The WPA as Leader
An Exploration

2009 WPA Conference
Minneapolis
The Need for Leadership Training

“Leadership education is a neglected goal of faculty development, even in the most enlightened of recent efforts to rethink the career and preparation of the future professoriate. . . . Few graduate teachers think of leadership in that sense as a faculty competence to be cultivated in doctoral education” (3)

The Need for Leadership Training

To be active members of academic community, “faculty themselves must develop thoughtful programs to foster the development of leaders from their own ranks —programs designed to operate seamlessly throughout a faculty career from graduate school to senior leadership roles in higher education” (4).
The Need for Leadership Training

Leadership is an inevitable aspect of faculty life, but especially important to faculty in rhetoric and composition and to WPAs: “For that reason, graduate education in rhetoric and composition must incorporate specialized leadership education for prospective WPAs while also providing some level of preparation and opportunities for all students to play leadership role as academic citizens” (5, emphasis added).
Leadership Roles for WPAs

- By Location
  - Classroom, program/department, university
  - Community, profession
  - Meetings, committees

- By Goal
  - Effective operation of program
  - Foster change

- By People
  - Students
  - Peers
  - Administrators
  - Members of wider community
Leadership Challenges for WPAs

- Context, context, context
- Credibility/authority/ethos
- Faculty and staff
- Administration
- Vision and buy in
- Limited resources
- Lack of experience
- Patience
“Specialized Leadership Education” in Writing Program Administration

- Course work in administration
- Practical leadership experience in graduate school (assistant directorships, committee work, etc.)
- Mentorships and OJT
- Course work in rhetorical theory: “leading with words through the politics of persuasion and through the power of critical audience analysis”*
- Course work in leadership theory and research

Aspects of Rhetorical Study that Aid Leadership

- Rhetorical analysis
- Audience analysis
- Informative and persuasive speaking and writing
- Logos, pathos, ethos
- *Kairos*
- Critical reading
- Argument theory (especially Rogerian and feminist theories)
- Role language plays in forming relationships and shaping understanding
- Group dynamics
What We Can Learn from Work in Leadership Studies

- Theorize (and thus better understand) our views of leadership
- Better understand leadership traits, attributes, styles
- Move from good to great programs
- Identify one’s strengths and limitations as leaders
- Learn effective leadership practices
- Develop better leadership education programs
Important Concepts from Work in Leadership Theory and Practice

- Identifying and developing effective leadership traits and skills
- Visioning
- Fostering change in an organization
- Understanding leadership styles
  - Transformative leadership
  - Servant leadership
- Developing effective listening skills
- Emotional intelligence
Leadership Theories

- “Great Man” Theory
  - Leaders born, not made—inherent skills

- Great Events Theory
  - A person rises to the occasion

- Situational Theory
  - Best leader determined by context—best fit

- Trait Theory
  - For some, inherent traits; for others, learned

- Behavioral Theory
  - Learn leadership behaviors through study, observation, and experience
Leadership Theories

- Transactional Theory
  - Good leaders are skilled at supervising and organizing current conditions

- Transformative Theory
  - Good leaders change the status quo through their guiding vision and inspiration of others

- Principle-Centered Leadership Theory
  - Leaders are committed to self-improvement and personal growth—theirs and others

- Servant Leadership Theory
  - Good leaders humbly serve those they lead
Leadership Traits


- Intelligence and action-oriented judgment
- Eagerness to accept responsibility
- Task competence
- Understanding of followers and their needs
- Skill in dealing with people
- Capacity to motivate people
- Courage and resolution
- Trustworthiness
- Decisiveness
- Self-confidence
- Assertiveness
- Adaptability/flexibility
Leadership Traits

  - Self Awareness
    - ability to understand your own strengths and weaknesses
  - Social Skills
    - how you relate to others and build rapport
  - Self Regulation
    - ability to think things through before reacting to a situation
  - Motivation
    - strong will or dive to succeed
  - Empathy
    - ability to understand another’s point of view
Vision and Change

  - Challenging the Process
    - Search for Opportunities
    - Experiment and Take Risks
  - Inspiring a Shared Vision
    - Envision the Future
    - Enlist Others
  - Enabling Others to Act
    - Foster Collaboration
    - Strengthen Others
  - Modeling the Way
    - Set the Example
    - Plan Small Wins
  - Encouraging the Heart
    - Recognize Individual Contribution
    - Celebrate Accomplishments
Vision and Change

- establish a sense of urgency
- create the guiding coalition
- develop a vision and strategy
- communicate the change vision
- empower broad-based action
- generate short-term wins
- consolidate gains and produce more change
- anchor new approaches in the culture
Leadership Styles

  - **Telling / Directing**
    - Leader takes a highly directive role, telling others what to do. Building a relationship with others is not a high priority. Leader makes all expectations clear.
  - **Selling/Coaching**
    - Leader guides followers by listening to them then advising them on how to accomplish goals. Leader does not tell them how to do it.
  - **Participating / Supporting**
    - Leader attempts to find out why followers are underperforming and determines how best to motivate them to perform better. Leader spends a lot of time listening, praising, and supporting.
  - **Delegating / Observing**
    - Leader gets out of the way of motivated and capable followers. Leader may keep a distant eye on the project.
Transformative Leaders

Characteristics of transformational leaders:
- They identify themselves as change agents.
- They are courageous individuals.
- They believe in people.
- They are value-driven.
- They are lifelong learners.
- They have the ability to deal with complexity.
- They are visionaries.
Key Principles of Servant Leadership: Robert Greenleaf

- Listening
  - Listening to others and to oneself
- Empathy
  - Accepting and understanding others, assuming good will
- Healing
  - Striving for wholeness and well-being
- Awareness
  - Committing oneself to full awareness of oneself and others
- Persuasion
  - Being consensus through persuasion
Servant Leadership: Robert Greenleaf

- **Conceptualization**
  - Examining problems from a conceptual perspective

- **Foresight**
  - Applying lessons from the past to the present, understanding consequences for the future

- **Stewardship**
  - Marshaling resources well

- **Commitment to the Growth of People**
  - Promoting the personal, spiritual, and professional growth of people

- **Building Community**
  - Identifying the best way to promote a sense of community and engagement
From Good to Great Leadership: Jim Collins

- Manifest Personal Humility or Compelling Modesty
- Project Success Beyond Self
- Accept Responsibility for Failure
- Promote a Learning Culture
- Work to Achieve, not to Avoid Failure
- Be Rigorous rather than Ruthless
- Encourage Self-Motivation for Meaningful Work
Readings


