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## Programs in Writing Across the Curriculum

### Earliest Programs

As far as has been documented, the earliest Writing Across the Curriculum faculty seminar was led by Barbara Walvoord in 1969–70 at Central College (a four-year liberal arts college in Pella, Iowa). As part of the concern for student writing in all majors, a writing proficiency requirement for undergraduate majors was established at the college. Another early program to explore the promise of Writing Across the Curriculum was at Carleton College in Minnesota, also a private four-year liberal arts college. In the early 1970s, Carleton started a cross-curricular program that encouraged faculty to use writing in their courses and eventually ran conferences to train faculty in writing pedagogy and assessment strategies. These early programs were eventually joined by more ambitious programs, funded by outside sources, at Beaver College (also a private four-year school) in Pennsylvania and Michigan Technological University (the first PhD granting and the first public institution to institute a WAC program). In these various programs we see the emergence of key structures that would be used to implement WAC programs: faculty seminars and workshops, writing intensive course requirements, linked courses, the freshman seminar, and peer tutoring. We also see the strong relationship with the National Writing Project that was emerging at the same time, and which was to be a frequent resource and partner with WAC.

The Britton et al (1975) study and the Bullock report (1975) from the UK (see previous chapter) were the subject of a National Endowment for the Humanities summer seminar in 1975—a seminar attended by Michigan Tech faculty member, Toby Fulwiler. Fulwiler returned with new ideas and possibilities for writing in the university and, in collaboration with colleague Art Young, developed a program of faculty workshops, implemented in 1977, that explored ways to use writing in university courses across the departments by integrating writing into existing curricula. The emphasis was “writing to learn” (see Chapter 4) by using journals and ungraded writing assignments to encourage students to explore and develop their thoughts on paper. The program is outlined in Fulwiler and Young’s book, *Language Connections: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum* (1982) (available online at [http://wac.colostate.edu/books/language\\_connections](http://wac.colostate.edu/books/language_connections)), and the use of journals in university course work is explored in Fulwiler’s book, *The Journal Book* (1987a). See also Young and Fulwiler (1986).

At roughly the same time that Toby Fulwiler was encouraging Michigan Tech faculty to integrate writing into their courses, Elaine Maimon was called upon by the dean of Beaver College to do something about the writing crisis. Maimon’s program also involved faculty workshops. Her approach, however, focused on “writing as a form of social behavior in the academic community” (McLeod, 1988, p. 4). In her emphasis on the need for students to enter the discourse communities housed in the various college departments, Maimon promoted group work, collaborative projects, and writing intensive courses within the various majors (Maimon, 1982; McLeod & Maimon, 2000). Her program is outlined in her 1981 book, *Writing in the Arts and Sciences*. The approach adopted here is related to what would emerge as the rhetoric of inquiry movement (see Chapter 6).

Writing intensive courses also became the heart of the WAC program at the University of Michigan, where these courses were overseen by an interdisciplinary English Composition Board. The Board organized seminars for faculty development, oversaw syllabi for writing intensive courses, trained teaching assistants, and administered a writing lab. Another solution to increasing emphasis on writing in large courses, the linked course, was pioneered at the University of Washington. In this model small sections of writing courses were linked to large general education lecture courses. Students registered for the lecture course, then had the option to fulfill their writing requirements in the

linked writing class, whose assignments would be built around the material and assignments of the lecture course (Russell, 1991, p. 288).

The peer tutoring labs first developed at Brooklyn College (Bruffee, 1978) and California State Dominguez Hills (Sutton, 1978) in 1972. Undergraduate tutors were competitively selected and trained to work with other undergraduates either in a lab or in conjunction with a course. The tutors not only provided support for the writing of the tutees, but together increased their mutual engagement with academic material and the process of writing, creating a more scholarly undergraduate culture.

Cornell University had already begun to reform its freshman writing program as early as 1966 by replacing some sections of the traditional course taught in the English department by seminars taught by professors in nine different disciplines. By the mid-1970s the seminars had grown to largely replace the traditional composition course, and a few years later the freshman seminars became placed within an independently funded unit, which has since become the Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines ([http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight\\_institute/index.html](http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight_institute/index.html)). The Knight Institute now offers a full range of courses in writing in the disciplines at all levels.

The Bay Area Writing Project formed in 1973 as a collaboration between public schools and university writing teachers, and rapidly proved such a successful model for the teaching of writing that within a couple of years it had grown into the National Writing Project, which now has projects in all fifty states. The project formed communities of writing teachers through intensive workshops and continuing activities. Within the workshops teachers were provided experiences to help them perceive themselves as writers and to develop their self-conscious skill as writers. By developing their own writing confidence and competence through interaction with peers, they would then be better prepared to return to their classrooms and establish positive writing environments where all students would write and see themselves as writers. As WAC programs were developing they frequently looked to the Writing Project model of faculty development to design WAC seminars and engage faculty in all disciplines as writers. The idea was, as with the writing projects, that instructors who came to understand themselves as writers and who developed their ability to reflect on writing in their disciplines would be in a better position to expand writing expectations, instruction, and support in their own

disciplinary classrooms. They would also become more sympathetic and responsive to students' struggles with writing. Further, some writing projects invited faculty from all disciplines to participate in their seminars, and they became vehicles for introducing WAC to primary and secondary teachers in all subject areas. Such two-way alliances between WAC and local writing projects, for example, developed at George Mason University (which was to become a major force in creating the National Network of WAC Programs) and at the University of North Carolina (which was to run the influential Wildacres Retreats on WAC from 1983–1998).

*Writing Across the Curriculum: A Guide to Developing Programs* (1992), edited by Susan McLeod and Margot Soven, compares programs in the 1990s with these early programs (available online at [http://wac.colostate.edu/books/mcleod\\_soven/](http://wac.colostate.edu/books/mcleod_soven/)). The early programs, according to McLeod, were funded by external sources and utilized the expertise of outside consultants for their creation. By the 1990s, the majority of WAC programs were reliant upon internal funding in the colleges and universities that housed them. Additionally, the early programs were generally championed by faculty members—in most cases, junior faculty with little administrative clout. The 1990s saw high-ranking college and university administrators enthusiastically promoting WAC programs and prodding sometimes reluctant faculty to bring more writing into courses and general education requirements. In both cases, power moved from a bottom-up movement requiring a certain amount of salesmanship to a top-down institutional mandate.

Many of the WAC-related journal articles published since 1975 have been reports of specific programs designed and implemented at specific institutions (see especially the online journal archives of the *Journal of Language and Learning Across the Disciplines*). Writing program administrators (WPAs) have also conducted research studies on their own programs and those studies are published in journals from time to time, covering topics ranging from faculty motivation to student outcomes (see the journal, *Writing Program Administration*). Toby Fulwiler and Art Young's 1990 book, *Programs That Work: Models and Methods for Writing Across the Curriculum*, provides comprehensive descriptions of fourteen WAC programs, each written by the program administrators from campuses ranging from the two-year college to the PhD granting research university. For further accounts of early

WAC programs, see the new collection, *Creating A Community: The Beginnings of the WAC Movement*, edited by Margot Soven and Susan McLeod (in press).

### Administrative & Institutional Support and Interest (1970–1985)<sup>1</sup>

Institutional and administrative interest for writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines in the earlier stages of the movement developed largely in response to continued concerns about a perceived literacy crisis among American students. This sense of crisis was in part a response to the expansion of university access fostered by Open Admissions Policies, pioneered at the City University of New York, which guaranteed admissions to any high school graduate. Modified versions of this policy were adopted at a number of public universities in other cities. These policies, which brought new students into the university, made visible the limitations of K-12 education in fostering writing among all students. The challenge of providing all students with the literacy skills necessary for success in a world requiring college education became one of the chief motives for the development of Composition as a professional field.

The first signs of the longstanding struggle among college English professors to teach literacy basics like reading and writing instead of what most preferred—literature—became visible. “The pressure from students who need remedial or basic instruction in writing and from those who are demanding more practical courses in English are forcing some English departments to re-examine their basic approach to the study of English,” writes *Chronicle of Higher Education* reporter Malcolm G. Scully in 1974. While for some time high school English teachers had been criticized for allowing literacy standards to slip, col-

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<sup>1</sup> The institutional support and interest discussed here is measured mainly through articles in American higher education journals. In other words, a review of the major journals that report on the state of higher education was done and not a review of specific universities, departments, or faculty. The support and interest discussed here is gleaned from the opinions of higher education in general as expressed in several of the field’s larger and more respected journals.

lege open admissions policies offered college English departments the opportunity to “fix” matters. English departments were not the only ones needing to reconsider their curriculum and pedagogy. “The lack of writing skills [affected] the work of other departments besides English,” reports the *Chronicle* (Scully, 1974). A report on undergraduate education in political science for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, for example, reported that many students were not strong enough readers and writers to advance in the discipline at an appropriate pace.

The literacy crisis was such a matter of public concern that *Newsweek* declared a state of emergency in American education in a cover story in 1975, posing the problem “Why Johnny Can’t Write.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* used extreme headlines such as “Crisis in English Writing” (Scully, 1974) and “Stamping Out Illiteracy” (Berman, 1978) followed by detailed discussions and ample statistics about the declining verbal and written skills of college students. Although few explicit references to writing across the curriculum were made, many of the suggestions aimed at solving the literacy “crisis” involved implementing WAC fundamentals. A research associate at Syracuse University Research Corporation responds with a letter to the editor about the “Crisis” article and questions why “the lion’s share of the burden of developing literacy skills is being placed on English departments? Writing is vital to most subjects” (Huff, 1974). She concludes her article with an emphatic assertion that students’ exposure to literature should not be limited by the need to develop important writing skills. A letter to the editor by Ronald Reagan’s future head of the National Endowment for the Humanities responding to the “Stamp Out Illiteracy” article draws an elaborate analogy between illiteracy and a plague. Joseph C. Voekler, Department of English at Franklin & Marshall College, extends the “disease” metaphor when he comments: “The ‘concrete’ solution, then, is simple. Infect the students by exposure. Teach the entire faculty—the popular and powerful first, the others later—to know good writing when they see it, to practice it, and to criticize bad writing in an effective way. They have got to stop expecting someone else to do it for them” (Voekler, 1978). Later he speaks directly to the WAC cause by remarking, “It will take expensive faculty workshops on rhetoric in the summers, a writing component in every course the college offers, and the effective persuasion of moss-backed faculty members [to get rid of the disease]” (Voekler, 1978).

Faculty development, a central element of writing across the curriculum theories, gained swift momentum in the 1970s. Also known as “instructional development” or “staff development,” it became an extremely popular practice in American higher education. Perhaps one of the biggest reasons for its popularity was that it challenged the long-held belief that college professors’ primary goal was research and not teaching. In 1975, Bert Biles, director of a new national center on faculty development at Kansas State University, estimated there were between 400 and 500 such programs on American campuses (Semas, 1975). The programs were characterized by conferences, handbooks, newsletters, and the central belief that teaching did matter as much if not more than research. Jerry G. Gaff, a researcher who conducted a study of these programs for the Exxon Education Foundation, speculates that the “publish or perish [philosophy] will soon be regarded as a quaint piece of academic nostalgia” (1975). Possible reasons for the area’s explosive growth included a narrow job market and poor mobility for faculty members; pressures from students, statewide and institutional governing boards, legislatures and governors; and reduced research funding turning more professors’ interests towards teaching (Semas, 1975). Although the majority of these faculty-development programs are not foregrounded in WAC, they reflected and informed writing across the curriculum theories, as well as provided an additional motivation for administrators to support WAC programs.

### Writing Across the Curriculum in K-12 Education

Although Writing Across the Curriculum developed most visibly in the United States as a higher education initiative, it also resonated with K-12 educators committed to Deweyian models of progressive education. The following anecdote from 1984 indicates how closely WAC was linked to authentic, participatory learning:

Rich Gottfried, who teaches earth science and chemistry at Chantilly (Va.) High School, was asked how much “extra time” he spent having students write essay tests, rather than fill in the blanks, and helping them develop group projects, rather than just lecturing. “Extra time?” he replied, puzzled. “It’s not extra. That’s how I teach, and that’s how they learn.

Of what use are facts about rocks and elements if students don't learn to think about those facts the way scientists do?" (Thaiss & Suhor, 1982)

Because schools have more resistant and hard-pressed administrative arrangements (see Siskin, 1995), WAC was taken up mostly as a means of improving instruction in individual classrooms rather than as a major school-wide initiative. As a result the major publications of the K-12 WAC movement largely presented easily implemented classroom suggestions rather than describe institutional programmatic development.

Thaiss and Suhor's 1984 volume aimed to "translate the most vital research in writing and oral communication into useful suggestions for classroom practice" (p. ix). It remains a remarkably useful and practical book. Nine essays provide a balance of theory and practice for any teacher (or parent) who wants to understand how writing and speaking across the curriculum can enhance learning. The book is useful for any K-12 practitioner who seeks to understand the theory behind writing to learn and learning to write, as well as some practical classroom implementation strategies.

In *Language Across the Curriculum in the Elementary Grades* (1986), Christopher Thaiss defines language across the curriculum as "something that happens continuously in classrooms and in homes and on playgrounds, whether we wish it to or not" and suggests that much learning can't happen without it (p. 2). Since a child learns about the world through words and symbols, it stands to reason that anything a child is interested in talking or writing about is an opportunity for learning. Thaiss explains that language across the curriculum requires a refocusing of curricula away from content and toward envisioning writing, games playing, and class discussion as opportunities for learning.

Thaiss summarizes the seminal research in this field and introduces the reader to five different elementary classrooms where excellent teachers allow language across the curriculum to work with children of varying learning abilities and disabilities. This book is an excellent reference for any elementary teacher who wants to explore language across the curriculum methods.

Tchudi and Huerta's *Teaching Writing in the Content Areas: Middle School/Junior High* (1983) directs the reader's attention to the why and



how of writing in the content areas for middle and junior high students. This small and practical handbook is divided into three parts: Part I—a primer for the novice or experienced writing teacher, Part II—specific examples of writing in the content areas with model units and lessons, and Part III—a source for teachers who want to move on to developing specific materials for their own classrooms. The theme of this publication is “keep content at the center of the writing process” (p. 3). Unlike writing to demonstrate a mastery of the content, the authors believe that writing well follows from creating situations where students want to write, “using their subject-matter knowledge in the process” (p. 3). Recommendations for prewriting and revision activities, as well as guidelines for how to evaluate student writing, are included along with several lesson designs, worksheets, and topic ideas for writing projects in science, math, art/music, social science, history, social studies, civics, career/vocational education, and others that are still practical twenty years after the original publication. Similarly, *Teaching Writing in the Content Areas: Senior High School* by Tchudi and Yates (1983) provides specific model units for high school classrooms.