THE CENTER WILL HOLD

Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship

Edited by

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the profession as a viable discipline, albeit one that continually questions the relative merits of disciplining and being disciplined as writing specialists.

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ADMINISTRATION ACROSS THE CURRICULUM
Or Practicing What We Preach

JOSEPHINE A. KOSTER

Writing center administration, a highly complex task as is, has an added complication in that so many new directors plunge in with an almost total lack of preparation.

MURIEL HARRIS

I sometimes fantasize about an inspirational poster with Mickey Harris's intense portrait, arms upraised, and the caption "writing lab directors unite."

JOYCE KINKEAD

When we observe tutoring going on in a writing center, we're likely to hear comments like these: "Well, in a case study you use terms like . . ." or "Now when you're talking about the reverse transcription of this DNA, do you mean that . . . ?" A given of writing center practice and tutor training policy is that our tutors will learn to work with writers across the curriculum, attempt to understand the forms and practices of many specialized areas, and use and manipulate the discourse conventions of those practitioners. While many of our tutors are *not* economics or biology majors, they learn to approximate the language and to appreciate the practices of their clients, in order to project credibility and merit the trust of the writers they are tutoring, and to achieve their joint communication objectives. Using the strategy of "speaking the other's language" leads to successful communication and collaboration between tutor and client.

But what we preach to our tutors does not always carry comfortably over into our own practices. A frequent topic of conversation for writing center administrators (hereafter WCAs) is our wars with the administrators, bureaucrats, bean counters, what have you who control our acade-

mic worlds. We report what "they" have done to us—how "they" cut our budgets, reduce our space, and misunderstand our missions and our very real contributions to our institutions. A common theme of these conversations is that administrators fail to understand *our* rhetoric, *our* discipline, *our* practices, *our* values. Beth Boquet speaks for this position when she talks of "the judgments of administrators who may understand little about the idea of a writing center" (Simpson et al. 1995, 23). Jeanne Simpson and Barry Maid (2001) characterize this oppositional position concisely:

> The bonding work of the writing-center community has, unfortunately, also resulted in a shared and frequently articulated hostility toward administration. The community perceives administration as the enemy and frames the lack of administrators' knowledge about writing centers and writing-center pedagogy as at least contemptible and often malevolent. That an economics or biology professor turned provost or dean would have no reason to know anything about writing centers seems not to be a consideration. When more traditional (and familiar) models of writing pedagogy are favored by administrators, the writing-center community may express outrage at the perceived obstructionism. The writing-center community's attempts to provide more accurate information or to offer research-based alternatives often come either too late or are presented defensively. Perceiving a 'marginalization' of writing centers, the community attaches blame to administration for failure to be supportive or interested or understanding. (127)

But as St. Augustine once observed, not the least part of finding the answer is asking the right questions. We might also ask, *should* administrators use our form of discourse? Or might we benefit by appropriating elements of *their* discourse? Should we as writing center administrators practice what we preach to our tutors? In this chapter I would like to suggest that if we apply the tools of audience analysis we would use in a tutorial consultation, we might identify why "they" just don't understand.

After twenty-five years spent working with bureaucracies in business, industry, and education, I've concluded that administration of any organization is an example of chaos mathematics, the study of complex systems in motion. Chaos theory attempts to describe those systems. In a very real sense, academic administrators are chaos theorists. They are constantly trying to describe, control, and direct large numbers of

dynamic systems—entities like departments, programs, football teams, what have you—whose personnel, budget, space, and other requirements never are the same from one moment to the next. The formulae central administrators (hereafter CAs) create to manage these systems are necessarily complicated—and must take into account what chaos theorists classify as attraction, repulsion, and neutrality—the effects systems have on another. If the resources allotted for student support one year must go to replacing outdated computers, then other valuable student support services like a writing center will probably suffer—the two budget goals are repulsed by each other. On the other hand, if the reading center and the writing center decide that they can share a receptionist, the salary money saved by eliminating duplication might buy more computers for the two centers to share, providing more services—budget attraction. Most of us are only used to looking at administration from our center-focused vantage point, rather than looking at the entire dynamic system to which we belong. Rhetorically, our viewpoint may be described by Young, Becker, and Pike's (1970) theory of tagmemics—we're able to see the particles, but it's harder to pick up the waves and the fields.

If we only look at our own subsystem, or express our needs and demands in the language of our subsystem, we will likely set ourselves up for miscommunication at best and failure at worst. As Mickey Harris pointed out in her keynote address at the 1999 National Writing Centers Association conference in Bloomington, we must overcome our resistance and listen to our CAs' perspectives even when we disagree with them, just as we ask our tutors to do with their clients. She argues that

> We need to face some realities as to what can be changed and what perceptions will always need to be worked on. Administrators have their worlds and their frames of reference that aren't ours. If they think quantitatively, have a higher regard for credit-bearing courses than student services, consider budget-limiting to be more important than expanding services that students need, then we need to recognize their realities. That will always be their agenda and many administrators are selected because they can attend well to achieving such goals. We can try to modify their perspectives, but we are always going to be faced with talking to a constantly changing group of people who manage the budget, prefer figures and graphs to anecdotal evidence, have mission statements to guide them, have streams of faculty on campus clamoring for larger pieces of their shrinking pies, and have state legislatures and boards of trustees to answer to. (1999)

Neal Lerner (1997) reminds us that the administrators Harris talks about "often want numbers, digits, results" (2). One problem for many WCAs is that we essentialize other disciplines' perspectives as being primarily positivistic. The emphasis on "numbers, digits, results" and needs that CAs can interpret raises in many of us the old fears of having centers regarded as purely remedial, even mechanistic sites. Our conceptual and theoretical frames have taught us to beware of systems that rely on such hard-and-fast measures of outcomes. We recognize that writing cannot be reduced to the answers on a standardized test, and that writing problems cannot be solved by a thirty-minute visit to a fix-it shop. When CAs ask for measures of our effectiveness, we rightly say, "Our discipline doesn't express judgments that way." Yet there may be ways in which we can use the language of other disciplines to articulate our own methods of determining effectiveness and needs if we take an "administration across the curriculum" perspective to dealing with central administration.

For instance, consider the complaint articulated by Boquet (Simpson et al. 1995) that administrators don't understand what we do, haven't read the works of North and others that define our theoretical positions. This is probably true. It's likely that they haven't read the theoretical positions that govern what our colleagues in nursing or music or social work do, either. What administrators read is the information *we* send *them*. Mostly that's in the form of periodic reports; that's how CAs usually acquire information. Typically, the reports we write present our information to CAs in the best possible light from *our* rhetorical perspective, even though that might not be the most effective way to express both our successes and needs. As Jeanne Simpson tells Steve Braye in the trialogue "War, Peace, and Writing Center Administration" (1995), when a WCA writes a glowing report of his or her successes, the message is that "You are doing a great job with meager resources. And since you've proved that you can do that, there is no incentive for the dean/provost to give you more resources. You need to do a great job and also prove that you are about to collapse. Or define other goals that cannot be met without more resources" (165). Typically, too, we present this information in the text-dense prose that is most comfortable to us as humanists, rather than in the graphics- and bullet-list-laden reporting style of administration. We rarely think of how the readers of these reports are accustomed to finding, interpreting, and deciphering the information we present.

We often fail to realize that the language we use to make those proofs and define those goals for our institutions is crucial. CAs have a professional duty to look at the big picture and listen for particular key phrases and terms that define that picture for them. Take 'quality,' for instance. In the humanities, we have a very open definition of quality; as Plato asks in the *Phaedrus*, "What is good and what is not good? Do we need anyone to teach us these things?" In the language of business that so many CAs are familiar with, "quality" has a very specific definition. It means delivering the best service to customers in the most effective, efficient, error-free way. David Schwalm (1995), Provost at Arizona State University West (another writing program administrator turned CA), highlights some of the key phrases to which administrative audiences respond positively:

> [Administrators] tend to value projects that are student-centered. We like projects that encourage retention, since losing students is expensive and state legislators are on our case. We *have* to be concerned about costs. We favor solutions over problems. We like proposals that reflect an understanding of the institution at large. We also like projects that help to overcome the vertical organization of the institution, reduce duplication, and allow for recombinations of existing resources. (62)

Schwalm's statement is full of the buzzwords of the ivory tower administrator: *student-centered, solution, retention*, and so on. This linguistic code shifting, so obvious when we tutor or coach our tutors to work with writers in other disciplines, often escapes us when we deal with administrators. It behooves us rhetorically to construct our arguments on grounds that match the concerns and perspectives of our administrative audiences. As Simpson (1995) says, "Central Administration is interested in information that addresses the issues that concern it. These are things like accreditation, accountability (assessment), staffing plans, space allocation, and personnel dollars. Those are the nuts-and-bolts concerns, the daily assignment of administration. It is crucial to understand that" (49). I was reminded of this myself not long ago when talking to the outgoing and incoming provosts of a respected liberal arts college who had hired me to evaluate their writing center. At one point, I characterized the training of its tutors as "belletristic." The outgoing provost, a Victorian literature specialist, nodded sagely. The incoming provost, a nationally known geologist, asked me what the term meant and why I apparently thought it was a short-coming. I had taken for

granted that all of my administrative audience would understand the term; the misunderstanding reminded me that I had to be more audience-focused in communicating my concerns to them.

One place where many WCAs have confronted the language of another discipline is the mission statement, a business tool meant to drive an organization's policies and actions. In recent years, many of us have developed such documents, usually in response to administrative prompting. Since our perspective is the framework of humanistic inquiry, usually with an expressivist or social-constructionist bent, we try to write sweeping mission statements that usually sound something like this: "The Writing Center will provide a nurturing and supportive environment in which all writers are encouraged to develop their full potential for communicating in a wide range of voices and forms through working with their peers in a collaborative setting." For us, that is a rhetorically sound mission, and it describes what we do very well. But for a central administrator it's a nightmare. How do you assess qualities like "nurturing and supportive"? "full potential"? "encouragement"? In the rhetoric of quality management, a mission statement describes an organization's goals and desires in concrete, measurable ways. How many writing center mission statements include sentences like "We aim to serve at least 35% of the student body this year" or "We intend to provide at least one hundred twenty hours of tutoring services a week"? Administrators favor statements like these, because they can be measured; they can determine how many students are served or how many hours the center is open. Moreover, if the institution accepts such a mission statement, the writing center director can then go to the dean or provost at the appropriate time in the budget cycle and say, "To meet our agreed-upon mission of tutoring 120 hours a week, we need to run three sessions concurrently. That means I need another 50 square feet of space, another table and four chairs, and $900 of additional salary money. Where can we find it?" (Using the rhetoric of quality management works both ways; if your central administration wants to have you achieve your articulated mission, it has to give you the tools to do so. Conversely, if you want the tools, you need to show they're necessary through your mission statement.) Understanding and using appropriate budgeting language in the appropriate rhetorical situations can help diminish the perception some WCAs have that the "distribution of funding support within an institution is unpredictable at best, capricious at worst" (Simpson 1995, 48).

Bob Barnett has recently demonstrated how centers can use their rhetorical analysis skills on other management documents to lobby effectively for resources to meet their needs. In "Redefining Our Existence: An Argument for Short- and Long-Term Goals and Objectives" (1997), Barnett shows how his center analyzed the University of Michigan-Flint's Academic Plan for language that would support the center's "top priority—helping students become better writers" (124). Using these results, the center phrased its list of short- and long-term priorities in the language the institution valued so that it could better make the argument for a larger slice of institutional resources and better publicize its efforts to students and faculty on campus. Barnett argues that positioning the center rhetorically as part of the institution's most valued activities—in his case retention and collaboration—allowed his center to "continue making progress toward what I see as our ultimate goal—to bring writing to the center of the university curriculum" (133).

Another illustrative argument for how, indeed, we can make such political cases in language appropriate to our audiences is Joyce Kinkead and Jeanne Simpson's "Administrative Audience: A Rhetorical Problem" (2000), where they patiently explain both the meanings and importance of key administrative terms such as student retention, time-to-degree, student attrition, student credit hours (SCH), full-time equivalents (FTE), productivity, assessment, accreditation, and cost-to-benefit ratios as they apply to writing center work. Kinkead and Simpson argue, correctly in my opinion, that

> Ultimately, all academic issues boil down to budget decisions, and if the goal is to encourage a beneficial decision, the first step is to use the language of budgets. Understanding this terminology will help a WPA [writing program administrator] to see how the economics of the institution work. . . . Administrators use these terms frequently. Their meanings are well-understood and so embedded that, as with a nation's currency, everyone is expected to know how to use them and how they relate to each other. (74–75)

Muriel Harris (1997) likewise argues, in her valuable discussion of how to present writing center scholarship to administrators, that in institutions where accountability is an issue, using outcomes-based language in writing center communication "does permit the director to talk in language other administrators will easily recognize" (97). She also points out that center directors might look to participation in and pre-

sentations to organizations of educational administrators, not just writing center or composition specialists, as ways of gaining fluency in such discourses.

Rhetorically, the process these experienced WCA/administrators describe is not difficult, and most of us could, I suspect, theorize it comfortably from our rhetorical, comp-theory, and literary perspectives. How many WCAs, though, feel comfortable talking about the quality of center services in the language of quality management? About budget requirements in terms of demonstrated cost effectiveness? About creating compatibility between organizational goals and human values in the language of organizational behavior, or about staffing and funding decisions in terms of sustainable results or process re-engineering? For these are the kinds of terms our CAs are likely to use. Most recent CAs, if they come from academic backgrounds, have come from either the schools of business or from the quantitative sciences, according to a recent study; educational institutions are increasingly seeking business-oriented leadership and fewer humanists now occupy the highest rungs of CA (Mangan 1998, A43). There is, of course, considerable resistance among humanities-trained faculty to think and speak in these more businesslike terms, and with good reason; they are terms from fields we distrust because they are so different from our own enterprises. In *Management Fads in Higher Education: Where They Come From, What They Do, Why They Fail*, Robert Birnbaum (2000) notes that "Institutions of higher education . . . . function in a trust market in which people do not know exactly what they are buying and may not discover its value for years. . . . Compared to business firms, colleges and universities have multiple and conflicting goals and intangible outcomes" (215-16). To think of dealing with our more number- and product-oriented colleagues and supervisors in a business-like way can seem a betrayal of that trust market, and the goals and outcomes for which we stand.

But if our *rhetorical* approach to our administrators is cast in the conceptual frames of their disciplines, are we not more likely to attract these busy people's attention and gain their trust? Rhetorically, this seems like such a simple decision: it doesn't mean changing what we do or what we value, the nature of *our* trust market, but how we *talk* about it. We tell our tutors and our tutoring clients this all the time. Yet how many writing center administrators have been prepared to do this before accepting their positions, or have learned to do so once on it? Linda Houston (1999) perceptively points out that "Very little is written

on the funding of Writing Labs and the politics of them. . . . In all situations, one must be clever in order to secure funding and navigate the politics for a program that meets the needs of the students but is not a required part of a technical program. How do you do that as a Writing Lab Coordinator?" (119).

To look at this issue more closely, I surveyed sixty attendees at the WCenter networking breakfast at the 1998 CCCC conference in Chicago. Eighty percent of the respondents were center directors. Admittedly, this was a convenience sample and may not represent the field as a whole, but given that many of the Executive Board members of the then-NWCA were there, that many active, experienced, and well-known practitioners in our field were there, I believe that the results they reported have considerable significance for us as administrative practitioners. The results of this survey point to some surprising, perhaps even disturbing trends among center directors.

Thirty-five percent of the respondents had PhDs, over 36% had MAs or were ABD, and another eight percent had other doctorates. Only one of the sixty had a degree in any kind of administrative area (educational administration). I asked if the respondents had taken formal coursework or a workshop in, or had other training in, a variety of fields: 72% had preparation in rhetorical theory, 85% in composition and pedagogy, and 56% each in linguistics and in educational methods. Since many centers are housed in and draw their personnel from English departments, this was to be expected; as Steve Braye wryly remarks, "most of us who direct . . . WCs came out of English depts and are comfortable with the career development notions they represent" (Simpson, Braye, and Boquet 157). But on the administrative preparation side, it was a different story: in my survey, only 20% had preparation in management, 10% in accounting, just under 12% in business administration, 16% in educational administration, 20% in organizational psychology, and 10% in marketing.

Similar results came when I looked at the major works respondents had read. First, I selected a small number of well-known books and articles in writing center theory. Almost 82% of the respondents had read North's "The Idea of a Writing Center" (1984) and 80% had read Mickey Harris's book on tutoring (1982). More than 71% had read Mullin and Wallace's theoretical collection *Intersections* (1994). A respectable 40% of respondents had read Marilyn Cooper's "Really Useful Knowledge" (1995). But only five percent had read Richard and

Barbara Smith Gephardt's *Academic Advancement in Composition Studies* (1997), which deals with skills for dealing successfully with administrators. On the business side, of the three best-selling business books of 1997, 40% of respondents had read Steven Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), but only 23.3% had read Tom Peters's classic *In Search of Excellence* (1982), a book widely admired by CAs. Thirty percent of my respondents had read some book on quality management (including Peters's), but only about 11% had read a book on marketing communications. (However, 26.6% had read the third best-seller, Scott Adam's *The Dilbert Principle* [1996]; at least the cartoons get around.)

These results suggest that the writing center people I surveyed are well- and even superbly qualified to train tutors and articulate the theoretical stances and concerns of writing centers, but they lack familiarity with the kinds of discourse and conceptual frames that administrators often work in—either from formal training or from informal self-education. They don't read the literature, they don't seek out the training, and this puts them at a distinct disadvantage in making their cases to central administration. It is hard to explain in economic terms the value of your service when you don't speak economics, after all. When only ten percent of a widely experienced group of WCAs has training in either accounting or marketing, is it any wonder that we see so many inquiries on electronic discussion lists like "I need to market my center—should I give out pencils?" or "Help! They're cutting my budget! How do I get it back?"

Work like Bob Barnett's (1997) with the language of institutional mission statements, the examples in Kinkead and Simpson (2000) and in Harris's 1997 essay, Neal Lerner's critique of center assessment methods (2001), the perceptive analyses of typical writing center prose by Pete Carino (2002): these begin to model the kinds of rhetorical practices that WCAs can use instead of speaking and writing, in Carino's terms, "like outlaws plotting subversively in an out-of-the-way tavern" (92) or, perhaps even more rhetorically ineffectively, the discourses of victimization when talking about our interactions with administration. As Ray Wallace wrote in "Text Linguistics: External Entries into 'Our' Community" (1994):

We complain about our budgets, about our low status in our departments, and about how even our own composition colleagues outside our centers don't understand us! We are becoming our own worst enemies in the profes-

sion—if all we can do is complain about how badly we are treated, how no one sees our worth in the composing process, and how we never are given enough resources to do our job, then we clearly are not doing enough to sell ourselves to the external forces who control much of our destiny. . . . We must reach out to other communities in our profession, and such outreach is done by reflection about our own claims and those of other communities. (71)

Such outreach is extremely consistent with a commonly held view of the writing center as source for innovation in our institutional settings, yet perhaps that viewpoint is one of the reasons why we seem to resist so strongly speaking as insiders to instigate such events. Unless we see writing center administration as a rhetorical act, unless we theorize it, interrogate it, and practice it as such, and until we value doing so, we handicap ourselves and the centers we represent.

It might well be argued that the voices Wallace (1994), Simpson (1995), and Maid (1999) describe represent a vocal minority in our world. On the other hand, how many graduate programs in rhetoric and composition, or in English, allow—let alone encourage—students who want to be WPAs or WCAs to reach out to those other communities, and, for instance, take courses in the graduate schools of management or education to prepare themselves for such a career? (Balester and McDonald's recent article [2001] on the training of WPAs and WCAs shows how unusual such training opportunities are.) How many of us get a chance to learn the languages of these other communities? How many of us have taken the steps to educate ourselves to appreciate those other communities' points of view, and negotiate how their discourses might match with our own?

This means, of course, abandoning the expressivist discourse of "WCA as oppressed individual," and turning instead to seeing ourselves as part of not only a system but also an ongoing negotiation. A hard turn but, I think, a necessary one, and one our rhetorical skills prepare us to make. Karen Rodis (2001) notes that

We have been talking for many years now, and misperceptions persist. Moreover, to believe that enlightening the boss will bring an end to these inequities implies that the responsibility for these inequities, as well as the power to correct them, lies primarily with the boss. This implication is dangerous to writing centers in that it renders us powerless: the responsibility and the power lie elsewhere; the best we can do is to convince the powers

that be to shine on us. In fact, it is empowering to writing centers and to those who work there to realize that much of the fault for these inequities—and therefore, much of the power to remedy them—lies with us. (177)

One way we can begin to apply "administration across the curriculum" strategies is to collaborate, as we do in tutor training, to help bridge the gaps in our own knowledge by enlisting the expertise of colleagues in other disciplines. For instance, Neal Lerner (1997) points out, "resources abound for us to engage in self-study. Math and statistics colleagues can help with the numbers, behavioral science faculty can help with the surveys, and offices of institutional research can point to the relevant literature"(3). We encourage our tutors to help train each other; an excellent example is Beth Rapp Young's "Using Heuristics from Other Disciplines in the Writing Center" (2001), where she describes how tutors in nursing and engineering demonstrated the methods of inquiry in their disciplines for other tutors and used these methods to help develop tutoring strategies. Why can we not learn in like manner from our colleagues, and use our shared results to better make our cases to CAs?

Additionally, as we ask our tutors to do with clients, we can also try to understand the viewpoints of our administrative audiences, to see our negotiations with other segments of our organizational communities as a complex but essentially rhetorical situation. This seems much harder for WCAs to do. Most react to such a call the same way Luke reacted to Darth Vader's invitation to join him on the Dark Side of the Force: taking up our lightsabers and preparing to fight to the death. Again, focusing on the rhetorical nature of such acts can help us take the essential step toward negotiating the distances that often exist between centers and other institutional priorities. As Steve Braye says,

I [need to] strive to understand [the administration's] decision-making process, present ideas to them in terms and/or contexts they can understand (budget numbers mean budget numbers, not narratives), and raise their awareness of issues relating to writing and the center. I should never assume that administrative rejection is a rejection of my ideas, but that competing issues are more important or are argued more effectively. . . . I also don't lose battles, but some victories are deferred due to institutional needs. . . . I also demonstrate that I use monies and time successfully in the best interests of the college, but that we have only begun to tap our potential. We should take

what we are granted and use it to serve our students in a way consistent with the philosophies of the center and the campus. (Simpson, Braye, and Boquet 168–169)

Note that this position does not require that we agree with positivistic reductions of the Center to a page of pie charts or cost-benefit analyses, but rather that we present *our ideas and our positions* in "texts and/or contexts they can understand." As Barry Maid's (1999) Theory of Organizational Chaos asserts, "power is not something which can be given or assigned. It must be taken and used. . . . People who find themselves in conflict or not 'in' the power structure serve their own needs best when they find the chinks in the organization" and take advantage of them (210).

Some, of course, would argue that even this rhetorical repositioning means that centers are participating in their own marginalization or capitulating to the institution. As Beth Boquet (2000) so concisely states it, "To perceive ourselves as being 'allowed' to exist by some external force as long as we prove ourselves 'worthy' is to live with the constant threat of extinction" (23). As much as I admire Boquet's work, I cannot agree with her position here. Centers *are* allowed to exist by an external force, the organizations to which they belong. Atomistic thinking—believing that the centers exist alone on the pinnacle of Truth, or at the center of some isolated world of humanistic belief and inquiry always under attack from the Philistines at the gates—is understandable in theory but not very helpful in practice. We are, for better or worse, part of the institutions that house us. We must learn to represent ourselves as effective parts of those institutions if we accept the challenge of administrating centers. That is our best chance not only to perpetuate what we do well, but also to transform the institutions themselves. If we fail to translate our center-focused anecdotes and instincts into the kinds of persuasion our CAs recognize, we should not be surprised if our efforts fall short. If, on the other hand, we learn to express our importance in the language of our own institutional culture, we improve our chances for success. By changing from the discourse of victimization or opposition to the discourse of administration—that is to say, by understanding and appropriating the rhetorical practices of our administrative audiences—we increase the likelihood that our audiences will understand us, and through understanding respond positively to us. That is what we tell the writers we tutor; that is what we teach our tutors to work on:

establishing common ground and creating ethos by using the language of the audience. We need to do this ourselves.

This appropriation of discourse strategies from administration does not mean that we should change over to a number-crunching perspective, or only judge our successes by quantitative figures; far from it. The trust market works both ways. Even if we must sometimes describe our work in the language of quantitative assessments, there is still space for us to describe the quality of our work as well. But as George Eliot wryly observed, "We have all got to remain calm and call things by the same names other people call them by." When I argue that we must practice what we preach as writing center administrators, I mean that we must remember that directing a writing center is not only a pedagogical, political, and theoretical act, it is a rhetorical one as well. We lose nothing by learning about and employing the conventions, disciplinary practices, and linguistic expectations of administrators, just as we have lost nothing by learning about the conventions, disciplinary practices, and linguistic expectations of literary theorists, educational philosophers, cognitive psychologists, and yes, even chaos mathematicians.

The Council of Writing Program Administrators has already conceded this point, beginning to run workshops at conferences and in the summer to train writing specialists in the discourses and practices of administration. It is time for the IWCA to make an organized effort to help writing center specialists develop these professional skills as well. We should be arguing for allowing graduate students in composition and rhetoric and literature to gain the experience and training in other disciplines that will let them succeed, eventually, as WCAs. They should have the opportunity to take courses in organizational psychology, educational administration, finance, and the like, so that they are prepared to do the best possible jobs when they assume administrative responsibilities. We should be mentoring new WCAs, helping demystify the processes of finance, marketing, and management. We should be discussing the books and trends that our administrators are reading and responding to, so that we know what language we'll be hearing next. We should share examples and methods of making center cases to administration so that other members of our community can learn from our successful (and even unsuccessful) strategies; the new Writing Centers Research Project at the University of Louisville may help in this regard. In short, we should do for ourselves as WCAs what we do for our tutors:

make sure the tools are available to give us the best possible chance to negotiate understanding with our audiences.

Making our case in the language our CAs expect does not mean that we give up any of the advantages of being on the margin, nor that we concede our independence, our humanistic perspectives, our ability to inspire change, or our student-centered focus. Rather, it means that we gain the rhetorical advantages of being able to support, explain, and defend our work in terms that our audiences can't pretend *not* to understand. It means that we use the Force rather than be used by others who wield it better than we do. If we practice as administrators what we preach as tutors, we—and our centers—stand only to benefit.