



## *Writing Centers and WAC*

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While writing across the curriculum and writing centers both have histories with roots in the nineteenth century, the current connections between them date back to the early 1970s. Researchers claim that this recent linkage began as a response to open admissions, a population explosion, and increased pressures for job-related skills instruction and educational accountability (Carino, “Early” 103; Russell 271). It is worth noting that these same forces exerted themselves at the turn of the century, and in both eras educators were confronted with student populations that challenged their previously held ideas about language instruction. The response in the late nineteenth century included the beginnings of a composition course that, in some cases, included collaborative peer work and the vestiges of writing across the curriculum. It is interesting that the response to a student population whose language skills didn’t match faculty expectations in the 1970s was similar to the response of nearly a century before: a growth in the *discipline* of composition, writing centers, and writing across the curriculum.

Today we find our educational assumptions challenged yet again by new but familiar forces. Society and technology herald a millennium in which alternative educational communities and the languages of hypertext, Internet, and cyberspeak compete with previous understandings of communication and disciplinarity. Added to these forces, increased access to education and the population’s need for retooling in a quickly changing job market create cross-generational classrooms. As Lester Faigley points out, “More than 80 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary education do not live in dormitories. Close to half are older than

25. . . . A different college population with different needs and expectations is bringing different models of learning," which in turn require different models of teaching (14–15). The recent growth and collaboration of WAC and writing centers owe much to practices that allow a quick response to such changing conditions within institutions.

Current social forces and the added collaborations of community and college, industry and university, create an increasingly multi- and interdisciplinary system that demands services tailored to specific needs. Electronic classroom delivery, both face-to-face and screen-to-screen instruction, changes the traditional teacher-learner dynamic and threatens traditional notions of education. It remains to be seen whether, in an era of challenge similar to those mentioned earlier, the academy will turn again to a historically powerful philosophy that promotes writing and learning as skills to be learned discretely. At the moment, practices of writing across the curriculum programs and writing centers seem to have successfully met many of the educational and social needs of the last decade and are poised to respond to those of the new millennium.

## **Intersecting Histories**

David Russell notes that often, from the end of the nineteenth century on:

When [administration and faculty] did require writing as part of regular courses in the disciplines, that writing was less likely to be integrated into the activity of the course or program and more likely to be seen merely as a favor to the English department or the institution, as a way of enforcing standards of correctness or reinforcing general-composition courses, or as a means of evaluation. (8–9)

Articles on early writing labs likewise establish a connection between enforcement of standards, remediation, and required classroom “lab” attendance (Carino, “Early” 104). Russell and Carino note that contending perspectives of language learning in educa-

tional and public forums influenced writing centers and fledgling writing programs (Carino, "Open" 39). In both cases, the pedagogy used was created in response to these competing perspectives, but it was also shaped in response to each successive student population.

For example, while the dominant theories at the beginning of the last century spurred the growth of composition programs, these theories did not support any attempts to spread active responsibility for the teaching of writing to disciplinary faculty other than English. Historians of writing agree that at that time, students "whose writing did not conform to a particular community's standards were thought to exhibit some deficit, which had to be remedied *before* they could be admitted to the [academic, disciplinary] community" (Russell 15). Not particularly enthusiastic about assuming this task, departments of English questioned the assignment of writing instruction to their literature faculty or were overwhelmed by the inability of their practices and theories to "remedy" student writing. So writing instructors and labs were elected to take care of those deficiencies. Nonetheless, with each new cultural challenge, with each incoming first-year group of students, the problem of writing continued to grow across the curriculum. Writing centers and writing classroom instructors with their smaller class sizes and concentrated work environments began to experiment, testing new theories and developing responsive pedagogies.

Despite decades of practices that sought to remedy writing discretely, writing centers attempted early on to connect language learning with a discipline or tutoring lab methods with classrooms. The latter gained strength in the military training of the 1940s that recognized the importance of individualized instruction in the form of lab-connected classrooms (see Redford; Weigle; Wykoff). Some of these practices were adopted by university writing programs throughout that decade, with an important addition in communications programs, which focused on the affective domain (Carino, "Early" 107). Likewise, some writing center practitioners at the time also recognized the need to go beyond surface correction, or skill-and-drill, and sought to identify and work with an individual context—holistically.

Exerting another force on writing practices were the “progressive methods . . . founded or reorganized along the Deweyan lines between the world wars” (Russell 224). Emphasizing interdisciplinarity and what we might today call service learning, private colleges tied writing instruction to disciplines and to the connections between them and learning (see Clark; Jones). Such efforts in writing centers and early WAC initiatives, however, were overwhelmed by the educational theories which separated learning “skills” (such as writing) from content (e.g., Russell 10–12, 108), or separated the affective from the intellectual (Carino, “Early” 107–8). Writing centers and writing teachers were caught between an acquired cultural image of themselves as remedial centers focusing on skill-and-drill and their successful experiences with real writers.

In the 1970s, language learning again came under fire from within and outside the academy. The response was twofold: evaluate composition teaching and establish more writing centers. Writing centers along with other “cross-curricular writing programs were almost always a response to a perceived need for greater access, greater equity. They set out to assimilate, integrate, or . . . initiate previously excluded students by means of language acquisition” (Russell 271). This time, however, the work of writers such as Elbow, Graves, Macrorie, and Moffett gave writing center practitioners a student-centered pedagogy that corroborated affective practices already woven into the traditional skills-centered response to writers. Many histories of individual centers maintain that during this period, they “rejected their imposed roles as course supplement responsible for remedial grammar and developed an innovative student-centered writing pedagogy that competed with classroom work” (Carino, “Open” 31). Influenced by “mass education” in the 1960s and the concomitant increase of diverse student backgrounds in the classroom (Russell 274), writing center practitioners in their one-on-one interactions learned that teaching students an all-purpose academicspeak, one that would serve in all classrooms across the curriculum, was not effective. Center practitioners began interacting across the disciplines to find out what faculty expectations were, how they constructed language in their disciplines, and to what questions their students must respond.

The same forces “gave to the WAC movement its focus on the classroom as community; its student-centered pedagogy, often with a subversive tinge; and its neoromantic, expressivist assumptions” that focused on the individual (Russell 273), as well as on the individual disciplinary classroom. Perhaps unconsciously, faculty began to believe that English teachers couldn’t teach everything about writing in one composition class. They began attending writing workshops in an effort to discover “what to do,” and research on the nature of writing in the disciplines grew. While there never was a single evolutionary line that both writing centers and WAC programs followed, their mutual philosophies began to develop mutual theories and practices. These created a context for current programs that traverse disciplinary lines and challenge traditional ways of thinking about writing and learning content in a world in which writing and learning contexts constantly change.

### **Who Begets What in WAC/Writing Center Connections?**

One of the tenets oft repeated in writing center circles is that any center must shape itself according to its local context. That is, writing centers will exist with their audience in mind, will build on the purpose of their assignment, and will respond to the tacit conventions of the institution within which they operate. The same is true of WAC programs: models are useful for stimulating ideas but should be seen as menus from which ideas can be chosen—or generated. So while numerous variations exist, two basic models drive WAC-writing center connections: writing centers beget WAC programs or WAC programs beget writing centers.

Our program at the University of Toledo followed the first model: while the College of Arts and Sciences wanted to establish a WAC program, faculty decided that they first needed a writing center as a resource; the writing center in turn established the WAC program. As is typical in some universities, such as Purdue, WAC may not be a formal program, but the writing center performs WAC activities as part of its pedagogy and because of the perceived need for faculty interaction across the cur-

riculum (see Harris). In the second model, a WAC program may be established and then administrators find it necessary to establish or change the mission of a writing center as faculty assign more writing across the curriculum. At the University of North Dakota, for example, Joan Hawthorne reports, “The connection with WAC happened during about the fourth year of our WAC program, when we [the WAC program] first began hiring undergrads from disciplines outside of English in a conscious effort to build liaisons with departments where lots of writing was happening.” All of these universities responded to their contexts in different ways, yet all of their WAC programs—official or unofficial—are vital and thriving.

## **WAC and WC Partnerships**

Partnerships between WAC and writing centers seem obvious because they both draw from some of the same theories, engage in shared practices, and are similarly placed within the academic community (often not reporting to departments or working across traditional curricular lines). Even the debates between WAC and writing center practitioners parallel each other: in disciplinary writing, the issue is summarized in the philosophical and semantic contest between the WAC proponents (characterized as forwarding writing to learn) and WID (Writing in the Disciplines) proponents (characterized as favoring writing as disciplinary genres). In writing centers, the same debate takes shape between those who claim that generalist tutors, with their “outsider” status, provide the most effective feedback to writers in any discipline and those who claim tutors must have disciplinary knowledge in order to maintain maximum effectiveness with writers (see Soven, Chapter 9, this volume). In each case, though, and in the WAC and writing center movement toward workplace literacy, there are several common agreements:

- ◆ Each discipline has genres, ways of performing, or conventions specific to its manner of constructing, supporting, and questioning knowledge.

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- ◆ No discipline can effectively act alone: this fact implies a call for workplace alliances, interdisciplinary planning, and multidisciplinary exchanges of theory and practice.
- ◆ The most effective pedagogy is one-on-one or small-group instruction.
- ◆ Assessment of teaching and learning effectiveness is a complex, continual, reflective activity.

Because these commonalities are in line with what we know about teaching and learning, it is no surprise that these two programs serve as model educational initiatives. *Returning to Our Roots*, a report of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, outlined three primary changes institutions must initiate in the new century: they must become “*genuine learning communities*”; they must be “*student centered*”; they must “emphasize the importance of a *healthy learning environment* that provides students, faculty and staff with the facilities, support and resources to make this vision a reality” (v-vi). WAC and writing centers are natural partners when it comes to shared theory and practice, but they also form strong partnerships for changing curriculum and administrative practices, and for examining the ways faculty and students think about writing, learning, and evaluation. In so doing, they create a faculty-student connection—a loop of feedback and response—that promotes student-centered learning communities and provides a healthy environment that supports risk taking and innovation.

Recent educational movements—the federally supported School-to-Work Initiative, the current growth of service learning in universities (see Jolliffe, Chapter 4, this volume), the growth of corporate-school-university relationships, and the new corporate universities—all point to the need to closely align instruction with workplace or vocational competencies. The importance of genre studies in WAC research (see Russell, Chapter 11, this volume) parallels this emphasis in professional contexts. Both WAC programs and writing centers continue to develop ways to read rhetorical situations, deconstruct them, respond to them, and mirror or challenge their practices. There are several areas in which effective partnerships can be built on this common ground.

I discuss four: faculty development, tutor- and technology-linked courses, assessment, and community connections.

### *Faculty Development*

If a director of WAC or of a writing center learns one thing, it is this: faculty members do not want to be told how to teach their classes, how to write assignments, or how to evaluate assignments. While they may well solicit help for any of these—and many of them do—they do not want to be *told* they have to shift their way of thinking about writing, teaching, or learning. The advantage of being a writing center director, therefore, is that the focus of discussion with faculty members can be the student, even while the object of the discussion may be to change teacher pedagogy or philosophy. WAC directors maintain the same focus and objective in faculty conversations since WAC proponents likewise want to have an effect on teaching practices. On the forefront of effecting pedagogical change by promoting reflective practice among faculty, WAC and writing centers can use their discussions with faculty and their work in partnerships to stimulate curricular change.

The blurring of disciplinary boundaries, now a common topic of discussion in academe, has some roots in WAC and writing centers even as such centers acknowledge disciplinary contexts. This dual perspective again puts writing centers both at the edge of educational reform and in paradoxical conflict with the tradition of “disciplinarity.” Conflict 1: The most difficult concept for faculty and students to understand is that writing is not a matter of correct surface features, but a product of a disciplinary culture; nonetheless, at many points disciplines need to speak to each other and to the larger community through accepted conventions that demand interdisciplinary surface correctness. Conflict 2: If WAC and writing centers recognize discipline-specific proficiency, they risk alienating the very discipline from which they evolved (English); yet if they align themselves too closely with English departments, they risk being seen as an arm of composition programs—a remedial lab for those who need emergency treatment. Conflict 3: If a WAC program or writing center is



connected to a “home” English department, it risks aligning itself with the position that writing should be taught discretely, that it is only the purview of those who overtly teach language, and that other areas or disciplines have no obligation to do so. If it is not connected to any department, a WAC program or writing center may be perceived as lacking disciplinary scholarship—the currency of the academy. Working together despite these conflicts, WAC programs and writing centers can serve as models for ways in which education might structure itself as a *knowledge-building community*, responding to blurred concepts of disciplinarity and conflicting political and social agendas in a fluid culture.

In efforts to establish learning communities, WAC program and writing center directors use many forms of engagement, but workshops have been their primary venue. In the late 1980s, writing centers reported a variety of ways in which they were called on or sought to interact with faculty: books such as Fulwiler and Young’s *Programs That Work*, Kinkead and Harris’s *Writing Centers in Context*, Fulwiler’s *Teaching with Writing*, a handbook of faculty development workshops, or Web sites like that of the Citadel (<http://www.citadel.edu/citadel/otherserv/wctr/index.html>), serve as examples of faculty outreach through such means.

In addition to workshops, some directors facilitate monthly talks during which a faculty member discusses the writing done in class. In tandem, WAC programs and writing centers may host writing groups made up of faculty across the disciplines who are working on their own articles, grant proposals, or textbooks. These collaborations can prove rich sources for modeling how to respond to writing, for learning that writing is a complex activity, and for discovering that faculty do write differently in other disciplines—and that maybe students need that explained to them. Such public activities build a culture of writing and a community of writers while providing supportive resources.

Community building also occurs through daily conversations between WAC or writing center directors and their colleagues. The Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering in the College of Engineering at the University of South Carolina began

understanding writing in that discipline when center staff engaged in corridor conversations, and when Kristin Walker interviewed faculty about their writing and cultural practices as engineers. Conversations in offices, during lunch, and in corridors are as effective as formal workshops because faculty feel less threatened about asking questions and less reluctant to seek advice in this private forum. WAC seminars and writing centers, with their lively atmospheres, serve as spaces where faculty feel comfortable enough to discuss the one activity that previously had no forum: their teaching.

The practice of working with faculty in these ways arises from conversation pedagogy essential to writing centers (see Farrell-Childers). When students from a class have a particularly rough time figuring out or responding to an assignment, writing center staff typically contact the faculty member, explain that many of his or her students are running into difficulty, and ask how best they can work to support the faculty member's goals. These conversations are rich teachable moments for both sides; writing centers learn more about the discipline and that individual faculty member's style of teaching and assumptions about learning, while faculty members learn more about the writing center, disciplinary writing, and their own discipline's way of communicating (something many of them have not considered before). Phone or e-mail conversations also lead to collecting faculty syllabi, writing guidelines, and assignments for files or Web pages; they lead to invitations to faculty to speak to tutors at monthly inservices about their expectations, assumptions, assignments, and disciplines. In *The Writing Center Resource Manual*, Joe Law outlines these and other general faculty development initiatives common to both WAC and writing centers, and Barnett and Blumner's *Writing Centers and Writing Across the Curriculum Programs* offers a menu of initiatives that help draw together student and faculty constructions of each other and of education.

Tutor reports provide another means by which writing centers can educate faculty about WAC and from which WAC directors can learn of faculty needs. The University of Toledo has developed a double-column, process-oriented tutor report, for our own record keeping but also to be sent to instructors if stu-

dents choose to have us do so (see Figure 8.1). On the left side is a checklist describing where the student was in the writing process (revision, draft, brainstorming, etc.) and what the primary areas of concentration were in the tutorial (organization, conventions of American culture, surface features, etc). On the right side is a blank column where tutors—along with tutees, if they choose—summarize what was worked on during the tutorial. Faculty responses to these reports have been positive: “I never thought about the difficulty Kim might be having with culture, not just language,” or “Thanks for the feedback on the students. I see I needed to explain more thoroughly what ‘describe’ means in music theory!” Using resources like the tutor reports, WAC and writing centers can work together to develop a language by which writing and disciplinarity can be discussed across the disciplines.

### ***Tutor and Technology-Linked Courses***

An effective outgrowth of both WAC and writing centers has been the tutor-linked classroom. Margot Soven discusses such linkages in Chapter 9, and many writing center Web sites point out the availability of tutors for writing intensive classes. It is worth noting that this activity provides another link between teaching and learning by creating a collaborative group rooted in the classroom (see Mullin, Reid, Enders, and Baldridge, “Constructing”). Faculty working with a viable writing center have confidence that tutors placed in their classes will enhance not only their students’ abilities, but also provide a “teaching mirror” through which they can determine the effectiveness of their instruction, assignment, and feedback. Such an association with faculty provides not only an opportunity for the director to talk about disciplinary writing, but also a nonthreatening co-instructor in the form of a tutor.

For more than a decade, tutor-linked associations have demonstrated that they contribute some of the richest instruction to both faculty and students; they also provide the director of the writing center and WAC with disciplinary insights never gleaned without being in a classroom—something I also do by linking

<b>Writing Center Tutor Report</b>	
Name of Student: <u>Larry Wolzniak</u> # Visits this semester: <u>2</u>	
Tutor: <u>Mullin</u> Date: <u>Sept.9</u> Time: <u>60 min</u>	
Instructor and Department: <u>M. Perri, Educational Foundations</u>	
Type of Writing Assignment: <u>Report</u>	
Intended Audience: _____ Unspecified: <u>x</u>	
Did the student have an assignment sheet? <u>Yes</u>	
<p>Writer is at what stage of the writing process?</p> <p>___ Prewriting</p> <p>___ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reading/thinking/talking about topic</p> <p>___ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Researching</p> <p>___ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exploratory writing</p> <p>___ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Outlining</p> <p><u>x</u> Rough draft</p> <p>___ Revising</p> <p>___ Editing</p> <p>___ Final draft</p> <p>___ Rewriting previously turned-in paper</p> <p>Writer needed assistance with <i>content</i>:</p> <p>___ Understanding the subject matter</p> <p>___ Determining a main idea (thesis) for the paper</p> <p>___ Using logic</p> <p>___ Developing ideas through explanations and examples</p> <p>___ Adopting appropriate tone and diction for the situation, purpose, audience</p> <p>Writer needed assistance with <i>organization or format</i>:</p> <p>___ Organizing information in a way that is easy to follow and makes sense</p> <p>___ Arranging information into introduction, body and conclusion</p> <p><u>x</u> Following the specific format required</p> <p>Writer needed assistance with <i>grammar or mechanics</i>:</p> <p>___ Using correct punctuation</p> <p>___ Understanding subject-verb agreement</p> <p>___ Eliminating fragments, run-on sentences</p> <p>___ Using correct spelling</p> <p>This <u>international student</u> needed assistance:</p> <p>___ Finding adequate vocabulary to express ideas</p> <p>___ Using appropriate articles, prepositions, verb endings</p> <p>___ Understanding American cultural conventions</p>	<p><b>Comments:</b></p> <p>Larry had written a draft for his education course, but found he wasn't sure what went into an abstract that was required. We looked at some models in the writing center, and he began constructing his own.</p> <p>As we read through his paper to find major concepts for his abstract, I noticed some awkward syntax. It turned out that English is Larry's second language—that Polish is still spoken at home. We talked a bit about second language/first language translation, and how Polish differs from English, centering on verb constructions that he used. We both constructed a way for him to think about editing those areas where he "forgets his English."</p> <p>Larry continued through his paper, rewriting phrases, choosing main ideas for his abstract, and smoothing out transitions which changed as a result of his revision. He made an appointment to return with his final draft in two days.</p>
UT Writing Center - White Hall, Lower Level - Ext. #4939	

FIGURE 8.1. Sample tutor report.

myself to classes. As a colleague engaged in teaching with another, I have the opportunity of suggesting not only teaching practices, but also research practices which lead to discipline-specific, classroom-based inquiries that join my writing center expertise and perspectives on language with a faculty member's knowledge of content and convention (see Mullin, Holiday-Goodman, Lively, and Nemire, "Development"; Mullin and Hill; Putney; Stoecker, Mullin, Schmidbauer, and Young). In such associations, faculty members gain insights on the hidden agendas or tacit assumptions lodged in their discipline and therefore their teaching practices—as do I. These insights, passed along to writing center tutors, benefit the students they work with across the curriculum.

With the advent of technology in the classroom, faculty struggle to add a new expertise to their disciplinary repertoire, one based on technological knowledge making (see Reiss and Young, Chapter 3, this volume). The addition of a WAC/writing center perspective can help faculty focus on how this new writing tool, the computer, changes the way information may be presented, processed, and communicated. Online activities (ranging from tutor-linked electronic classrooms, to presentations about network researching, to the e-mailing of tutor reports and working with student papers online) affect the ways students use language and how they measure its validity. Partnering of WAC and writing centers helps faculty discover how the technological classroom has immense repercussions on discipline-specific knowledge making.

OWLs (Online Writing Labs) offer the academy and outside community many forms of support. One of the best known OWLs is Purdue University's at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>; however, the National Writing Centers Association homepage (<http://nwca.syr.edu>) lists nearly three hundred sites that offer many uses of this new medium. In every case, the connection between instructor, student, and WAC and writing centers provides generative feedback through continual reflective assessment about the learning process; in every case, language is being renegotiated, and faculty, students, and center are responding to immediate contextual needs.

## *Assessment*

One of the most difficult problems any WAC director faces is “proving” to faculty that the pedagogies promoted do indeed improve learning and communicating (see Condon, Chapter 2, this volume). While more evidence has accumulated over the last few years (e.g., Walvoord and McCarthy; Mullin, Holiday-Goodman, Lively, and Nemire, “Development”; Russell), there is still more to be learned. Writing centers can be of help with WAC assessment efforts. Directors of WAC programs may not get to see the range of writing processes and products demanded within the disciplines or within a particular discipline the way a writing center director often does. Even in the inexperience of our first year, tutors at my institution immediately saw the discrepancies between what faculty thought they were doing in the classroom and through their assignments and how students interpreted those activities. Writing centers often target this gap between theory and theory in practice.

While writing centers can serve as the locus for gathering student portfolios for formative and summative assessment projects, they also can stimulate more effective assessment practices within the classroom. Students often perform for their teachers; they answer assignments as they think they should be answered (see Bartholomae), fail to ask questions for fear of appearing “stupid,” or don’t realize they don’t understand an assignment or course content until they have to write about it—often the day before the assignment is due. Close alignment of writing center observations with classroom practices can provide ongoing assessment that forestalls the continuation of lore about student abilities (e.g., “The material is difficult, that’s why only a few students understand it”; “Students just don’t know how to write”).

Tutor-linked classes, calls to faculty about the difficulty students are having with an assignment, the ability to “arm” students with questions they are not afraid to take back to instructors: these are all writing center strategies that can fold into assessment. They are uniquely available in tutorial situations where the absence of performance evaluation allows the student the

freedom to make errors—to learn in a way that is not always possible in the classroom. Unless this information is communicated to faculty members (through tutorial reports, phone, or e-mail), however, teachers may have no way of knowing whether their writing assignments are clearly stated, whether their students are engaging in critical thinking or in outguessing the instructor, or whether their WAC objectives are being met. Web sites, such as the University of Missouri's, demonstrate the kind of assessment through feedback necessary to maintain the writing center-WAC loop (see <http://cwp.missouri.edu>).

Of course, the advantage to the writing center of working with faculty across the disciplines is that directors can draw on the measurement expertise of these disciplines. A sociologist might choose to help construct a case study of a WAC classroom participant; a political scientist might construct a quantitative study of her WAC practices and those students who use the writing center; a pharmacist might measure, by means of pre- and post-tests, the power of WAC strategies to help students learn scientific content as well as to convey scientific information to patients and customers. Because a WAC or writing center director might not necessarily construct an assessment that is disciplinarily precise, and because the writing center is a rich source of teacher-researchers, there exists in the association of WAC and writing centers new and extensive possibilities for assessment and research, both short term (classroom) and long term (curricular).

Local and national cross-curricular work (e.g., Berkenkotter and Huckin; Connolly and Vilardi; Young and Fulwiler) has been used to inform writing center pedagogies and their follow-up assessments for the disciplines. All of these help complete the teaching-learning circle necessary to viable, active, and ever-changing pedagogies. The research and practice also provide a means of extending WAC beyond the university walls.

### *Community Connections*

Writing centers might have more opportunities to interact with the community in various ways than WAC programs (though many high school WAC programs have evolved on their own).

Farrell-Childers, Gere, and Young's *Programs and Practices* describes how high school writing centers have been instrumental in starting WAC programs (some by linking to university programs). College, university, and secondary writing centers also may serve as community literacy centers, help not-for-profit organizations with grants, run workshops for businesses, or start writing centers in high schools or grade schools. This last project stems from a belief that promotion of WAC at early levels of education ensures less "remedial" work at the university level. In addition, by educating parents through work in the schools, writing centers also touch the business, industrial, and service communities in which parents work—and vote.

The educational community has realized rather belatedly that self-promotion has been needed for the last fifty years. Now it is difficult to gain the ear of the community and legislature with our theories and practices—unless we have sound assessment data and a cadre of people within those areas who can speak for and with us. Often schooled in an environment of skill-and-drill, with competition instead of collaboration as the motivator, many of those who make laws and fund schools can and must be drawn into the learning communities established by WAC and writing centers. This proves especially true as the programs become more actively involved in the service learning initiatives being promoted around the country.

Perhaps one of the best examples of successful service learning that grows out of a WAC-writing center is the Write for Your Life initiative of Project CONNECTS at Michigan State University. In this program, undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and teaching consultants from across the curriculum work with schoolchildren. Based on the research of Deborah Protherow-Sith, dean of the Harvard University School of Public Health, the project rests on the "observation that students learn more easily and better when they undertake new study in terms of the images and experiences they bring to it from their home communities" (Stock and Swenson 154). Responding to students' personal narratives, the university consultants work to develop with the writers a topic "of inquiry, subtopics, if you will, of the broader course of study in which they are engaged, a course that might itself be



named 'American Adolescents: Challenges to Their Health and Well-Being'" (154). Such service learning projects demonstrate vital ways writing centers can collaborate with the community to promote WAC objectives.

## The Bottom Line

Finally, there comes the bottom line, the administrative and budgetary reason for linking WAC and writing centers: public relations. While this subject is closely tied to issues of assessment and to the need to explain ourselves to the larger community (as well as to our own), it also closely affects the changing landscape of education and the places where our combined knowledge about writing and thinking can be enacted. Through joint efforts in assessment, for example, writing centers and WAC programs can provide recruitment offices with the promotional tools they need to demonstrate that the university does care about the real-world abilities with which students should graduate. Admission efforts that involve highlighting both WAC and writing centers can also help to change assumptions about the inability of academe to prepare students for the world, which in turn have negatively affected our ability to construct curricula and programs which create reflective, critical thinkers and writers.

Likewise, combined efforts to provide assessment demonstrate that our practices—and the theories which back them—retain students in the institution by engaging, motivating, and stimulating learning. We know that the one-on-one interaction of writing centers and the student-focused classroom provided by WAC programs change the teaching and learning culture. (We also need to be sensitive to the language with which our institutions recognize the value of what we do—*retention* is one, but only one, buzzword that brings automatic, positive support.)

Twenty-five current and former presidents of state and land-grant institutions summarized best how we need to prepare our students for the new millennium; they called for “seven action commitments that”

- ◆ revitalize partnerships with (K–12) schools
- ◆ reinforce commitment to undergraduate instruction
- ◆ address the academic and personal development of students
- ◆ strengthen the link between education and career
- ◆ strive for the highest quality educational experience for students while keeping college affordable and accessible
- ◆ clearly define educational objectives to the public
- ◆ provide experiential learning environments for students (Kellogg 22–23)

If this is an accurate description of the future, then WAC and writing centers have laid the ground for all these initiatives (see Stock). We

- ◆ already reach out to schools
- ◆ have revitalized the undergraduate curriculum
- ◆ address student and faculty development holistically
- ◆ create links outside academe with real-world writing practices and service learning
- ◆ help make college educationally accessible by improving teaching and learning
- ◆ stress clear assessment strategies through clearly stated objectives in assignments
- ◆ participate in discovery learning practices—part of many WAC and writing center initiatives linked to real-world writing

The same opportunity that WAC and writing centers offers students and faculty is offered to the surrounding communities: education in how we have come to understand the linked processes of writing and thinking within contexts. In working to further these linked processes, WAC and writing centers can partner to respond to shifting contexts and serve as a source for effecting needed changes in the new millennium.

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