

KEY CONCEPT STATEMENT

Service

Heather Brook Adams, Holly Hassel, Jessica Rucki, and K. Hyoejin Yoon

Submitted on behalf of the Conference of College Composition and Communication Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (CSWP)

The term “service” is vexed, particularly when understood as gendered labor central to the work of rhetoric and composition. Over the past thirty years, rhet/comp scholars have defined and redefined service in order to better identify, represent, and measure it as the demographics of the field have changed. The 1987 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) position statement “Scholarship in Composition: Guidelines for Faculty, Deans and Department Chairs” underscored service as a hidden activity that lies outside the most recognizable and compensable categories of professional work. By 1994, the American Association of University Professors labeled service a “vital contribution” to academic life warranting “appropriate recognition and reward” (46). Rhet/comp scholars extended these conversations by connecting the devaluation of service with the rise in writing program administration. By 1998, the Council of Writing Program Administrators championed “refiguring” WPA work in its “many manifestations” from service to “scholarly and intellectual” labor. Such developments can be charted against shifting gender demographics: in the mid-1980s, one-third of WPAs were women and two-thirds men, whereas by 2007 those proportions were reversed (Charlton and Rose 118-19).

More generally, service remains an important professional expectation that shapes the work of rhet/comp teacher-scholars. Simultaneously, feminists teaching composition have a complex relationship to service because of a key paradox. On the one hand we realize that through service we gain “opportunities to make a difference” (Adler-Kassner and Roen 2) individually and institutionally, thereby shaping the teaching and learning conditions of our colleagues and students. On the other hand, those same opportunities risk undermining feminist principles, key among them the equitable distribution of labor and power. Increasingly, service work in rhet/comp—especially program administration—falls to women and continues to be invisible or devalued despite efforts to raise its intellectual and institutional profile.

Given these circumstances, women teaching composition and performing service (as rhet/comp scholars, instructors, current or future WPAs, etc.) are, in many ways, still the titular “women in the basement” (Miller 121) laboring for a psychic income that is too often their only reward (Schell 38). Further, the changing figurative and material economics of higher education and an increasingly neoliberal climate in academia make the time ripe for reassessing the feminization of composition studies (see Hogan). Most universities now structure their labor force so that contingent faculty are left out of opportunities for professional development, decisions about curriculum, and discussions about student learning outcomes and program development, etc.¹ This exclusion is deeply gendered, entrenching a largely female workforce in low-status and disempowered positions relative to the work they do.

In light of ambiguous definitions of service—encompassing everything from committee work to governance which is often limited to the permanent/tenure-track faculty, as well as the ongoing decline in those positions—we question the implications of concentrating programmatic leadership in fewer hands. Furthermore, we are concerned with the resulting increase in the distance between the curricular, theoretical, and scholarly work that informs the development of the teaching of writing and the women on the frontlines teaching these courses. In addition, the rapid recent decrease in permanent lines will inevitably reshape contemporary service expectations of the rhet/comp field and its sizeable, female-dominated, contingent workforce. Finally, we are concerned with how new trends, such as online course delivery, will increase the invisibility of some work, including both teaching and service (see Steiger).

In response to these unsatisfactory labor conditions, the CCCC’s Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession seeks to further a feminist understanding of women’s current service, particularly in relation to contingency and gendered working conditions (Committee). We aim to create a more well-defined picture of service in our field through a crowd-sourced, data-driven “map” of service activities in rhet/comp (CSWP, “Service Map”). The project currently reflects the service experiences of 120 women professionals in our discipline. A majority of respondents are tenured faculty members (39%) who report “Program Coordinator” as their most commonly held primary service responsibility. This preliminary result leads us to consider the relationship between service and administrative work, especially the forms of administrative work pursued by women writing professionals. We wonder, for example, how different institutions value this work and how women are compensated for it. Knowing that at least some administrative roles are construed as service, or institutional housework, we also wonder when and under what

conditions they are also understood as critical work undertaken by change agents (Hart).

Conducting further analyses, collecting additional data, and reviewing statements like the Portland Resolution guidelines for WPAs² are all necessary steps toward accurately mapping service in the profession. Ultimately, we hope our efforts, in conjunction with others, can help our field set an agenda for fully seeing and assessing service by:

- characterizing the complex local, institutional sites and types of service taken up within our field, especially by women,
- investigating the impact of service on institutional and programmatic survival,
- considering service in light of increasing contingency.

These three aims position us to transform our map from a spotty and two-dimensional representation to one with increasing dimensionality. Expanding the service map will deepen discussions meant to:

- advocate for greater recognition of service as intellectual labor of content experts,
- challenge hierarchies perpetuated by institutional practices detrimental to women's personal and professional well-being,
- reframe and revalue service and individuals' dynamic relationships to it.

We invite *Peitho* readers to help by [participating in our survey](#) and encouraging others to do the same. We also invite readers to deepen their awareness of service, feminism, and ever-changing institutional landscapes, particularly by attending (and proposing) conference sessions on such issues, attending the Feminist Workshop and the CSWP's Feminist Network SIG at the CCCC annual convention, and actively participating in the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric. Conversations within these networks can help us all more fully situate and understand service as a key concept for feminist scholars in our field.

Notes

- 1 See Schell and Stock; Mendenhall; Doe; Harris; see also Fall 2007 and September 2014 *Forum* newsletters and pieces by Arnold et al., Bilia et al., Cubberly, Cucciare et al., and Zobel in a *College English* special issue on contingency.

- 2 The Portland Resolution provides guidelines for the work of WPAs, including statements on working conditions and the broad scope of responsibilities and resources required for the job.

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About the Authors

Heather Brook Adams is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Alaska Anchorage and a member of the CCCC Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession and the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition. A feminist historiographer, Heather explores issues of motherhood, reproduction, and rhetorical shaming. Heather's additional projects investigate visuality, feminism and indigeneity, qualitative and rhetorical research methods, and rhetorical genre theory. Her recent publications appear in *Women's Studies in Communication and Composition Forum*. At UAA, Heather teaches *Rhetorical Theory and Gender Rhetorics*.

Holly Hassel is Professor of English and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Marathon County in Wausau, WI, where she began teaching in 2002 after earning a Ph.D. in English from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her work on teaching and learning in first-year writing and women's and gender studies courses has appeared in *Feminist Teacher*, *College English*, and *College Composition and Communication*. She is the co-author of *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies* (Routledge, 2015) and incoming editor of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*.

Jessica Rucki recently graduated with her Master's degree in English from West Chester University. Her academic background is a diverse mosaic of undergraduate and graduate level studies in theoretical linguistics, anthropology, and literary studies. Her scholarly interests center on ethnographic writing, qualitative research, and visual rhetoric, in addition to the professional narratives of women scholars in higher education. In her free time Jessica volunteers at a non-profit writing center for inner city youth in Philadelphia. She is currently applying to PhD programs.

K. Hyoejin Yoon is Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. She is Professor of English and focused her scholarly work on feminist/critical pedagogy, affect, gender and race studies. Her work has been published in *JAC*, *College Literature*, *RSA's Re/Framing Identifications*, and a forthcoming chapter on graduate writing co-authored with former graduate students in *Postgraduate writing pedagogies and research literacies in the 21st century*, ed. Cecile Badenhorst and Cally Guerin. Her most recent focus has been on institutional concerns regarding gender, race, equity and labor, including a qualitative research project on the experiences of women rhet/comp professionals in the field. She is co-chair of the CCCC Committee on the Status of Women, and co-chair of the Asian/Asian American Caucus. At WCU, she is co-chair of the President's Commission on the Status of Women.