PERFORMING FEMINISM
AND ADMINISTRATION
IN RHETORIC
AND COMPOSITION STUDIES

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments v
Introduction: Actions Un/Becoming a Feminist Administrator: Troubled Intersections between Feminist Principles and Administrative Practices vii
Krista Ratcliffe & Rebecca Rickly

PART I The Politics of Connecting Ethics, Theory, and Praxis 3
1 What's Ethics Got to Do With It?: Feminist Ethics and Administrative Work in Rhetoric and Composition
Carrie Leverenz

2 Checking the Source (book): Supplemental Voices in the Administrative Genre
Jeanne Gunner 19

3 When Theory and Practice Collide: Becoming a Feminist Practitioner
Sibylle Gruber 31

PART II Performing WPA Work: Challenging Feminist Assumptions About Collaboration
4 Collaborative Writing Administration as Intellectual Inquiry
Lynée Lewis Gaillet & Letizia Guglielmo 53

5 The Maternal Melodrama of Writing Program Administration
Christine Farr 67

6 Interrupting Collaboration: Feminist Writing Program Administration and the Question of Status
Ilene Crawford & Donna Strickland 77

7 Three Models of Mentorship: Feminist Leadership and the Graduate Student WPA
Julie Nelson Christoph, Rebecca S. Nowacek, Mary Lou Odom & Bonnie Kathryn Smith 93
WHAT'S ETHICS
GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Feminist Ethics and Administrative Work in Rhetoric and Composition

Carrie Leverenz

A decade or so ago, when I was interviewing for my first academic job, I
had an early lesson in the different ways one might view academic adminis-
tration. It was a snowy day in early February, and I was being ushered
around a large midwestern university by the English Department chair, a
middle-aged man who was dressed in a full-length coat and drove a red
sports car, very low to the ground. Although I wasn’t interviewing for an
expressly administrative job, it became clear during my visit that whoever
they hired as an Assistant Professor of Composition would be expected to
direct the writing program in short order. As a graduate student, I had done
a fair bit of administrative work, and most of the colleges that interviewed
me were clearly interested in my administrative experience. That was not a
surprise. What did surprise me was the chair’s casual attitude toward
administration. “How hard is it to be Chair?” he asked, rhetorically. “All
you have to do is figure out how to spend a million dollars.” For my sec-
ond lesson, fast forward 8 years and I am sitting across the desk from a Vice
Provost trying to make my case that we should do a national search for a
writing center director rather than advertise only locally. He tries hard to
be sympathetic to my position while clearly preferring to fill the vacancy
quickly. After all, he tells me, in his soothing Texas drawl, “What’s administration but budget and personnel, budget and personnel?” More recently, a graduate student doing an independent study on writing program administrators asked why the work we value so much is not always valued by the institutions for which we work. “We’re the ones who make our jobs hard,” I said. “What most institutions want writing program administrators to do is to put students in classes and hire teachers and deal with complaints. We’re the ones who want to do more.”

For feminist administrators, the urge to “do more” includes not just the goal of improving the programs for which we are responsible, but also the goal of changing the institution. This is not just an issue of our personal and professional development, it is not just an issue of professional ethics, but rather an issue of social change. As we work in the public institutions, we are not just workers, we are also community members, and we are responsible for the well-being of the community. This is a responsibility that we cannot ignore.

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within feminist theory—the nature of the female subject and of gender more broadly conceived, as well as the relation of gender to other social markers like race, class, sexual orientation, country of origin, and so on—have consequences for feminist ethics. Acknowledging that there is no single approach, Eve Browning Cole and Susan Coultrap-McQuin, in their introduction to *Explorations in Feminist Ethics,* nevertheless identify several characteristics of feminist ethics:

[T]hey are grounded in a feminist perspective; they seek to challenge traditional, some would say “masculinist,” moral assumptions; they frequently seek to reinterpret the moral significance of women’s cultural experience as care-givers; they emphasize the importance of particularity, connection, and context; and they strive to reinterprer moral agency, altruism, and other relevant concepts from a feminist perspective. (2)

In the following, I discuss some of these principles in more detail as they apply to administration in Rhetoric and Composition.

**STANDPOINT THEORY**

It seems obvious to say that feminist administrators operate from a position that acknowledges the widespread oppression of women as a social group and seeks to overturn such oppression. Yet it is not so obvious to say what that means in actual administrative practice, where principles such as fairness and objectivity typically trump efforts to give support to members of a specific group. One WPA told me that she only recently realized that a lot of her responses to the teachers she supervises were affected by their gender. The fact that she realized the influence of the teacher’s gender only after the fact, and that she felt vaguely uneasy about it, demonstrates how difficult it can be to bring together our feminist commitment to advance the interests of women and our administrative commitment to advance equally the interests of everyone whom we serve. Perhaps this is not surprising given that a focus on individual rights and equality have dominated discussion of ethics for hundreds of years. One important insight of feminist ethics is the recognition that any argument about ethical principles, even arguments about rights and equality, is necessarily an argument from a specific position. Moral values proposed to be universal or objective inevitably represent the values of the group proposing them; claims of universality typically come from dominant groups that think of themselves as the norm. In a well-known example, Carol Gilligan, in her 1982 volume, *In a

What’s Ethics got to do With it?*

Different Voice, exposed the way that Lawrence Kohlberg’s moral development scale failed to apply to the women in her study not because the women in her study were morally immature but because Kohlberg’s scale was derived from a study of White, male, Harvard students whom Kohlberg likely thought of as the “norm” (or a norm that we should all aspire to), but that clearly did not represent everyone.

This idea that there can be no universal moral code, that every moral principle reflects a particular set of values and beliefs, is related to a controversial but still important idea within feminist philosophy, that of “standpoint” theory. Originally articulated as a critique of the ideal of objectivity in science, feminist standpoint theory claims, in feminist philosopher of science Sandra Harding’s terms, that “some kinds of social locations and political struggles advance the growth of knowledge, contrary to the dominant view that politics and local situatedness can only block scientific inquiry” (26). Nancy Hartsock, in “The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism,” identifies five claims of standpoint theory:

1. Material life . . . not only structures but sets limits on the understanding of social relations.
2. If material life is structured in fundamentally opposing ways for two different groups, one can expect that the vision of each will represent an inversion of the others, and in systems of domination the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse.
3. The vision of the ruling class (or gender) structures the material relations in which all parties are forced to participate.
4. In consequence, the vision available to the oppressed group must be struggled for.
5. As an engaged vision, the understanding of the oppressed, the adoption of a standpoint exposes the real relations among human beings as inhuman, points beyond the present, and carries a historically liberatory role. (103)

According to Harding, perhaps the most significant contribution of feminist standpoint theory is the commitment to “map the practices of power, the way the dominant institutions and their conceptual frameworks create and maintain oppressive relations” (31). As a principle of feminist ethics, standpoint theory insists that we struggle to see how our views of ourselves, our work, and the work of the university have been shaped by those in power, and that we then work to expose systems of oppression in the university that benefit those in power at the expense of others. As Harding puts it, “feminist standpoint projects are always socially situated and politically engaged in pro-democratic ways” (32). This commitment to making institutions more democratic obviously extends to all oppressed groups: people of color, underpaid workers, people whose religion or language or
A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education, goes beyond Gilligan’s description of a specific group of women’s moral experience to argue explicitly for the benefits of a moral education based on an ethics of care. Noddings identifies several key characteristics of an ethic of care. First, it is an act involving two actors—the "one caring" and the "cared for" (4). Second, it does not involve the application of general principles, nor can it be universalized. In Noddings’ words, "my attention is not on judgment and not on the particular acts we perform but on how we meet the other morally" (5). Another feature of caring is that it involves the displacement of one’s own interests and an attempt to apprehend the reality of another: "Caring is largely reactive and responsive" (14, 19). Caring also must be freely chosen; it cannot be coerced. As such, caring for another requires that one also care for oneself so that care for another can be for the other’s sake and not for one’s own sake. As Grace Clement notes, "unless a version of the ethic of care allows for the autonomy of the caregiver and the care recipient, the ethic of care will be deficient on moral and on feminist grounds" (21–2). When operating from an ethics of care, decisions and actions are thus motivated not by the protection of individual rights, the application of a universal principle like “fairness,” nor by a calculation of the greatest good for the greatest number of people, but by the desire to act in a caring way toward this person or group at this particular time in this particular context. As a result, as Noddings notes, actions motivated by an ethic of care will vary from one instance to another: “Variation is to be expected if the one claiming to care really cares, for her engrossment is in the variable and never fully understood, in the particular other, in a particular set of circumstances” (24).

Like standpoint theory, the “ethics of care” has not been without its critics. Although one goal of feminist ethics is to take into better account the lived experiences of women (which for many involves caregiving responsibilities), Noddings’ concept of “care” has come under fire from feminists who accuse her of identifying caring as an (inherently) feminine behavior without considering the degree to which women have been socialized into their caregiver roles for the benefit of a patriarchal system. Noddings has defended her ethic of care by arguing that caring is not an inherently female quality and that both men and women need a moral education that teaches them to care. What has been widely accepted by feminists is Noddings’ insistence that, rather than grounding moral decisions in abstract or general principles, ethical decisions should be made in the context of specific human relationships where feelings, not just rationality, play a key role (Cole and Coultrap-McQuin 2). Feminists committed to large-scale social change have questioned the feasibility of an ethic of care for national and international action given its focus on local and individual caring relationships. But scholar Sara Ruddick shows how an ethics of care

Perhaps the most frequently occurring term in feminist ethics theory is care, a term that officially entered feminist moral philosophy when Carol Gilligan concluded that the women she studied made moral decisions based on "an injunction to care" for others, rather than on "an injunction to respect the rights of others," as men often do (Gilligan, In a Different Voice 19). Nel Noddings, a philosopher of education, in her 1984 book, Caring:
could be relevant globally by using the concept of what she calls maternal thinking as the basis of a critique of militarism and war. Similarly, Joan Tronto extrapolates elements of care—attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness—that she believes can serve as the basis of ethical actions on a larger scale (Malhefer 390). Granted, many feminist administrators already think of themselves as motivated by a caring attitude toward those whom they supervise and with whom they interact. Yet an ethics of care demands more; it demands that care be the dominant term in all of our interactions with others. For example, think of what it would mean to enact a plagiarism policy that is informed by an ethics of care. It means that rather than applying a straight rule—using the words of others without documentation results in an F in the course—each case must be considered individually, taking into account who the student is and what kind of work he or she has been doing, what the circumstances are around the specific instance of plagiarism, who the teacher is, what kind of assignment she has given, and what kind of teaching she has done. Whatever administrative decision is made by the WPA must balance care for the student’s interests with care for the teacher and also must take into account the responsibility to care for the other students in the class. A plagiarism policy based on an ethics of care might result in different penalties for what looks like the same infractions, a move that, ironically, can appear unethical to those who believe one should objectively apply a universal principle. When we imagine an ethics of care on a larger scale, such as in tenure and promotion cases, it becomes clear how difficult this change would be in many institutions. Gone would be the single standard of a scholarly monograph and in its place would be a more complex assessment of professional work that might vary dramatically from person to person. Obviously, it is easier to apply an ethics of care in arenas where we as feminist administrators have primary responsibility and much harder in larger arenas where we must persuade others—our nonfeminist peers or upper administration—to act on the basis of an ethics of care. Yet our commitment to change motivates us to make just such arguments.

THE CONCRETE OTHER

Feminist ethics theorists have been influenced by multiculturalism and poststructuralism and by the work of lesbian feminists and women of color to see gender as only one category of difference that intersects with race, class, sexual orientation, nation, and so on, to produce a complex array of subject positions that are hierarchically arranged. Thus feminist ethics questions not just the immorality of gender oppression, but other kinds of oppression as well. In addition to countering oppression against groups marked as culturally different, feminists have also sought ways to value difference in the process of moral decision making. As Margaret Urban writes, “Differently situated people will tend to have different moral problems or experience similar ones differently” (368). Feminist philosopher Seyla Benhabib likewise seeks an ethics that attends to differences in individual perspectives, but she also believes that such an ethics can result in universal principles that everyone can recognize as applicable to them. Benhabib rejects ethical theories that claim individuals can reason from some objective position outside of their personal history. She also rejects the theories that claim we can consider the perspectives of some “generalized other” by placing ourselves behind what philosopher John Rawles calls a “veil of ignorance,” wherein we reason about moral principles by setting aside our actual social positions. According to Benhabib, the setting aside of one’s social position when theorizing about ethics is neither possible nor desirable because, “for the democratic citizen and economic agent, the moral issues that touch her most deeply arise in the personal domain” (Benhabib 185). At the same time, communities cannot be good or just if individuals consider only their personal interests. Rather than trying to imagine what it is like to be “the other,” Benhabib insists that processes be put into place whereby differing voices engage in conversations about what will be shared moral principles. In her words,

Neither the concreteness nor the otherness of the “concrete other” can be known in the absence of the voice of the other. The viewpoint of the concrete other emerges as a distinct one only as a result of self-definition. It is the other who makes us aware both of her concreteness and her otherness. Without engagement, confrontation, dialogue and even a “struggle for recognition” in the Hegelian sense, we tend to constitute the otherness of the other by projection and fantasy or ignore it in indifference. (167-8)

Such ethical processes of communication, referred to as communicative ethics or discourse ethics, depend on two conditions, according to Benhabib:

(1) that we recognize the right of all beings capable of speech and action to be participants in the moral conversation—I will call this the principle of universal moral respect; (2) these conditions further stipulate that within such conversations each has the same symmetrical rights to various speech acts, to initiate new topics, to ask for reflection about the presuppositions of the conversation, etc. Let me call this the principle of egalitarian reciprocity. (Benhabib 29)
Perhaps the most obvious way to apply the principle of the concrete other—with its instantiation via the principles of universal moral respect and egalitarian reciprocity—is to include representatives of all affected constituencies in decision-making procedures. Especially important is the inclusion of voices typically excluded. In how many institutions, for example, are adjunct instructors given any say in the policies that govern their work? Adjuncts rarely have voting rights or serve on committees that choose textbooks, design curriculum, set policies for instructors or students, and so on. Even more rare is the presence of adjuncts on committees that determine adjunct salaries or benefits. Although feminist administrators can support unionization and collective bargaining for contingent labor and other workers, in the absence of such efforts or even in institutions where such efforts have already been successful, they can still advocate for the inclusion of all voices. What about students? Should student representatives also be included in the making of policies that affect them? It seems that they should. Furthermore, working to include the voice of the "concrete other" is not always a matter of seeking out the obviously excluded. At one institution where I worked, the two tenure-track faculty who served as the WPA and WC director and who together were responsible for training and supervising more than 100 graduate TAs were replaced by the Dean with staff lines that did not have departmental voting rights, thus giving these new administrators little say in a department where they played an essential role. Given the difficulty of making any policy changes in large state institutions, it would be tempting to simply denounce this situation as unfortunate but unchangeable. Yet feminist administrators' commitment to change, to care, and to include the voices of those "othered" by the institution demands that we work against such policies.

All of us know women—or have been those women—trapped in administrative roles whose agency is structurally limited. Recognizing these limits as a form of oppression that benefits those in power, as standpoint theory suggests, is a first step. Finding allies, especially feminist allies, willing to work for change is another. For administrators in such a position, assuming as much agency as one can—asking to attend meetings, to be informed about decisions, offering an opinion on issues that affect one's work while continuing to make arguments about changing one's official status—is another important step. Obviously, feminist administrators with more agency (e.g., tenure) have a heightened responsibility to advocate for increased agency for others even in the face of staunch resistance. In one liberal arts college where I worked as both an adjunct and a full-time instructor, a feminist chair worked hard to give part-time teachers voting rights in the department. The transition wasn't easy for anyone. Part timers (several of whom had worked in that capacity for 20 years) were used to being excluded from department business and thus felt awkward attending meetings and were hesitant to speak. Tenure-track faculty who had opposed their inclusion ignored their presence. But over time, having a vote gave those part-time teachers a reason to take positions on important department issues, and knowing that part timers could vote against their proposals made tenure-track faculty pay attention to the needs and interests of part-time teachers.

**PROCESS**

Postmodern theory also has had an impact on feminist ethics. If we accept the challenge that postmodernism poses to ethical reasoning, according to Zygmunt Bauman, then we must accept that postmodern ethics are characterized by (a) an inability to believe in the possibility of a nonequivocal moral code, (b) accepting that there are no innate moral principles, and (c) recognizing that moral decisions are often made in the face of contradictory impulses. In Bauman's view, modernist attempts to reason out an ethical dilemma by dividing it into parts, seeking agreement on terms and the rules that should apply in a particular case, result in an oversimplification of the kinds of complex moral problems we need to act on in the real world (9–11). For Bauman, however, the absence of universal or foundational principles of moral action does not mean a descent into relativism. Although postmodern ethics teaches that, whatever we do, we will never know that we are "right," the absence of certainty requires that we be even more ethically sensitive in the process of making decisions and reflecting on the consequences of those decisions.

Margaret Urban Walker makes explicit connections between postmodern and feminist ethics when she notes the degree to which feminist epistemologies "reject foundationalism that posits given, self-evident, or incorrigible bases of justification" and "urge us instead to examine actual practices of forming and fixing beliefs..." (368). Walker adds that this process of examining moral beliefs should be exercised in the context of groups, rather than by individuals alone. In her words, "Feminist ethics profits from viewing moral knowledge as a communal product and process constructed and sustained in interactions among people, rather than an individually action-guiding theory within people" (369). One goal of a feminist process of ethical decision making, then, beyond the inclusion of multiple points of view (especially less privileged points of view), is to make the process as transparent as possible. This may mean something as simple as reporting to constituents how decisions are made (and by whom) as well as what decisions are made. When I was in graduate school, graduate students were chosen to serve as senior faculty's administrative and research assistants by an
unknown process that seemed to involve being plucked by some invisible hand into these privileged positions. Although as a graduate student I benefited from this invisible process, I had many competent friends who complained bitterly that they were never asked to serve in these prestigious roles. When I suggested that faculty write job descriptions, solicit applications, and conduct interviews, one faculty member expressed concern that she would then have to reject people, as if choosing a research assistant through an invisible process wasn't also a rejection of everyone else who was interested in the job. Although inclusive, transparent decision-making processes do make administrators more accountable for their decisions, it is this process of being accountable that makes the decision ethical, not just the outcome of the decision.

Equally important in a feminist process of ethical decision making is the commitment to revisit decisions to determine their effects and to make changes where necessary. In Walker's words, "This process allows us to see what our terms and arrangements really are, what it takes to sustain them, how their costs are distributed, and how habitable is the common life to which they lead, for people variously placed within it" (370). Although we as individuals can certainly reflect on the consequences of our decisions, Seyla Benhabib would remind us that doing so in the absence of those who are affected places us in danger of projecting, distorting, or ignoring the actual experience of those concrete others. Realistically, we cannot spend every minute of our day consulting everyone about how our decisions affect them, but we can build in regular opportunities for constituencies to respond to our efforts through staff meetings, surveys, and formal evaluations of our administrative work.

**CHALLENGES TO FEMINIST ADMINISTRATION**

It would be unethical to espouse these principles of feminist administrative ethics without also considering the difficulties—and risks—one is likely to face when attempting to enact them. First and most obviously, feminist administrative practice is complicated by institutionalized assumptions about what good administrators are like, assumptions based primarily on masculinist models. Although WPAs and others who work primarily with students and instructors who have the least power are frequently women, WPAs continue to struggle to see their administrative work valued, making them especially vulnerable to unstated assumptions about how the job should be done. In 10 years of administration work at two different universities, my administrative work has never been formally evaluated in the way that teaching evaluations and peer-reviewed publications constitute criteria-driven evaluations of those other important parts of my job. Evaluations of the various chairs and deans under whom I have served also have been infrequent and informal and have not been based on explicit criteria. This evidence indicates that evaluation of administrative work often depends on local assumptions (or the assumptions of the next administrator up the ladder) about how to do that work effectively.

For example, in "Who's the Boss?: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Collaborative Administration for Untenured WPAs," Eileen Schell describes the difficulties of enacting feminist administrative principles in the context of sharing administrative responsibilities with a male colleague, an experience that exposed unstated assumptions about how administrative work should be conducted. For example, the autonomous and authoritative decision making of her male colleague seemed to him to be more efficient than the process of taking the time to "mull over decisions and get multiple opinions" that Schell preferred (75).

Another problem that Schell experienced as a codirector is that students, teachers, and other administrators continued to see her as the primary caregiver of the composition program. As Schell reports,

> [Gender stereotyping played a role in the perception that I was more nurturing and approachable] and that I participated in reinforcing that stereotype with my attentive, caretaking behaviors. Feminist educational theorists and sociologists . . . have argued that such gendered response and role constructions often place academic women (especially untenured women) in the "double bind" of taking on disproportionate service and mentoring obligations when most need to be engaged in developing their own scholarship and teaching." (Costs" 75)

As another female WPA put it in a survey on gender differences in writing program administration: "It's not so much our lack of status as our female conditioning to be very service-oriented, placating, and caring. These qualities cause us to attract responsibility, not rewards" (Barr-Ebest 66). Not only do these qualities cause us to attract responsibility, they also can lead to a loss of respect and authority in institutional cultures where being firm, tough, and independent are more highly valued as leadership qualities than are collaboration and caring. As Schell notes, the extra time and energy required to play the care-giver role inevitably takes time and energy away from the teaching and research that are often the more valued (or more rigorously evaluated) parts of our job, which is especially problematic for untenured administrators ("Costs" 74-5).

A second challenge to a feminist ethics of administration may come in the form of resistance from those concrete others whom we seek to include for their benefit and the benefit of the program. For teachers who have
never been permitted to choose their own textbooks or design their own syllabus, the responsibility can be daunting. An increase in responsibility—even if it means more agency—typically results in more work. Adjunct instructors or graduate TAs who have been socialized by their lack of choice to put limited thought into their teaching may balk at what we deem to be a valuable freedom. Similarly, for low-paid workers who must supplement their incomes by teaching at various places, often at a distance from each other, the sudden invitation to serve on a committee or collaborate on a project may be perceived as simply more work without more compensation. In “Lessons of the Feminist Workplace,” Louise Wertherbe Phelps discusses the complex challenge of creating a writing program based on feminist principles, during which time she experienced just such a reaction from those she supervised. As she describes it, “Many teachers in my program were angry, anxious, and resistant to expectations for professionalization” (312). She goes on to remark that,

even every aspect of my vision of a writing program as utopian project is questionable (and was immediately questioned) as both impractical and at least potentially unethical. In treating teachers as moral agents—adults—and providing opportunities for curricular control and leadership, I exposed them, perhaps involuntarily, to new risks and pressures while possibly exploiting their capabilities and energy without adequate reward. (313)

Even when disempowered employees embrace the offer of greater agency, the move can still be problematic. For example, I have known instructors hired into temporary positions who have been eager to participate in program or departmental service in the hope that being a good citizen would increase their chances of being hired permanently, although no such opportunity existed. In this context, they would have been better off spending their extra time doing things that would help them get a permanent position, which in the current job economy means publishing. When there is no immediate chance that an instructor’s working conditions can be improved, we should be careful how we articulate the benefits of fuller participation. Instead of requiring attendance at meetings (unless a stipend can be offered), we might instead ask for participation in the form of a survey or an e-mail exchange. We also can invite participation that will benefit contingent faculty in ways they value. If a part-time wishes to advance her career or if professional development counts for merit evaluation, inviting contingent faculty to lead a workshop or participate in a conference panel may benefit them more than requiring attendance at workshops we lead. That means, of course, making an effort to know what kind of career each person we supervise wants. Even as we seek to include those with different experiences and perspectives, we need to be especially mindful of differing material conditions as well.

A third force working against the enactment of feminist administrative ethics can be our own assumptions about how to be a good administrator. As Amy Goodburn and I suggested in an earlier essay, sometimes it is the “bureaucrat within” that is the feminist administrator’s worst enemy (Goodburn and Leverenz 290). In As If Learning Mattered, Richard Miller argued that it is naive to think that as administrators we can act for change within institutions without acknowledging that we are bureaucrats whose job it is to do the institution’s bidding, which Miller argues is essentially bureaucratic work. We are not independent agents or resistance fighters but employees—often tenured, permanent employees. In his discussion of the disillusionment that many successful academics feel, Miller notes how James Scott’s Domination and the Arts of Resistance applies: “If such a thing as ‘false consciousness’ may be said to exist, it is to be found not among the disenfranchised, as theories of dominant ideology would have us believe, but among those who have risen through the educational system and have come to believe deeply in its values” (R. Miller, As If 195). Having become successful academics and having been deemed worthy of leadership roles means we likely know a good deal about how to do what is asked of us and have thus inevitably internalized at least some of the institution’s bureaucratic values. For example, when a faculty member at my graduate institution was denied tenure, in part, because most of his scholarship was collaborative, one of my feminist colleagues commented that, because he knew collaboration was going to be a problem, he should have done less collaborative work. This from a woman who had published collaboratively, had written a dissertation on collaboration, and espoused its value. As feminist administrators, we must be ever aware of this tension between our need to be successful in traditional terms and our desire to change those terms. It takes courage and vision to turn away from established measures of success and define success differently—to find as much satisfaction in achieving voting rights for part timers or establishing a more inclusive decision-making process as we do in that teaching award or publication in a prestigious journal.

If feminist philosophers like Margaret Urban Walker are right, and knowledge is created communally rather than individually, it follows that effective feminist work depends not on a single feminist administrator’s actions, but on the actions of a network of others with shared interests. If no such group exists on your campus, consider creating one. Teach a women’s studies course. Start a women’s reading group. It is equally important to connect with other feminist administrators or academics outside your institution to share war stories (is there a less masculinist metaphor?) and to get an outsider’s perspective on your own situation as
well as to explore models of feminist administration in place elsewhere. Finally, continue to read and theorize about feminist ethics. It can be both comforting and motivating to see your concerns reflected in the words of others, but it also is important to continue honing your own process of critical reflection by exploring how current theories of feminist ethics do and should inform your administrative work.

CHECKING THE SOURCE(BOOK)

Supplemental Voices in the Administrative Genre

Jeanne Gunner

In writing about the politics of performing feminist administration, a critical challenge is to resist the conventionally administrative approach to writing about administration. Such writing, cued by what can be identified as the administrative genre, is typically framed within a rhetoric that smooths over questions otherwise raised by political and feminist critiques. The conventional rhetoric of administration tends strongly to the monological, the linear, and the teleological, and, in so doing, references and reaffirms a normative and model-bound epistemology. Hewing to its conventional models, the administrative genre privileges abstraction over the complexities of local material conditions. The sourcebooks, resources, and problem-solving guides that embody the administrative genre direct those who write within it to assume and reproduce an ahistorical space and a politics of political cleansing, leading to a utopian valorization of seamlessness, transparency, and a uniform sensus communis. A Platonic impulse tempered by an Aristotelian method: In the rhetoric of the administrative genre, the truth emerges from material experience cleansed of the individuating, stripped to an essence that is then posited as the essence within particular local conditions. The case study. The scenario. The problem–solution framework. The decision-making heuristic. Guidelines, statements, principles, and standards.