

Radiant Figures: Visual Rhetorics in Everyday Administrative Context, edited by Rachel Gramer, Logan Bearden, and Derek Mueller. Computers and Composition Digital Press/Utah State UP, 2021. n.p. (digital publication).

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How powerful is visual language in rhetoric & composition? How can everyday writing program data be generative? One place to find answers to these questions is in the digital book *Radiant Figures: Visual Rhetorics in Everyday Administration*. Edited by Rachel Gramer, Logan Bearden, and Derek Mueller, this book advocates for visual rhetoric's power to uncover the latent potency of data for writing program administrators (WPAs). In this book, the alphabetic mode of representing WPA work is deemphasized; instead, the authors of each chapter opt for visual approaches to representing WPA work and data. The use of visual artifacts in making sense of a WPA's past operations, present conditions, and future prospects—which the editors call *VizAdmin*—has far-reaching impacts and advantages.

The book proceeds from several premises: one, that the visual mode has gained prominence over other representational modes (Rockenbach and Fabian 27); two, that visual artifacts are a great simplifier of information; three, that visuals make data and information lucid for many kinds of audiences; and, four, that visuals can assist in the understanding of complex information. To put it simply, the book emphasizes how visual delineation and depiction (and the attendant need among WPAs to be trained sufficiently in creating such images) can generate larger implications in a push for a broader administrative reform within and outside of writing programs. In the introductory part of this book, the editors “posit *VizAdmin* as a term [...] signifying a philosophical orientation to the work of WPA, one that understands, accounts for, and embraces the rhetorical potential in the creation and circulation of everyday visuals.” By representing data, information, and facts about WPA visually, it is possible to make sense of how WPA functions, including its complications and hurdles.

The audience for the project is clear: This book will be useful for WPAs who want to have a framework for crafting programmatic visions, mapping curricula, depicting programmatic concerns, informing multiple kinds of audiences about program work, and deciding on particular courses of action—and who are open to learning to do these tasks visually. Through crafted charts, diagrams, graphs, images, animations, tabulations, pictorials, and more, the figures in this book show many parameters of current WPA work: changes in student enrollment, a pattern of student support, ratios of student completion rates and attrition, the proportion of allocated faculty and class size, continuity

of funding, institutional measures of student retention, connections between placement and students' academic performance, and others.

The book is divided into two parts: the first part contains 12 different chapters by authors who are noted for their digital dexterity, visual versatility, graphic gumption, and data-driven and bibliometric know-how; the second part comprises seven response essays. Because the second part is a collection of responses on the preceding chapters, I focus the review here on the first part, taking a chapter-by-chapter approach that, though plodding, highlights the exciting and varied combinations of rhetorical strategies, visual genres, and institutional contexts that constitute each chapter.

The first chapter, by Julia Voss and Heather Turner, treats course scheduling as a recurrent administrative challenge for WPAs. Voss and Turner maintain that the majority of parameters such as “number of students, size of budget, number of classrooms, classroom capacities, numbers of instructors, and instructor availability”—if represented via alluvial diagrams—can help WPAs know better where writing is being taught, promote focused inquiry, generate best disciplinary practices, and catalyze data-driven approaches to understanding WPA commonplaces.

In the second chapter, Mueller explores infographics' generative potential for WPAs by using the “census pictograph as [a] social justice heuristic.” Widening social justice practices through the practice of visual rhetoric is a bold enactment of Mueller's pedagogical insight. Culling data about students at Eastern Michigan University who ended up receiving failing, withdraw, or incomplete grades (DFWI), Mueller crafts a pictographic account of the students with DFWI marks and can thus draw on and leverage the attention of those who support WPA administrative reform. Similarly, in the third chapter Ryan J. Dippre shows how visual counterstories about students enrolled in writing courses can play a powerful role in dismantling stubborn assumptions—like that “students cannot write.” For me, Dippre's chapter provides a visual analogue to McLeod and Maimon's approach to tackling issues; Dippre uses the frame of “splicing, symmetry, and sediment” to debunk “stubborn facts” and mundane myths about student writing and WPA administrative efficiency.

Visual administrative mapping is the centerpiece of the fourth chapter “WPA Responsive Genre Change,” which is by Kate Pantelides, Jacie Castle, and Katherine Thach Musick. They pose holographic thinking as a visually potent way to project data that celebrates student writing, arguing that holographic map-making assists WPA stakeholders in perceiving where programmatic change is needed and where there is a basis for glorying our successful administrative endeavors.

The fifth chapter, “Diagram as Boundary Object” by David Swiencicki Martins, creates analytical narrative diagrams to capture his own expertise

with respect to WPA work and apply that expertise to working within a new institutional context. The maps allow Martins to work across and satisfy various stakeholders and audiences, thus acting as “boundary objects” in his push for new and generative thinking about writing programming and support. The sixth and seventh chapters likewise take up the challenge of merging expertise with action: The sixth chapter, “Designing to See, Mean, and Act” by Laurence José presents visual design as “a style of making the program visible and rendering programmatic goals knowable and definable”—that is, as a way to deliver a vision of a writing program to oneself, to faculty and institutional stakeholders, and to students. The seventh chapter, by Rachel Gramer, turns the focus of visual design onto the humanist work of teaching itself, offering “the process of making, interrogating, and revising visual-rhetorical artifacts... and infographic envisioning” as “open[ing] up generative opportunities for us to resee not only new teacher enculturation in writing programs but also tutoring in writing center.”

The eighth chapter, by Natalie Szymanski, proposes “an ecological heuristic that guides WPAs through the process of making transformative, reflective and sustainable curricular alterations at the programmatic level.” Szymanski manages to capture and explore the serious intellectual work of thinking about writing program ecologies—especially with respect to interconnected, fluctuation, complexity, emergence—through simple cartoon diagrams that bring both insight and a bit of fun to the task of visualizing WPA work.

The ninth chapter, Jacob W. Craig and Chris Warnick’s “Networks of Discourse,” sheds light on how network mapping can be pivotal to instituting change at the administrative and institutional levels. In this chapters, the author use network mapping to “trace relationships among our data to see how institutional cultures, institutional histories, writing program outcomes, and writing program pedagogy shape student learning” for an inter-institutional bridge program. In addition, the mapping process and the maps themselves allow Craig and Warnick to stage institutional critique, solidify institutional relationships, and map institutional change among the stakeholders of the bridge program.

The tenth chapter demonstrates how decision trees serve as a visual delineation of practices and parameters within writing program placement procedures. Of particular interest in this chapter is the concept of fairness—one that foregrounds the needs of ESL students—that orients writing program placement so that “mapping can help WPAs detect and attend to instances of institutional racism in the realm of assessment and placement.”

The eleventh chapter, by Andrew Lucchesi, urges us to consider game design principles in writing course documents. Although this chapter illustrates the principles with respect to a course on comics—a natural fit for a graphical

approach—the visual depiction strategies, orientation to student choice, “playable” course documents, the underlying principles (purposefulness, stability, and autonomy) are suited for any course where “what matters most is that the visual and interactive modalities take the lead in representing how the course works for students.”

The final chapter, by Logan Bearden, traces the uses of “graphical curricular representations” to articulate curriculum structure. A graphic of curricular structure “reveals new or currently underexplored territory,” which, in turn, can promote thinking about curricular revision and serve as a persuasive mechanism for its implementation. Helpfully, this chapter ends with a series of questions about writing programs that will help WPAs articulate how to create graphical curricular representations.

In composition more generally, multiliteracies and new media composing have continued gaining traction; visual rhetoric, information literacy, and information management, too, have received increased attention in rhetoric and composition. This book clearly extends those subfields into WPA work. I think this book shows that the opposite is also true: some of the major insights from this WPA work in this book can invigorate work across subfields of the discipline, if applied judiciously. For instance, graduate students taking research methods and methodology courses could benefit from pairing a book like this with lessons on data visualization, coding, case study methods, or grounded theory—just to name a few.

Granted, it is tough for any learner to practice the complex visual craft of data depiction without training and exposure. Moreover, there may be generational gap between experienced and early-career WPAs with respect to the use of visual modes for data depiction and management. I expect, then, that the challenges of visual composing will be difficult for some WPAs who reference this volume. However, I expect the methods in this book to remain applicable among scholars and WPAs who are keen to (visually) map rhetoric, composition, and writing studies as a discipline. Additionally, by making this book accessible digitally, the writers and editors of this book have done great justice to WPAs (and perhaps those aforementioned graduate students) who count visual accessibility as a pedagogical virtue.

At the same time, this book’s contribution to the field might be unmapable: it may happily join the parade of visual and empirical approaches to work in the discipline—and to WPA contexts, in particular—by helping us continue to traverse programmatic parameters, take action against institutional inertia, persuade program stakeholders, and more generally impact data-driven and technology-guided approaches to WPA work.

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