Elder, Cristyn, Davila, Beth, Perryman-Clark, Staci and Rankins-Robertson, Sherry. *CWPA Position Statement on Bullying in the Workplace*. **Prepared by the Taskforce on WPA Workplace Bullying and charged by President Dominic DelliCarpini. Approved 2019.**

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The "Council of Writing Program Administrators' (CWPA) Position Statement on Bullying in the Workplace" is an essential document designed to help WPA leaders, individuals, programs, and departments identify and respond proactively to the phenomenon of workplace bullying. Prepared by the CWPA Taskforce comprised of Cristyn L. Elder, Beth Davila, Staci Perryman-Clark, and Sherry Rankins-Robertson, as charged by WPA President Dominic DelliCarpini, the CWPA statement is also embedded in an ongoing series of conversations and literature about bullying in the WPA workplace (see Craig and Perryman-Clark; Dardello; Elder and Davila; Lester). The statement, along with this vital literature, sets the stage for much-needed conversations and actions addressing bullying in "writing programs, WAC programs, writing centers, online, in the classroom, at faculty meetings, at professional conferences" and other places (para 1). As someone who has held leadership positions as a Department Chair, as a WPA, and as a Director of a mid-sized Ph.D. program, and who is often called upon to provide program reviews, I perused the statement with great interest and with an eye toward how such a statement will help those of us who have served in leadership roles create healthy and proactive departments and programs free of workplace bullying.

What is workplace bullying?

The CWPA statement defines WPA workplace "bullying as a persistent pattern of destructive behavior(s) that span a period of time, typically identified by scholars in a time frame of six months

or longer. Bullying can take the form(s) of excluding and isolating targets, undermining individuals and programs, exerting control over individuals and programs, and verbal and physical intimidation or attacks" (para 3). Specific examples of 22 bullying behaviors adapted from the *NAQ-R (Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised)* are listed below and indicate the multi-faceted nature of bullying in academic life.

1. Having information withheld from you, which affects your performance
2. Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work
3. Being ordered to do work below your level of competence
4. Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks
5. Having gossip and rumors spread about you
6. Being ignored or excluded
7. Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person, your attitudes, or your private life
8. Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger
9. Being the target of intimidating behaviors such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way
10. Receiving hints or signals from others that you should quit your job
11. Receiving repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes
12. Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach
13. Enduring persistent criticism of your errors or mistakes
14. Having your opinions ignored
15. Being the target of practical jokes carried out by people you don't get along with
16. Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines
17. Having allegations made against you
18. Experiencing excessive monitoring of your work

19. Imposing pressure not to claim something to which by right you are entitled (e.g., sick leave, holidays)
20. Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm
21. Being exposed to an unmanageable workload
22. Receiving threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse. (para 3)

What this list makes apparent is that bullying behaviors range from overt acts and gestures to more subtle hints, withholding behaviors, and verbal statements. What also becomes apparent is that bullying can target not only an individual or group of colleagues, but also larger structures such as departments or programs through the act of "program mobbing." As the report indicates: "Many of these behaviors have been treated as common working conditions for WPAs in existing scholarship. For example, WPA scholarship has regularly worked to address hostility in English departments that could likely be characterized as bullying if it persists over time" (para 4).

How pervasive is workplace bullying? Who is frequently targeted?

As the CWPA statement notes, Davila and Elder's survey of over 100 WPAs and connected stakeholders shows that as many as "84% of respondents report that they have experienced bullying in the WPA workplace at some point in their careers" (para 1). This response rate suggests that academic bullying can happen to almost anyone. However, are there individuals or groups who are more vulnerable to being bullied based on who they are and where they are located in the academic hierarchy?

Due to its hierarchical nature, higher education as a workplace often values, supports, and rewards specific bodies and identities more than others, and those bodies and identities have tended to be white, cis-gendered male, able-bodied, and heteronormative, usually occupying tenured, tenure-track, or administrative leadership roles, what researchers have referred to as the "white man template" (Reid and Curry). Thus, bullying behaviors may

often be levied at those who are perceived to be different than academe's anticipated normative body, and those affected may include women faculty and graduate students; LGBTQ faculty and graduate students; faculty and graduate students of color; faculty and graduate students who are living with disabilities, among others. Age may be a factor as well; older and younger faculty members may be targeted more often and in specific ways. The power of academic rank and title also may be used as a way to manipulate, threaten, and silence colleagues working off the tenure-track or graduate students. Even as there are workplace policies that are meant to address discrimination and harassment based on age, gender, race, sexual orientation, and disability, bullying behaviors can still be present and interconnected with harassing and discriminatory behaviors and are often acted out on the groups mentioned earlier. Higher education researchers have often noted that bullying and harassment, while they differ in terms of targeted behaviors, demonstrate some common tendencies, "overlaps and interrelationships between them. Both, for example, are likely to involve the abuse of power—though the derivation of such power may vary" (Simpson and Cohen 165).

As the CWPA statement indicates, bullying patterns can be connected to "being ordered to work below your competence and having key areas of your responsibility removed or replaced with trivial tasks" (e.g., Craig and Perryman-Clark; Dardello; Davila and Elder, "Responding") (para 4). Destructive gossip, rumor, innuendo and groupthink may also be used to control and regulate responses to specific bodies, especially those with less power and that do not fit a specific set of embodied and culturally coded expectations for the "normative body" in higher education. For instance, faculty of color who are the "only ones" in the department or program may be marginalized, excluded, ignored, as well as subject to discrimination and racist microaggressions (Frazier 3).Women faculty may be talked over, interrupted, mansplained, ignored, excluded, and dismissed as too aggressive, bossy, intimidating, or "crazy" as well as being harassed or discriminated against (Simpson and Cohen 170-74). LGBTQ faculty and graduate

students may face hostile responses, exclusionary behaviors, and belittling comments and also be subject to overt homophobic and transphobic patterns of discrimination. Faculty and graduate students living and working with disabilities may find themselves marginalized, ignored, and not included in specific department activities, which is, in turn, part of a pattern of denying access and not complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Faculty members with significant caregiving responsibilities such as single parents or elder care providers or faculty with chronic health conditions and illnesses may find that they are bullied into schedules and work arrangements that impact their ability to meet their caregiving responsibilities and remain healthy; they may be treated as lesser colleagues because they must balance home and work, health and well-being and not be available 24-7 to work or respond to emails. Contingent faculty may be bullied into silence about their concerns and questions due to their precarious job status, which connects to the long-standing pattern of contingent faculty being denied academic freedom due to their contingent status.

Age and rank are key factors for consideration in academic bullying cases as well. Younger colleagues may be lectured about not knowing enough or being too "junior" to make decisions or provide input on department or program matters; their opinions may be disregarded, and they may be bullied into silence. "Wait until you have tenure" can be useful advice, but it can also be used to control and silence untenured faculty who wish to contribute ideas and insights to their departments, especially ideas that revise structures of power and disrupt privilege. Older colleagues may also be dismissed for being too ill-informed, outdated or "out of touch," ignored and marginalized even as they are able to make vital contributions. These bullying behaviors may intersect with specific ageist acts such as the pressure to retire and "get out of the way." Clearly there is more to be said about how academic bullying contributes to a pattern of suppression, exclusion, and marginalization of specific bodies and identities and also how bullying connects to or feeds into overt patterns of discrimination and harassment. As universities and colleges push to diversify their

faculties and student populations and make their programs more inclusive and accessible, how have we, those of us who serve or have served as WPAs, WAC/WID, Graduate Directors, Writing Center directors as well as department chairs, ensured that diverse faculty and students will not be bullied as well as not harassed or discriminated against? The CWPA statement provides an opening for conversation, naming of the problems, and considered action.

Complicity and Consequences

The statement productively calls out the ways in which academic culture and academics are often complicit with bullying and "look the other way," tactics labeling bullying as simply a matter of "politics" or "working conditions." The CWPA statement effectively critiques and dismantles those dismissals, urging academics to understand and change the power relations that are at work in bullying actions and behaviors. The statement also makes it clear that workplace bullying has deep consequences that affect the health and well-being of individuals, programs, departments, and institutions. As noted in the report:

> Workplace bullying is destructive, causing oftentimes serious consequences to the targets of bullying, including diminished physical, mental, and emotional health. Targets of bullying report feelings of isolation, depression, heart conditions, hair loss, weight loss/gain, anxiety, stress on family relations, and thoughts of suicide (Elder and Davila, "Defining"). (para 6)

When bullying is not addressed or glossed over, the agenda can be set for further bullying and the creation of a toxic department atmosphere. Not responding to bullying "can normalize the behaviors and lead to more bullying and more bullies" (para 8). Furthermore, those who witness bullying may hesitate to speak out, participate, or engage in a department or program because they don't want to "stir up trouble" that may result in their being targeted as well. As the report notes, colleagues may leave their current positions, creating a revolving door that leaves the bullying

patterns unchecked. If those being bullied stay at an institution and nothing is done to stop the problematic behaviors, their productivity—as well as mental and physical health—is often affected, and they may feel silenced, withdrawing or minimizing participation in program and department activities as a protective measure.

The implications, though, for undergraduate students studying in a department or program where bullying has taken place or is taking place are not clear. How might students be affected when the faculty, instructors, and graduate students that teach them are being bullied or are the aggressors? How does bullying translate into classroom actions and pedagogies as well? How should departments and programs address students engaged in bullying behaviors toward their instructors or peers, especially toward those from underrepresented groups who are more harshly judged and treated within higher education?

Taking Action

Beyond naming and raising awareness around bullying, the CWPA statement also provides strategies for preventing and stopping workplace bullying. The document makes it clear that various stakeholders can take part in, enable, witness, and perpetrate bullying—whether it is "WPAs themselves, writing instructors, graduate student teachers, writing center tutors, and institutional administrators (e.g., department chairs, deans, and provosts)" (para 9). These stakeholders can also work to stop bullying. The statement offers five recommendations for addressing bullying, which I summarize briefly:

Recommendation #1: "Document and Report:" The report establishes that it is important to document the specifics of bullying (dates, times, frequency, effects on the person being bullied). Stakeholders should report bullying to supervisors, and, if not addressed or inadequately addressed by the supervisors, the person alleging bullying can go to the next institutional level (Dean's office, Provost's office, Human Resources) so documentation is contained in personnel files.

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Recommendation #2: "Establish Written Policies and Refer to Written Position Statements:" It is important to identify and address bullying because there are no federal laws protecting against it as there is with "sexual harassment, assault, and discrimination of protected classes" (para 11). If there is no written policy for a program, department, or college/university, an institutionally specific anti-bullying policy can be crafted and distributed via governance documents, program or department handbooks, and placed on syllabi. It is also important to have the opportunity for anonymous reporting structures for those in vulnerable positions such as undergraduate students, adjunct and untenured faculty, and graduate students. The CWPA report cites the University of New Mexico's "C09: Respectful Campus" policy as a productive example of institutional policy and also the "CCCC Position Statement on CCCC Standards for Ethical Conduct Regarding Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment, and Workplace Bullying" can be referenced.

Recommendation #3: "Reorganize as a Standalone Program or Department:" The statement also identifies the need to create alternative departmental structures if an entire unit is being bullied or "program mobbed," which happens when "a bully majority of another discipline within a department, for example, impedes the work of the writing program through various means" (para 12). Alternative department structures such as a stand-alone writing programs may provide relief from "mobbing" and create productive opportunities for growth and development free of program bullying (see the Independent Writing Departments and Programs Association IWDPA at independentwriting.org). As the statement notes, though, independent program status is not a panacea; some of the problematic power relations may continue and perhaps other challenges or threats may arise due to altered power structures.

Recommendation #4: "Provide Leadership Training:" One particularly savvy piece of advice is to prevent bullying by providing leadership training for those in positions of power, especially since bullying can be "perpetrated or enabled by administrators, either in their role as WPA, department chair, director of a disciplinary

program, dean, etc., and bullies may go on to serve in these additional administrative roles" (para 13). The statement points to the need for professional organizations like the CWPA and CCCC to provide such training on how to identify bullying, providing training on addressing it through panels, workshops, conferences and also through graduate education. In addition, it will be important to have the opportunity for stakeholders to learn conflict management strategies, "including how to have difficult conversations with stakeholders about power and equity and how to address bullies who use litigation as a threat in an effort to protect themselves and their destructive behavior" (para 13).

Recommendation #5: "Seek Support Beyond the Institution:" The CWPA statement also acknowledges that seeking support beyond the institution may be necessary through independent HR departments, ombuds offices, teacher unions, or through CWPA resources such as the <u>CWPA Consultant Evaluator Service</u>, the <u>CWPA Mentoring Project,</u> and the <u>CWPA Labor Resource Center</u>. The statement does not spend time discussing pathways to legal action, but seeking legal recourse is a possibility as well.

Moving Forward

The "CWPA Position Statement on Bullying in the Workplace" is a much-needed resource that should be widely distributed, discussed, and implemented within departments, programs, universities, and colleges. Academic units would be well-advised to proactively bring the CWPA statement to departmental meetings to discuss, engage, and strategize about. As the statement notes, academic bullying is often naturalized and normalized and thought to be a "rite of passage," which can result in a toxic department or program atmosphere. Discussing the statement up front with various department and program constituencies will hopefully provoke introspection and an examination of what makes a productive and open department, writing program, or writing center free of bullying and toxicity and focused on supporting **all colleagues**.

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