



# Letter from the Editor

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*Language and Learning Across the Disciplines* is pleased to celebrate the debut of our sister journal online, *Academic.Writing*, at <http://aw.colostate.edu/index.html>. The mission of *Academic.Writing* is to sponsor interdisciplinary perspectives on communication across the curriculum, and to provide the support for faculty that was originally made available on WAC Clearinghouse. According to editor Mike Palmquist, since *Academic.Writing* is designed to take advantage of cyberspace, the journal will not use a volume and number system. Instead, articles will come online as soon as they have been reviewed, and the volumes will be dated by the year, beginning in January.

*LLAD* and *Academic.Writing* have a loose affiliation, designed to explore the relationship between a traditional print journal and the online version. We plan to develop joint issues from time to time, addressing a specific topic, with material allocated to both kinds of space. Currently we plan that the first of these will be a joint issue focused on writing centers, guest edited at *LLAD* by Lisa Johnson-Stull at Washington State University and at *Academic.Writing* by Carolyn Handa at Southern Illinois University.

The debut website of *Academic.Writing* features a Forum in which Ann Herrington, Donna Lecourt, Susan McLeod, David Russell, Art Young and Mike Palmquist discuss “Principles That Should Guide the Development of WAC/CAC in the Coming Decade.” More about that below. Other sections of *Academic.Writing* include a Column on CAC in K-12, Feature Articles, Reviews and Interactions, CAC Connections, Teaching Exchange, Conference Papers, and CAC Research (including CAC research archives). The “WAC Clearinghouse” links designed to support WAC research also appear on the front page: back issues of *LLAD* online, CAC links, CAC Theses, CAC Research (CAC includes WAC here), Introduction to WAC, Join WAC-L.

Subscriptions are free, but *Academic.Writing* needs to document its readership, so readers must subscribe.

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In the spirit of our new venture, *LLAD* in this issue takes up one of the concerns we found in the Forum discussion on *Academic Writing*, the ongoing tension between Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing-in-the-Disciplines. Several of the speakers in the Forum counseled that in the coming decade WAC/CAC programs should be guided by the pedagogical principles of WAC: the emphasis on pedagogy, and specifically student-centered pedagogy. Art Young's passionate plea is worth reproducing here.

We need to emphasize writing across the curriculum (WAC) significantly more than writing-in-the-discipline (WID). Many teachers and scholars are calling for a greater emphasis on WID, arguing that knowledge is socially constructed and that academic language is constituted by the written conversation of particular discourse communities (i. e., history or physics). I've sometimes simplified, for my own understanding this concept as: "In order to be a physicist, a student needs to know what a physicist knows, be able to do what a physicist does, be able to read and write the world as a physicist." In some cases, the call for more WID is narrated as a hierarchical advancement over the pioneering but less knowledgeable ways of WAC, with its emphasis on expressivist notions of writing to learn and process notions of learning to write, with its emphasis on authentic voice and negotiating knowledge within the classroom community. For WAC to continue its influence on college campuses and to collaborate more actively with schools and other civic groups, I believe WAC pedagogy needs to be at the philosophical center of WAC/WID programs.

Thus WAC programs need to continue to focus on pedagogical goals associated with expressive writing, reflective writing, writing to learn, conversational discourse, and what I call "the middle ground" of much classroom discourse, a writing space where students develop language and thinking abilities in interplay between what they know and are able to express and the formal language and conventions of academic communities. This is a major way to assist the development of writers in educational settings, kindergarten through graduate school, and this is the way to develop WAC projects that involve students in writing for audiences outside classrooms, and this is the way to develop students who write to make a difference in their own life and the lives of others.

That's great stuff. Now *LLAD* had already put together an issue using articles developed out of the National Writing Across the Curriculum Conference at Cornell, in which all the articles seemed to address writing in the disciplines, if not Writing-in-the-Disciplines. Elsewhere in the Forum, Art wrote that sometimes he thinks WAC isn't about writing at all, but about learning. Perhaps what is attractive in the *LLAD* articles is the way they address learning in the disciplines.

The argument of Lynn Rhodes's article might better be seen as a call for student-centered assessment. Her project is to find a way to tell the story of students' progress through undergraduate education as a seamless tale of individual development, without the little hitch between the gen ed courses and the upper level professional courses, to find a way of valuing what students have to say that does not translate as a set of numbers profiling the professionalization of their language.

Betty Bamberg's article also deals with evaluating the program at her school. Her method of assessment reveals that writing intensive courses in the disciplines (implemented with little input from WAC) appear to be more in harmony with the principles of WAC than do the upper level general education courses that were designed in a more ideally WAC principled process. It suggests that traditional methods of interacting with students in the disciplinary courses at her school already amount to a student-centered pedagogy. Is it enough that teachers in some disciplines ask students to do a lot of writing, say lab reports, and give them a lot of feedback? Is WAC really different from the ideal practice in small liberal arts schools?

The third article, by Cynthia Bolt-Lee and Sheila Foster comes from an accounting department. It documents the value of re-taking essay exams in accounting. Is this WAC pedagogy? Or just good pedagogy? It reminds me of an article that appeared in the last issue of *LLAD*, written by Patty Connor-Greene and Janet Murdoch. They report on research which used writing in ways some WAC specialists would not approve, to teach disciplinary discourse. In the experiment students in a psychology course were required to write short exams in every class meeting, short exams that asked students to work with concepts—with "mid-level Bloom" kinds of questions. At the end of the term students who had participated in these exams were judged better able to read and understand a new but related professional article than students in control groups. The authors admit up front that their methods smack of the lecture/test model. And yet the intervention is on the learning side, not the formal presentation of material.

*LLAD* editors and *Academic.Writing* editors overlap, so we had read the article by two biologists that is "reprinted" here, from A.W. Like the other two disciplinary examples above, Shahan and Costello offers a

WAC intervention on the learning side of teaching disciplinary discourse. Citing “post-Piagetian” work in cognition that suggests how different is formalized thinking in disciplines from thinking in other life contexts, the authors offer a method for utilizing that work in cognition to design writing assignments and evaluate students’ understanding of science.

What these articles have in common is attention to learning processes in the project of teaching disciplines. They do not use expressivist or reflective writing, but they do use writing to learn a discipline. Art speaks of the “middle ground” in which students learn to connect their own lives to the formal and conventional languages of academia. In another sense, writing in the disciplines needs to be the middle ground, used in the service of other interests. Feminists, for example, need lawyers and accountants and historians and biologists to make their cases. WAC needs this WID piece, too.