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## IWCA Graduate Student Position Statement

by Julie Eckerle, Karen Rowan, and Shevaun Watson

In 1985 (5.2/6.1), this journal published "What Lies Ahead for Writing Centers: Position Statement on Professional Concerns," by Jeanne H. Simpson, which outlined ideal conditions for writing center directors and sought to "encourage a trend toward graduate programs that provide specific training for writing center directors" (58). Happily, graduate programs in English studies and, more specifically, rhetoric and composition, are increasingly attending to the complexities of training graduate students in administrative work, and many are expanding administrative opportunities for graduate students. The following Position Statement on Graduate Student Writing Center Administration, endorsed by the IWCA Executive Board in November, 2001, formally addresses this trend by outlining the ideal working conditions for graduate student administrators in our writing centers. As with the 1985 statement, such ideals are unlikely to be wholly met in any single writing center. The position statement, therefore, is intended as a basis from which writing center directors, graduate student administrators, and other concerned faculty and administrators can revise and improve both the professional development and working conditions of graduate student administrators.

We encourage writing center directors and graduate student administrators to put this position statement to work. Directors might provide it to incoming graduate student administrators to guide discussions about roles and responsibilities. This position statement might suggest new projects for graduate student administrators, such as devising a formal job description or administrative handbook. Outside of writing centers, this position statement may also serve, as has the 1985 statement, as support from our professional organization for equitable working conditions for administrative assignments. We look forward to hearing how writing center professionals bring their creativity, insight, and

### About the Authors

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experience to bear upon this position statement and its applications in their own writing centers.

This position statement has been shaped by the invaluable contributions of the writing center community at NWCA and CCCC workshops, especially the members of the IWCA Executive Board. For more information on the history of this statement, see "Graduate Student Writing Center Administrators: Some Concerns and Proposals." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 25.6 (February, 2001): 4-6.

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### *IWCA Position Statement on Graduate Student Writing Center Administration*

1. Graduate students should not hold the top or sole administrative position in a writing center that is affiliated with their graduate institution, but should instead be given supporting writing center administrative roles.
  - A. Appropriate titles include assistant director, coordinator, assistant coordinator, writing specialist, etc., depending on local circumstances. Throughout this position statement, we refer to graduate student administrative positions as "graduate assistant director," but all graduate student administrative roles should be informed by these ten guidelines, whatever the title.
  - B. Although we recognize that assistant director positions are often occupied by staff or faculty administrators and that these employees often face similar concerns as graduate student administrators, this position statement exclusively addresses the employment of graduate students.
  - C. This position statement is not intended to suggest that the IWCA does not support graduate students who do hold top administrative positions in writing centers; on the contrary, this position statement suggests an ideal set of conditions for graduate student employment with the intention of improving working conditions for the graduate student directors and writing center work in general.
2. Assistant directorships should be assigned by faculty members or administrators (such as the director) who are intimately familiar with the workings of the writing center. When this is not possible, the director should at least have input into the decision. While the positions should not be limited to students in rhetoric and composition programs, they should be offered first to graduate students who are interested in writing center work and continuing in the field beyond graduate school. An application process is encouraged.
3. Assistant directorships should be limited-term appointments that support students' needs to complete graduate degrees in a timely fashion. Although invaluable training and experience, a graduate student's administrative tenure should never interfere with his/her completion of the degree and advancement to professional life.

Whenever possible, therefore, a graduate student's administrative role should complement his/her program of study and professional interests.

4. Assistant directorships should have formal, updated job descriptions written or approved by the director. Assistant directorships should be established within a clearly defined administrative structure so that assistant directors know to whom they are responsible (ideally the director), who they supervise, and exactly what their responsibilities are. If assistant directors are asked to supervise other graduate students, directors should support assistant directors' supervisory and administrative responsibilities. At the same time, graduate assistant directors remain responsible for their supervisory decisions, administrative work, and professional conduct.
5. Graduate assistant directors should be given responsibilities that are vital to the work and vision of the writing center; assistant directorships should not be primarily clerical.
6. Graduate assistant directors should receive adequate training and preparation for the position. This could involve holding writing center roles that lead to the assistant directorship; ongoing training during the assistant directorship; development and use of resource material for graduate administrators; and/or appropriate coursework prior to the assistant directorship. Training is best done with a strong mentorship program. Whenever possible, connections between teaching and writing center work should be discussed.
7. A faculty mentor, ideally the writing center director, should be directly involved with the graduate assistant director's training and development. Mentoring should adjust to the graduate student's particular professional needs and interests, but may include regular meetings, joint projects, reading or research suggestions, modeling of supervision and leadership skills, conference and publication guidance, and regular evaluation and feedback.
8. Graduate assistant directors should be afforded opportunities for research and publication, and they should have access to travel and/or research funds to pursue such opportunities for professional development. While directors should provide mentorship and guidance for individual and/or collaborative projects, graduate assistant directors are accountable for their own participation in research and professional development projects.
9. Graduate assistant directors should receive regular formal evaluations from their supervisors, and these evaluations should be part of their files.
10. Graduate assistant directors should receive the same or greater compensation as graduate students teaching in the classroom or performing directed research.