

Introduction

As the demand for English writing proficiency on college students is becoming severe, I am proposing to implement a Writing-across-the-Curriculum (WAC) program at my institution, hoping it is the best possibility for bringing up students' writing level across all curricula. The program has fallen into disuse and disrepair mainly because of a huge turnover in personnel. The original program was started in the mid-1980's by a core group of faculty who were trained at the Prairie Writing Project of Moorhead State University in the United States (Brewster & Klump, 2004). The local program began with a three-day faculty in-service led by those faculty who participated in the Prairie Writing Project. The predominantly humanities faculty adopted the plan quickly. A grant from a fraternal insurance company, Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL), provided faculty development funds for the flagship program. Remnants of the program still exist. A few colleagues use journals, many assign formal written papers, but there was no talk of process, revision or forms of informal writing. Likewise, no one was clear about all the reasons why the program became a secondary road, and it is now known by the public that this particular program had no steering committee, no program administrator, very little follow-up to the original workshop, and no inter-departmental communication avenues. As my colleagues and I are seeking to resurrect a second generation WAC program, we felt a historical perspective of WAC, its development, and its problems might help to prevent a series of mistakes for the second time.

What is Writing across the Curriculum?

A Writing-across-the-Curriculum program is rarely defined, more often it is described. The goals of most WAC programs are to help the students improve writing and to learn by writing in a wide array of academic areas. Maimon (1980) posits that writing is "a complex process that is integrally involved with the subject area which is written about" (p. 11). Process writing and revision, and perhaps collaboration, become integral parts of the writing assignments in the arts, sciences, mathematics, humanities, and literature. Writing includes both formally prepared papers evaluated for a grade as well as informal and in-class writing which may be

ungraded. A faculty researcher, Bangert-Drowns, at the State University of New York, Albany, defines Writing-across-the-Curriculum model as

WAC seeks three things: to increase the frequency of student writing, to integrate and elaborate writing strategies throughout the different content areas, and to promote the instrumental use of writing as a tool for other academic ends....Seen in this way, WAC is more than just writing instruction, more than just making students write more, more than trying to get students to write better. It is the strategic integration of carefully designed writing tasks in any content area to serve the ends of learning, authentic communication, personal engagement, and reflective authorship (Personal communication, cited in Brewster & Klump, 2004, p. 7).

Nevertheless, in real practices, WAC could differ depending on the joint needs of student population, faculty, administration support, specific program goals, and resources from local community. McLeod and Maimon (2000) perhaps capture the original form of a WAC program best by defining from two viewpoints:

From the teacher's point of view, WAC is a pedagogical reform movement that presents an alternative to the 'delivery of information' model of teaching in higher education, to lecture classes and to multiple-choice, true-false testing. In place of this model, WAC presents two ways of using writing in the classroom and the curriculum: writing to learn and learning to write in the disciplines (p. 579)....From the WAC director's point of view, WAC is a programmatic entity made up of several elements, all of them intertwined: faculty development, curricula components, student support, assessment, and an administrative structure and budget (p. 580).

To sum up simply, common curricular requirements for WAC may include the followings:

1. A group of cross-disciplinary faculty members,

2. Change in ways of delivering information in classroom settings,
3. A collection of writing-related courses, such as writing intensive courses, first-year composition, upper-division writing, senior writing seminars, course clusters, and discipline-specific writing instruction,
4. New forms of evaluation, including multiple writing proficiency assessments and student portfolio assessments (Fulwiler & Young, 1990),
5. Consistent workshops, support, and fund for providing training to faculty as well as services to students (McLeod & Maimon, 2000).

The Early Development of WAC

For many WAC is a new name for an old idea. Oddly enough, writing had been a part of the disciplines well before the twentieth century. It was not until much later that writing and grammar instruction were separate from the rest of the curriculum. “English” teachers taught exclusively literature; there was little need for extra instruction in grammar and writing. The re-emergence of integrating writing and content became crystallized with the advent of the writing-as-thinking movement. But a more important summit a decade earlier made more of an impact.

The 1966 international meeting of educators from the United States and Great Britain was jointly sponsored by National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, the U.S.), Modern Language Association (MLA, the U.S.), and National Association of Teachers of English (NATE, the U.K.). The conference, dubbed the Dartmouth Conference for its host, raised critical issues that led to the ideological and theoretical foundations of WAC (Bazerman & Russell, 1994). The conference was like two semi trucks meeting: the American school of rigid industrial models vs. the British linguistic, social, and development model. Ultimately, the conference rejected the transmission model of teaching in favor of a personal growth model and has been credited as the real beginning of composition as a legitimate research field. To demonstrate how much of a significant theoretical change took place, Fulwiler (1987) cites Moffett: “instead of using writing to test other subjects, we can elevate it to where it will teach other subjects” (p. 11).

The true beginnings of the modern WAC and perhaps the whole language movements can be traced to two 1975 publications in Great Britain, *the Bullock*

Report and Britton's *The Development of Writing Abilities*. These documents would dominate language education for the next few decades. In the late 1960's, Britton led a British WAC research project which produced *The Development of Writing Abilities*; he would also be a heavy contributor to *the Bullock Report*. In his research project, Britton claims that "children develop writing ability by moving from personal forms of writing (what he calls expressive or poetic) to more public, workday forms, which communicate information (what he calls transactional)" (cited in Russell, 1991, p. 278). Russell (1991) cites Britton's argument which states that "language is central to learning because through language we 'organize our representation of the world'" (p. 279).

At almost the same as Britton's work, the Minister of Education and Science of Great Britain, Margaret Thatcher, appointed Sir Alan Bullock to head a committee to explore reforms in the teaching of English (Bailey, 1983). This was a reactionary effort responding to a public furor over British children's decline in reading skills. Bullock's committee set out to study "language in education" across the curriculum. Bullock's committee studied relationships of reading, writing, talking, and listening by visiting over one hundred schools, twenty-one colleges, and six reading centers in Great Britain. The research comprised seven major areas and issues: (1) current attitudes toward teaching English and the question of standards; (2) discussion of interaction of language and learning; (3) reading as a process; (4) language instruction in middle schools and content areas, including writing; (5) organization of English education; (6) reading and language difficulties; (7) and a discussion of pre-service and in-service teacher training.

The report was published in 1975 as *A Language for Life* and contained over three hundred recommendations and rationale for each. Despite wide debate in the public arena, two recommendations were of importance to the WAC movement. Bailey (1983) cites *the Bullock Report*:

In the secondary school, all subject teachers need to be aware of:

- The linguistic processes by which their pupils acquire information and understanding, and the implication for the teacher's own use of language.
- The reading demands of their own subjects, and ways in which

pupils can be helped to meet them.

To bring about this understanding every secondary school should develop a policy for language across the curriculum. The responsibility for this policy should be embodied in the organisational (sic) structure of the school (p. 25).

British schools began implementing techniques for incorporating writing, reading, and the oral use of language as effective methods of instruction. Although not without critics, *the Bullock Report* received support for its basic premise from the NATE: “All teachers must accept responsibility for improving standards of reading and language” (Bailey, 1983, p. 26).

Three assumptions that serve as theoretical support for the inferences of *the Bullock Report* represent major changes in educational philosophy. Again Bailey cites Bullock:

- All genuine learning involves discovery, and it is as ridiculous to suppose that teaching begins and ends with ‘instruction’ as it is to suppose that ‘learning by discovery’ means leaving children to their own resources.
- Language has a heuristic function; that is to say a child can learn by talking and writing as certainly as he can by listening and reading.
- To exploit the process of discovery through language in all its uses is the surest means of enabling a child to master his mother tongue (Bailey, 1983, p. 26).

Another key element of the report suggests that “*every*” teacher is a teacher of language. For British schools these recommendations for change were less revolutionary than they would be for North American schools. The British school system is “based on external written examinations—essays that are graded outside the classroom, school, or even country” (Russell, 1991, p. 279). British school reform did not aim to introduce or extend writing across the curriculum; however, the report did criticize the type of writing in those disciplines. Writing for

summarization was more common than writing to discover. In perspective, the most important long-range recommendation dealt with the integration of all language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This model would have a radical effect on teaching in North America for the next twenty years. Teachers were no longer simply lecturers, but coaches of language use who promote thinking. The program was founded on a strong commitment to theory. Fulwiler and Young (1990) suggest four theoretical assumptions that are necessary for WAC to be successful:

1. Language is central to thinking; written language is central to disciplined thinking; writing is central to teaching and learning in all disciplines.
2. The more students write about something, the better they learn it.
3. Writing is a complex process for students and professors; instructors who understand this will assign and evaluate writing with greater sensitivity and receive better learning and writing in the bargain.
4. Writing, revising, and editing improve the quality of ideas, information, and expression in any piece of writing (p. 47).

In the United States, the early impetus for WAC grew out of the spirit of educational reform that permeated the 1960's. Many WAC-like programs began, but were unable to sustain their influence due to a lack of staffing and funding. Public pressure would change that problem. In addition to the climate of reform, Russell (1991) points to three additional reasons for the acceptance of WAC in the 1970's: rising enrollments, academic professionalism, and societal forces.

In the 1970's many post-secondary colleges and universities experienced massive enrollment growths. With this growth came students of varying abilities. The need for "remedial" writing courses led Shaughnessy to found the "basic writing" movement. This movement became critical to the growth of WAC (Russell, 1994). Some of the first articles published on WAC would appear in the *Journal of Basic Writing*. On another front, local administration in the U.S. began

efforts to demonstrate their institutional effectiveness. WAC became a tool for curricular reform and faculty development. Because of internal and private funding, WAC programs expanded and proliferated. One publication of note in the mid-1970's promoted writing as thinking. Emig's landmark article *Writing as a Mode of Learning* (1977), which was the earliest major article dealing with writing in this vein, set the tone for change in North America.

The growing acceptance of composition in the academy also influenced the growth of WAC programs. The professionalization of composition teachers allowed these teachers to lead campus-wide workshops and be involved in directing writing programs and writing centers, two support apparatuses for WAC. Russell (1991) points to the "revival of rhetoric" which gave the composition teachers identity separate from a typical English department focus on literature. The organization of College Composition and Communication also expanded and explored its own methods of research into issues beyond freshman writing. Soon composition instruction would be led by teachers who were actually trained in writing pedagogy.

The public pressure became a factor after the publication of *the 1974 National Association of Education Progress Report* on the state of writing. The report sparked a December 1995 *Newsweek* cover story entitled, *Why Johnny Can't Write*. The public attention to this supposed crisis launched a national debate in the United States on the state of writing. Administrators, anxious to abate public criticism, allocated more resources for campus-wide WAC training and resources (Russell, 1994). Despite the societal pressures, the origins of the WAC movement were firmly entrenched in educational and linguistic theory.

The Initial Successes of WAC

The earliest seeds of WAC sprouted at three private liberal arts colleges in the mid-1970's (Russell, 1991). Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota, initiated a two-week faculty conference on improving and evaluating student writing in all courses. The faculty later added writing fellows (tutors) and developed criteria for what would later be called writing intensive (WI) courses. Students would need to complete a number of these WI courses in their programs. Central College, Pella,

Iowa, implemented faculty development workshops, a faculty-wide supervisory committee, a writing laboratory, writing tutors, and student portfolios (Russell, 1991).

Perhaps the most influential small college program began at Beaver College, Glenside, Pennsylvania. Maimon secured outside funding for faculty workshops only after her dean mandated that she “do something” (Maimon, Nodine, Hearn, & Haney-Peritz, 1990, p. 140) about the *Newsweek* article. Maimon adapted the model from Carleton College for faculty workshops at her college (Maimon et al., 1990). The program at Beaver College treated writing as a serious scholarly activity related to inquiry, not just as a service course. The Beaver model would include course clusters of three instructors and three related courses that incorporated writing. Maimon later founded the National Council of Writing Program Administrators, a support group for those who supervise collegiate writing programs.

Perhaps the most famous WAC program began in the fall of 1977 at Michigan Technological University, Houghton, Michigan. Young and Fulwiler, firmly grounded in the theory of such a program, initiated their first faculty workshop at a lodge on the Keweenaw Peninsula of Upper Michigan. Fulwiler and Young also integrated the work of Britton, along with free writing, journaling, dialogues, and the philosophies of Elbow, Murray, Moffett, and other expressivists into their program (cited in Russell, 1991). In their faculty workshop, they stressed theory, collaboration at all stages, writing process, emphasizing prewriting and revision strategies, primarily for ideas, not editing for correctness. Some faculty called it “a conversion experience and restored their sense of mission as teachers” (Russell, 1991, p. 287). WAC programs were soon implemented at larger research universities. By 1987, roughly 40% of colleges and universities in the U.S. had a WAC program of some kind (McLeod, 1988a). The first travelers mapped the route; it was up to the rest to follow their lead.

Resistance and Failure

WAC programs are not all the same. Institutions have traveled different routes. Freshman seminars, freshmen colloquy, linked or co-registered courses, course

clusters, or collaborative teaching are all ways to link writing to content areas. “Writing Intensive, writing concentration, writing emphasis, designated writing” courses abound in many places (Griffin, 1985, p. 402). These “writing intensive” type courses carry certain criteria: amount of writing, multiple submissions of drafts, opportunity to revise, and faculty assistance with revision. The growth of WAC has not occurred without resistance or failure. Typical problems that hinder a successful WAC program fall into four categories: program leadership, faculty resistance, faculty training, and administrative support.

Turnover in program leadership is a concern; Young and Fulwiler (1990) use the term “uncertain leadership” when describing programs that fail. Several successful WAC programs have dropped by the wayside when key personnel leave or retire. At many colleges, the program director is not afforded full faculty status. Many leaders do not have tenure or are part time. Many WAC coordinators have heavy teaching loads and often direct the writing center or other departmental writing projects. Faculty members once charged with WAC oversight either get promoted, switch to another administrative task, burn out, or leave the institution for other jobs. When these people depart, the resulting void often spells a low point for the WAC program. The high burnout rate among writing program leaders forces them into job changes or departures (Tandy and Smith, 1990).

On the faculty side, many WAC leaders will meet with resistance, even hostility, from established instructors. Part of the problem is simply a misunderstanding. Some teachers perceive WAC as grammar across the curriculum or a study for surface errors (Maimon, 1980) which translates into, “It’s the English department’s job” (p. 5). Just getting faculty to the workshops can be difficult. Maimon reports this comment from a resistant faculty member: “I’ll come to your damned writing workshop, but remember—I never promised you a prose garden” (Maimon, 1980, p. 4). Another faculty concern is what Maimon describes as the “Myth of the Magistrate:” the magistrate is the only one who can grade, evaluate, or judge student writing (1980, p. 9). Large classes, heavy teaching loads, committee work, the pressure to publish deter faculty from making these commitments of time and energy (Raimes, 1980; Griffin, 1985). Other teachers merely run out of enthusiasm and resort to old teaching habits.

The implicit mixed message of the institution is that research and publishing is more important than teaching (Fulwiler, Dickerson, & Steffens, 1990). Until the reward system changes to value teaching as well as research and publication, WAC programs will constantly face challenges. Ironically, one of the surprises of WAC programs is the increase in faculty writing, publication, and collaboration (Fulwiler, 1984; McLeod, 1988b). After one faculty workshop, Fulwiler and Young (1990) recount stories of a business professor keeping daily journals, a German professor finding he could overcome writer's cramp using workshop techniques, and numerous publishing opportunities.

Other faculty attack WAC as being indicative of the lowering of academic standards across the institution. Revision and collaboration are viewed by them as lowering the quality and integrity of their classes. Some resist the expressive nature of most WAC programs (Fulwiler, 1984). Young and Fulwiler (1990) provide us with an exhaustive, if not somewhat contradictory, list of what they call misinformed, "entrenched attitudes:"

Students should learn to write in high school, students should pass a proficiency test, writing instruction is remedial, learning to write is a series of discrete skills that can be taught in isolation removed from any functional or communicative context; writing is not connected to learning; writing cannot be taught; writing can be taught by anyone with a college diploma; writing research is not real research; and the new writing pedagogy is 'soft' with its reliance on collaboration and revision (p. 293).

English intra-departmental philosophic wars over WAC and writing in general have splintered some departments and threaten to still wreak havoc in other places. The Minnesota Writing Project leaders observed that "Authoritarian teachers resist change, defend lofty academic standards and the sanctity of 'the major' and their own academic freedom" (Fulwiler & Young, 1990, p. 252). Firmly ensconced literature professors often dictate the tone of a department, so writing programs are often marginalized by staff shortages or funding shortfalls. The attitudes "anyone can teach writing" and "teaching writing is drudgery" still prevails in many

departments (Young & Fulwiler, 1990). Either way, the success of the WAC program is seriously compromised by this divisiveness.

Training faculty to implement WAC is a key component to overcoming negative attitudes, infighting, and resistance. The most successful WAC programs sponsor faculty training which involves workshops, inservices, or seminars. Some programs operate more informally by employing brown bag lunches, monthly group support meetings, or advanced workshops for WAC practitioners. Often participants are “encouraged” to attend these workshops with financial carrots. Sometimes workshops are held off-campus at conference centers or lodges, away from phones, email, and other disturbances (Griffin, 1985). For instance, Hunter College, City University of New York, granted semester release time for first-time faculty using WAC. They used this time to meet weekly with the workshop leaders (Raimes, 1980).

A one-time, introductory faculty training session is apparently insufficient. Most successful programs sponsor ongoing training workshops and often repeat the original workshop for new instructors or new faculty converts. Consistent follow-up is a key element for a successful program. Follow-up workshops meet with mixed success; the most commonly attended follow-up workshop occurs about two months after the original workshop (Fulwiler & Young, 1990). Some larger institutions have a campus newsletter with ideas and an opportunity to share; others incorporate a WAC column or article in a faculty development newsletter. Even the availability of good workshop leaders was mentioned as a concern by one school. Maimon suggests three essential topics for a training workshop:

- The design of clear and productive writing assignments
- Ways to respond helpfully and fairly to student papers at various stages of the writing process.
- The use of short, ungraded writing activities that make writing an expected and inevitable part of the teaching and learning process (1980, p. 9).

Once we convince faculty, Raimes (1980) claims, and get them to the workshops, the results can be amazing. At Hunter College one faculty member noted: “she

saved time in her classes by assigning writing on topics instead of lecturing, testing, and then of, necessity, lecturing again. Students grasped the concepts better” (Raimes, 1980, p. 799).

Another issue that is often ignored is the reaction of students. Fulwiler warns of “journal overkill,” which occurs when a student is keeping a journal for any number of classes (Fulwiler, Dickerson, & Steffens, 1990, p. 60). This is especially prevalent at smaller institutions where students may encounter several professors who attended the WAC workshop. Student loads need to be considered and student attitudes need to be overcome. Some students feel that writing is a mere “obstacle to obtaining the grade and an odious interruption in their career training. They will write whatever is necessary to successfully pass the course, but they don’t see the point of developing their writing and thinking abilities” (Young & Fulwiler, 1990, p. 293). These students are products of previous educational, testing, and grading procedures.

Problems with administrative support entail school administration interference and funding issues. Questions of how to pay for workshops, workshop leaders, conference centers, food, travel, even office space persist within WAC programs. Sources for internal funding continue to dwindle; outside sources are disappearing. Money has come from a number of areas: research grants, corporate sponsors, private foundations, and institutional funding. Walvoord (1996) states it bluntly when she describes the precariousness of WAC’s existence: WAC programs are vulnerable to “simply being wiped out in the next budget crunch or the next change of deans” (p. 62).

Another problem with academic bureaucracy is delineating WAC institutional guidelines. Designating, managing, and monitoring writing intensive courses is just one example. The biggest mistake institutional administrators can make is to mandate a WAC program. This eliminates any faculty grass roots leadership and development. Some mistaken administrators try to dole out the responsibilities for the teaching of writing: the business department is responsible for the semi-colon, the math department for conjunctions, the history department teaches the use of quotes. Some deans try to develop measurable competencies to hold over writing teachers’ heads (Maimon, 1980). The other side of the blade is the ineffectiveness

of a program that is operating without any administrative support. Thaiss (1988) suggests administration should assist grassroots WAC efforts rather than dictating it. Coordination and communication can be assets in making WAC successful.

Lastly, the threats coming from program assessment and funding each deserve its own article. Both can derail a well-run program. Sometimes they are related. Institutions keep trying to measure the effectiveness of a program, ironically justifying its continued funding. Some have gone to impromptu written assessments; others use a portfolio variation. Young and Fulwiler admit that attempts to measure the effect of WAC programs have not been successful. Institutions are guided by testing and quantification of teaching (Young & Fulwiler, 1990), as the public and administrators clamor for results that demonstrate teaching effectiveness. Amidst these potholes, roadblocks, warning lights, and road repairs, the popularity of WAC has survived, even thrived.

Variations, Challenges, and New Trails for WAC

Not long after this explosion other “across the curriculum” programs started: speaking across the curriculum, reading across the curriculum, language across the curriculum, critical thinking across the curriculum, ethics across the curriculum, technology across the curriculum, and now, electronic communication across the curriculum. But the real problem facing ongoing programs is where to go next. McLeod (1989) suggests that in order to maintain the initial enthusiasm WAC movements need to offer multi-tiered workshops for new faculty, maintain the high enthusiasm of the early adopters, and find a way to integrate the middle and late adopters (Walvoord, 1996). WAC must also continue to institutionalize WAC, write it into curriculum via reform, in essence, monitor and nurture changes. The best way to maintain WAC is to write into the mission and goal statements of an institution. Thaiss (1988) advises leaders to make use of the general education reform movement, perhaps even joining the core curriculum committee. Misperceptions about WAC still persist. In a recent article, McLeod and Maimon (2000) re-iterate the purposes of WAC. Their article was a response to recent attacks that WAC is merely “grammar across the curriculum.”

What lies ahead for the WAC? Thaiss (1988) has a number of concerns about

the direction of WAC programs. Textbooks are promoting “across the curriculum” motifs by merely supplanting literary readings with readings within disciplines. This approach sustains the misperception of the “isolationism” of composition classes. Furthermore, as the lines between communication and technology blur, WAC can no longer ignore the infusion of technology into the writing environment (Walvoord, 1996).

Concluding Remarks: Possible Strategies for Implementing and Sustaining a New Generation WAC Program

It has been nearly five decades ever since the beginning of WAC movement. Currently WAC is being interpreted in many different forms throughout the United States. Many taking a broader school-wide approach by setting up on-campus writing centers (Brewster & Klump, 2004), middle school-university partnerships (Jennings & Hunn, 2002), or peer and cross-age tutoring programs (Stuckey, 2002). Others make changes at the classroom level via two types of practices: Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and Writing to Learn (WTL). Classroom practitioners believe that the former trains students to become better readers, thinkers, and learners by conducting discipline-specific writings while the latter uses writing as tool to translate knowledge (NWP & Nagin, 2003).

For any seeking to resurrect or begin a WAC program, the past speaks volumes. By looking at the historical perspective it is obvious to find several key elements to focus a new program on. 1) Start with a big scale campus-wide needs assessment in order to meet the demands of students and teachers (Brewster & Klump, 2004). 2) Make sure an institutional structure for leadership is in place and funded (i.e., a new leader can run the original WAC program without comprising). 3) Carefully plan (and fund) initial workshops with faculty to overcome misperceptions, attitudes, practices, and theoretical differences. 4) Plan on-going training and support for faculty who implement WAC in their classrooms. 5) Prepare for the future by institutionalizing WAC by writing it into curricular reforms and mission and goal statements. Bazerman (1991) gives us the best state-of-the-WAC commentary as he marks the end of first generation WAC and looks to the second:

Building a New Generation Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Program:
What Can an Emerging Program Learn from the Past?

As we start to turn the microscope on academic disciplinary writing, it will take us a while to know what we wish to concentrate on and how to get our analytic tools in focus. Now we are rightfully searching for striking details, intriguing possibilities, and organizing patterns....It is too early to prejudge which concepts will produce the most useful analyses (p. 212).

With all heart, my colleagues and I at our current institution hope to learn from the theoretical inceptions, the early successes, the roadblocks, and then develop successful alternate routes which will guide us through all the possible but unpredictable challenges. No program is without hitches, but being aware of the dead ends can make the difference between a smooth ride on the WAC expressway or a bumpy trip down a narrow country lane.

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