

CHAPTER 1.

A PERSONAL HISTORY OF WAC AND IWAC CONFERENCES, 1993–2020

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The biennial WAC and IWAC Conferences have become WAC's foremost conference for scholarly exchange. Yet no history of them exists for newer scholars to consult for help in understanding their role in WAC's becoming a subfield within Writing Studies. This article compiles a complete history to date, including how they began; what prompted the hosts to volunteer to take them on; how the conferences operated and were financed; the potentially confusing name change from WAC to IWAC; the value of the conference to the field as seen through a sampling of keynote addresses; and a look ahead. Beginning in 2020, the conference will for the first time come under the aegis of the newly formed Association for Writing Across the Curriculum (AWAC), making this an appropriate time to record conference history from 1993 to now.

My history of WAC and IWAC Conferences began as one third of a keynote address for the 2016 IWAC Conference hosted by the University of Michigan. I call this a personal history because, as I announced in the keynote, my goal was modest. I wasn't looking to make any grand claims. I simply wanted to document this one particular aspect of WAC culture so that it could be better known. Not long before the Michigan conference, I had taught a WAC graduate seminar for which students researched the conferences so as to better understand WAC as a subfield within Writing Studies. Although the students easily found information online, numerous gaps made forming a coherent picture problematic. The students and I realized that newer, younger scholars were likely not to ferret out the history either.

I say "one third" of a keynote address because the hosts of Michigan's conference, Anne Gere and her colleagues at the Gayle Morris Sweetland Center for Writing, were intent on "mak[ing] sure that the newest members of our

profession feel that they have a place in IWAC” (A. Gere, personal communication, May 9, 2015). Gere’s team assembled three keynote addresses, featuring multiple co-presenters ranging from doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows, and assistant professors to research and emerita professors. Gere invited me to “share the podium [and] engage the newcomers in a discussion . . . about where they see IWAC going.” Andrea Olinger, one of the co-editors of this volume, was a co-presenter with me. As my review of WAC and IWAC Conferences shows, earlier conferences also featured multiple keynote addresses, often with two or more presenters (more on this later).

Table 1.1 summarizes the history of all WAC and IWAC Conferences, showing years held; locations held (which are sometimes different from the hosting institution); themes, if one was designated (the 1st, 2nd, 8th, 9th, and 10th conferences did not); attendance, if known; and conference hosts. Some of the information presented here is available at The WAC Clearinghouse (<https://wac.colostate.edu>), which hosts IWAC Conference archives from 2006 through 2018, and the Rice University website (<https://nationalwac.rice.edu>), which hosts WAC Conference archives from 1993 through 2004. The archives contain limited material, but offer reasonable places to begin exploring.

Table 1.1 A history of WAC and IWAC conferences

| Year | Location | Theme | Attendance | Institution(s) | Conference Host(s) |
|------|------------------|---|------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 2020 | Fort Collins, CO | Celebrating Successes, Recognizing Challenges, Inviting Critique and Innovation | TBD | Colorado State University | Mike Palmquist, Caleb Gonzalez, and Matthew Klingstedt |
| 2018 | Auburn, AL | Making Connections | 339 | Auburn University | Margaret Marshall |
| 2016 | Ann Arbor, MI | Writing Across Difference | 402 | University of Michigan | Anne Gere |
| 2014 | Minneapolis, MN | Shifting Currents/ Making Waves | 401 | University of Minnesota | Pamela Flash |
| 2012 | Savannah, GA | The Future is WAC | 453 | Georgia Southern University | Michael Pemberton, Randall McClure, and Janice Walker |
| 2010 | Bloomington, IN | 10 th International WAC Conference | 319 | Indiana University | Laura Plummer and Jo Ann Vogt |

| Year | Location | Theme | Attendance | Institution(s) | Conference Host(s) |
|------|-----------------|--|------------|---|--|
| 2008 | Austin, TX | 9 th International WAC Conference | 470 | University of Texas Austin | Joan Mullin and Susan "George" Schorn |
| 2006 | Clemson, SC | 8 th International WAC Conference | 420 | Clemson University | Art Young and Kathleen Blake Yancey |
| 2004 | St. Louis, MO | WAC From an International Perspective | 360 | University of Missouri | Martha Townsend, Martha Davis Patton, and Jo Ann Vogt |
| 2002 | Houston, TX | Writing the Future: Leadership, Policies, & Classroom Practice | unknown | Rice University | Linda Driskill |
| 2001 | Bloomington, IN | Writing, Teaching & Learning in New Contexts | 418 | Indiana University, Purdue University, and University of Notre Dame | Raymond Smith |
| 1999 | Ithaca, NY | Multiple Intelligences | 400+ | Cornell University | Jonathan Monroe |
| 1997 | Charleston, SC | Celebrating 27 Years of WAC | 750 | The Citadel, Clemson University, and College of Charleston | Carl Lovitt, Sylvia Gamboa, Angela Williams, and Art Young (advisor) |
| 1995 | Charleston, SC | 2 nd National WAC Conference | 500 | The Citadel, Clemson University, and College of Charleston | Carl Lovitt, Sylvia Gamboa, Angela Williams, and Art Young (advisor) |
| 1993 | Charleston, SC | 1 st National WAC Conference | 150 | The Citadel, Clemson University, and College of Charleston | Carl Lovitt, Sylvia Gamboa, Angela Williams, and Art Young (advisor) |

For information not available through these archives, I turned to conference hosts themselves, most of whom I've come to know over the years and several

of whom are treasured colleagues and friends. I also talked with one nonhost, Roy Andrews, editor of *The WAC Journal*, due to his longtime involvement with the field. All but one of the conference hosts provided personal recollections in semi-structured phone or in-person interviews in May 2016 and January to March 2019.

I was seeking basic background material, not in-depth information that would lead to a scholarly analysis. I spurred hosts' memories by asking such questions as: What was the impetus for your hosting the conference? What were your goals and did you achieve them? Did you "pay forward" any of the proceeds from your conference to help the next host mount her or his event? And—often their favorite—do you have any special memories from hosting? All interviewees seemed pleased to be discussing "their" conference and chatted freely about their experiences. One host declined to be interviewed due to that grant-funded program having ended and the host's retirement.

Taking a "personal" approach allows me to recognize and honor my own good fortune in having found an over 30-year academic home in WAC. As I think back on the WAC and IWAC Conferences I have attended (all except 1993), I am grateful for the intellectual and professional acculturation they have offered. A personal approach also allows me to integrate some of the hosts' reactions that would not necessarily appear in a more formal history but which illustrate the WAC and IWAC Conference ethos: friendly, open, congenial, good-natured—qualities that characterize the field of WAC itself.

The Association for Writing Across the Curriculum (AWAC), newly formed in 2019, will surely alter some of the conference's traditions, making this a propitious time to record the history. Basgier et al., in "The Formation of a Professional Organization for Writing Across the Curriculum" (this volume), describe how and why AWAC has taken shape. At the same time, some of AWAC's new leaders will come from WAC-GO, the relatively new graduate-student-led organization, which is concerned, as they say, not simply with the sustainability of WAC as a movement but also WAC as a field (see Russell et al., "The Writing Across the Curriculum Graduate Organization: Where We've Been, Where We Are, and Where We're Going," this volume).

Knowledge of one's professional history provides newcomers a way to build stronger relationships, construct disciplinary identity, nurture a sense of pride in one's work, and educate those who follow. Even though WAC-focused sessions have proliferated at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (4C's) over the years, the biennial WAC and IWAC meetings have become WAC's foremost conference for scholarly exchange. To invoke the old adage, and as the WAC-GO co-authors' title suggests, if we don't know where we've come from, how do we know where we're going?

CONFERENCE ORIGINS

WAC conferences began in 1993 in Charleston with the support of Art Young, one of WAC's foremost founders, scholars, and practitioners. Young, then a professor of both English and Engineering at Clemson University, was in Charleston to consult for Angela Williams at The Citadel and Sylvia Gamboa at College of Charleston, both of whom "were making a major commitment to WAC." (All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are personal communications, taken directly from phone or in-person interviews.) Gamboa had been asked to "start a WAC program . . . to help evaluate writing across the disciplines." Having neither a WAC background nor a budget to travel to other programs, she "pushed for a conference in Charleston to bring WAC information there." Young took the idea back to Clemson, where Carl Lovitt was directing the Pearce Center for Professional Communication, with the suggestion that Lovitt help them organize it. "Gamboa ran it and Williams supported her," Lovitt recalls, while he "assembled the program all three years from Clemson," some 240 miles away. Lovitt fondly remembers that this assembly was accomplished by his "moving piles of paper around on the living room floor. *There was no technology.*" When the Charleston-based conference manager wanted Lovitt to send a program draft by email attachment, Carl had no idea how to do it.

Lovitt, Gamboa, and Williams' goals were straightforward: "to bring together practitioners in WAC and CXC (Communication across the Curriculum) and offer a forum for exchange of best practices." The first two conferences saw no emphasis on research or assessment, but participant feedback in 1995 indicated strong interest, and by the 1997 conference, research on WAC programs, especially in assessment, was added. By the time of the third in 1997, the attendance had grown so large—some 750—the three-way consortium had begun looking for a new host to take over.

Jonathan Monroe at Cornell eagerly assumed the role of next in line. Then in his second year of directing the Knight Writing Program (later the John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines), Monroe "wanted to start realizing a fuller potential" for Cornell's writing program. Akin to Gamboa, Monroe, a comparative literature scholar, reasoned that, "hosting a conference would bring scholarship to campus from non-lit disciplines." The Cornell conference's 1999 theme "Multiple Intelligences" could be seen as solidifying the turn from "best practices" to a more scholarly oriented academic conference. One of Cornell's plenary addresses was delivered by a Nobel Prize winning chemist on their faculty. Monroe subsequently edited two volumes featuring his colleagues' work: *Writing and Revising the Disciplines* (2002) and *Local Knowledges, Local Practices*:

Writing in the Disciplines at Cornell (2006).

From Cornell onward, the conferences have seen a continually increased focus on research, assessment, transfer of student knowledge from first-year composition to writing-intensive courses, interdisciplinarity, translanguaging, and more—while also maintaining WAC’s initial, primary focus on classroom pedagogy and student learning.

The sole exception to the WAC conference’s biennial timing occurred in 2002, when Rice University hosted just one year after Indiana University’s 2001 conference. Rice organizers hoped that henceforward conferences would be held annually, as they had done. However, the University of Missouri which was selected as the next host, recognized that one year’s lead time was insufficient to identify a conference venue and lodging; issue a Call for Proposals; plan a program; and attend to the myriad other details required in mounting the conference. With Missouri’s 2004 event, the conference returned to a biennial calendar.

IMPETUS AND ETHOS

As expected, all hosts demonstrated a scholarly commitment to the field of WAC, albeit from differing perspectives. All had been working in WAC for some time, and their ability to mount a large professional conference likely derived from having steered into being the complex, campus-wide curricular programs under their direction.

Hosts had strategic reasons for hosting that were not necessarily foregrounded in their Calls for Proposals (CFP). Of course, all aimed to create and disseminate scholarly knowledge about WAC. But they also used the conference to showcase their institutions, programs, faculty accomplishments, and ongoing research. Some capitalized on hosting to garner the attention of their local administrators, while others, like Gamboa and Monroe, used the conference as an occasion to educate themselves or influence their own faculty’s thinking.

All hosts exhibited a capacious spirit for collaboration. Key to WAC’s overall ethos is sharing methods, data, teaching practices, and administrative acumen. This collaborative spirit of WAC in general is clearly evident in hosts’ comments about mounting their conferences. Hosts paying forward a portion of their proceeds to assist subsequent hosts in mounting their conferences is a good example, as are the freely offered suggestions of how to run them efficiently and offers to help vet the hundreds of participant proposals submitted.

Not surprisingly, all 15 WAC and IWAC Conferences have been (or will be) hosted by institutions with a strong WAC presence. All but three—Cornell, Notre Dame, and Rice, private institutions with endowed programs—are large public, research-based universities. Michigan is the single public exception in

holding endowed status. Most are situated in the South and Midwest. No two-year institutions have hosted, presumably because WAC's presence and resources have traditionally been concentrated at four-year institutions.

OPERATIONS AND FINANCING

Until 2020, WAC conferences have been undertaken without an official organizational imprimatur. Each conference was organized and funded independently by a volunteer host and institution or group of institutions. The gatherings followed the general pattern of academic conferences (keynote addresses, plenary and concurrent sessions, workshops, publishers' exhibits, a reception, a proceedings document), with local hosts determining their own theme. Hosts usually engaged their institution's central conference office to manage enrollment, publicity, hotel contracts, meal arrangements, program printing, etc. But each local host remained responsible for establishing a budget; soliciting external funding; issuing a CFP; and inviting plenary speakers to address each conference's unique theme.

Each year, a committee of former hosts convened to review proposals for hosting the subsequent conference and select the next location. Each prospective host submitted a proposal demonstrating that institution's ability to mount a successful conference—dates, venue, lodging, institutional and financial backing, travel options, theme, perhaps tentative plenary speakers, and the like. As a participant in those deliberations every year from 2006 onward, I was always reassured by the proposals' quality and the commitment represented in them. Selections were made unanimously and with confidence. As with the fiscal philosophy of "paying forward," former hosts have generously advised new hosts on myriad logistics.

Because each host institution operated without a backing organization, each conference needed to break even to avoid sustaining a loss. So, in WAC's spirit of sharing *pedagogical* resources, a tradition took hold early on that each conference "paid forward" a portion of its proceeds to help the new host mount the succeeding conference—a tradition that continued through 2018. A portion of the monies remaining at the end of Auburn's 2018 conference was transferred into AWAC's new budget. Effective with the 2020 conference at Colorado State University, hosting institutions will be supported by the new professional organization.

WAC VERSUS IWAC NAMING: A CONFERENCE CONUNDRUM

Building on its work at multiple sites abroad, Missouri designated "WAC From an International Perspective" for the 2004 conference in St. Louis. Rather than re-naming the conference outright by declaring it an "international" conference,

the previous-WAC-host committee waited to see how the international community responded. When 10% of the 2004 participants—36 of 360 registrations—came from institutions beyond U.S. borders, with panels featuring WAC work abroad, the committee added “International” to the title. Thus, the 2006 event hosted by Clemson, and all that follow, are referred to as International WAC Conferences or IWAC.

WAC advocates in the US have long noted substantial interest in WAC theory and pedagogy from non-U.S. locales. Mike Palmquist, WAC Clearinghouse founder (and host for the upcoming 2020 IWAC Conference), reports: “Of 2.7 million visits to the website, nearly 54 percent come from outside the US.” (email to Townsend, April 10, 2019). The visits track closely to downloads, he adds, although he does not have data matching downloads to countries. In another sign of international interest, robust exchanges have been taking place between WAC scholars in the US and their international colleagues for more than two decades.

WAC Clearinghouse statistics and scholarly exchanges across borders, however, do not ensure IWAC conference participation. To my knowledge, no consistent records of international participation have been kept. Gamboa reports that two foreign countries were represented at the 1995 conference. Seventeen years later, Michael Pemberton’s international response for 2012 in Savannah was “relatively small,” with most of the non-U.S. participants coming from Canada. Pamela Flash reports that, despite significant recruiting, her 2014 efforts for the Minnesota conference were “not successful.” In a significant uptick, Michigan host Anne Gere’s staff reports that 22 countries were represented in 2016. Auburn host Margaret Marshall, reports that the 2018 international response was “thin.” She notes that the English Across the Curriculum conferences sponsored by Hong Kong Polytechnic University (2016, 2018) and the Writing Research Across Borders conferences, sponsored by the International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research, held or forthcoming in Paris, France (2014), Bogota, Colombia (2017) and Xi’an, China (2020) offer opportunities that may be more cost effective for international travelers.¹

Others, however, cite productive international collaborations that have developed in conjunction with IWAC events, such as Clemson’s former project with Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden. Flash reports that her Writing-enriched Curriculum (WEC) Program at Minnesota has had collaborations with universities in Germany and Norway. From as far back as 1996, we at Missouri have hosted over a dozen international scholars for several weeks to as long as a full year.

1 Regrettably, the 2020 China event was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Consideration was given some years ago to selecting a conference site in Canada, but concern for travel cost for the predominantly U.S. audience led to a U.S. site being chosen. As the conference continues to mature, organizers may wish to track international participation. Eventually, organizers and hosts may need to grapple with the conundrum of an “international” conference that is held only in the US.

To close this section on an upbeat note, a favorite memory from Art Young of hosting the first-designated International WAC Conference, at Clemson, involves inviting more than a dozen international participants to an impromptu dinner at his home after the conference ended. These conference goers couldn't leave town until the following day and he was eager to ensure they enjoyed a hospitable closure to their travels. The South Carolina skies poured forth with heavy rain that day, but the camaraderie wasn't dampened. Wine and beer and barbecue are just as easily served on the carport as in the dining room.

CONFERENCE VALUE AND NOTABLE KEYNOTES

Conference hosts believe that the WAC conferences have contributed to the field of WAC practice and theory. As Mullin succinctly puts it, “The conferences situate us as valid researchers and teachers.” Pemberton says the conferences “have demonstrated sustained, ongoing interest in WAC; [helped to grow] the international connections; offer format and opportunity to share research, experiences, innovations; they inspire, respect, and value what *all* disciplines can bring.”

Roy Andrews who, as editor of *The WAC Journal*, has observed the field closely since 1995 and attended most of the biennial meetings, reeled off a list of the conferences' contributions to WAC: “It's a good place to recruit ‘frontier’ articles for the journal, like Carol Rutz's interview series with prominent WAC figures; to meet people from disciplines like ESL and STEM (as opposed to writing center conferences, where participants are more homogeneous); and to foster research in addition to pragmatics.”

A complete history of keynote addresses from 1993 through 2018, and the scholars who delivered them, would say much about the 14 WAC and IWAC Conferences so far. But inasmuch as most conferences featured multiple keynotes—and many of those talks featured two or more speakers delivering co-authored remarks—such an accounting isn't possible here. Still, the following selection of keynote addresses illustrates the range and depth of issues that conference goers have been asked to ponder.

In 1995, Jacqueline Jones Royster, then at The Ohio State University, posed a provocative question about the emerging field in her talk “Writing Across the

Curriculum: Whose Story Is This?” Whose experience, exactly, is being enacted, she wanted participants to consider. As a listener in that Charleston audience, I felt undeniably challenged. Even before the advent of today’s diversity-driven agendas and institutionally appointed diversity officers, I was personally called to examine more closely who my students were and whether I was teaching them ethically.

Four years later, Charles Bazerman, University of California, Santa Barbara, took up Cornell’s theme of Multiple Intelligences to pose “An Unfinished History of Intelligences, or Just Where Is This Curriculum We’re Supposed to Cross?” He brought to Cornell the external scholarship that Monroe had sought in order to empower that institution to think more deeply about using writing to teach discipline-based modes of thinking. The two books Monroe subsequently edited featured a cross-section of Cornell faculty from neurobiology, psychology, philosophy, law, physics, history, chemistry, classics, government, and more.

Befitting its 2004 theme of “WAC from an International Perspective,” Missouri featured the WAC Conference’s first international keynoter, Professor and Dean of Education Richard Bates from Deakin University in Australia. In “Can We Live Together? Towards a Global Curriculum,” Bates took up French sociologist Alain Touraine’s assertion that the major global problem is not economic, but social, to argue that a global curriculum conceived in social terms would be possible if certain criteria were met. Bates’ keynote was published in 2005 in *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, (4)1, 95-109.

Bazerman, founder of the Writing Research Across Borders (WRAB) initiative, was back as a WAC Conference keynoter again in 2008, this time at University of Texas at Austin. Bazerman’s plenary panel, “Writing Across International and Curricular Borders,” featured colleagues from Université Stendahl, Grenoble, France; Central European University, Budapest, Hungary; Loyola College, Baltimore, Maryland, US; and Institute of Education, University of London, England, who offered WAC Conference goers a cross-section of research that had been represented at WRAB conferences. WRAB’s work has been subsumed by the new International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research (ISAWR).

In Michigan in 2016, conference participants considered the impact of WAC on non-native students through that year’s focus on difference. A three-speaker keynote panel comprised of Jonathan Alexander, University of California-Irvine; Paula Carlino, University of Buenos Aires; and Jonathan Hall, York College, CUNY, presented “World-Wide WAC?: Encountering Difference Across Places, Languages, and Technologies.” Among other topics, they examined the transnational and translingual identities students bring to our classrooms.

In numerous ways, many of these keynotes seem as current today as when

they were originally presented. An analysis of as many of the addresses as could be found would make for a worthwhile master's thesis.

LOOKING AHEAD

Both the field of WAC and its academic conference have come a long way since their respective origins in the 1970s and 1993. To put WAC conference history into context with the field as a whole, see “Fifty Years of WAC: Where Have We Been? Where Are We Going?” presented by the new WAC Standing Group at the 2019 4C's, available at <https://wac.colostate.edu/standing-group/>. As the 4C's presentation and other recent developments make clear, the study of writing in and across the disciplines, both in the United States and abroad, is proliferating via AWAC, WAC-GO, ISAWR, WEC, and the WAC Standing Group.

These, combined with already familiar locations where writing teachers converge—K-12, NWP, CAC, ECAC, writing centers, regional WAC associations, Consortium on Graduate Communication, and others—indicate a continued need to come together to discuss and share what we know and do. As scholars in the US and abroad continue to pursue an understanding of how writing, and language use writ large, affects student learning—particularly of the burgeoning number of second-language users—IWAC is well positioned to continue as a site for scholarly exchange. With the infusion of new leadership through AWAC and new leaders rapidly coming up through WAC-GO, new young scholars will surely find the conference as affirming and intellectually stimulating as I have. They will also find a welcome environment for making their own contributions to the field. Personally, I'm excited to observe and take part.

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