CHAPTER 2.

THE FORMATION OF A PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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In this chapter, we describe the rationale for and development of the Association for Writing Across the Curriculum (AWAC), which held its first meeting for members at the 2018 International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference. We first provide a historiography of previous WAC/WID-related efforts, including the specific contributions of each one, leading up to the more formalized process of establishing this new organization. Finally, we explain our aspirations of AWAC's role in supporting a sustainable and inclusive scholarly WAC/WID community.

Writing across the curriculum (WAC) has been recognized as the longest-standing curricular reform movement in U.S. higher education (Russell, 2002). It is widely adopted across the United States and, to a lesser but growing extent, in other countries. It is also recognized as one of the original high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008). A 2009 survey of WAC programs found that 64% of responding U.S. institutions either had or were planning to start a WAC or WID program (Thaiss & Porter, 2010). WAC enjoys substantial international strength as well, as indicated by reports in *Writing Programs Worldwide* (Thaiss et al., 2012) and presentations at conferences sponsored by organizations such as the European Association of Teaching Academic Writing and Writing Research Across Borders.

Despite its widespread adoption, WAC had not given rise to a formal professional association until 2018. Certainly, informal efforts such as the International Network of Writing Across the Curriculum Programs (INWAC), which began holding its annual meetings in 1981 at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), played a central role in bringing WAC scholars together. And a wide range of WAC initiatives have served as a focus for this important educational movement. Until late 2018, however, members of the WAC community lacked a formal membership-based organization with bylaws that provided clear procedures for joining, entering into leadership roles, and funding initiatives.

This observation is not intended to diminish the success of WAC or the support it has enjoyed in higher education in the US and elsewhere. Indeed, one challenge we have faced, both as members of the working group that established the organization we discuss in this chapter and as the authors of the chapter, is how to accurately and appropriately recognize efforts that came before—and in some ways led to—the formation of the Association for Writing Across the Curriculum (AWAC). These include several important initiatives and groups:

- Since its founding in 1981, the INWAC Board of Consultants led an annual INWAC Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting at CCCC.

During this meeting, consultants met with small groups to discuss WAC program design, assessment, and administration, thus facilitating numerous mentoring relationships between experienced WAC scholars and those new to WAC. INWAC also facilitated the creation of a directory of WAC programs, managed and published annually by Chris Thaiss and later moved to the WAC Clearinghouse.

- In 2017, this INWAC SIG became the CCCC WAC Standing Group (https://wac.colostate.edu/standing-group), which meets annually at CCCC. It supports relationships between WAC and the broader writing studies community and provides resources to CCCC members interested in WAC.
- In addition to the attention it receives in national, regional, and international writing and education conferences, two biennial conferences bring together WAC scholars: the International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference (IWAC) and the Critical Thinking and Writing Conference held at Quinnipiac University.[2] More recently, the English Across the Curriculum conference, hosted by Hong Kong Polytechnic University, has also brought together international WAC scholars.
- Since 1997, the WAC Clearinghouse publishing collaborative (https://wac.colostate.edu) has offered access to a large number of open-access publications and resources, including monographs, edited collections, scholarly journals, and textbooks.[3] In addition to several book series, the Clearinghouse publishes *Across the Disciplines*, *The WAC Journal* (with Clemson University and Parlor Press), and *The Journal of Writing Analytics* and makes available several other open-access journals in current or archival forms, including *Double Helix*, *Language and Learning Across the Curriculum*, and the *Journal of Basic Writing*.
- The WAC-L email discussion list supports communication among WAC scholars (https://lists.illinois.edu/lists/info/wac-l).
- The Writing Across the Curriculum Graduate Organization (WAC-GO) provides a professional organization for graduate students focusing on WAC (https://wac.colostate.edu/go).

Regional organizations such as the Northeast Writing Across the Curriculum Consortium (https://newacc.colostate.edu) have been or are being formed.

Certainly, these WAC-related initiatives and groups do much of the work

2   For a thorough history of IWAC with reflections on the influence that the formation of AWAC will have on the conference and WAC more generally, see Townsend (this volume).

3   For an analysis of the publishing collaborative model, see Palmquist et al. (2012).

Joshua Kim (2018) identified in an *Inside Higher Education* blog as the province of professional associations. However, for much of its existence, WAC has resembled writing program administration before the formation of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) and writing center studies before the formation of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA). The lack of a formal professional organization—a hub, such as those provided by the CWPA and the IWCA—has arguably limited what this collection of WAC groups has been able to accomplish.[4] Barbara Walvoord (1996), for example, observed that a central organization would better position WAC to take part in national movements that impact writing and to support new and existing WAC programs (p. 74). Similarly, Thaiss (2006) noted that without a formal organization, WAC had been unable to "create an agenda to focus efforts, issue position statements, establish and publish standards, conduct statistical surveys of members, and, maybe most basic, ensure continuity through an orderly process of succeeding leadership" (p. 139).

Moreover, the informality of the structures that have emerged has had unintended consequences, including a lack of clearly defined pathways for getting involved and perceptions, particularly among those new to the WAC community (including graduate students, junior scholars, and seasoned scholars who unexpectedly find themselves in the position of leading institutional WAC efforts), that the existing constellation of WAC organizations has not met their needs. In "The Writing Across the Curriculum Graduate Organization: Where We've Been, Where We Are, and Where We're Going" (this volume), Alisa Russell, Jake Chase, Justin Nicholes, and Allie Sockwell Johnston attribute the motivations for forming WAC-GO to a desire to contribute to the sustainability of WAC and the need to develop clearer pathways for involvement:

> WAC-GO is the result of turning these conversations about the sustainability of WAC as a *movement* toward WAC as a *field*. Many of the founders and key figures of the WAC movement who have ensured its sustainability so far are moving (or have moved) into retirement. As a new organization in the field, then, WAC-GO contends that the question of who will replace these founders and key figures should be one of central focus. WAC-GO also contends that replacing and diversifying key figures in WAC will take more than informal measures. . . . We believe that a formal organization

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4   For an analysis of WAC organizations and the impact of the lack of a hub on the sustainability of a field, see Cox et al., 2018, pp. 218-233.

> like WAC-GO can provide the structures graduate students
> need for successful socialization, which we further believe is
> necessary to both sustain and diversify the field.

The establishment of a formal organization makes it easier for those new to the field to obtain mentoring, engage in professional development, collaborate on scholarly work, and participate in leadership efforts. It also allows WAC as a field to increase the diversity of scholars who participate in WAC initiatives. Making a commitment to diversifying WAC not only promises to strengthen the field but also aligns with broader calls to address the disparity between the lack of diversity in faculty and leadership positions in higher education and an increasingly diverse student demographic nationwide (Taylor et al., 2010).

A formal organization can (1) provide codified structures for active membership in the WAC community, (2) ensure equitable pathways for scholarly and professional development in WAC, (3) establish procedures for cultivating new leadership, (4) envision and build new resources for the WAC community, and (5) include faculty from WAC programs who would not likely have become involved without institutional membership opportunities. Thus, a formal organization increases the likelihood that the diverse perspectives associated with a wide range of member experiences, backgrounds, institutional affiliations, and instructional goals can enhance the vitality of the WAC movement, its constituent organizations, and its scholarship. The inclusion of these diverse perspectives also makes it likely that the WAC movement itself will remain responsive to shifting student demographics and associated changes in the landscape of higher education. A formal organization can also seek status as a government-sanctioned 501(c)(3) entity, allowing it to address pragmatic concerns such as the establishment of bank accounts for constituent organizations. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a formal organization can ensure that emerging scholars see WAC as a welcoming, intentionally inclusive community that is committed to the growth of WAC scholars, WAC scholarship, and WAC programs.

ESTABLISHING AWAC

AWAC emerged from conversations at and following CCCC 2015, CCCC 2016, IWAC 2016, CCCC 2017, and CCCC 2018, as well as Skype discussions involving a fairly large group of interested participants who volunteered to help draft the organization's mission, goals, bylaws, and descriptions of committees.

These conversations were prompted by a change in leadership of the INWAC Board of Consultants, combined with the impending retirements of many of the leaders of the WAC movement. At the CCCC 2016 INWAC SIG meeting, par-

ticipants agreed (1) to move forward with a CCCC Standing Group application, which would give the SIG more stability, and (2) to host a broad discussion about a larger WAC organization at the upcoming IWAC conference in Ann Arbor.

At the IWAC 2016 meeting—which included stakeholders representing INWAC, the WAC Clearinghouse, WAC-GO, various WAC journals, and directors of the IWAC and Critical Thinking/Writing conferences—participants expressed a great deal of respect for those who had created the foundations for WAC. However, they also identified limitations, such as perceived barriers to participation and the need to engage critically with the diversity and future of WAC. Attendees discussed how WAC might benefit from the coordination and collaboration a formal organization could foster.

INWAC Co-Chairs Michelle Cox, Jeff Galin, Anne Ellen Geller, and Dan Melzer subsequently created a survey to solicit feedback from the wider WAC community about the structure and goals for a new national organization. The survey results were presented at an open meeting at the CCCC 2017. Most survey respondents supported the idea of creating a new professional organization, noting that this organization could create pathways into leadership positions, promote research, and provide more visibility for the field and those who identify with it professionally. During the meeting, some participants expressed concern about the potential loss of the informal spirit that has characterized WAC culture, others expressed concern that an organization emerging from the field of Writing Studies might discourage membership from scholars in other fields, and still others argued that formal structures would allow the field to be more inclusive and diverse.

The CCCC 2017 meeting concluded with a proposal to form a working group to draft the prospective WAC organization's mission, goals, and bylaws. Invitations were sent to a number of email discussion lists. The resulting group, composed of more than 20 new and seasoned stakeholders, worked for 18 months to develop AWAC's foundational documents. Subsequently, feedback was solicited on AWAC's mission statement, bylaws, and associated documents on the web, via email discussion lists, and at an open meeting at CCCC 2018. In the AWAC working group's subsequent Skype discussions, initial dates were set for a membership call, approval of the bylaws, election of officers, and incorporation of AWAC both as a state nonprofit and as a 501(c)(3) organization.

In the spring of 2018, more than 250 members joined the organization and plans were made to host a fourth face-to-face open meeting at IWAC 2018. This timing was opportune: IWAC 2018 was the conference's twenty-fifth anniversary, so it was fitting that the inaugural meeting of the growing organization coincided with this milestone for the larger WAC community. AWAC also embodies the conference theme, "Making Connections." We saw such connections

at work in the organization's IWAC 2018 session, during which available AWAC working group members offered a brief overview of the organization and then invited members to meet in committee working groups, to discuss committee descriptions, goals, and objectives, and to share ideas and insights. Each committee group reported back to the larger group, suggesting ways that AWAC could help support and grow existing WAC initiatives as well as strategies for the committees to work with each other. This participatory process mirrored the WAC community's long-standing commitment to grassroots action and the inclusion of diverse perspectives, including those of the many scholars, administrators, disciplinary faculty, librarians, high school teachers, and community members who attended IWAC 2018.

One important conversation that took place during and following the IWAC 2018 meeting addressed the nature of affiliations with other organizations. The key concern was how, if AWAC were to act as a hub, affiliations with other organizations would function. Four groups were interested in formal affiliations: IWAC (see Townsend, this volume), the recently organized WAC-Graduate Organization (see Russell et al., this volume), the WAC Clearinghouse, and the newly launched WAC Summer Institute. These groups sought formal affiliation not only for the organizational support but also to manage funds more effectively than they had been able to do as less formal (i.e., non-501(c)(3)) organizations. At first, the intention was to create Memoranda of Understanding to define the relationships between these organizations and AWAC. However, in working through the process of filing for 501(c)(3) status, it became clear that this option wasn't tenable. In the end, three of the organizations decided to become part of AWAC by forming committees within it, giving each organization representation on the AWAC Executive Board and full access to AWAC's infrastructure. The WAC Clearinghouse, which had been involved in the discussions, was unable to affiliate using the committee model because of the nature of its funding structure.

In November 2018, the state non-profit organization was created, the first slate of officers was elected, and the AWAC website (https://www.wacassociation.org) went live. Dues-paying membership was opened in January 2019, committees held their first official meetings that February. In March, the 501(c)(3) application was filed, committees drafted proposals for their first year of work, and the organization held its first business meeting, which took place at the CCCC.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND NEXT STEPS

The Executive Board of AWAC is comprised of Past-, Current-, and Incoming-Chairs; a Secretary and Treasurer; three Members-at-large; and Committee

Chairs. The inaugural Executive Board (elected in November 2018) is charged with developing the foundation on which the organization will build over time.

Central to the organizational structure of AWAC are the committees, through which much of the work of the organization moves forward (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. AWAC's standing committees

Committee	Primary Purpose
Advocacy	To advocate for WAC organizations, programs, and practices
Communications	To communicate and disseminate the work of AWAC
Diversity and Inclusion	To promote diversity and inclusion within AWAC and the field of WAC
International Collaborations	To foster collaborations between AWAC and WAC organizations, conferences, and scholars outside of the US
International Writing Across the Curriculum (IWAC) Conference	To host a biennial conference focused on WAC
Mentoring	To facilitate mentorship opportunities for a range of WAC stakeholders
Partnerships	To develop and sustain formal and informal partnerships with higher education and K-12 organizations whose purposes align with the goals of AWAC (i.e., CCCC, CWPA, NCTE, NWP)
Research and Publications	To support, disseminate, and develop research related to WAC
Writing Across the Curriculum Graduate Organization (WAC-GO)	To provide networking and mentorship opportunities for graduate students interested in WAC
Writing Across the Curriculum Summer Institute (WACSI)	To host an annual summer institute for novice WAC program directors

Two of the AWAC committees, IWAC and WACSI, are comprised of those who organize the events associated with these committees. The remaining eight committees are open to all AWAC members, who may select the committees they wish to join when registering with the organization. It is important to note that while the WAC-GO committee is focused on creating opportunities for graduate students, membership on this committee is not limited to graduate

students. In fact, the committee chairs hope that experienced WAC scholars join this committee. Furthermore, graduate students are encouraged to join other committees, so that they may have a voice in the important conversations that have implications for the future of the field. AWAC also encourages cross-fertilization among committees by allowing members to join two committees. The inclusive nature of these committees creates opportunities for all members to have a hand in shaping and contributing to the organization.

Immediately following its launch, AWAC charged each committee to begin its work. On an ongoing basis, the chairs of each committee will collaborate with committee members to identify specific, measurable, and achievable goals, and the committee members will then work to achieve these goals. Initially, these efforts have been built on the ideas gathered during the AWAC meeting at IWAC 2018. For example, the members of the Research and Publications Committee began exploring initiatives for supporting WAC scholarship, such as mentoring, mini-grants, and cross-institutional research collaborations. The Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Committee explored ways to hold AWAC accountable to issues of demographic, disciplinary, and institutional diversity and inclusion, such as having D&I committee members sit on other committees and inviting members of other committees to do D&I work. The Partnerships Committee brainstormed potential partnerships between AWAC and other WAC and writing-related organizations as well as among WAC programs. The Mentorship Committee brainstormed the idea of establishing mentoring "pods" of colleagues from similar institutions who seek support for their ongoing programs with seasoned WAC program directors. This committee also began exploring how to formalize a WAC consulting board to take on one of the roles that the INWAC board of consultants used to serve, providing consultations for universities building WAC programs. The Advocacy Committee began thinking about how AWAC might advocate for WAC programs and practices, as well as what AWAC's role should be in advocating for more equitable working conditions for the graduate students and adjunct faculty who often teach WAC courses. In conjunction with the aforementioned efforts, WAC-GO considered ways to inform and integrate graduate students and junior scholars into the field, with the goal of establishing a pipeline of mentoring and professional development that might lead to a more dynamic, accessible, supportive, sustainable, and robust WAC community.

Through these collaborative and strategic efforts, AWAC aims to provide a structure through which WAC scholars, educators in diverse contexts, and other interested stakeholders can access research and practices related to the field, as well as build networks of like-minded individuals. Even if it means forgoing some of its informal, grassroots ethos, the larger WAC community stands to gain

much from this new professional organization. AWAC can ensure that the field continues its broad mission of curricular and pedagogical reform, even in the face of generational changes in leadership and fluctuations in funding and institutional support. What's more, it can provide an accessible network of seasoned WAC professionals and newly interested graduate students, teachers, administrators, and researchers who can promote the work of writing across disciplinary, curricular, professional, institutional, and international contexts.

NOTE

The authors of this chapter were part of the 23-member working group that led the formation of AWAC until the Executive Board was elected. All members of the group were invited to co-author this chapter. In addition to the chapter authors, the other members of the working group are Chris Anson, Melissa Bender, Ann Blakesley, Laurie Britt-Smith, Pamela Childers, Jonathan Hall, Margaret Marshall, Maureen Ann Mathison, Siskanna Naynaha, Federico Daniel Navarro, Joseph Pizzo, Justin Rademaekers, Nicole Severino, and Terry Myers Zawacki. We express our gratitude to our colleagues in the working group as well as to the many individuals and groups who have helped shape this moment along the way, some of whom are mentioned by name in this chapter.

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