

Survey responses from 401 community colleges show that many of these two-year, open-admissions institutions have developed writing across the curriculum programs that address the special needs of their faculty and students.

Writing Across the Curriculum at Community Colleges

Barbara R. Stout, Joyce N. Magnotto

Community colleges are based on educational and political theories that suggest that almost all people can learn adult-level material if they are provided with effective instruction in a supportive environment. Writing across the curriculum is based on composition theories that suggest that almost all people can write—and can learn through writing—if they have opportunities to develop their own writing processes, to write often in various ways, and to learn the rhetorics of their disciplines.

Because community colleges stand for the broad extension of higher education and WAC stands for a similar extension of writing, this kind of college and this pedagogical movement should interact productively, helping to define and expand each others' purposes and possibilities. To explore this interaction and to see the present situation of WAC programs at community colleges, we surveyed 1,270 colleges on the mailing list of

Thanks to Montgomery College vice-presidents Frederick Walsh and Charlene Nunley and to David Hemenway and Ruth Garies in the Office of Institutional Research for making possible the survey of American Association of Community and Junior Colleges members.

the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) by means of a questionnaire administered by Montgomery College's Office of Institutional Research.

We asked about activities, organization, funding, and benefits of WAC programs, and we elicited information about possible impediments to WAC at community colleges. We received 401 responses. In this chapter, we look at what those responses indicate about WAC at community colleges, and we highlight programs that meet the needs of two-year college students and faculty.

An Overview of WAC Programs in Community Colleges

Almost one third of the survey respondents reported that their colleges have WAC programs. This percentage is consistent with other recent estimates of WAC programs at colleges and universities (see the Appendix in this volume and Kinneavy, 1987). Survey responses from 111 community colleges indicated that they are planning or considering writing across the curriculum. The remaining 169 of the 401 responding colleges do not have programs. Eleven reported discontinuing their programs, and one reported reinstating a program after a lapse.

Community college WAC programs vary in longevity, organization, and funding levels. Nine respondents began WAC before 1979; fifty-two began between 1980 and 1984; sixty started between 1985 and 1987. Thirty-four plan to begin in 1988 and 1989.

Some community college WAC programs are organized on a system-wide basis (for example, those in Minnesota and in Arizona's Maricopa & strict), but most operate at individual colleges. WAC is typically directed by a faculty member, although fifteen survey respondents reported management by an administrator. Multidiscipline WAC committees are common (eighty respondents), as are connections with core curricula or general education (sixty respondents). A few colleges, such as LaGuardia Community College in New York, have language across the curriculum programs, in which writing is important but not primary.

Funding for WAC ranges from the \$600,000 in Bush Foundation grants used to establish programs at the eighteen community colleges in the Minnesota system to the annual budgets of \$1,000 to \$4,000 that are the norm. Compensation for faculty members who direct WAC includes release time, varying from less than one course to full-time reassignment, and, less often, extra pay, ranging from \$100 to over \$3,000. A few programs have no funding and are fueled by faculty zeal or pushed by an administrator. Fifty percent of respondents with WAC programs identified funding as a concern (see Chapter Six).

The most common faculty development activities are half-day workshops and informal, information-sharing sessions. Full-day workshops,

longer institutes, and discipline-focused activities are also popular. The three WAC benefits most frequently cited on the survey are more student writing, increased student learning, and increased faculty interaction.

As this overview indicates, community college WAC programs have much in common with programs at four-year colleges and universities, and this is consistent with their collegiate function (Cohen and Brawer, 1987). Community colleges, however, often differ from senior institutions in curricular dimensions, student characteristics, and faculty circumstances, and many community colleges have developed WAC activities especially suited to their own realities.

The Two-Year Curriculum

Community college curricula are shaped by their two-year status and their “numerous tasks of . . . offering transfer, vocational, technical, adult, and developmental education.” (Cohen and Brawer, 1972, p. 7). With varied programs and no upper-division offerings, curricular dimensions at community colleges are more horizontal than vertical, to use James Kinneavy’s terms (1983, p. 13). Therefore, some WAC practices that were developed at four-year schools either *are* not useful at community colleges or must be adapted. Some respondents to our survey identified the two-year curriculum as a problem for WAC on their campuses, expressing a belief that writing-emphasis courses are more appropriate in upper-division programs and voicing a concern about limited time for student growth.

Writing-Emphasis Courses. Obviously, community colleges cannot offer upper-division writing courses such as those at the University of Maryland and the University of Michigan. Several community colleges, however, have developed writing-emphasis courses and subject-composition courses, both of which can accelerate students’ growth as writers. In addition, a few colleges have modified the usual two-semester freshman composition sequence.

For example, at Broome Community College in New York, both writing-emphasis (W) courses and a second-year composition course are important components of a newly adopted general education program. To receive the associate’s degree, Broome students must take two W courses after taking one semester of composition. Then, at the end of their curricula, students must take another semester of composition in which writing assignments are related to their specific fields. In the spring of 1988, Broome offered writing-intensive courses on a trial basis in computer science, mathematics, interior design, chemistry, business, dental hygiene, and nursing. Faculty receive stipends and course-load reductions to develop their W courses; they also attend a seminar directed by WAC coordinators Patricia Durfey and Ann Sova.

Linked Courses. A number of community colleges offer linked or team-taught subject-composition courses to address the two-year curricular limitation. Among these colleges are Richland College and Houston Community College in Texas, Fullerton College in California, Johnson County Community College in Kansas, Bucks County Community College in Pennsylvania, Monroe Community College in New York, and Harford and Prince Georges community colleges in Maryland. At Prince Georges, paired sections of Psychology 101 with English 101 and of History 101 with English 101 are offered. Students enroll in both classes, and assignments in the English composition course are directly connected with the psychology or history course. The instructors each receive three hours of released time during the planning semester to develop their team approach.

The Technical and Vocational Curriculum

Many community college faculty seem to believe that technical and vocational courses are not compatible with writing. In the survey, 154 respondents checked "curricula in which writing is not usually assigned" as an impediment to WAC on their campuses. Again and again, comments such as these appeared: "Community college vocational programs have few academic courses in their curricula and little opportunity for writing in vocational courses," and "WAC seems less adaptable to technologies."

These responses reflect a misunderstanding of major WAC principles, especially the concept of writing as an instrument of learning in any subject. They also indicate the persistence of the assumption that traditional assignments, such as the research paper, are the only way to put writing into a course. In addition, these comments seem to deny the importance of writing in many of the careers for which community college students are being educated.

WAC advocates believe that career courses can (and should) prepare graduates for on-the-job writing. Cosgrove (1986) notes that community college graduates perform a variety of writing tasks and that they find "two-year college courses in their major to be the most helpful to present work-related writing," with "English courses most helpful to academic and domestic writing" (p. iii). WAC programs can serve the technical and vocational curricula integral to community colleges by emphasizing writing to learn and writing that is likely to help graduates become promotable employees.

For example, one of the country's strongest WAC programs deals directly with technical classes. This program, Writing and Reading in the Technologies (WRIT), is at Queensborough Community College (QCC) in New York. WRIT has now expanded into the liberal arts at

QCC, but it began in 1982 in vocational and technical programs. It emphasizes journals and microthemes. WRIT provides faculty with several workshops each year, including some of a second-stage nature that help faculty continue to integrate writing into their classes. WRIT is directed by Linda Stanley, who is supported by an assistant director and department coordinators.

The WAC program at Orange County Community College in New York also functions in technical and occupational courses, with credit-bearing writing modules and writing workshops that are team taught by composition and technical faculty. Writing workshops are piggybacked onto courses in such fields as physical therapy and engineering science. Students take two of these modules to meet a three-credit, cross-disciplinary writing requirement. Christine Godwin is director.

Student Diversity

The open-admissions policies of community colleges affect WAC programs. Around 40 percent of the nation's college students attend two-year institutions ("Targeted Forecast," 1987; Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 1988), and these students are as diverse as the population of the United States. Some are well-prepared fledgling scholars, equal to their peers at selective universities; others arrive ill prepared for any kind of postsecondary study, academic or technical.

Community college students often take classes part time; some have children; many have jobs. They spend little time on campus and so have few opportunities for collaboration or conversations about their writing assignments. Without juniors, seniors, and graduate students as role models, community college students may not understand the commitment and excitement of serious study, which inevitably includes writing.

While these demographics should not and do not prevent community colleges from having WAC programs, respondents to our survey most frequently identified the following student characteristics as impediments to WAC on their campuses: job and family demands (cited by 44 percent of respondents), wide range of abilities or preparation (42 percent), and little time on campus (37 percent).

The character of the community college student population has at least three implications for writing across the curriculum. First, this variety of students benefits from a variety of writing assignments. WAC directors can inform faculty about the many kinds of assignments that help students to learn course material as well as to become more practiced writers. Second, community colleges need writing centers and other support services for student writers. Third, community colleges with effective—and sensitive—assessment and developmental programs have a better chance of having strong WAC programs.

Support for Student Writers. Writing centers that provide help with assignments in all subjects are particularly useful to community college students. Survey respondents from 136 colleges reported writing centers at their campuses; 78 identified the lack of a writing center as a problem for WAC.

Community colleges often find that their lower-division status provides a staffing problem for writing centers. With no cohort of upper-level students to work as tutors, centers are staffed by faculty, by freshman- or sophomore-level students, occasionally by students from nearby universities, or by community members. Budgeting for faculty tutors and training for student tutors, who are seldom available for many semesters, are regular concerns. To address these problems, community colleges have developed a variety of tutor-training programs and courses. For example, the State University of New York (SUNY) Agricultural and Technical College at Farmingdale offers a special section of English 101 (Composition) as a peer-tutoring course; students who have scored well on the placement exam are invited to enroll, and those who complete the course satisfactorily can become paid tutors, helping fellow students with writing assignments. Ann R. Shapiro developed this community college variation on Brown University's tutor-training course.

Student workshops on such topics as essay exams, lab reports, and research papers are a support service provided at forty-nine colleges responding to our survey. A few WAC programs (twelve respondents) help students through joint efforts with secondary schools. Examples are Brookdale Community College in New Jersey and Queensborough in New York, which have sponsored conferences on writing and learning for secondary school teachers.

Assessment and Developmental Programs. Even the most devoted WAC faculty admit difficulty with students who have severe problems with writing in standard English. Faculty and students alike are more comfortable with writing when students can perform at the level expected in any credit-granting course.

At Miami-Dade Community College in Florida, improved student placement and emphasis on writing work together. Miami-Dade's approach to WAC has been through writing assignments in core curriculum courses. Students are expected to be prepared for writing because the college has strengthened its requirements for assessment, placement, and enrollment in developmental programs.

The connection between developmental courses and writing across the curriculum probably merits more attention. Only 7 percent of survey respondents reported revising developmental courses as a result of WAC. Students in such courses, however, need to practice all kinds of writing, particularly writing that will help them learn the material for all kinds of classes.

Faculty Circumstances

While community college faculty share many characteristics with their four-year and university colleagues, these faculty teach under circumstances that often affect their attitudes toward and participation in WAC.

Teaching loads are heavy at community colleges. The standard assignment each semester for a full-time faculty member is fifteen credit hours, which often means five classes and multiple preparations. An additional class or a few more credits are not unusual. Sometimes classes are large, with thirty or more students to be taught without the help of graduate assistants. Many community college faculty are convinced that they do not have time to assign and respond to student writing. On the survey, 195 respondents (49 percent) checked "heavy teaching loads" as an impediment to WAC on their campuses.

Community college faculty have not been expected to do research (although many do produce fine scholarship). Doctoral degrees and publishing records are not critical to their hiring, promotion, and tenure. This situation provides both positive and negative potential for WAC. The positive is that community college faculty, free from the pressure to publish, may have some energy to devote to student writing. The negative is that many community college faculty are not writers themselves and may not be comfortable dealing with writing in their classes (Obler, 1985). This situation is an interesting inversion of that at research universities. In addition, like their four-year colleagues, community college faculty are specialists who sometimes have problems with "terminology, personality, and turf" (Fulwiler, 1984, p. 114) when writing is encouraged in all curricula.

Our survey shows that several community college WAC programs deal directly with the realities of heavy teaching loads, faculty uncertainty about writing, and specialization by using intensive institutes, one-to-one consultation, discipline-specific activities, and resource materials.

Intensive Faculty Institutes. The Minnesota colleges, Richland College and El Paso County Community College in Texas, and the Maricopa Community College District in Arizona are among those that have been able to provide intensive WAC institutes, which feature composition theory, easy-to-grade assignments, and faculty writing experiences. Richland has annual two-day workshops; El Paso County has a semester-long program with weekly seminars. In the summer of 1987, faculty from all seven Maricopa campuses participated in a two-week session modeled after National Writing Project summer institutes, with stipends and graduate credit. These faculty reviewed scholarship in their fields, both to update themselves and to learn what kinds of writing were being used in their subjects. They also wrote and participated in writing groups, gaining or regaining a feeling for the pain and pleasure of writing, a sensi-

tivity important to using writing well in classes. The Maricopa project is described in "Writing: A Way of Learning" (Bertch, 1987). Julie Bertch is director.

One-to-one Consultation. At North Shore Community College in Massachusetts, WAC committee members have used a one-to-one consulting approach, meeting individually with faculty in various disciplines to help them develop and respond to writing assignments. Marion Bailey is director. Clinton Community College in New York reports a similar approach.

Discipline-Specific Activities. Sixty-two survey respondents said that their WAC programs have included department- or discipline-focused activities. At Montgomery College in Maryland, WAC in its second stage will focus on writing in science, mathematics, and related programs in 1988, on writing in business, management, and related programs in 1989, and on writing in the humanities, the arts, and related programs in 1990. This approach was developed in consultation with faculty in each discipline.

Resource Materials. Books, with copies of assignments from all kinds of courses, can assist faculty in both technical and academic classes; such books are particularly helpful to part-time faculty. Colleges with good resource materials include Quinsigamond (in Massachusetts), Minneapolis Community College, Queensborough, and Miami-Dade.

Other Faculty Support Activities. Some community colleges encourage faculty writing by organizing writing groups and giving luncheons or teas honoring faculty writers. A few colleges give other assistance: Chesapeake College in Maryland provides a writing hot line for faculty and staff; Miami-Dade has used paid, trained "collateral readers" from the community to help in evaluating and grading papers. Orange County's Consultancy Project provides writing consultants for technical departments and for individual faculty who request them.

Support for Part-Time Faculty. In the survey, 101 respondents (25 percent) said that the employment of large numbers of part-time faculty creates a problem for WAC on their campuses. It is often difficult to attract part-time faculty to WAC presentations and workshops; they are often not well paid and usually have other jobs, so they seldom come to the college apart from their teaching times. Helping part-time instructors use writing well in their classes can be an important WAC goal. Distributing resource materials among part-time faculty, scheduling evening and weekend workshops, and assigning full-time faculty mentors are possible methods for improving the situation.

Planning for the Second Stage

Community colleges are moving into the second stage of writing across the curriculum on two levels. Colleges now beginning programs

are building on the experiences of those with established programs. Colleges with continuing programs are using the strategies presented throughout this sourcebook as they evaluate what they have accomplished and what they plan for the future. Both groups can take advantage of the natural affinity of WAC with the teaching mission of the community college. WAC programs at community colleges can emphasize writing to learn, writing that prepares students for work or transfer, and writing that enriches students' lives.

Community college WAC programs should be increasingly involved with employers, composition programs (including developmental components), and secondary schools. Faculty and administrators need to know more about the writing demands in the careers for which they train students; only six respondents identified "increased interaction with employers" as a WAC benefit. Composition sequences should be reexamined. Colleges should collaborate with secondary school systems to increase continuity in writing experiences (see Chapter Five).

In the future, community colleges will have a hard time avoiding writing across the curriculum. Not only will transfer students write in upper-division courses, but, because "there is virtually no occupation in our society today that does not require literacy of its employees, . . . the challenge to read and write must permeate the curriculum" (Roueche, Baker, and Roueche, 1987, p. 25). The report of the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges (1988) says that "above all [the colleges] should help students achieve proficiency in written and oral language" in all classes (p. 47). Finally, government agencies are now involved. The Maryland State Board of Community Colleges' recent report *Blueprint for Quality* (Committee on the Future of Maryland Community Colleges, 1986) recommends writing across the curriculum, and Florida has legislated writing into its community colleges' curriculum.

More idealistically, we see writing across the curriculum as demonstrating the "vision and grit" that our community colleges embody (Stimson, 1987, p. 39). WAC is based on visions of learning and literacy, and WAC programs across the country are showing the grit needed to extend higher education to a wider community.

References

- Bertch, J. "Writing: A Way of Learning." *Innovation Abstracts* (National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, University of Texas at Austin), 1987, 9 (15).
- Cohen, A. M., and Brawer, F. B. *Confronting Identity: The Community College Instructor*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972.
- Cohen, A. M., and Brawer, F. B. *The Collegiate Function of Community Colleges: Fostering Higher Learning Through Curriculum and Student Transfer*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987.

- Commission on the Future of Community Colleges. *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1988.
- Committee on the Future of Maryland Community Colleges. *Blueprint for Quality*. Annapolis: Maryland State Board of Community Colleges, 1986.
- Cosgrove, C. "The Writing of Two-Year College Graduates: An Examination of the Writing Activities of Alumni from Two Western New York Institutions." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of New York, Buffalo, 1986.
- Fulwiler, T. "How Well Does Writing Across the Curriculum Work?" *College English*, 1984, 46 (2), 113-125.
- Kinneavy, J. L. "Writing Across the Curriculum." In P. Franklin (ed.), *Profession* 83. New York: Modern Language Association, 1983.
- Kinneavy, J. L. "Writing Across the Curriculum." In G. Tate (ed.), *Teaching Composition: Twelve Bibliographical Essays*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1987.
- Obler, S. "Writing Across the Curriculum Practices of Full-Time Faculty in Selected Community Colleges." Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Texas at Austin, 1985.
- Roueche, J. E., Baker, G. A., III, and Roueche, S. "Open Door or Revolving Door: Open Access and the Community College." *AACJC Journal*, April/May 1987, pp. 22-26.
- Stimson, C. R. "Who's Afraid of Cultural Literacy?" *Community College Humanities Review*, 1987, 8, 39-46.
- "Targeted Forecast: Higher Education Enrollment." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 25, 1987, p. A29.

Barbara R. Stout is professor of English and coordinator of writing across the curriculum at Montgomery College, Rockville, Takoma Park, and Germantown, Maryland.

Joyce N. Magnotto is associate professor of English studies and director of writing across the curriculum at Prince Georges Community College, Largo, Maryland; she also serves on the board of consultants of the National Network of Writing Across the Curriculum Programs,