

9 Conclusions and Implications

Summary of Findings

Our study affirms previous research which suggests that WAC influences teachers, often in significant ways. But we have operated not in the match-to-sample or “resistance” frameworks common to much previous research: we have tried not to define what *we* think WAC is but to let those definitions emerge from the faculty. We have viewed faculty not as adopters or resisters but, in the words of Hargreaves (1988), as “creators of meaning, interpreters of the world and all it asks of them . . . people striving for purpose and meaning in circumstances that are usually much less than ideal and which call for constant adjustment, adaptation, and redefinition.” We have tried to ask, therefore, in Hargreaves’s words, “how teachers manage to cope with, adapt to, and reconstruct their circumstances . . . what they achieve, not what they fail to achieve” (216).

We found that faculty often came to WAC to work on problems and goals they had already articulated or because they believe in periodic reflection and renewal. Their image of themselves as self-directed managers of their own growth underlies the entire study. Faculty often remembered WAC events—workshops, faculty response groups—in terms of community. For many, the WAC community was characterized by safety, liberation, the sort of naming that gave them language for what they were doing, support for their own growth, and validation of the importance of teaching. But a few remembered a “true believer” mentality or a top-down presentational mode that compromised community.

At UC, 99 percent of a faculty sample reported changing their teaching in some way as a result of their WAC workshop. When faculty identified the most important things they had learned from WAC, they often described not particular strategies but changes in their philosophies and attitudes about teaching. They altered their theories about teaching and learning, acquired new habits of mind, found new confidence and enthusiasm, and changed their own roles in relation to their students.

WAC also changed particular teaching strategies. Faculty were often quite explicit about the impact of WAC on their strategies, but

some were not always sure whether to classify a strategy as “WAC.” At times, their definitions of “WAC” differed. Faculty tended to concentrate not on adopting or resisting WAC per se but on finding what strategies “worked” for their particular settings. The same criteria were used to decide that a WAC strategy had “worked” as to decide that it had not “worked.” The criteria concerned whether the strategy had helped create community in the classroom, whether it enhanced student learning, whether it was feasible, and whether it fit the teacher’s own personal priorities and teaching style. Teaching strategies tended to shift and change over time to some extent, regardless of whether they were perceived to “work”; faculty reported themselves as constantly changing, as constantly experimenting with their teaching.

WAC affected career patterns as well as teaching. Patterns were complex and intermingled, and influences were often impossible to isolate. However, we noted six themes:

- “The Road Not Taken,” in which faculty were active in educational reform but in a way they saw as not directly connected to WAC;
- “WAC on Hold,” where a new baby or a new department chairship meant that they did not have time or attention to push WAC forward;
- “Embracing, Then Winnowing,” in which they tried to implement many things from WAC, became overwhelmed, and then had to select what they could do;
- “Little by Little,” in which they saw themselves as making slow, uneven progress;
- “The Road to Damascus,” where there was a revolutionary turnaround in their thinking or teaching; and, finally,
- “New Worlds,” in which WAC served as a spur to move outward in many directions which faculty had previously not imagined for themselves.

These conclusions are drawn from data collected throughout periods of years at each institution. Until 1993–1994, data were collected without any knowledge that they would one day be combined into a single study. In 1993–1995, a series of forty-two interviews and faculty-authored accounts on all three campuses addressed a comparable set of questions. These lent some consistency to the data and served as the culmination to the stories of faculty on whom we had collected other data over the years. They also gave us many of the direct quotations from faculty that fill this book.

The body of data for this study, as a whole, is characterized by its variety and wealth. The largest part of it is the faculty self-reports, which we viewed as strong data because they revealed faculty perceptions and because the point of the study was to see WAC through faculty eyes. But we are also aware that if one's goal is to find out what changes actually occurred in an empirical sense, self-reports are relatively weak data. Our self-reports, then, are supported in many cases by syllabi, other course documents, classroom observations, observations of teachers at work on committees and in discussion groups, and student interviews and questionnaires.

We are also aware that the "testimonial" genre still influences our report. It seemed inevitable that in the interviews, sponsored by the WAC office, teachers would try to cooperate by telling what WAC had done for them. We tried to avoid this syndrome by having the interviews conducted by someone other than the workshop director, by using data where the faculty member had spoken in a group or for some other purpose, and so on, as we detailed in the methods chapter. But we acknowledge that the influence of WAC may have been fore-fronted for our faculty, simply by the fact of our asking.

Nonetheless, the themes we describe here were strong and clear in the data throughout the years and in all types of data.

Implications for WAC Programs

What did we, as WAC directors, learn from our own study?

1. We learned not to imagine that faculty came to WAC in a vacuum. They had, we discovered, already articulated plans, philosophies, and agendas. We realized that WAC leaders need to know what those are and to help faculty to build upon them.

2. We learned that faculty will end up defining WAC differently, or ambiguously, and that it doesn't matter. The important thing, we concluded, was for them to shape a definition that is meaningful to them. In fact, the definition of WAC was not nearly as important as the definition of "what works." *That*, we believe, is the definition that faculty developers need to focus on because it's the definition that drives a faculty member's decision to adopt or drop a particular teaching strategy.

3. We learned that the richest gift we could offer to faculty were resources for their own development. We learned not to try completely to predict or control that development, but to suggest, from our own knowledge, how it might go, and then to leave the faculty mem-

ber to integrate our knowledge with his or her own. We learned to trust that synthesis. Our role, we learned, was to stimulate, not to evangelize.

4. The atmosphere, the kind of community, that is created at WAC events will be long remembered and is crucial to the impact of WAC on faculty. Faculty will seek in WAC and in their own classrooms those elements that help them to achieve community. We believe that WAC directors cannot give too much emphasis to the nature of the communities they form and facilitate.

5. The faculty will perhaps be helped more by the philosophies and attitudes they take away than by specific strategies. WAC directors might then work to make their philosophies clear and visible and to help faculty do the same. But not in the abstract—through concrete example, through lived experience.

6. We learned that perhaps the most valuable contribution WAC can make to a faculty member is to be a source of renewed commitment and enthusiasm.

7. We learned the imperative of building our programs not as one-shot workshops, not as camp-meeting conversions, but as a network of ongoing support for career-long development. Faculty, we saw, benefited from support, community, and constant stimulation, across time. To do that, WAC needs to collaborate with other faculty development efforts. WAC, we believe, must see itself as part of a network of different kinds of programs that together can serve needs for growth and community (see Walvoord 1996).

Perhaps the final outcomes for us as WAC directors on our own campuses were humility, trust, and awe:

- humility that we cannot win converts to our vision, nor be so arrogant as to imagine that faculty are even focused on accepting or rejecting WAC. They're not—they're focused on finding what works for them;
- trust that those same faculty have the resources and the intelligence to engineer their own career-long development;
- awe at the complex, creative, sometimes crazy, always fascinating directions that development can take. Awe at what emerges when we focus, in Hargreaves's words, not on what faculty fail to do but on what they achieve—in the long run.