13

Writing Across the Curriculum

Writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs engage in the intellectual and social contexts of writing and are designed to help administrators, teachers, and students learn more about how writing works across contexts and within disciplines. WAC seeks to answer questions about how writing activities are constructed and how knowledge is produced and circulated within disciplinary environments. WAC extends well beyond first-year writing programs and English departments. In fact, these programs emerged in the 1970s with the first faculty seminar being held by Barbara Walvoord at Central College in 1969–1970. The growing popularity of the writing process movement and new composition theories (e.g., expressive, cognitive) helped propel the expansion of WAC programs across the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. Since its early beginnings, there's been a relatively stable mission: to develop writing initiatives and workshops that increase attention on teaching and assessing writing, and to bring faculty together to talk about how and what writing can do within disciplinary homes to support students.

WAC is local, interdisciplinary work often led by an English or rhetoric and composition teacher who wants to offer strategies for curriculum development and help faculty and students see the power of writing. Walvoord (1996) reflects on its history: "WAC, like any movement, was influenced by societal factors. It may be seen in part as a move by writing faculty to extend their power and influence, helped by wide-spread perception that student writing was inadequate" (p. 61). WAC ultimately provides a space for faculty across disciplines to share their concerns about student writing, writing activities, and writing assessments (e.g., rubrics). Moreover, WAC is an opportunity to educate faculty about best practices, as

well as a chance to collaborate with other faculty. Walvoord writes, "Workshops were the backbone of the WAC movement, and they tended to generate high energy and enthusiasm" (1996, p. 63). Chris Thaiss and Tara Porter (2010) find in their national study of WAC programs that faculty development workshops and seminars "remain the staple activities of WAC programs" (p. 555).

In the 1970s and 1980s, it was important for WAC programs to establish an identity that moved beyond national conversations on literacy which focused primarily on "errors" and notions of "good" writing. WAC didn't fixate on errors and grammatical rules; instead, programs were dedicated to developing ways for teachers and students to *use writing*. WAC programs provided a space for conversations around disciplinary objectives and writing curriculum: "WAC would never have spread had its advocates had nothing more to offer fellow teachers than correction symbols, syntax rules, and pious lectures about the need for 'good' writing" (Thaiss, 1988, p. 92). WAC programs are still concerned with helping faculty navigate the kinds of assignments and genres that will effectively demonstrate the skills and knowledge faculty/programs/disciplines want students to practice and transfer from class to class. And now, over the last decade, teacher-scholars have encouraged administrators to pay more attention to students' racial and linguistic identities when building faculty workshops and seminars (Anson, 2012; Hendrickson & García de Müeller, 2016; Poe, 2013). Mya Poe (2013) writes, "Integrating race in WAC practice has the potential to address very real teaching problems that are experienced by teachers across the curriculum. For this reason, I believe it is essential that we ground discussions of race in local contexts and in ways that have specific meaning for teaching writing" (p. 11).

WAC ultimately generates conversations around writing and helps faculty use writing to develop thinking and knowledge. The most common approaches to WAC are *writing to learn* and *writing in the discipline*. Writing to learn assumes "writing is not only a way of showing what one has learned but is itself a mode of learning—that writing can be used as a tool for, as well as a test of, learning" (McLeod, 2000, p. 3). Writing in the disciplines focuses on disciplinary knowledge and conventions and the rhetorical and social nature of an academic community (e.g., engineering,

biology). WAC directors often use these approaches to help faculty better understand how incorporating writing into their curriculum can help meet teaching goals and departmental aims while reaching their student populations. WAC programs obviously offer extraordinary benefits to colleges and universities, especially in the sense that they bring greater attention to writing and help support faculty and students.

That said, there are some common issues that surround WAC, such as where and how programs are situated within institutional contexts. Some programs are connected to English departments, some standalone, some are tied to writing centers, and some are attached to centers for faculty development or centers for teaching excellence. The spatial location of WAC programs can be logistically complex. Further, some WAC programs have a full-time director and assistant director whereas others are led by a faculty member in the English department. These different orientations affect what these programs can do and can be. For example, given these precarious elements, sources for funding and financial allocations or budgets that WAC programs have vary. Some programs rely on external grants, whereas others have a university budget. And then, of course, programs have to think about how to get faculty invested in writing curriculum and initiatives. WAC program administrators have to consider how to reach faculty and encourage them to participate in seminars. Some directors have to incentivize workshops, for example. Despite these nuances, the goal is to create a campus-wide culture centered on writing. The structure of how to best accomplish this aim relies on administrators, faculty, and students.

INTERVIEWS

In this chapter, I talk with Chris Thaiss, Chuck Bazerman, Alisa Russell, and Linda Adler-Kassner about the development of WAC programs and the importance of WAC efforts in helping establish a university culture that values writing. Thaiss reflects on the early beginnings of WAC, identifies key moments in its history, and emphasizes how WAC is really about learning: "When you talk about writing across the curriculum, you are largely talking about *learning*. You are talking about writing as a tool of learning." Additionally,

Bazerman and Russell talk about the importance of WAC programs to colleges and universities in helping bring awareness to how writing builds and circulates knowledge within disciplines. Russell adds that WAC "inherently brings this interdisciplinary view to writing and to scholarship," and she shares how campuses benefit from the collaborative nature of WAC. Adler-Kassner concludes by talking about her decades of experience in different program leadership roles and how programs like WAC can use assessment to better understand "disciplinary interests."

Shane to Chris Thaiss: How did you get into writing across the curriculum (WAC)? [Episode 44: 01:51–05:04]

> Well, it's a good story. I remember it very vividly because it was back in 1978, which is not long after I started at George Mason, which was in '76. I was an assistant professor. In '78, I turned 30. It was that long ago. We had a situation at the school where we were being criticized in the English Department for not being able to teach our students how to write. We had this cross-curriculum committee from the faculty senate that was saying, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" It was coincidental at that time that we were setting up the Northern Virginia Writing Project, the site of the National Writing Project. We were doing a tremendous amount of reading and working with teachers in terms of the new research on which a lot of it was on writing across the curriculum (WAC).
>
> We decided to set up a program that we called the Faculty Writing Program, which was actually student-centered but it was also faculty-centered. We brought in Janet Emig, who had recently written her groundbreaking article on "Writing as a Means of Learning," and Donald Murray and a whole bunch of other people. The next year, we brought in Elaine Maimon and her folks from Beaver College who were doing great work on that. What we really decided to do was use a WAC approach to this question of preparing students to write. It was great because we got a lot of faculty from different disciplines involved in this.

They could see how they could contribute to helping students develop as writers rather than just pointing fingers at the English department.

That's really how we got started. We were working, as well, with writing groups for the faculty. They were working on their own writing. It was a great sort of combination of things at that time. One thing I want to really stress there is that a lot of WAC in the '70s came as a result of a collaborative effort between the National Writing Project and universities. Almost all the people that you could name who were really getting into WAC at that time in the US were also involved with K–12 schools.

I have to say, I would love to see that come again because it was a great collaboration. It was wonderful, actually, to see the kinds of cross-fertilization that would go on from environment to environment. That's really how I got started in WAC. Then, two years later, because we were working through the National Writing Project, which was already a national organization, I was able to start the WAC network for Conference on College Composition and Communication and NCTE.

Shane to Chris Thaiss: What would you identify as critical moments in WAC history, and what issues or questions were most significant to its development? [Episode 44: 05:05–09:46]

A lot of the questions that were significant then are still significant. When you're working with faculty and trying to develop policies and programs in schools, faculty . . . if they're interested in student writing and student learning through writing, they always have the questions about, "How do I find the time to do this? How can I add this to my curriculum?" Those are still questions that are make or break questions for whether WAC is going to work in a particular environment and whether there's going to be enough support for it as well. Those kinds of questions and those kinds of issues were really important then. They're really important now.

Of course, the difference between then and now is that virtually everybody, regardless of faculty, has heard of this thing called writing across the curriculum. A lot of people have had experience with it in graduate school or in universities that they might've been a part of. Then, it was brand new; it was a slightly different situation. Looking at landmarks and important things, I think the research that was going on in the '70s and then into the '80s was really important in providing a kind of a foundation or framework. A lot of different models for how you could do WAC at institutions. The British Schools Council Research from the '60s into the '70s with James Britton, Nancy Martin, a lot of other folks, was really important in creating a kind of theoretical framework. When you talk about writing across the curriculum, you are largely talking about *learning*. You are talking about writing as a tool of learning.

Sometimes we miss that in setting up WAC programs because, too often, what will happen is that a WAC program will develop as more or less sort of a continuation of a first-year writing course. That's not what it means. It means something very different from that. It is really focused in disciplines and focused in courses and teachers . . . some other landmarks that were really important at the time . . . the collaboration between the National Writing Project and the sort of nascent WAC movement in universities.

Also, writing and publication by certain people who were associated with both of those things are really important in creating that framework. I mentioned Janet Emig. I mentioned Elaine Maimon. Barbara Walvoord was an extremely important person early on and continues to be. Toby Fulwiler and Art Young, who at that time were both at Michigan Tech. Susan McLeod and Margot Soven and the kinds of works and edited publications that they've done over the years. Certainly the books by David Russell, the two volumes of the history of *Writing in the Academic Disciplines*. Those are very important things in creating a substance for the movement.

The WAC conferences that started in 1993 in South Carolina with Art Young and a number of other people in that region that then became this bi-yearly event that brought people together. Then in 2005, it became an International Writing Across the Curriculum (IWAC) Conference. I've got a couple others I want to mention . . . Mike Palmquist starting the WAC Clearinghouse. The WAC Clearinghouse has been extremely important. That's been over 20 years ago now. I'll also mention . . . in the past 15 years, there has been a lot of emergence of international and transnational and translingual research. That's going to become more and more important as time goes on. Then, the last thing I want to mention as sort of a landmark is the founding of the Association for Writing Across the Curriculum two years ago. That's going to be really important moving forward.

Shane to Chris Thaiss: What would you say to someone who might ask, "Why is writing across the curriculum important?" [Episode 44: 16:52–20:13]

This is a kind of question that actually I have been answering for more than 40 years. At George Mason, it was a question that arose all the time. At Davis, it's a question that arises. What happens is that sometimes one of the reasons why people will ask that question is because in some way, they've gotten the wrong idea of what writing across the curriculum is. There's sort of a natural assumption by academics who are not within writing studies or in English departments to think that writing across the curriculum— what we mean by that is, that a teacher in chemistry or a teacher in political science actually has to become a writing teacher or an English teacher. Well, that's never been what it means.

My attitude has been over the years to treat my role as not as a sort of a messianic person getting out there saying, "Oh, here are the wonders of writing," but actually . . . I learned this from Barbara Walvoord, one of my mentors. She said many years ago that when you do work in WAC,

what you really are doing is research. When you have conversations with people and they ask you this question . . . I like to shift the burden . . . I want to learn from them. I want to ask them, "Well, as a teacher, what are the things that you do as a teacher that you think work? What are the things that you do that helps students to learn?"

. . . they'll say, "I can tell students are learning by the degree to which they're engaged in their learning" . . . then, I ask them to talk about engagement and what processes they have in their teaching that gets students engaged. They always involve some kind of dialogue; some kind of conversation; some type of opportunity for students to demonstrate their curiosity and interest in learning . . . so the question tends to answer itself.

Shane to Chuck Bazerman: How did you get into WAC? And what do you think WAC's mission is at colleges and universities? [Episode 13: 16:03–20:51]

I have never been a director of a WAC/WID program. In fact, none of the campuses I've been at has there been a successful WAC/WID program. I'm not the practice guy. I'm not the administrator. So it's kind of odd that I have become so engaged in it and in some ways I'm considered an expert in that area . . . it seemed to me that from the beginning that WAC needed to approach each of the disciplines with a great deal of respect and understanding. I think it took the field, as a whole, a while to get there because at first, they were very much taken with the practices they developed. Writing programs have been by and large the pedagogical innovators for the universities since the 1950s or '60s with things like writing centers, collaborative pedagogies, learning centers, importance of communication with students, even the question of writing as inquiry-based education.

Another thing I want to mention about writing across the curriculum . . . is the formation of knowledge and how people get knowledge. How does that enter into how they think and

how they communicate and the bonds and commitments they make through writing? Where does that knowledge come from? As human beings, we're not computers on desks. We're not brains in a bottle. We have eyes and ears, and we walk around, and we touch things, and we get to know the world, and we try to make sense of it and bring it in.

Research methods is one of the main ways that knowledge of the world gets into texts and therefore enters into activity systems. There are related ways, like intertextuality is when knowledge from one system gets into another, but if texts are the place we communicate and we think through things, we analyze them and we make proposals out of them and we make plans and situations, it's important we get knowledge into them. And that the ways of getting our data about the word gets formulated into useful knowledge. That, to me, is of paramount importance.

. . . I think this is of paramount importance in the academic disciplines. Research communities have been one of the tremendous changes that have allowed us to think differently and gather knowledge and deal with our world in a more intelligent, sensitive, aware way. That's why writing across the curriculum is really important.

Shane to Alisa Russell: What excites you about the possibilities within WAC programs? [Episode 59: 01:20–05:18]

When I was a graduate research assistant for the WAC program at George Mason doing my master's, we did this huge assessment project of all the writing-intensive courses. That was a foundational project for me because what I got to do was interview a bunch of faculty across the disciplines. I think a lot of times, really all disciplines maybe, you get very siloed. It's very rare that you get to, especially as a grad student, talk to so many faculty all over the university. I got to talk to them about what challenges their student writers face and what challenges they face in integrating writing into their classrooms and teaching writing. I realized quickly, all faculty that I talk to value writing. They

see how important it is. They see how much their student writers need it to be able to be part of the discipline and know in the discipline and do in the discipline. They want this. They want their student writers to succeed.

. . . I think one of the other things that's so important about WAC is that it inherently brings this interdisciplinary view to writing and to scholarship and an awareness of other disciplines. It lets you see how rhetoric and the work of the humanities is in all disciplines. I once taught a writing for engineers course. I had fourteen petroleum and chemical engineers in this course. They were forced to take it. They didn't really want to take it, but they were shocked when we started. I started piling them with all of these texts that engineers write all the time for lots of different audiences, for other engineers, for clients. They write standards. They write instructions. They have to make websites when there's a big public works project. They have to do all of these things and have all this rhetorical flexibility. You can know the engineering all day long, but unless you're able to then put it into a communicative form—write it up in a way that makes sense—it doesn't work.

WAC helps bridge that divide, I think, between the sciences and the humanities and shows that it's all implicated in one another. It's really fun to be in that position as a WAC administrator or as a WAC scholar where you get to see all those connections between disciplines and be in that interdisciplinary space.

Shane to Alisa Russell: How do you think WAC contributes to institutions and affects university campuses? [Episode 59: 05:19–08:06]

It's a culture of writing. Because WAC sees writing as, it's not just part of the English department, it's all the disciplines. This is how every discipline creates what they do and solidifies how they do their work. You end up with this wider understanding on a campus of how writing is situated, how it's a non-generalizable skill. It's an area of expertise. It takes time to study it and learn it and figure

out how to teach it and how to develop. That's always a big plus when other disciplines see the validity of rhet/comp and of writing studies . . . you're helping foster this wider culture of writing on campus.

Because a lot of my other research focuses on the relationship between writing and access and how writing shapes access to different actions or settings or communities, I've been thinking a lot about social justice movements in writing studies and rhet/comp and what that looks like, you know, identity and difference in writing, alternative assessment practices, all these things. WAC, to me, is an inherently socially just practice. I'm not saying that it doesn't need renewed attention and critique and that there are a lot of things we could be doing to increase the way it contributes to social justice initiatives.

When we treat writing like it's a one-and-done skill, like you can just learn it in first-year comp and then . . . automatically you can do it in any discipline, what happens is those who already have some writing knowledge for different disciplines end up succeeding because of their experiences or backgrounds. While maybe those who don't, who are further away from those discourses in different disciplines, can end up not succeeding when you're not teaching it, or making it a part of the instruction, or making it explicit.

WAC increases students' access to their disciplines. It increases their ability to engage with course content and increases their ability to contribute by making writing part of the conversation. That's a really exciting place to be: To think of WAC work as a social justice initiative in itself.

Shane to Alisa Russell: What are some challenges WAC programs face? [Episode 59: 08:07–13:12]

All the things that I just said that make it so exciting and valuable are also the things that make it so challenging. It's a total double-edged sword. WAC work does happen at

the administrative and student levels. I think it's a Mike Palmquist piece where he has this great WAC model, where it's not just working with faculty, but it's also working at these different levels. Most models still happen at the faculty level, like faculty development, faculty workshops, working with faculty on their assignment prompts, on their course design, things like that. That's part of what makes it so fun is working with all these different faculty. But it's also a challenge because faculty are strapped. Faculty are busy. Faculty have a million things on their plates and learning new pedagogies and redesigning your courses or assignments is hard. It's time consuming.

It also needs to be a collaborative conversation. Not just me, "I'm the writing expert and I'm telling you what to do." But actually, "I know a lot about writing, but you're the one who knows about writing in your discipline, so we have to collaborate and work together." But that takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of buy-in . . . I mean, we're touching on a bigger conversation of incentivizing and paying people for professional development.

You need incentives, or a stipend to do a seminar series. Or you need a developed program and a range of curricular options that different faculty can plug into based on the time or expertise they already have. You need ongoing support. A one-time seminar or workshop is wonderful, but we all have that high of coming out of a workshop, "Oh, we're going to make all these changes." Then we try one thing and it fails. And we're like, "Well, maybe not." You need that ongoing support.

All of those things require a budget. They require buy-in from upper administration. One challenge is . . . convincing everyone that the time is worth it, and that this is a valuable practice and that this is somewhere we should put our money because this is really important. That can be a challenge that varies from institutional context. Another challenge that's related is finding how WAC fits into an

institution, especially if it's like a program. I just said that it's inherently interdisciplinary. So where does it go? Is it a standalone program, like in the provost office? Is it part of the English department? Is it connected to the writing center? Is it a branch of the Center for Teaching Excellence? A lot of that gets decided for a variety of factors, usually outside of the director or whoever's part of the WAC program's control.

Then, it's about how to stay sustainable in whatever institutional space you're in. If you are part of an English department, that presents you new sets of challenges to show that this isn't just an English thing, that this is an interdisciplinary thing. Or if you're connected to the writing center, that presents challenges in you're not just here for students, this is the faculty branch. Then budget lines get really complicated. It's all about wherever you are institutionally. Some of the things like partnering with other projects, layering your mission into other campus initiatives, setting up structures, they're going to outlive any one director or board or whatever your leadership is. A lot of those sustainability issues become an issue depending on where you are in the institution.

Finally, as maybe anyone who studies writing knows, the successful teaching of writing and writing improvement is famously difficult to measure and assess. Because WAC is usually having to answer to upper administration, we're always facing that challenge of how do we prove the efficacy of WAC? How do we prove that this is working? Chris Anson actually has a really great piece about different assessment data that can be effective when combined in different ways. I think this is a challenge that all of rhet/comp faces. How do we assess? How do we measure writing progress?

Shane to Linda Adler-Kassner: Through all your leadership roles and experiences, including being an associate dean, the Director for the Center for Innovative Teaching, Research, and Learning, and a writing program administrator, what have you discovered to be the

most productive approach to facilitating workshops and generating conversations about writing across disciplines and contexts? [Episode 54: 13:08–18:03]

Starting at people's points of need. So people like to engage with things when they find it meaningful for them. I'm lucky to be at a place, UC Santa Barbara, where, we're a relatively recent minority-serving institution. Within the last six or seven years, our student population is really changing here in California. People are very interested in how they can best work with the students in their classrooms. That creates lots of questions and lots of willingness to engage with different kinds of ideas. For them and for me, too. I have learned so much as I've worked with faculty from across the university.

When people recognize that writing doesn't need to be like writing a five-page paper, but writing can do lots of things for them and that it's super important, that's another really great way to engage . . . so we talk about inclusive practice being about facilitating access and opportunity. Access means making the knowledge-making practices of your discipline explicit and providing opportunity to practice with them. Opportunity means creating ways for people to bring their identities, knowledges, and experiences to your discipline in order to push on those knowledge-making practices so that they are representative of and include the ideas of others . . .

When we think about access and opportunity, we then engage in thinking about four domains of knowledge-making. Disciplinary knowledge, so what are the knowledge-making practices of your discipline? Representational knowledge, what does it look like or when you show what writing looks like. Empathetic knowledge, how can you form and confirm knowledge with others, mostly your students, and how can you even learn about their identities, experiences, and knowledges? That's especially important if you're teaching a class of 400 students, "How are

you going to do that?" There are ways to do that. Then, learning knowledge, what do we know about learning and learners that can help you do this?

Everything that we do operates through the idea of inclusive teaching and thinking about access and opportunity, and then those intersecting knowledge domains and how we can think about what those are and how teaching functions through them . . . the only way that leadership works is when you do it with other people. Basically what I try to do is take the knowledge of our discipline, build on that knowledge from other places, listen really, really, really, really, really hard to people, try to work with them to put some language around the things that they do, use that language and that thinking to develop new things that can help them advance their goals and their ideas within the contexts of our institution and its goals and our students, et cetera.

I'm certainly not the first person to say this, but leadership really is this sort of multi-dialogic process of listening . . . it's so not a solo activity. It's one that requires, at least for me, constant evaluation and sort of reflexive metacognitive practice.

Shane to Linda Adler-Kassner: Since you work closely with assessment, can you suggest ways directors can assess their WAC programs or what questions might be significant in helping programs better understand their impact across campus? [Episode 54: 18:04–21:15]

I think the kinds of questions people need to ask about WAC, first, need to be aligned with the disciplinary interests. It's probably easier to start with what not to do, which is something like a value-added model. If students take course X, does that improve their performance in course Y? Well, unless you can control, and I mean in the research sense, a whole lot of variables, like how has the writing handled in course X and course Y? How much of the grade

does writing account? Are the values aligned? Is the grading consistent? I think that's not necessarily a successful model.

What we can do is understand writers' experiences and their writing knowledge as they move from course to course. That is an easier thing to follow. Then you can ask writers to submit artifacts that they think reflect different elements of their writing knowledge or the direct evidence for any kind of assessment. So I think we need to think about what are we assessing, writing and/or writers? What are the key attributes that we associate with growth and knowledge development? And what kinds of artifacts can be associated with that?

Asking writers to be involved in that process is really important. At UCSB, we're in the last year of a longitudinal assessment of general education that follows a cohort of students through the GE program every year. It's been really interesting to see what happens through that. So we're following students, but we're looking at the program and artifacts that students submit. We're seeing why students are taking things in general education. We're seeing the kinds of things that they tend to say that they're asked to do in GE courses. What kinds of knowledge do students say they're being asked to produce? How is that aligned with the overall goals? We're seeing some really interesting patterns . . . one of the things that emerged was classes where students write, that fulfill our writing requirement, students and faculty were consistently rating the artifacts more highly.

DENOUEMENT

These interviews indicate how WAC programs, when supported, can cause a shift in attitude and culture on writing at colleges and universities. WAC program administrators are in positions to work collaboratively with faculty across disciplines and to implement writing initiatives to help facilitate teaching and learning goals. What stands out to me is the kind of grassroots nature of WAC. WAC listens to the needs of faculty and students, and WAC

responds appropriately. WAC ultimately supports faculty and students by connecting writing to learning. I also think it's important to see how WAC can come alongside larger university missions and goals and can complement those aims through their efforts. WAC is in one of the best positions to champion change. They can be sites that cultivate relationships, and they can be mediators and facilitators of teaching and learning.

For additional readings on writing across the curriculum, I recommend *Sustainable WAC* (Cox et al., 2018), *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing* (Yancey et al., 2014), *Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum* (Bazerman, Little et al., 2005), *Landmark Essays on Writing Across the Curriculum* (Bazerman & Russell, 1995), and *Writing Across the Curriculum: A Guide to Developing Programs* (McLeod & Soven, 2000). I also think these questions can further generate conversations about WAC programs:

- What would it look like to construct a first-year writing class that uses a WAC approach to teaching and learning? What WAC research might help teachers since many first-year writing classes are interdisciplinary?
- What kinds of university writing initiatives and writing curriculum developments are already happening in the institution?
- How does the spatial location of the WAC program affect what it can/cannot do? What are the limitations and constraints? What are the strengths of its alignment? What collaborations can happen with other programs?
- As an administrator, how are you listening to different perspectives and experiences with writing, both of faculty and students? How are you responding to those perspectives? How are you meeting the needs of faculty and students across disciplines and providing resources to assist them? How are you increasing the visibility of the WAC program on campus? What workshops or seminars would be most useful in your current environment?