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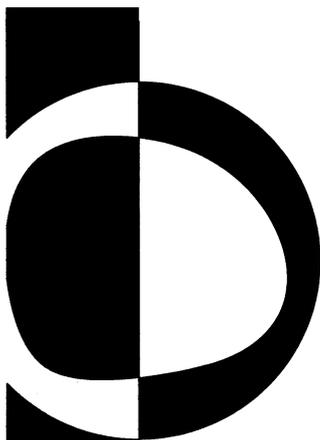
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Centering Institutional Status and Scholarly Identity: An Analysis of Writing Center Administration Position Advertisements, 2004–2014

Abstract

Labor issues long have presented critical challenges for many writing center administrators (WCAs), who interrogate their “marginal” status with questions about how position type, education, oversight, responsibilities, resources, and support impact individual WCAs and writing centers as well as their research practices and production. Prior interview and survey research (Peterson, 1987; Olson & Ashton-Jones, 1988; Healy, 1995; Balester & McDonald, 2001; Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2012, 2014; Geller & Denny, 2013; Wynn Perdue & Driscoll, 2017) has represented some WCAs’ perceptions of their institutional responsibilities and scholarly identity—often in relationship to other composition professionals—but WCAs have not been studied adequately on their

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own terms. To gain a systematic, comprehensive overview of WCA positions, this research uses problem-based and method-driven content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) as well as corpus-based analysis (Kutter & Kantner, 2012) to analyze 395 unique WCA job ads from 2004–2014, aggregated from the WPA-L listserv archives, the Modern Language Association (MLA) job information list, and the Wcenter listserv. While frequencies, cross tabulations, and AntConc analyses of the ads yielded some trends and relationships about who is hired and under what conditions as well as about what they do, findings are more notable for what ads cannot tell readers about the WCA. More specifically, the gaps and omissions identified in the ads have critical implications for the ads themselves, the WCA described within them, and the future of writing center studies.

In 2014, the Wcenter listserv exploded with controversy over Arizona State University's job advertisement for a writing center director at its Tempe campus. It was not the first ad to raise the ire of the writing center community, but it was potentially the most egregious example of what many deemed an unethical position description. The ad detailed a laundry list of professional writing responsibilities: several years of administrative and supervisory experience; three years of prior teaching; knowledge of writing center theory, pedagogy, and practice; and a host of other advanced skills and experiences. And yet, the position required only a bachelor's degree. In sum, the ad was incoherent: its desired qualifications did not fit the degree status, its emphasis on experience over a terminal degree seemed to suggest the work was primarily managerial, and its range of roles appeared beyond the abilities of one person.

This situation is hardly unique: listserv threads and conference chatter frequently document writing center administrators' (WCAs) frustration about the ways their positions are described, funded, and/or redefined, often by administrators who do not understand what they do and how their work compares to that of other WCAs and/or writing professionals. While not unusual, it speaks to a growing need to address the institutional status and scholarly identity of WCAs.

With our recent survey and interview findings in mind (Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2014; Wynn Perdue & Driscoll, 2017)—research indicating that WCA experiences vary greatly by position type—we decided to investigate what job ads could tell us about WCAs or at least how different institutions across the country conceive of WCAs. What qualifications do institutions seek? How do job ads characterize WCA work? How do job ads signal educational expectations and training needs? How do they represent the state of writing center studies?

Evolution of a Research Agenda

The faculty coauthors of this article (as our student collaborator can attest) regularly remind students that the inquiry trajectory evolves over time. This happens when we learn more, as we add and triangulate data sources. Researchers need to be prepared to investigate the emergent questions that the data pose and to revisit central research questions as well as decisions about the best ways to answer those questions and to measure the results. We now chart this evolution across previous data collections and articles and in relationship to the extant literature.

When the faculty coauthors commenced our collaboration in 2009, we sought to understand what constituted research in the field of writing center studies and how much of this research was replicable, aggregable, and data supported (RAD) (Haswell, 2005). We started with a systematic content analysis of its flagship publication, *The Writing Center Journal (WCJ)*. Our findings, published as “Theory, Lore, and More” (2012), demonstrated that less than 6% of *WCJ*’s articles were RAD. While we understood the status of writing center research as it was published in *WCJ*, our research question and the data we collected could not explain why we found so little RAD research.

In our next study of RAD writing center research, the center of our inquiry moved from the research itself to those who produce it and to the conditions under which they conduct their work. We therefore surveyed WCAs (n=133) from across the country about such factors as their research beliefs, practices, education, degree status, research training, position type, and oversight. Then we selectively sampled willing survey respondents for a series of 15 interviews. Our findings were so rich that we documented them in two separate articles: “RAD Research as a Framework for Writing Center Inquiry: Survey and Interview Data on Writing Center Administrators’ Beliefs about Research and Research Practices” (2014) and “Context Matters: Centering Writing Center Administrators’ Institutional Status and Scholarly Identity” (2017). By coding these two data sets in the context of our earlier content analysis, we learned that RAD research production is influenced by factors such as education, position type, and field norms. We also discovered that tenure-track faculty and staff WCAs generally live within separate and unequal environments (institutional status) that have important implications for their scholarly identity, findings that complement Anne Ellen Geller & Harry Denny’s (2013) interview research with writing center professionals.

WCAs' Institutional Status and Scholarly Identity in the Literature

Previously published studies of WCA positions and statuses from 1985 to 2014 based their findings on interviews and surveys of WCAs, generally in relationship to writing program administrators (WPAs). That literature has represented the WCA's position as one plagued by ambiguity and identity conflict, fueled by differences in institutional oversight, position type (faculty or staff), education, and training (Geller & Denny, 2013; Caswell, Grutsch McKinney, & Jackson, 2016; Wynn Perdue & Driscoll, 2017). The majority of these studies (Peterson, 1987; Olson & Ashton-Jones, 1988; Perdue, 1991; Healy, 1995; Balester & McDonald, 2001) were published in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. Although they describe WCAs' work, they primarily advocate for a better understanding of and role for the WCA in comparison to department-based faculty.

One of the newest studies examining the work of WCAs (and other kinds of program administrators) is the *National Census of Writing* (2015). With data from over 900 institutions, it provides a detailed look at writing program administration (including writing center data). Although this self-reported survey data represents the lived conditions of administrators and their work, many of the writing center results are lumped together with other kinds of program administration (first-year writing program directors or Writing Across the Curriculum [WAC]/Writing in the Disciplines [WID] directors.) As such, it offers an incomplete understanding of issues surrounding WCAs' institutional status.

A few previous studies have sought to understand WCAs in relationship to other WCAs. Writing for a *Composition Studies* audience, Melissa Ianetta, Linda Bergmann, Lauren Fitzgerald, Carol Peterson Haviland, Lisa Lebduska, & Mary Wislocki (2006) enter the conversation, theorizing three different models for WCAs: 1. the "Universal Professional," whose role as a disciplinary scholar is analogous to the departmentally-based WPA; 2. the practitioner-centered "Local Professional, whose purview and identity is located within the writing center itself"; and 3. the "Administrative Iconoclast," who disavows academic jurisdiction and status for a service role. Rather than promoting a unified job description, these authors defer to institutional differences, advocating "pick all three," or what we colloquially refer to "as different strokes for different folks." Geller & Denny (2013) likewise examine WCAs' work in relationship to institutional status in their article for *WCJ*, also by way of three routes: 1. a tenure-line faculty appointment; 2. an administrative professional position; or 3. a non-tenure-line fac-

ulty position. While Geller & Denny (2013) also resist promoting one description of WCA work over another, their analysis of interviews with administrative professional WCAs reveals stark differences in the work and scholarly identity of the tenure-line faculty WCA and the administrative professional WCA. These studies shed light on what some WCAs do and how they view their work in relationship to their institutions, but they fall short of answering our research questions.

The aforementioned interviews and surveys offer one source of data about WCAs' work, but they could not yield a systematic, comprehensive overview of WCA positions. Another such source of data can be found in the job advertisement. Job ad analyses offer an important indication of employment trends and reveal professional competencies and academic qualifications as well as signal training and education needs (White, 1999; Majid & Bee, 2003; Kennan, Cole, Willard, Wilson, & Marion, 2006; Choi & Rasmussen, 2009; Applegate, 2010; Harper, 2012).

Although writing center researchers have not systematically studied job ads to determine what they reveal about the field's work and underlying assumptions about the specifications required to do that work, academic librarians have composed an extensive body of research focused on the role of job ads in their field, which has influenced the etiology of this study. While WCAs are not librarians, library and information science (LIS) positions, often irrespective of similar responsibilities, tend to be divided between faculty and administrative appointments in ways that might be similar to WCA positions. Further, writing centers are increasingly located within libraries, and the WCAs within them frequently collaborate with librarians to support students and faculty.

LIS researchers regularly have conducted content analyses of job ads (Applegate, 2010; Harper, 2012) to determine market changes and how they affect the qualifications and skills employers seek; to assess the impact of one factor, such as technology job title, etc.; to compare different LIS positions; and to draw conclusions about curricular changes needed to meet the needs of a changing field (Beile & Adams, 2000; Triumph & Beile, 2015). For example, Laurel A. Clyde (2002) examines three months of an LIS listserv, coding ads for specific types of instruction expected of entering librarians. Her findings suggest that instructional expertise was an important competency, with implications for the LIS curriculum. Karen S. Croneis & Pat Henderson's (2002) analysis of a decade of ads published in *College and Research Libraries News* reveals important differences in competencies sought by job titles, whereas Mary Anne Kennan, Fletcher Cole, Patricia Willard,

Concepción Wilson, & Linda Marion's (2006) comparative study of ads in America and Australia over an eight-week period reveals emergent expectations for skills not previously associated with LIS. When taken together, the numerous content analyses we reviewed—each with different foci across different time spans—offer a snapshot of the field's past and present as well as the shifting vision of the preparation and roles of the academic librarians within it, which informed our choice of variables and other methodological decisions.

Although the reviewed LIS studies differ by date of publication, collection period, and target variable(s), what they share beyond the use of content analysis is “an accepted body of knowledge over which the profession claims unrivalled expertise” (Kennan, Cole, Willard, Wilson, & Marion, 2006, p. 181), what Andrew Abbott (1998) calls jurisdiction or a “system” that distinguishes it from other professions. We argue herein that because writing center studies and the professionals within it have not been adequately studied on their own terms, our field has failed to articulate its jurisdiction or system, leaving it at risk for others to define it for us, or, perhaps even more devastating, for others to argue that writing center studies lacks a knowledge base and purview that can evolve to meet the changing needs of its stakeholders. To address this gap, we share what to our knowledge is the first empirical study of WCA job advertisements.

Method

This study used both systematic content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) and an iteration of content analysis from linguistics, corpus-based content analysis (Kutter & Kantner, 2012). More specifically, we employed manual problem-based content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) and Ant-Conc freeware (Version 3.2.1), a computer-based corpus analysis tool created by Laurence Anthony (2010) that allows researchers to analyze word and phrasing recurrence as well as grammatical structure in large bodies of text (Froehlich, 2015). To ensure that others appreciate the importance of carefully credentialing their methodological choices, we next provide a thorough overview of content analysis as a method of inquiry. Then we thoroughly describe our coding and analysis process so others can replicate our study.

Overview of content analysis. Many definitions of content analysis have been offered since the method was first discussed in the professional literature in the 1940s (Krippendorff, 2004). This study's use of content analysis is shaped by Krippendorff (2004), who defines it as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences

from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 18). Content analysis initially was used to analyze short news articles for word frequency, but today it is a rhetorically rich method used by diverse academic and industry researchers alike to systematically cull large data sources manually or with computer assistance for trends and patterns (Krippendorff, 2004). Although many past and current content analyses have been classified as either quantitative or qualitative, we heed Krippendorff’s (2004) rejection of this distinction because “even when certain characteristics are later converted into numbers” and despite the use of computers and sophisticated algorithms, “all reading of texts is qualitative” (p. 16).

Using Krippendorff’s (2004) framework, we propose that our study of WCA job ads is both a problem-driven and method-driven content analysis. Its primary purpose is to determine how job advertisements define WCAs—the specific specifications they bring to the job, the type of position being offered to them, and the work WCAs will do in the center and, potentially, elsewhere. This study also offers readers an opportunity to examine WCAs’ position types and roles via a content analysis, complementing the understanding of the WCA’s position the faculty authors gained from a grounded theory analysis of their interview and survey data.

Our implementation of problem-based content analysis and corpus study. Following the precedent of researchers in academic librarianship who have analyzed job ads to better understand what job descriptions reveal about trends in their profession, we conducted a systematic content analysis of WCA position advertisements from 2004–2014 culled from one or more of the following sources: the WPA-L listserv archives, the Modern Language Association (MLA) job information list, and the Wcenter listserv. Duplicate advertisements for the same position were eliminated from analysis. If a source was limited to a brief overview of the position, we attempted to locate the full version in one of the other sources or by searching it online via the hiring institution’s website or Internet Archive Wayback Machine, a digital archive of Internet information. If too little information was accessible via one of these resources, we eliminated it from the study. Of the 440 unique positions we located via our aggregation methods, only 395 contained enough data for analysis.

Each job was assigned a number that clearly represented the year the position was advertised and that distinguished it from all other jobs. Rather than use *a priori* coding, where categories are established prior to analysis based upon precedent or theory, we employed emergent coding, where categories are chosen after a preliminary examination of the data

(Saldaña, 2016). In December 2014, three researchers read through a random set of 50 ads from the 11-year period to develop codes based on the research questions. Physical codes that emerged included objective codes, such as Carnegie classification, position type, reporting structure, and degree requirements. Subjective codes included “reasonableness of the position”—a judgment we made by weighing such factors as the WCA’s course load, duties, and additional titles—and whether the WCA position was “primary, secondary, or tertiary”—a decision based upon the extent to which the ad described responsibilities centered in the writing center rather than a writing center role mentioned as an “add on” to an otherwise non-WCA position.

Three reading teams, each overseen by one of the three researchers, spent several months manually coding each ad into the established categories as follows:

- Team one coded for institutional characteristics, position type (faculty or staff), and institutional oversight.
- Team two coded for features such as required degree field and degree status.
- Team three coded for job duties, such as assessment, research, and training.

Next, each category was examined for missing data. Then one researcher cleaned the data to ensure that the same nomenclature was used in all categories. Once we were reasonably sure that the data had been coded consistently, we uploaded the data set into SPSS (version 24), which we used to run frequency analyses on all variables and cross tabulations on relationships of interest.

To supplement our manual coding and statistical analyses, we also employed a computational linguistic analysis through the use of AntConc, a freeware program that provides analysis of text. For this analysis, all job ads were sorted into two text files based on position type: staff (full-time and part-time) and faculty (tenure-line). We used two AntConc features: “frequency” to identify words that most appeared in the ads and “concordance” to determine which words appeared most frequently next to other words.

Of time and coding disposition. Locating the ads, coding them within teams, and conducting the analyses detailed herein took upwards of 500 hours. In addition to time for research, something our prior survey and interview research suggested WCAs possessed in short supply, Johnny Saldaña (2016) explains that coding efficacy is dependent upon seven personal attributes, which are worth noting here. Coders must be 1. organized (we had to manage ads that filled over a ream of paper) and 2. perseverant. Some of the subjective codes initially eluded

us, causing us to check and recheck our decisions. Coders must therefore 3. abide ambiguity and strive to be 4. flexible, especially when the categories are not working. Because coding involves choices and interpretation, the coder also must be 5. creative, able “to think symbolically, to think in metaphors, to think of as many ways as possible to approach a problem” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 39). That creativity, however, is constrained by a commitment to being 6. “rigorously ethical,” unwilling, for example, to “ignore or delete those seemingly problematic passages of text” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 39). Finally, coders need to hone 7. “an extensive vocabulary” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 39) of linguistically precise words, which signal, for example, that researchers understand the difference between a “frequent” occurrence and something that happened “periodically” or “several times.”

Limitations of the methods. Before we discuss our findings, it is important to acknowledge potential methodological limitations we faced in conducting this work and the ways we attempted to mediate them. First, as noted above, we could not draw upon prior studies of WCA job ads. We had to turn to another academic field, LIS, as a model for our own.

Second, although analyses of job ads are a staple in assessments of professions, they are not without pitfalls (Applegate, 2010; Harper, 2012). Ray Harper (2012) cautions that while job ads tend to be “easily accessible” (p. 30), the available data may be unwieldy and of inconsistent quality; the ads may reflect “a desired future state” (p. 31) rather than the reality of the current context; and the description may be affected by contextual pressures that influence the specifications included/omitted from the ad, thereby challenging the researchers’ ability to code, compare, and synthesize. We faced this burden throughout the process to the extent that we chose not to include tests for significance, which we felt would overvalue the results of our statistical tests.

Although content analyses of job studies are frequently cited as reliable indicators of the information we sought—this claim was a common refrain in the LIS studies we consulted—researchers must be careful to discuss the representativeness of the data pulled from these aggregators (Applegate, 2010). The aggregators we used for locating available positions were difficult to navigate and incomplete. While MLA was the most comprehensive, it was more likely to publish faculty WCA positions than staff ones. WPA had a searchable archive of positions, but in all cases the positions were based upon institutional or member reporting, so we cannot be certain that the posted positions represent the range of jobs advertised during the period of study. The Wcenter listserv was the most problematic. One of the researchers

had archived several years of Wcenter emails, which she searched via keywords. It is quite possible that ads were missed and that our terms were not inclusive enough. To find a truly representative sample, Rachel Applegate (2010) suggests going directly to the hiring institution, but since our study attempted to gather research over more than a decade of WCA searches, many of these positions announcements were no longer available. We did, however, use the Internet Archive Wayback Machine locate a number of full ads that were only partially listed on Wcenter or WPA-L.

Concerns about potential missing data (beyond the 45 ads we had to omit for lack of adequate information) and the reliability of the data included were not lost on us. However, we note that this study was considered in relationship to earlier survey and interview research conducted across the same time frame. Further, as discussion of our findings will indicate, many of our conclusions center on problems with information in the job ads themselves rather than on our conclusions about the nature of WCA work itself.

Sample Characteristics

In this section, we describe some of the numerous institutional characteristics, applicant requirements, and job responsibilities that we systematically analyzed. In addition to contextualizing our study, we believe others can use this information for a variety of purposes.

Carnegie classification. Of the 395 institutions, 54% were public, 43.6% were private, and 2.4% were for-profit. Doctoral/doc-toral research institutions advertised 40.8% of the jobs, followed by master's-granting institutions (29.9%), bachelor's-granting institutions (23%), associate's-granting institutions (3%), and high schools (0.3%).

Reporting structure. To whom the WCA would report was explicitly expressed in 61.8% of the ads. Of those, the English department (23.8%) was the most likely to play a supervisory role. In many cases (38.2%), the advertisements did not clearly convey the reporting structure of the WCA position.

Position type. A near-even split existed between tenure-track faculty ads (50.1%) and those for all other position types, including staff (21.8%) and non-tenure-track faculty (14.4%). This is one expression of the widespread disagreement regarding the WCA role. The position type could not be clearly determined in 7.1% of the job ads.

State of the writing center. A great deal of work is involved in starting a writing center, so we sought to determine whether or not a school had an existing writing center. Though most of the ads seemed

to concern established writing centers (87.1%), we could not tell whether or not the school currently had a writing center in 6.3% of the ads. Very few ads shared the number of students employed or served by the writing center. Similarly, 83.2% of the ads included no indication of administrative support (a category that included any staff besides the consultants, ranging from receptionists to assistant directors).

WCA role. Positions that treated the writing center as the WCA's primary responsibility comprised 78% of the ads, whereas writing center administration was secondary in 16.7% and tertiary in 5.3% of the sample ads. In other words, WCA work was added after a list of other roles (e.g., assistant professor of English will serve a rotation as writing center director) or implied.

Reasonableness. Coding for a job's reasonableness involved considering how many things the WCA was responsible for in relationship to resources such as course releases and other support structures. Most of the ads (70.4%) were deemed reasonable, offering a position where the writing center was the only major responsibility outside of teaching. The remaining positions expected oversight of two (24.8%) or three (4.8%) areas, such as a WAC or first-year-composition (FYC) program, in addition to running the writing center.

Degree and field requirements. The expected education level for a WCA was not consistent across or within institutions. Most positions required (54.7%) or preferred (19.7%) a doctoral degree. Master's degrees were also frequently required (13.4%) or preferred (1.3%), but the requirements in the remaining jobs were surprising. A small number of ads (.8%) called for a bachelor's degree, and some (9.6%) made no mention of education. Although we collected information about degree fields sought, we were unable to draw meaningful conclusions about them.

Job responsibilities. The positions detailed in the ads varied widely, both in terms of noted and unmentioned responsibilities. This section identifies responsibilities that WCAs frequently fill and what we learned about them from our sample.

Research. The frequency of ads that explicitly required research was modest (28.9%). However, it is not clear whether or not the other positions required research. Only 0.2% of the ads clearly excluded a scholarly agenda, whereas 70.9% failed to mention research at all.

Assessment. A responsibility to assess the effectiveness of the writing center was included in only 21.8% of the ads; a clear majority (78.2%) ignored this aspect of the WCA's role. No advertisements clearly excluded an assessment role.

Teaching. WCAs frequently teach in addition to their role within the writing center. Although one ad indicated that the WCA would not teach (0.3%), the remaining ads either clearly stated that the candidate would be expected to teach (68.1%) or did not indicate whether or not teaching was expected (31.6%). The means of expressing the teaching load within ads was not easily categorized because the terms “classes” or “credit hours” describe teaching load, whereas “semesters” or “years” describe time. As such, we could not draw conclusions about WCAs’ general teaching load, which varied widely from one class per year to a full 4/4 load. Although some positions included an expectation for the WCA to teach a peer-tutoring course (14.2%), most ads (85.3%) did not address this responsibility either.

Budgeting. Although WCAs do not always control their own budget, 84.3% of the ads did not mention whether or not the WCA was expected to manage the writing center’s finances. The remaining 15.7% clearly stated that the WCA would manage their own budget.

Professional development. To remain effective, a writing center must develop the skills of its consultants. It seems logical that this responsibility would fall to the WCA, but less than half (44.6%) of the ads explicitly included this role.

A theme of ambiguity emerged when we examined the above descriptive statistics. Similarly, the ads themselves often left us unsure of the responsibilities a given position entailed. While some ads painted a clear picture of the WCA’s purview, most did not. This became more pronounced when we examined job factors in relationship to one another.

Relationships

Now that we have overviewed individual WCA variables, we address potential relationships between and among them. The next set of statistics offers cross tabulations, descriptive statistics that allow us to see relationships between two or more variables. Due to the complexity and length of this analysis, a brief discussion is included after each finding. Broader implications are addressed within the discussion.

Research-based relationships. Research plays an integral role in the advancement of any field, so we sought to determine what kind of WCA job ads encouraged scholarly activity. However, only 28.9% of the ads in our sample explicitly required research. Therefore, we can do little more than speculate potential relationships.

We compared Carnegie classifications to research requirements. Although doctoral/doctoral research institutions were the largest group

in our sample, only 31% of these ads required that candidates have a scholarly agenda. Master's-granting institutions required research in 29.7% of position ads. Bachelor's-granting schools had a similar rate of research requirement (25.8%). The difference between these rates is not large, but it does suggest that research-intensive universities are not much quicker to recognize the knowledge-making capacity of WCAs than their less research-oriented counterparts.

We also considered the relationship between the research requirement and the institution type. Public institutions (31.6%) required research more often than private ones (25%). With only seven ads from for-profit colleges in our sample, two of which required research, no meaningful conclusions can be drawn regarding research requirements in for-profit institutions.

Position type and degree requirement. We also compared the education requirements listed in the ads to the position type they assigned. Some positions in our sample called for PhDs but did not offer tenure-track status. Others did not explicitly list a PhD as a requirement despite offering tenure-track positions. This analysis was complicated by 38 (9.6%) ads that did not specify a degree requirement and 28 (7.1%) ads that did not specify a position type.

Table 1. Position Types and Degree Requirement: Faculty and Staff

Position Type	Degree Requirement		
	PhD Required	PhD Preferred	Total
Faculty: Tenure track	132	13	145
Faculty: Nontenure track	24	18	42
Faculty: Tenure track status unknown	27	8	35
Staff: Full-time	23	27	50
Staff: Part-time	0	0	0
Total	206	66	272

Faculty. Our sample included 57 faculty positions clearly advertised as non-tenure-track and 164 positions clearly advertised as tenure-track. Of the non-tenure-track positions, 24 required a PhD and 18 expressed a preference for candidates with one. Together, these categories indicate that 73.7% of the non-tenure-track ads called for a candidate to earn a PhD and accept a non-tenure-track position.

Though some WCAs were asked to earn doctorates and then work in staff or non-tenure-track positions, a small minority was of-

ferred tenure-track positions without having completed a PhD program. Of 164 total tenure-track positions, a large majority (155, or 94.5%) preferred or required a PhD. Over the 11 years included in our study, five advertisements expressed an intention to appoint candidates to the tenure track without a doctorate.

Staff. Some WCA ads called for a candidate with a PhD but offered a staff position in return. Of 81 full-time staff positions, 23 (28.4%) required and 27 (33.3%) preferred a doctorate. Four part-time staff positions required a master's degree, and the fifth required a bachelor's. While these numbers were lower than the requirements for faculty, a sizable number of WCA ads expected candidates to meet requirements for a faculty position but accept a staff role.

These data demonstrate disparate levels of reward for education across WCA ads. If the job ads we studied were to represent the current state of the field, 11.6% of all tenure-track WCAs would not have completed doctorates, but 64.3% staff or non-tenure-track WCAs would have done so. This disparity could make it difficult for institutions to determine the appropriate status and degree requirement to assign to their own WCA positions, an issue we will explore more in our discussion.

Position type and expectation of research. There is an apparent relationship between the type of position that a candidate will hold and whether or not they are expected to perform research, as demonstrated in Table 2. In short, research expectations were low across the board; faculty WCAs were only 12.4% more likely to be expected to do research than staff. Institutional research expectations varied notably between different faculty ranks. However, one must consider that a large majority (280, or 70.9%) of advertisements did not specify whether the WCA would be required to perform research. A wide degree of variance in research expectation made defining the WCA role difficult, and the issue is further complicated by Carnegie classification.

Table 2. Position Types and Rate of Research Requirement: Faculty and Staff*

	Position Type									
	Full/ Assoc.	Assoc.	Assoc./ Asst.	Asst.	Open- Rank	Full- Time Admin	Nontenure Track	Full- Time	Part- Time	Total
Positions Requiring Research	11	5	16	38	7	0	10	17	1	105
Positions	21	5	40	116	17	5	57	81	5	347
Total (%)	52.4%	100%	40%	32.8%	41.2%	0%	17.5%	21%	20%	30.3%

*We excluded hybrid or visiting positions as well as those where rank was unspecified.

Faculty and staff. Faculty WCAs were more likely (at a rate of 33.3%) to be expected to do research than those entering staff positions (20.9%), although the nature of this research in connection to the writing center is not clear (see AntConc analysis, below).

When we examined the distribution of the research expectation over various faculty positions listed in Table 2, a trend appeared to emerge. The rate of research rose as faculty entered higher-status positions. Just over half (52.4%) of full/associate professor positions required research. Fewer than half (40%) of the candidates who filled positions that called for associate/assistant professor positions were clearly expected to do research. Only 38 of 114 (32.8%) associate professor WCAs were expected to do research. Though rank seems to correlate positively with expectations for research activity, expectations are low even in the highest-status positions.

We have considered several possible explanations for these low requirements. It may be that, per the position ads, many of those who hold higher-ranking positions are simply not expected to do research. Even if faculty WCAs choose to do unsupported research, a position in which a high-ranking WCA *can* research but is not recognized by their institution for doing so is not a healthy one. Likewise, staff or non-tenure-track WCAs might have the option of doing unsupported research, but without institutional support, such as the ability to serve as a principal investigator, the work becomes much more difficult. Another explanation may be that the job ads are unclear, leaving major commitments like research unmentioned.

Tenure-track and nontenure-track faculty. We also examined rates of research requirement in relationship to faculty positions that did or did not assign tenure.

Table 3. Tenure-Track Status and Rate of Research Requirement

	Position Status		
	Tenure Track	Nontenure Track	Unknown*
Positions Requiring Research	67	10	10
Positions	164	57	40
Total (%)	40.8%	17.5%	25%

*This category represents faculty position ads that did not mention tenure.

All three columns in Table 3 deserve attention. If less than half (40.8%) of the ads for tenure-track positions clearly required research, how do the remaining 60.2% earn their tenure? Perhaps, as we have mentioned before, the expectation for research went unmentioned. Conversely, 17.5% of ads offering faculty positions required research without tenure as a possible reward for it. Finally, one might question the ethics of the 10 ads that mentioned research but left the tenure-track status of the position unknown.

Position type and Carnegie classification. In an attempt to understand the role of WCAs at different types of institutions, we cross-referenced hiring institutions' Carnegie classifications and the position types their ads specified. When this relationship is paired with the expectations of staff WCA research and education, which closely resemble those of their tenure-track counterparts, a clearer picture emerges of the seemingly arbitrary means of deciding whether WCA positions ought to be faculty or staff. Of 161 WCA positions at doctoral/doctoral research universities, 59 (41.5%) offered appointment to the tenure track, indicating that fewer than half of the most research-intensive institutions deemed their WCA as worthy of a tenure-track position. Interestingly, bachelor's-granting institutions were more likely to offer tenure-track appointment, with 53% of their WCA positions advertised as such. Future research might consider what seems to be a contradictory line of thinking. Though doctoral/doctoral research universities are research-oriented, their hiring practices seem less likely to recognize or support writing center research than schools that grant

bachelor’s degrees. It is also worth noting that 28 ads did not clearly express the position the WCA would assume.

Table 4. Position Types and Carnegie Classifications

Carnegie Classification	Position Type						Total
	Tenure Track	Staff	Unknown	Hybrid*	Nontenure Track	Visiting	
Associate’s	3	5	2	0	2	0	12
Bachelor’s	44 (53%)	17	6	1	9	6	83
Master’s	55 (50.9%)	23	10	2	10	8	108
Doctoral/ Doctoral Research	59 (41.5%)	37	9	2	34	1	142
Total	161	82	27	5	55	15	345

* The “Hybrid” column represents positions that included two possible tenure-track appointment levels, such as Assistant/Associate. Five ads included hybrids that would fit into two categories; these were placed in their own category. Some position types (e.g., “visiting”) were not included.

Carnegie classification and expectation of research. Because the role of research differs among institution types, we looked at the relationship between Carnegie classification and research expectation. Based on our sample, an institution’s Carnegie classification modestly affects whether or not its WCA position advertisement explicitly requires research.

Table 5. Carnegie Classification and Research Requirement

	Carnegie Classification				Total
	Associate’s	Bachelor’s	Master’s	Doctoral/ Doctoral Research	
Positions Requiring Research	1	24	35	50	110
Total Positions	12	93	118	161	384
Total (%)	8.3%	25.8%	29.7%	31.1%	28.6%

One would expect that schools recognized for their scholarly activity would in turn recognize the knowledge-making capacity of writing centers, but doctoral/doctoral research institutions required research in only 31.1% of advertised positions. Interestingly, bachelor’s-granting institutions also commonly required research, clearly doing so in

25.8% of ads. It was surprising to see that the research expectations of bachelor’s-granting schools came close to their more research-oriented counterparts. Regardless of which Carnegie classification does the best job of supporting research, only 28.6% of WCA position ads clearly supported research. However, we must reiterate that it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about WCA research expectations based on job ads because 70.9% of the ads from the past 11 years make no mention of a research expectation.

Computational analysis: Research relationships in job ads.

Our AntConc analysis revealed additional insight into the nature of job ads, particularly with regard to research. The top words in job ads (removing form words like “the”) are “writing” (5450 occurrences), “center” (2628 occurrences), “university” (1923 occurrences), “director” (1495 occurrences), and “teaching” (1384 occurrences). We also analyzed words associated with research: “research” (466 occurrences, #57 on the list of top words), “researcher” (2 occurrences, not in the top 300 words), and “researching” (only 1 occurrence, not in the top 300 words).

When we looked at the incidence of the word “research” in proximity to other key words, we found that only in a small number of cases (the items marked with an * on Table 6) did a mention of research mean the director’s research itself. “Research agenda” showed up occasionally in this data set. Of the 23 faculty ads that specified the term “research agenda,” however, only three (13%) asked explicitly for “writing center research” as part of that agenda. Of the 12 staff ads that included the term “research agenda,” only one (8.3%) specified “writing center research.”

Table 6. Relationship of “Research” to Other Terms

Staff	Faculty
*Research agenda (12 instances /12 ads)	*Research agenda (28 instances/23 ads)
Research-intensive (9)	*Research interests (14)
Research university (7)	Research university (10)
Research-related (6 times)	Research-intensive (8)
*Research-based (6 times)	Research centers (7)
Research activity (5)	Research program (7)
Research center(5)	Research-based (6)
Research coordinators (5)	Research activity (4)
Research projects (5)	*Research publication (4)
Research initiatives (4)	*Research plans (3)

All variables and individual year. Because employment trends can change over time and because Geller & Denny (2013) demonstrate that WCAs tend to remain in their positions longer than other writing program administrators, we investigated the effect of time on each descriptive statistic measured. In every case, we found no substantial trends.

Table 7: Position Type and Year of Advertisement

Year	Position Type					Total
	Faculty	Staff	Unknown	Hybrid	Visiting	
2004	20	9	1	0	0	30
2005	24	5	2	0	1	32
2006	28	4	1	0	0	33
2007	25	9	0	0	0	34
2008	16	5	1	1	2	25
2009	17	5	0	1	1	24
2010	23	11	1	0	3	38
2011	23	3	4	1	2	33
2012	29	8	3	1	0	41
2013	27	10	6	1	5	49
2014	22	17	9	0	1	49

An average of 23 faculty positions was advertised during each of the 11 years covered by our study. The greatest outlier was 2008, when we found 16 ads (which likely had to do with the financial recession in 2008–2009, when the MLA job information list also reported that hiring was substantially down from previous years). It was followed by another low year with 17 faculty WCA ads. However, these outliers, along with others that came up as we looked at each variable over time, seemed to be just that: outliers, not representative of significant or lasting change. Without previous studies to which we could compare ours, and with such a large number of unknowns within each category, this study could not identify long-term trends.

Broader Discussion and Implications

This study's findings add to a growing body of work that questions writing center studies' current ability to be viewed as and to sustain itself as a viable field of inquiry (Lerner, 2014; Wynn Perdue & Driscoll,

2017). Though looking for changes over time did not reveal significant differences in our data set, we note that some patterns emerged across several variables and cross-tabulations. The most important trend is the inconsistency of expectations and rewards across different institutions. For example, one university might offer a tenure-track position that did not require research in the same year that another school advertised a staff position that required research. Such inconsistencies were common in the 11 years we studied, and they make defining the WCA role difficult. In this section, we explore the implications of these findings for scholarly identity and the field of writing centers as a whole, suggesting that job ads present yet another compelling indicator of deep-rooted challenges.

Ambiguity and omissions. We embarked upon this project to better understand WCAs' institutional status and working conditions, but we found that our results rarely provided illumination. Instead, we wandered into a world of ambiguity. Within almost every ad, we found ourselves coding "unknown" again and again because key information about the nature of the job rarely was provided. In many cases, ads lacked enough information for a prospective applicant to understand the nature of the job. This missing information included answers to a wide variety of key questions, such as the following: How much will you teach? Do you have support staff? To whom will you report? Do you control your budget? What is your institutional status (staff, faculty, etc.)? Is this a tenure-line position? How many months of the year will you work? Will you be expected to do research? The unknowns became one of our most prominent findings: we estimate that over 50% of the ads we attempted to code lacked at least some of this basic information. In particular, whether or not the WCA had or controlled the budget was unknown 84.3% of the time; if the WCA was required to conduct assessment was unknown 78.2% of the time; if the WCA was responsible for professional development of consultants was unknown 55.4% of the time; whether or not the WCA had a support staff was unknown 82.8% of the time; and the reporting structure itself, a critical indicator of a WCA's academic life with wide-ranging implications, was unknown 36.7% of the time.

We would like to believe that the missing information is simply a matter of oversight on the part of job ad writers, but we are not sure this is always the case. It might be that some of these aspects of the WCA positions, like teaching load, are negotiable and, therefore, not listed. It may also be that some university human resources offices require that certain material be added or removed from job ads (an increasingly

common occurrence) (Harper, 2012). Or, it could be that the person who composed the ad was unfamiliar with many aspects of WCA work.

Regardless of the reason, these omissions have consequences. If a job description does not adequately reveal an employee's education and responsibilities, these oversights might lead to misclassification of the position and its type, costing the WCA money and support staff. Other institutions might rely on incomplete job descriptions to form their own searches, thereby perpetuating the inaccuracies and ambiguities.

Implications for job seekers and the field. The implications of missing information are severe, especially for graduate students and applicants on the market for the first time. A potential job seeker might wonder if information has been purposefully omitted to “hide” an undesirable set of circumstances. One of us, a tenured associate professor, was searching for a job during this analysis. Search chairs quickly answered her inquiries into a number of writing center positions that did not specify key information. It is not that universities and committees do not know if these positions are tenure-line, require certain amounts of heavy teaching loads, have budgets, and so on. We believe, at least in some cases, that hiring committees know that advertising these aspects of their jobs will make the positions less appealing. It is quite possible that this information is omitted intentionally to be discovered only after an applicant has already invested a great deal of time and resources into the search. Applicants with limited experience may not know what questions to ask or how to evaluate whether or not positions are reasonable. Another possible consequence of this dearth of information could be that inexperienced WCAs accept positions they do not fully understand. Clarifying job ads is in the best interest of all parties. WCAs can more easily find jobs that suit them, and hiring institutions can more readily identify candidates who hold the necessary prerequisites.

Writing center work as “add on.” In some cases, especially for tenure-line positions located in English departments, writing center work is often seen as an “add on” to the job ad for an assistant professor, where a short line, usually toward the end of the ad, may indicate “additional responsibilities include directing the writing center.” This lack of specificity represents an inconsistent understanding of the nature of WCA work, a gap that includes the background one needs to do it and key details about the nature of the work itself.

Implications for WCA research. We originally undertook this study to determine how writing center research and WCA scholarly identity were shaped by hiring trends over the last decade. These position ads do not indicate, in many cases, that research or knowledge building is important to the work of a WCA. Research as a whole is

underrepresented in these ads, and writing center research is extremely undervalued (ads specifying a writing center research agenda were less than 5% of the total ads). If research is included, many times it is mentioned in discussion of supporting the research writing or processes of students who visit the writing center rather than the work of the writing center itself.

Given that a PhD is a research degree, we might expect to see more research required in these ads, but again, only 31.1% of ads specified a requirement for a PhD and any kind of research (not just writing center research). This means either that the doctoral degree is expected but left unused or that research may be expected but is not mentioned in these ads. Further, although the overall number of writing center positions is growing slightly, the rate of staff growth is outpacing that of faculty position growth, a challenge to the long-term growth and stability of the field as a research-producing, knowledge-making discipline.

Though it makes sense that faculty are more likely expected to do research than staff, the gap between the two groups is not as large as one might expect. Further, the low rates of research expectation in all positions were surprising. Defining evidence-supported best practices in the writing center field is difficult when those in a position to do research are not required or given a professional opportunity to do so. There need not be a division between faculty and staff WCAs, but expectations of research activity and rewards for it (including assigning appropriate position types) should be clearer and more consistent.

Further, when 95% of the ads do not specify that WCAs need to do research in writing centers, at least one of three assumptions is present: 1. writing centers are not sites of and/or informed by research; 2. writing centers do not need research to tutor effectively; and/or 3. WCAs do not need to do research connected to the writing center. In sum, the only thing we can conclude from these ads is that for most WCA positions, writing center research does not count (or, if it does count, it is not indicated in the job ad).

The persistent omission of research from these ads both 1) suggests that writing center studies lacks the jurisdictional knowledge that characterizes an academic field (Abbott, 1988) and 2) reinforces the notion that WCAs are not scholars who map out and sustain a field of expertise that informs writing center practice. This omission also contradicts nearly two decades worth of calls for more empirical inquiry into writing centers and motivates us to pose the following questions: What are its implications for the graduate students currently enrolled within writing center theory, practice, and administration courses? What happens to the field if new PhDs cannot do research and build

knowledge in writing centers? Will graduate students shift their projects away from writing center research? Who will pursue writing center positions? Will students apply if they invest substantial time and money into earning a PhD only to face employment within staff positions where they are unable to do research or to fully employ their education? Or, will they pursue employment in other composition fields? One of us, currently teaching a doctoral course on writing center research and administration, is frequently asked by her students, “Is it possible for me to have a tenure-line job and do research in writing centers?”

The difference in hiring patterns and tenure-line positions. The distinction between institution type and hiring decisions for tenure-line and staff positions is worth interrogating. Public and private liberal arts colleges that grant bachelor’s degrees hire tenure-line faculty to direct writing centers 53% of the time, whereas master’s-degree granting schools hire tenure-line faculty 50.9% of the time. Yet doctoral-granting research universities (public and private) hire tenure-line writing center directors only 41.5% of the time. This seems like a contradiction. Why do the places where research is most emphasized and where new PhDs are minted hire fewer tenure-track faculty for their writing centers?

We speculate—and we can only speculate—that one reason for this lies in who is doing the hiring. Based on our reading of these job ads, writing centers are more likely to be situated within the oversight of an English or writing department at small liberal arts colleges. At large doctoral universities, writing centers are much more likely to be independent, reporting to upper administration or part of a “big tent” academic skills center. When the position is being crafted, it is possible that faculty in a department with writing center oversight are more likely to be successful in advocating for a tenure-line colleague to direct the writing center, while this may not be the case in other situations where it is less expensive to hire a staff director to run “just another student service” on campus. These findings, then, add an additional layer to the issue of institutional oversight and reporting structures for writing centers.

The writing center job ad: A call to change. We recognize, and have reaffirmed through this study, that the job ad is an important site of information about the work of WCAs as well as a potential agent of change for the larger field. We also recognize that job ads, and the positions themselves, are sites of negotiation, of tensions between what job seekers need to complete the work to the best of their ability and what universities, under increasingly tight budget conditions, are willing to provide. Even with these negotiations and tensions in place, we believe

there is room for an intermediary, a role that should be occupied by our professional organizations.

First, we would like to suggest that the International Writing Centers Association create and maintain its own job list. We believe that doing so will provide at least two key benefits. First, we can more effectively monitor the status of jobs in the field and sponsor follow-ups to studies like this one (similar to what the Modern Language Association does each year in its annual jobs report). Second, our professional organization can provide guidance on key aspects of a WCA job ad by explicitly specifying information that needs to be present in an equitable job ad (among other things). We echo arguments we made in “Context Matters” (2017) that the field needs to do a better job of advocating for the real work of writing center directors, including thorough position statements on the basic conditions necessary for WCA employment and the role of knowledge-making within the WCA’s role.

Further, we advocate for a number of changes to the job ads themselves that can help frame the actual work of WCA positions. Job ads should include the following, at minimum:

- **Position Type and Rank:** A clear indication of the position type and rank, preferably in the title of the job. For non-standard position types that are specific to institutions (such as “professor of practice”), the non-standard position should be described in the ad.
- **Educational Requirements:** A clear indication of the educational requirements, and educational requirements that are in line with the position type. If a position requires a PhD, it should be a tenure-line position in line with the qualifications of the applicant.
- **Reporting Structure:** A description of the reporting structure for the position.
- **Budget:** Information about whether or not the WCA will administer the writing center’s budget.
- **Support Staff:** Information about how many support staff are present in the writing center.
- **An Overview of Key Responsibilities:** Assessment, research, professional development, staffing, etc.
- **Teaching load:** A list of the teaching responsibilities (kinds of courses) and load for the position in comparison to the overall load for the university.
- **Research:** We advocate that research be included in job ads for all directors.

We believe that including the above information will not only create more equitable hiring but also will allow our professional organization to better understand and address the field's hiring trends.

Broader reforms and advocacy work. In addition to advocating reforms specific to job advertisements, we also want to call into question some basic assumptions about WCA positions that were present in our ads. Those advertising faculty positions often do not realize that writing center leadership and writing center research are pivotal to a campus community. On the one hand, too many positions expect a separate research agenda and additional teaching; they position WCA work as secondary or an “add on” to the primary work of a faculty member. On the other hand, while staff positions are often firmly rooted in the writing center, they may lack the institutional capital (faculty status, tenure) necessary for advocacy work and leadership. We encourage those who hire new WCAs to consider the importance of institutional capital and institutional status as well as to frame writing center work as the WCA's primary responsibility.

Conclusions

This study has presented a first exploration of the last 11 years of WCA job ads. While our original goals were not met due to the incomplete and often contradictory nature of job ads, we believe that this study substantially contributes to our understanding of writing center work, the role of research within it, and the field's challenge to establish equitable hiring practices. More research is needed to better understand the relationship between WCAs' lived working conditions and their professional identities. Future research should investigate how WCA identities are shaped and maintained by market forces and job responsibilities. Before closing, we offer readers a number of questions for further inquiry: How do job ads match actual position responsibilities? How many position descriptions are renegotiated at the time of hiring? How, if at all, do positions “shift” from staff to faculty or vice versa? What institutional or broader factors contribute to these hiring practices? How will these trends continue or change in the future?

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