

AFTERWORD

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In the preceding chapters, colleagues lend perspective and insight to WEC's evolving history, its design and component practices, its impacts, and its challenges. Taken together, this multifaceted investigation will likely prove useful not only to those directly involved with WAC/WID programming but also to institutional administrators who recognize the limitations inherent in many top-down, cross-curricular writing initiatives and who seek a road-tested alternative. Beyond these two groups of colleagues, I hope this collection appeals to a broader audience of educational researchers and advocates who investigate ways of inspiring and sustaining progressive systemic change.

FACILITATING, FLEXING, AND SUSTAINING

The chapters composing this collection affirm the list of WEC's essential features I describe in Chapter 1, but they also underscore three themes central to the WEC approach. The first theme relates to the important and artful facilitation WAC consultants practice in their interactions with departments. The second relates to the model's perpetually negotiated balance of structure and flexibility, a balance that enables WEC's cross-departmental and cross-institutional portability. A final theme underscored by chapters in this collection relates to ways in which the WEC model's decentralized and iterative processes manage to circumvent factors that can threaten the longevity of WAC and WID programs.

In his forward to this volume, Michael Carter introduces the first theme when he remembers that his initial forays into departmental faculty meetings were met with a "sturdy and implacable resistance." Understanding this resistance as both politically inspired (the meetings were mandatory) and conceptually inspired (he'd been reminded that writing instruction was the dedicated responsibility of *other* departments) Carter opened the floor to complaints. "I learned that faculty needed to establish their opposition," he writes; "they wanted to be heard, to feel that they had been understood." This surprising decision productively disarmed the resisters, paving the way to constructive and productive discussion. Throughout this collection, contributors affirm Carter's approach to eliciting and working with (rather than despite) faculty resistance. They borrow strategies from rhetorical researchers, ethnographers, and community organizers. They de-

scribe listening instead of presenting, expressing an open curiosity in the face of jaded suspicion, handing control to “the room” even when the room may not want it, and partnering rather than leading. The generative results rendered by this deliberate ceding of control suggest a significant shift in the writing-missionary and change-agent roles routinely adopted in WAC work. Facilitation, as the term implies, requires facing raised challenges and considering possible means of addressing them rather than eliding concerns or presenting solutions.

The second theme, WEC’s negotiated balance of structure and flexibility, highlights an attribute that lies at the heart of WEC’s appeal and of its day-to-day operations. In many of the preceding chapters, colleagues describe their attraction to both the model’s structural framework and to its built-in adaptability. This unusual combination inspires the participation of departments as different from one another as mechanical engineering is to theatre arts and of institutions ranging from large-enrollment research universities to small-enrollment liberal arts colleges. In each of these contexts, WEC’s goal of increasing a faculty’s capacity for change remains constant. The model provides objects, maps, and methods for achieving the goal of integrating relevant writing and writing instruction, it affords time and space for discursive exploration, and it establishes relationships of trust and community.

Finally, contributors to this collection draw our attention to ways in which WEC’s decentralized and collaborative activity, its distributed leadership, and its ongoing rounds of implementation and assessment can enable it to withstand dangers posed by personnel changes and constrained budgets. Jeffrey Galin (in Chapter 8 of this volume) uses a whole system approach to analyze ways that a WEC model can address the sorts of structural and leadership-oriented issues that have long threatened WAC programs’ sustainability. Because WEC intentionally distributes and decentralizes leadership responsibilities, it can accommodate inevitable changes in personnel, whether those changes occur on the WAC team, in participating departments, or within senior administrative offices. Although, as Galin points out, administrators may be initially surprised by the model’s slow-to-scale design, we’ve seen its iterative cycles and gradual expansion build credibility and attract increased participation among the empirically minded and the wary. Also, as at least one of the case studies contained in this volume illustrates, the model has been successful at offering senior administrators (and external accreditors) a contextually relevant and locally assessed alternative to uniform, cross-curricular writing initiatives.

Again and again throughout this collection we’re reminded that the most important glue holding WEC initiatives together over the long haul is found in the relationships the model engenders. In Chapter 4 of this volume, Matthew Luskey and Daniel Emery ask the question, “What sustains WEC once enacted?”

In answering, they point to the durable partnerships and collaborations between WAC consultants and faculty members within WEC departments, characterizing these as, “partnerships that develop through frank and open discussion . . . bolstered by the use of data and assessments.” Data grounds the discussions; trust enables them to fly.

ADAPTING TO CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES

These three themes have revealed their importance in the chapters collected here, but also in the ways that WEC programming has responded to the current set of challenging societal circumstances. Since this collection’s initiation back in 2018, much in the world has changed. The onset of a global pandemic triggered a shift to online instruction and a logistical reconsideration of ways that academic writing is taught and learned across all disciplines and textual forms. Almost simultaneously, discussion of the ways that academic writing instruction and assessment have contributed to systems of structural inequity was intensified by our exposure to violent crimes perpetrated by police officers against Black, indigenous, and people of color.

Nationally and locally, the sudden and universal move to online instruction in March 2020 sparked an immediate, at times haphazard, outpouring of instructional support from technologists, librarians, and WAC consultants. In late fall, 2020, I convened a virtual meeting, “WEC in the Time of Covid,” to provide WEC practitioners from across the country with an opportunity to think together about ways in which the pandemic and move to virtual instruction were impacting WEC initiatives on their campuses. Although the pandemic was (and is still) proving challenging and exhausting on all sites, colleagues also reported some affordances to moving WEC operations into virtual venues. While some described a slowdown and a de-prioritizing of activity, others reported an increased sense of urgency and motivation. In some departments, all faculty meetings had been suspended which made contact difficult and progress uneven. In others, WEC programs were quickly tapped to provide much needed guidance related to online writing instruction. Colleagues reported that the method’s sequenced activity can provide a measure of forward propulsion when many other less-defined activities have become backburnered or optional. “We are practicing the technique of ‘friendly persistence,’” one colleague noted. “WEC offers an island in the sea of chaos!” exulted another.

On my campus, working remotely has inspired adjustments to the ways we organize and co-facilitate departmental WEC meetings. To make the most of precious synchronous time, we’ve abbreviated meetings (M1-M4) but added between-meeting tasks (in-advance preview of agendas, summaries, and data, for

a few examples). This works better in some departments than others, but across the board I can say that during synchronous meetings, individual participation has increased exponentially as small groups of colleagues collaborate on generating writing plan content in shared online documents and virtual breakout rooms. Also, after suspending our direct assessment of student writing for one year, we are now moving the next round of panel ratings online in a process that combines synchronous norming and debriefing meetings with asynchronous rating activity. When in-person meetings become possible once again, we'll determine which of the online meeting and assessment practices merit incorporation into what we hope will remain a primarily onsite operation.

The move to remote instruction also inspired my team to launch two versions of a virtual short course called "Teaching with Writing Online," one for interdisciplinary populations of instructors and one for instructors within any of the 60+ departments engaged in WEC. Contrasting the two versions has been instructive. When we bring the course into a WEC-participating department, we find that we don't need to spend much dedicated time in the first module surfacing participants' fundamental understanding of writing and writing instruction or introducing the importance of course-relevant writing goals as drivers of instruction. Our interpersonal history with the department and our knowledge of its curricular structure and writing expectations allow us to quickly zero-in on specific logistical or pedagogical issues triggered by the forced move to remote instruction. This background work has also allowed us to think *innovatively* with departmental instructors who recognize ways in which current circumstances are offering them unprecedented opportunities to collectively change assignment genres and modes of writing instruction that may have been previously considered immovable. As a colleague in the history department commented, "Virtual teaching just throws so many cards up in the air! Assignments that used to be considered standard—mandatory—are now up for question and trial."

After the death of George Floyd, interest in looking at ways that academic writing instruction and evaluation perpetuate systems of structural inequity was accelerated and prioritized on campuses all over the world. On my campus, WEC liaisons began to request in-house discussions of equitable approaches to evaluating student writing. Members of my team are invited into these discussions, because, as one liaison expressed it, "you *get* us." In discussions like these, we have opportunities to partner with faculty members and other instructors in a reconsideration of grading criteria they've already identified and of the ways they use them in evaluating student work. As always, our approach is inductive and responsive; we convene meetings at the faculty's request and we listen carefully to concerns and questions. We tie ideas to artifacts, drawing attention to specifics found in writing criteria, grading practices, and archived samples

of student writing. We ask framing questions: Are you concerned about grading practices, about specific items on your criteria list, or both? In response to questions about alternate teaching methods, we describe possibilities and, when asked about precedent and evidence, we quote research. We sit alongside our faculty colleagues as they consider ways of working concerns into incremental or radical changes in practice.

Advocates of more direct and activist approaches may wince at the slowness of this pace of change or challenge it as overly indirect or accommodating. As Robert Scafe and Michele Eodice in Chapter 11 of this volume remind us, however, our goal in WEC is “to keep building the core capacity for collaborative change, the type of change made possible in our context through crafting relationships within institutional, disciplinary, and personal contexts.” By serving as a thinking partners in candid discussions, by supporting faculty groups as they unpack intentional and unintentional effects of writing expectations and systems used to grade writing, we walk toward change, but as importantly, we build change capacity.

In “Black Holes: Writing Across the Curriculum, Assessment, and the Gravitational Invisibility of Race” (2014), Chris Anson asks how, as a field, “WAC ha[s] neglected issues of race and racial identity in its literature and its practices, particularly in the crucial area of assessment” (p. 15). By means of address, Anson suggests that we provide faculty members with opportunities to “dig deeper into issues that until now have remained hidden or are dealt with too perfunctorily to have much meaning” (p. 28). In “Reframing Race in Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum” (2016), Mya Poe suggests that moving beyond the perfunctory can be best accomplished when our activity is guided by three interrelated principles: (1) making race local, (2) identifying expectations, and (3) acknowledging the racial aspects of linguistic diversity and its meanings in the disciplines. In this collection, we demonstrate WEC’s commitment to working locally—within departmental faculty meetings—in order to identify and question writing expectations. In the role of trusted partner, WAC consultants are in an excellent position to move the discussion beyond identification and to increase attention to linguistic equity and to partner with faculty members as they find ways of addressing inequities in their teaching.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND INQUIRY

WEC is young. Throughout this collection, our colleagues have made important observations, taken up intriguing questions, and supplied us with illuminating case studies. As more institutions implement WEC initiatives, and as more colleagues engage the methods we’ve described in this collection, we’ll be in a

position to collectively ask and answer even more intriguing questions. Here is a small sampling of questions we can think about as we move forward together:

WEC'S IMPACT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

- In what ways does WEC's emphasis on the curricular integration of writing and writing instruction increase students' ability to transfer learning within departmental curricula and between instructional contexts?
- In what ways does participation in WEC change the ways that instructors teach and evaluate critical conceptual learning?
- What specific impacts has WEC activity had on writing assessment practices in participating departments and programs? What impacts can WEC methods have on enabling departments to devise, implement, and assess equitable assessment systems?

WEC'S FACILITATIVE METHODOLOGY

- How and where are the facilitative stances and practices used in WEC methods being learned? What literature and research helps us understand this approach?
- How might WEC further involve undergraduate students in the processes of identifying writing goals, drafting departmental writing plans, and assessing writing? How would their inclusion affect results?
- Under what circumstances might WEC methods have the inadvertent effect of reinforcing and calcifying traditional disciplinary values?

WEC'S WRITING PLANS

- What does cross-departmental and cross-contextual analysis of departmental writing plans tell us about commonly held and diverging values in academic writing? How might the local-generation and intended dynamism of writing plans enhance or curtail their use as static objects of study and/or instructional tools?

WEC'S PORTABILITY, SUSTAINABILITY, AND RATES OF ADOPTION.

- How might WEC methods be adapted to address graduate departments? What about international settings where majors and curricula are differently conceived?
- What has the move to online venues revealed to us about the WEC model and the interpersonal nature of WEC work?

- What level of adoption is necessary for WEC programming to sustain in institutional contexts? In terms of scope, how small is too small? In terms of scale, how slow is too slow?
- What forms of valid assessment might help institutions answer the question “What impact is WEC having on student writing across departments?”?

Although buffeted and tested by the tumult of the past year, WEC programs have held. The adaptations described in this volume demonstrate the model’s inherent flexibility, an attribute that has enabled programming to continue moving forward amid circumstantial disarray. Although moving our departmental interactions into online venues affirmed my own preference for onsite interaction, the move enabled us to develop some excellent online workarounds, practices that we’ll take with us post-pandemic. And although accompanying colleagues as they investigate their linguistic values and assumptions is a messy and excited business, the fact that we’re being invited to participate in these local and candid discussions reveals the power of sustained and trusting partnerships. If the past twelve months have taught us anything, they’ve taught us that the future is uncertain. In the face of this uncertainty, I’m hopeful for the changes WEC practitioners can help effect.

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