to create coalitional, horizontal power. We both were seeing movement in our institutional spaces resulting from this stance and our relationship was affirming and deepened both our commitments to it even as it subverts some of the narratives about WPA work that center on intractable injustice, insurmountable obstacles and despair (Riedner and Mahoney). Instead, our feminist framework demonstrated here, focuses on a strategic, active, agentive stance and immerses itself in optimism for our shared futures. We ultimately saw our work as a way to begin to develop a framework for feminist institutional citizenship as a concept and a

practice as it pays attention to labor conditions and builds power.

We also mean to contribute to conversations around the value of feminist mentorship as well and to begin to map pathways through feminist relational practice toward advocacy and activism in our varying institutional contexts. However, we know that presenting our work as a scalable model wouldn't be faithful to the realities of our labor or of feminist praxis. WPAs already struggle with enormous amounts of affective labor, managerial tasks and advocacy work (Wooten et al.). Building the time for this kind of practice—dialogue and reflection that takes place extra-institutionally over an extended period of time—is a challenging ask for many of us.

Nonetheless, we hope that readers will consider ways in which they might intentionally take up this kind of cross generational or institutional mentorship as feminist institutional citizenship work in ways that work for them and their exigencies. After all, we have much to offer one another from our varying experiences, struggles, and perspectives. Holding intentional structured space for for sharing is invaluable. WPA graduate courses, like the one that instigated our our conversations are good starting places, especially for those of us who are concerned with institutional change work. In addition, our professional spaces like the bi-annual *Feminisms and Rhetorics* conference can be a cross pollination space for these kinds of relationships. With intentionality, existing mentoring relationships can also include this kind of support as people move institutions and career trajectories, so common in WPA work (Wells; Wooten, Babb and Ray). To support those interested, we propose some beginning actions that people might take should they decide to embark on the work of reflective, dialogic, labor-centered feminist work together.

Coalition: Work together to understand who institutional partners might be in your location. Consider wide ranging coalitional approaches across units, ranks, and other markers of institutional status. Many of the intractable conditions we experience in institutions are located at the interstices of exploitation and isolation between workers. Share stories, reflections and ideas for how you might focus on that kind of relationship building in transparent, equitable ways that take into account the very real interlocking oppressions of race, ethnicity, gender, (dis)ability, class and more.

Persistence: Work together to understand timelines for change. What is shorter and longer term and where is the institutional landscape porous to change? What smaller alliances and relationships might be built into larger ones? How might you make time for the important friendships and conversations that will build solid foundations for change over time? Building friendships is institutional change work, because capitalism seeks always to alienate us from our labor and each other.

Power (building, understanding, resisting, dismantling): Work together to understand power structures in your institutions and to build worker power. Using organizational charts is an effective way to do this. Share how you might strategically advocate or push back with/on actual people in positions within the institution. Find out who is willing to use their privilege and power to make change and where you might engage your coalition to get decisions made. Acting like you are in a union, even if you are not, is a good framework to adopt because labor organizing work considers the fluid, dynamic nature of institutional power and how to respond and work with it over the long term.

As Rachel commented in our conversations, “All this is a part of feminist praxis: standing up, standing out, and getting others to stand up and stand out. This praxis pays attention to power, who can say what to whom, and asking them to do that, over and over.” Such an orientation provides space for developing agency within WPA work. This work is located in feminist approaches to institutional citizenship which in turn builds tools for organizing across spaces and constituencies for better shared futures in our departments and programs.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2017.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 2012.
- Blair, Kristine L., and Lee Nickosen. "Introduction: Researching and Teaching Community as a Feminist Intervention." *Composing Feminist Interventions: Activism, Engagement, Praxis*, edited by Kristine L. Blair and Lee Nickosen, UP of Colorado, 2018, pp. 3-17.
- Boris, Eileen, and Annalise Orleck. "Feminism and the Labor Movement: A Century of Collaboration and Conflict." *New Labor Forum: A Journal of Ideas, Analysis and Debate*, CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies, 2011, n.p.
- Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties*. Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1986.
- Concannon, Kelly et al.. "Crafting Partnerships: Exploring Student-Led Feminist Strategies for Community Literacy Projects." *Composing Feminist Interventions: Activism, Engagement, Praxis*, edited by Kristine L. Blair and Lee Nickosen, UP, 2018, pp. 155-73.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. W. "Demarginalising the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist theory, and Anti-racist Politics." 1989. *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, edited by Linda Supik et al., Taylor and Francis, 2012, pp., 25–42. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315582924-10>
- Davis, Angela. *Women, Race and Class*. New York Random House, 1981.
- Dixon, Elise Page. *Making as World Making: What the Lesbian Avengers can Teach about Communal Composing, Agency, and World Building*. 2020. Michigan State University, PhD Dissertation.
- Ebert, Teresa. *Ludic Feminism and After: Postmodernism, Desire and Labor in Late Capitalism*. U of Michigan P, 1996.
- Federici, Silvia. *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. PM Press, 2012.
- Federici, Silvia. "Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint." In the Middle of the Whirlwind. www.inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com Accessed 24 Feb 2023.
- George, Diana, editor. *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers and Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories*. Boynton, 1999.
- Gindlesparger, Kathryn and Holly Ryan. "Feminist Fissures: Navigating Conflict in Mentoring Relationships." *Peitho Journal*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2016, pp. 54-70.
- Harding, Sandra. G. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. Routledge, 2004.
- Heinert, Jennifer and Cassandra Phillips. "Transforming the Value of Gendered Service through Institutional Culture Change." *Peitho Journal: Special Cluster on Gendered Service in Rhetoric and Writing Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2019, pp. 255-78.
- Hill-Collins, Patricia. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, edited by Sandra Harding, Routledge, 2004, pp. 103-27.
- hooks, bell. "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness." *The Applied Theatre Reader, Second Edition*, edited by Tim Prentki and Nicola Abraham, Routledge, 2021, pp. 80-6. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203891315-22>

- Kabeer, Naila. "Gender, Equality, Economic Growth and Women's Agency: the 'Endless Variety' and 'Monotonous Similarity' of Patriarchal Constraints." *Feminist Economics*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2016, pp. 295-321.
- Kynard, Carmen. "Administering while Black: Black Women's Labor in the Academy and the 'Position of the Unthought.'" *Black Perspectives on Writing Program Administration: From the Margins to the Center*, edited by Staci M. Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig, NCTE, 2019, pp. 28-50.
- Lorde, Audre, and Adrienne Rich. "An Interview with Audre Lorde." *Signs*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1981, pp. 713-36. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173739>.
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press, 1984.
- McFarlane, Bruce. "Defining and Rewarding Academic Citizenship: The Implications for University Promotions Policy." *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 2007, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 261-73
- Mohanty, Chandra. T. *Feminism Without borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke UP, 2003.
- Nicolas, Melissa. "Ma(r)king a Difference: Challenging Ableist Assumptions in Writing Program Policies. *WPA: Writing Program Administration* vol. 40, no. 3, 2017, pp. 10-22.
- O'Meara, KerryAnn. "A Career with a View: Agentic Perspectives of Women Faculty." *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 86, no. 3, 2015, pp. 331-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2015.11777367>
- paperperson, Ia. *A Third University is Possible*. U of Minnesota P, 2017.
- Payne, Michelle. "Administration, Emotional Labor, and Gendered Discourses of Power: A Feminist Chair's Mission to Make Service Matter." *Peitho Journal: Special Cluster on Gendered Service in Rhetoric and Writing Studies*, vol, 21, no. 2, 2019, pp. 308-33.
- Ratcliff, Krista and Rebecca Rickly, editors. *Performing Feminism and Administration in Rhetoric and Composition Studies*. Hampton Press, Inc, 2010.
- Ribero, Ana Milena, and Sonia C. Arellano. "Advocating Comradismo: A Feminist Mentoring Approach for Latinas in Rhetoric and Composition." *Peitho Journal*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2019, pp. 255-79.
- Riedner, Rachel. "Where are the Women?: Rhetoric of Gendered Labor in University Communities." *Literacy in Composition Studies*. vol. 3, no. 1, 2015, pp. 122-30.
- Riedner, Rachel & Mahoney, Kevin. *Democracies to Come: Rhetorical Action, Neoliberalism, and Communities of Resistance*. Lexington Books, 2008.
- Royster, Jacqueline Jones. "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own." *College Composition and Communication*, vol 47, no. 1, 1996, pp. 29-40. doi:10.2307/358272
- Schell, Eileen. "Is it Worth It to 'Lean In' and Lead? On being a Woman Department Chair in Rhetoric and Writing Studies." *Peitho Journal: Special Cluster on Gendered Service in Rhetoric and Writing Studies*, vol 21, no. 2, 2019, pp. 308-33.
- Smith, Dorothy. E. "Women's Perspective as Radical Critique of Sociology." *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, edited by Sandra Harding, Routledge, 2004. pp. 21-2.
- Stenberg, Shari J. *Composition studies through a feminist lens*. Parlor Press, 2013.
- VanHaitisma, Pamela, and Steph Ceraso. "'Making It' in the Academy through Horizontal Mentoring." *Peitho Journal*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2017, pp. 211-33.
- Wells, Jennifer. "Review: WPAs Across Contexts and Thresholds." *College English*, vol. 81, no. 6, 2019, pp. 542-88.
- Wilding, Faith. *Faith Wilding's Fearful Symmetries*, edited by Shannon R. Stratton, Intellect Bristol, 2018.
- Wooten, Courtney Adams, Jacob Babb, and Brian Ray, editors. *WPAs in Transition: Navigating Educational Leadership Positions*. Utah State UP, 2018.

Yancey, Kathleen. B. "Defining Moments: The Role of Institutional Departure in the Work of a (Feminist) WPA." *Performing Feminism and Administration in Rhetoric and Composition Studies*, edited by Krista Ratcliffe and Rebecca Rickly. Hampton Press, Inc., 2010, pp. 143-59.