

## CHAPTER 5

# INTEGRATING WRITING INTO THE DISCIPLINES: RISKS AND REWARDS OF AN ALTERNATIVE INDEPENDENT WRITING PROGRAM

**W. Brock MacDonald, Margaret Procter, and  
Andrea L. Williams**

University of Toronto

## INTRODUCTION

When we think of independent writing programs, we tend to think of separation from the English Department and creation of a new department. Such programs can take many forms, however, born out of national educational traditions as well as cultural and institutional exigencies. This chapter presents a case study of a successful Canadian independent writing program that is centrally funded and led by a faculty writing specialist, yet implemented locally in collaboration with a range of participating departments. The Writing Instruction for Teaching Assistants (WIT) initiative in the Faculty of Arts and Science at the University of Toronto exemplifies a distinctive type of independence as a program that works across disciplines and is not limited to its own departmental perspective or structure. The program has three main goals: improving undergraduate writing instruction across the curriculum; preparing future faculty to teach writing as an integral part of their pedagogy, whatever their discipline; and disseminating cultures of writing across the institution and beyond. Its distributed structure challenges the notion that writing programs must either build on or react against traditional US models of staffing, departmental definitions, and funding. WIT has created new methods for cross-curricular writing instruction by sharing power and responsibility among the program's writing specialist (who serves as coordinator), members of participating departments (including administrators, faculty, and graduate

teaching assistants), and the central administrative structure that sponsors this shared work as a core element of the curriculum. One indicator of the program's reach is that in its six years, 22 departments from the sciences, social sciences and humanities have applied and been accepted to participate. The program operates on a large scale: it currently involves about 80 undergraduate courses and instructors in 20 departments, 500 graduate students, and over 10,000 undergraduates. WIT has not only developed integrated writing instruction but also transformed local conceptions of writing and learning and improved teaching practices, thereby changing institutional culture, which Condon and Rutz (2012) argue is key to the survival of WAC programs and which also applies to independent writing programs of all kinds.

Typical of most Canadian institutions (Graves, 1994; Kearns & Turner, this volume), the University of Toronto (hereafter U of T) has no tradition of required first-year composition, and is not obliged by structure or budget to teach writing in dedicated courses. The Department of English, consistent with its historical decision in the late nineteenth century to focus on literature instead of rhetoric (Hubert, 1995), deliberately ignores writing as a field of study or research. There are no faculty positions and no graduate programs in composition or rhetoric in the Department of English, and its one undergraduate course in "effective writing" cannot be counted as a credit towards an English major. Despite this lack of disciplinary home for writing instruction, the university has found ways to support student writing (see chapters by Irish and Procter in Graves & Graves, 2006). In a process with several parallels to that outlined by Hjortshoj in this volume, the University of Toronto has also come to recognize that academic discourse is discipline-specific and that departments are the locus of authority over the writing done by their students. Over the past two decades, writing initiatives and programs have developed in several areas of the university, loosely based on the range of composition and WAC/WID programs in the US, but adapted to fit local circumstances: WIT exemplifies this development in the Faculty of Arts and Science.

The WIT program has used its independence to bring about curricular change and forward the agenda of writing as a scholarly enterprise while avoiding some of the problems endemic to WAC/WID programs elsewhere, such as the "waning of early enthusiasm" noted by Kearns and Turner in this volume (Chapter 2) once workshops are over and visiting experts have come and gone, or the sudden withdrawal of support that has undermined some excellent programs in both the US and Canada (e.g., Strachan, 2008; Townsend, 2008). It has brought about visible and measurable changes in teaching and learning by working from within departments on collaboratively designed

and implemented initiatives, from helping departments design statements of writing goals to developing their own discipline-specific writing centers. WIT operates in multiple ways and in multiple locations, building on close collaboration of writing specialists and disciplinary partners (both faculty and graduate teaching assistants) *in situ*, rather than working from without and attempting to impose ideas and practices. In practical terms, instead of getting faculty buy-in through the typical WAC avenue of faculty workshops given by writing specialists (Thaiss & Porter, 2010), WIT engages participants in initiatives that are entirely departmentally-based, designed by and for the department's administrators, faculty, and TAs to meet the particular needs of their undergraduates. Such a structure, as we will show, creates a sense of joint ownership among all participants and avoids the false promise of "one-size" solutions (Russell, 2002) and what Segal, Paré, Brent, and Vipond (1998) and Jablonski (2006) describe as the "missionary position," i.e., the writing expert telling disciplinary faculty how writing ought to be taught. For writing program administrators in other institutions, this initiative demonstrates a flexible approach that could be adapted to widely varying circumstances and needs.

WIT's collaborative approach has gained stable funding (even in a time of budget cuts) and public recognition through awards, and has had measurable impacts in the institution, even serving as a model for writing initiatives at other campuses such as the University of Toronto Mississauga. As our analysis of its first six years will show, its establishment as a continuing program has been achieved with minimal friction, manageable infrastructure, and reasonable cost. Yet such an approach admittedly poses certain risks: faculty and departmental engagement with the initiative may in some instances be rooted more in pragmatic attention to immediate needs than commitment to long-term and thorough change; its distributed model means that WIT lacks the structure and power base of a more traditional departmental home; and the teaching methods rely heavily on the involvement of disciplinary Graduate Teaching Assistants (advanced disciplinary Ph.D. students), arguably the least secure and powerful teachers in higher education, though also perhaps those in the best position to influence undergraduates and disseminate new pedagogies. Succeeding sections of this chapter address the following: first, WIT's background and development in the context of a Canadian research university; secondly, the initiative's structure and the roles of the participants, including the WIT Coordinator and the departmental faculty and TAs; thirdly, the initiative's impact, traced in documents reflecting wider institutional developments; and finally, current challenges and directions for the future.

## **YES, WE HAVE NO FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION: BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT OF WIT**

WIT's focus on collaborating with disciplinary faculty has been informed and encouraged by the WAC movement in the US, along with British and European ideas on student development. Russell's curricular history of US writing programs (2002), for instance, strengthens the case against composition courses as wholesale solutions. Similarly, the work of Hyland (2006) and others in the UK (e.g., Ivanic, 2006) and the US (e.g., Beaufort, 2007; Haswell, 1991) emphasizes the importance of students' learning disciplinary discourse. Equally compelling is the bald fact that there is no required first-year writing course in the Faculty of Arts & Science.

All institutions offer opportunities for innovation as well as constraints. A centrally funded, departmentally-based writing initiative is well-suited to the particular context of the Faculty of Arts and Science at U of T, a large and structurally complex research university in Ontario, Canada. Arts and Science has roughly 25,000 students of the university's 85,000 total. Reflecting the multicultural population of Toronto, about half its students are multilingual. The faculty offers a huge range of academic programs, and requires students to specialize earlier and more intensively than most US universities. With no required first-year writing course and only one elective writing course in the English Department, most students must learn to write within their disciplines. Arts and Science does have a minor program in Writing and Rhetoric, but only a small percentage of the faculty's students enroll in it, and it has no graduate program in rhetoric or composition.

In the absence of required writing courses, professionally staffed Writing Centers located in the seven undergraduate colleges play an important role in the university. Their instructors, all of whom are either appointed or adjunct faculty with post-graduate degrees, teach students both individually and in group sessions. However, because the Writing Centers are separate units with diverse responsibilities within their colleges and are unconnected to the departmental structure, they are not positioned to take on a leadership role for a faculty-wide writing initiative. Nevertheless, WIT has built on the knowledge of the disciplines and curricula developed there. To work effectively with students from across the humanities, sciences, and social sciences, Writing Center instructors have had to learn the literacy practices of those disciplines and apply them to helping students meet the demands of specific assignments. This has led to many informal consultations and collaborations, establishing the relationships between writing instructors and faculty in other programs and departments on which WIT has built.

In addition to the Writing Centers, WIT's approach has been shaped by the powerful departments in Arts and Science and a central administration that holds the purse strings. Responding to ongoing high-level debates about student learning (Boyer Commission Report, 1998; Light 1990, 1992, 2001; Sommers, 2002, 2005), in 1999 the Faculty Council mandated that each department integrate and assess writing instruction (see also Davies, Hjortshoj, Lalicker, Schendel & Royer, and Thaiss et al., this volume, for the role of institutional mandates). The dean's office then funded pilot initiatives in several different courses and departments. Led by a writing specialist, these activities helped develop assignments that gave students opportunities to work iteratively on drafts after receiving formative feedback. Assessment of these projects showed, however, that unless TAs were capable of giving that feedback, the effects were limited.

WIT also came into being in response to institutional concerns about student learning and student writing. Ten years ago, U of T's lackluster NSSE results, coupled with provincial requirements to formulate learning outcomes, prompted administrators to address student writing. In 2006, as part of a curriculum renewal, the Faculty of Arts and Science struck a new Writing Committee with broad representation from departments and access to funding from the dean. The Writing Committee immediately commissioned an inventory project on student writing in three departments. Three writing specialists were seconded from the Writing Centers to analyze student writing and writing instruction in undergraduate courses and to identify effective and scalable teaching methods that would help achieve departmental goals. Both the process and the reports from the inventory (collated in MacDonald, Procter & Tallman, 2008) prompted far-reaching analysis and discussion among students, TAs, course instructors and administrators, anticipating the type of co-inquiry called for in current WAC scholarship (Gallagher, 2012; Thomas, 2009). The results identified a disjunction between the amount of writing required of students and the amount of instruction provided, particularly in the large classes staffed by a lecturer and multiple graduate teaching assistants.

The final catalyst for the establishment of WIT was the report of the Arts and Science curriculum review in 2007. Informed in part by discussion of the inventory projects, the report made writing a dominant topic, flagging it as "one of the most critical pedagogical areas to target for improvement" (CRRC, 2007, p. 23). The word "writing" occurs 54 times in 56 pages. Although sometimes categorized merely as a skill, writing is also designated a "core competency," often paired loosely with "communication" (27 times) but also grouped with "critical thinking" or "reasoning" (11 times). Strikingly, testing and special courses (including the US model of first-year composition) are mentioned but downplayed as options; instead, the report affirms a commitment to integrated

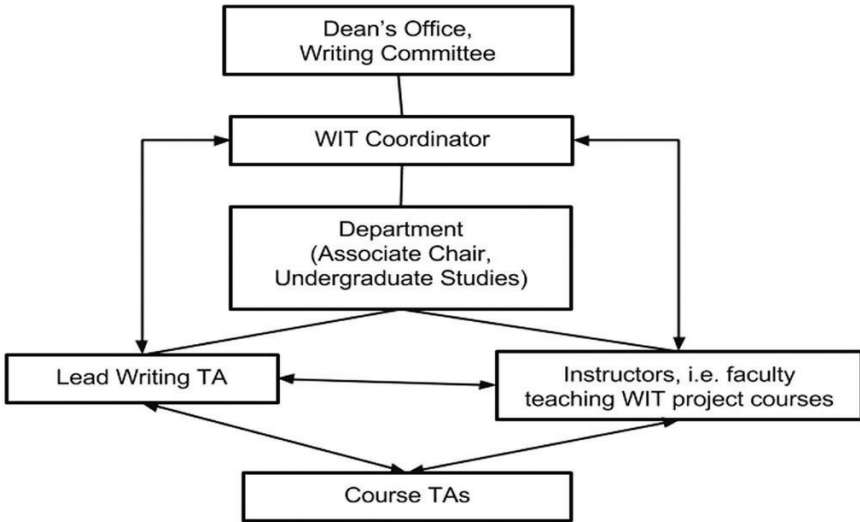
and collaborative teaching of writing as part of disciplinary courses, mentioning the inventory project as an example of the “creative pedagogy” needed to solve other challenges such as teaching information literacy and quantitative reasoning (CRRC, section 2.1.3 and *passim*). Besides giving impetus to WIT, the curriculum review report also led to the establishment of an English Language Learning program with its own full-time coordinator to address the needs of the university’s large population of multilingual students.

In discussing the Curriculum Report, the Writing Committee made the training and development of disciplinary TAs in writing instruction a priority, identifying it as the most cost-effective way to support student writers. Given the large cadre of advanced disciplinary Ph.D. students already engaged in both research and teaching, and the lessons from the pilot initiatives, a subcommittee developed the concept of the Lead Writing TA. Like the graduate writing fellows in some US universities (see Hjortshoj and Thaiss et al., this volume), these LWTAs would work as writing and pedagogical consultants for faculty and provide training and professional development to the course TAs in their departments, thus influencing the main method of undergraduate writing instruction.

## A DISTRIBUTED STRUCTURE

This section explores WIT’s structure as a centrally funded yet locally implemented writing initiative, with some similarities to flagship US programs such as those at Cornell (Hjortshoj, this volume) and the University of Minnesota, described by Anson and Dannels (2009), but also exploiting its own differences. The “Writing Instruction for TAs” name emphasizes the key role disciplinary TAs play in the WIT initiative, which is a growing trend in WAC/WID (see for example University of Minnesota’s Writing-Enriched Curriculum (WEC) program or the University of North Carolina, Charlotte’s Communication Across the Curriculum (CAC) program). Because U of T is a research university, high-quality graduate students are indeed a key human resource here.

A key factor in WIT’s success is that departmental involvement has always been voluntary. In applying to participate, departments must develop writing goals for their programs and plans for achieving these through the use of WIT resources. Departments also decide which course or courses to target for WIT funding: whereas some focus on large first-year service courses, others target upper-level courses for majors. They then receive the funding to hire a Lead Writing TA from among the ranks of their senior Ph.D. students, plus additional funding for regular course TAs who will work with the LWTA in the courses selected for WIT, receiving training in responding to and evaluating



*Figure 5.1. Administrative structure of the WIT initiative, with the key lines of communication and coordination shown as arrows.*

student writing as well as integrating writing instruction into labs and discussion groups. Figure 5.1 gives a rough idea of the program's structure.

At the administrative level, the Writing Committee reviews departmental applications, approves course-specific projects, and renews funding on the basis of annual progress reports and the advice of the WIT Coordinator, a writing specialist appointed full-time to manage the initiative. Once their applications have been approved and funded, each department hires a Lead Writing TA, who after receiving training in writing instruction, works with the faculty who are teaching the designated WIT courses and their regular course TAs; the WIT Coordinator serves in an advisory capacity, mentoring the LWTA and consulting with the course instructors on course and assignment design as well as assessment. (These roles and processes are explained in greater detail below.) This structure respects departmental and faculty autonomy and positions all WIT participants—including the departmental contact (normally the Associate Chair of Undergraduate Studies), the Lead Writing TA, the course instructors, and the WIT Coordinator—as change agents rather than relying solely on a person or people external to the unit.

Focusing resources on TA training and development is well-suited to a research university with large classes, where TAs do the lion's share of grading and of leading group tutorials and labs. We use the term tutorial to refer to the smaller group sessions intended to support larger lecture classes, which are held

weekly, bimonthly or occasionally, depending on course. In Arts and Science, such sessions range from 15 students (in a humanities unit) or 30 (typical of a science laboratory setting) to as many as 50 (in a social sciences course) and may involve, depending on the discipline, discussion of course content, hands-on experimental work, or doing problem sets.

The most critical role of the LWTAs is to train course TAs who are working the extra hours provided by WIT for grading and/or for leading writing activities in labs or tutorials. The LWTAs develop writing resources, lead workshops (for faculty, TAs, and undergraduates), in some cases tutor students one-on-one, and consult with course instructors and TAs on assignment design. The LWTAs also play a vital role in helping the WIT Coordinator understand the unit's teaching culture, particularly with respect to the course TAs, as well as the discipline and the disciplinary writing. In turn, the WIT Coordinator provides the LWTAs with training in writing instruction and ongoing support and mentoring. The LWTAs are in many ways the key to achieving WIT's fundamental goals: as they help to improve undergraduate writing instruction through their work with regular course TAs, they simultaneously prepare those future faculty to teach writing in their discipline and contribute to the dissemination of writing cultures across the institution and beyond. The next two sections explain in greater detail how the LWTAs are prepared for and supported in their role, and how the WIT Coordinator holds this complex, distributed structure together.

## **DEVELOPING PEER LEADERS: THE LEAD WRITING TAs**

For WIT to work, the right LWTAs must be engaged. They must be both advanced doctoral students and experienced in TA work, ideally in connection with disciplinary courses that have both a significant writing component and opportunities for TAs to conduct tutorials or labs. The disciplinary departments hire the LWTAs, who hold their contracts with their departments, not with WIT itself or centrally at the Faculty of Arts and Science—another instance of WIT's emphasis on departmental ownership and autonomy. The departments know their TAs and their courses, and so are far better able to identify appropriate candidates. Having this hiring responsibility familiarizes administrators with WIT's goals and its *modus operandi*, which is critical in a unionized environment such as U of T, and ensures that departments perceive the LWTAs as insiders—an essential point. In the early years of the initiative recruiting for the LWTA positions was sometimes difficult; now that WIT's benefits for both participating departments and the LWTAs themselves are widely known, the positions are highly coveted in most departments. The most ambitious doctoral students



apply for them, aware that in a highly competitive academic job market WIT experience will significantly enhance their teaching qualifications.

For the Lead Writing Teaching Assistants (LWTAs) to fulfill their crucial role in WIT, their preparation and mentoring by the WIT Coordinator is critical. We deliberately avoid using the word “training” for the LWTAs’ preparation: they train the regular TAs involved in the WIT courses in their departments, but their own preparation focuses on theoretical understanding of writing and disciplinarity, for which the essentially pragmatic emphasis of “training” seems inappropriate. They take a crash course in writing pedagogy, designed to activate their discipline-specific knowledge and expertise in writing. Much of this involves peer teaching and learning with Lead Writing TAs from other disciplines.

The WIT sessions for LWTAs have elements of all the categories of TA preparation identified by Roen, Goggin, and Clary-Lemon (2008): “functional,” devoted to the practical aspects of their work and to serving the institution; “organic,” based on a conception of TAs as apprentices, emphasizing their professionalization; “conversion,” focused on imparting the theory of writing instruction; and “multi-philosophical,” which takes as its starting point the diversity of writing practices and approaches with which TAs enter the program. The “functional” part of the preparation includes sessions devoted to topics such as TA training techniques, benchmarking or norming sessions, WIT communication scenarios, and WIT administration (including documentation and assessment). It is “organic” in its emphasis on apprenticeship and professionalization, stressing WIT’s potential benefits for participants’ long-term development as teachers. It exemplifies “conversion” because the new LWTAs are introduced to the WAC/WID principles that undergird the WIT initiative and given a brief overview of some of the major theories of writing instruction, with particular attention to their application to assignment design, evaluation, and classroom teaching; the readings include a number of seminal texts in the field of Composition Studies. At the same time it is “multi-philosophical” in its concentration on the ways writing instruction is uniquely situated in each discipline, encouraging the LWTAs to draw on their own experience of writing and teaching, relating theory to their familiar practices and vice-versa at every point. By combining all these, the program prepares the LWTAs to enact Hedengren’s (2001) “covert catalyst for change” idea—equipping them to do faculty development by stealth, in effect.

In terms of scope (in the sense of time and resources involved) WIT’s LWTA preparation exemplifies a middle way between the poles represented by such well-documented writing fellows programs as the Knight program at Cornell (Gottschalk, 1991)—a very expensive approach, involving a credit course all

future writing fellows must take—and the Teaching With Writing (TWW) program at the University of Minnesota (Rodrigue, 2012)—a minimal approach, with disciplinary TAs participating in training seminars on a voluntary basis and receiving a transcript notation for doing so (see also Johnson, this volume). WIT's initial LWTA preparation takes place in one week, consisting of three days of intensive seminar-style work. The university's TA Training Program is not involved in the LWTAs' preparation (though they had a small role early in WIT's history), but Writing Center participation is substantial, reflecting the fact that the Writing Centers are the Faculty's other major investment in supporting student writing, and effective coordination between WIT and the Centers is important for both.

This curriculum has evolved in two respects since WIT began. First, we have increased the focus on writing pedagogy and the challenges the LWTAs face in negotiating their roles with faculty and TAs. Most of the examples of assignment design, teaching situations, and working-with-faculty scenarios used are now drawn from prior WIT work. In effect, the LWTAs' preparation now reflects the accumulated knowledge of WIT participants. Secondly, we have added additional half-day sessions in September, November, and January, monthly check-in meetings with the WIT Coordinator and, finally, a peer mentoring component—regular meetings over coffee of all the LWTAs to share experiences and discuss current work, including their activities of program assessment and presentation to their disciplinary communities. That last element has helped the LWTAs, despite the diversity of their home disciplines, become a genuine “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998), which has significant benefits for both their work in the institution and their own emerging professional identities (Huntzinger, McPherron & Rajagopal, 2011); thus it also contributes to achieving WIT's dual goals of preparing future disciplinary faculty to teach writing as part of their disciplines, and of disseminating cultures of writing more widely. Eight years into the program, Lead Writing TAs have begun to publish on WIT in disciplinary teaching journals.

## **THE HUB: THE WIT COORDINATOR AND CROSS-DISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION**

A writing specialist and the only faculty member who works in WIT full-time, the Coordinator is the key change agent in WIT. She collaborates with administrators, faculty, LWTAs (Lead Writing TAs), course TAs, and Writing Center Instructors on curricular, course, and assignment design, and on all instructional activities related to writing. She promotes dialogue between WIT participants and the Writing Centers by facilitating sessions in which assignments are ex-

plained by course instructors, and Writing Center staff can inform instructors of the kinds of issues they see in their work with students. The Coordinator reports to the dean's office in the Faculty of Arts and Science and gives regular updates to the Arts and Science Writing Committee, which is made up of faculty from a range of departments as well as both graduate and undergraduate students from WIT and the English Language Learning initiative. The hub metaphor aptly describes the Coordinator's role because it suggests the importance of a strong center in a distributed structure: the Coordinator collaborates with participants on all facets of writing instruction and at all points in WIT's administrative cycle, including application, implementation, assessment, and renewal.

As the central hub for WIT, the Coordinator works intensively with individual WIT participants and departments, yet the collaborative nature of this work can paradoxically be isolating. She has no departmental home and no dedicated administrative support or immediate colleagues, though she maintains close contact with the Writing Centers and her English Language Learning counterpart. Jablonski (2006) warns that cross-curricular academic writing can lack visibility and status, and Artze et al. note that faculty development work, like WPA work, includes much invisible labor that can be difficult to document since it does not neatly fit the categories of faculty annual report forms (2013, p. 177). These potential problems have in part been overcome by two university awards recognizing the quality of the Coordinator's work: first, a student service award won in her first year for student seminars undertaken on a voluntary basis; and secondly, a major university award in the program category connecting teaching and research given in 2014.

The WIT Coordinator accomplishes her work with faculty through both one-on-one consultations and group sessions, usually focusing on course and assignment design. Departments that enroll in WIT receive funds for an additional 280 TA hours, which are usually divided across several courses, giving TAs in those courses training in writing instruction and additional hours to put that training into practice, whether in responding to and evaluating student writing or incorporating writing-to-learn activities and direct instruction on writing into discussion groups or labs. The faculty who sign up to participate in WIT are not directly compensated, although the additional TA hours have proven an excellent incentive for most. The Coordinator works with these participating instructors to plan how best to use the additional TA hours in their courses. Most appreciate the feedback on their assignments and syllabus (based on survey results). However, at research-intensive institutions like U of T, with high expectations for faculty to attract grant money, to publish, and to supervise graduate students, undergraduate teaching initiatives that require committing extra time can be a tough sell. WIT has had to drop a few courses from the initiative, and

in a couple of cases departmental applications have not been renewed. Tellingly, the LWTA (Lead Writing TA) preparation now includes case studies that capture some of the less successful WIT collaborations, including “The Elusive Professor Brandt,” “Passive Aggressive Professor Paul,” “Stubborn Dr. Stibnite,” and “Know-it-all Adam” (a TA). Academics commonly speak in proprietary terms of “my” course and “my” students except when explicitly “team teaching,” and some of us see our classrooms as our own private spaces, an extension of the concept of academic freedom, which can make collaborations fraught. Furthermore, as Brammer, Amare and Campbell (2008) show, working with faculty from other disciplines can cause a form of “culture shock.”

Achieving WIT’s success in disseminating writing cultures has therefore required more than a Coordinator adept at working with faculty across the disciplines: departmental allies and ambassadors have been essential. Local departmental champions or change agents, including both chairs and associate chairs, are essential to successful collaboration among WIT Coordinator, course instructors, and Lead Writing TAs, thereby building and sustaining WIT from within departments. These WIT contacts ease the potential shocks that Brammer et al. describe and help familiarize the WIT Coordinator with the department’s culture. In a similar manner, the Lead Writing TA serves as a disciplinary and departmental informant, sharing departmental views and news with the Coordinator. The LWTA can warn the Coordinator about potentially difficult faculty or TAs and help strategize ways to minimize friction and build relationships and alliances. (For more on integrating TAs from outside departments see Johnson, this volume.)

In addition to the one-on-one consultations that are the mainstay of the Coordinator’s work with faculty, once WIT has achieved a certain profile in a given department, group sessions with faculty have proven an effective means of expanding the initiative’s reach and familiarizing more instructors with concepts and practices such as writing-to-learn, scaffolded assignments, formative feedback, and rubrics. These have proven particularly effective when faculty already involved in WIT sponsor or co-facilitate sessions. Unlike the cross-disciplinary group workshops that have often been the first step in faculty development and TA mentoring in many WAC programs (Condon & Rutz, 2012; Walvoord, 1997), the workshops in WIT are mostly department-based. Informal lunch-and-learn sessions and more focused workshops based around department interests have become regular in some units. In one humanities unit, the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies has introduced a workshop series on pedagogy for the department’s graduate students, with a session on training in writing pedagogy by the WIT Coordinator. In other units, the WIT Coordinator and Lead Writing TA give regular brief updates. Several years ago at one such faculty meeting, a

well-respected senior faculty member gave (unprompted) a ringing endorsement for WIT: “It’s great! I highly recommend you do this—they helped me rethink my assignments!”

Although such discipline-specific workshops fit well with WIT’s departmentally-based structure, they nonetheless limit opportunities for building community beyond the departmental unit (Faery, 1993; McLeod, 1997; Walvoord, 1997) and the accompanying cross-pollination of ideas and practices related to writing instruction. To address this limitation and to meet the demand from both faculty and TAs for access to the wealth of instructional writing resources already created in WIT courses, a WIT website now features sample syllabi, assignments, rubrics, and in-class writing activities from across the disciplines. The website is becoming a repository of discipline-specific sample teaching resources for instructors and TAs. A community-building step that goes beyond information sharing is the now annual WIT Showcase, held each spring, which brings together members of the Writing Committee, College Writing Center directors, departmental WIT contacts, Lead Writing TAs, WIT course instructors, and other faculty guests interested in the initiative. Typically, about 50 participants attend. The formal part of the session has LWTAs and instructors presenting some of the year’s major achievements and highlighting innovative writing instruction.

Ensuring that WIT engages with what Condon and Rutz call “a broader set of institutional initiatives” (2012, p. 359) has meant collaborating with the university’s Center for Teaching Support and Innovation, the Library, and the Office of Student Academic Integrity on faculty development workshops related to writing instruction, conjoining information literacy and writing, and designing online tools to promote academic integrity. As Artze-Vega et al. argue, WPAs need to be adept at overcoming the silo structures of most universities by developing “strong affinity networks through collaboration” (2013, p. 171). In 2014 the Coordinator organized a university-wide workshop with John Bean, funded by crowd-sourcing campus groups including the college Writing Centers and attended by over 100 faculty members, not only raising the profile of WIT but more importantly meeting faculty demand for professional development in writing pedagogy.

As important as such community-building and outreach is, research is essential to moving WIT from what Jablonski (2006) terms the “service” model to the “discipline-based research” model of cross-curricular writing collaboration (see also Thaiss, this volume). In the context of a research university, the latter model is more likely to give WIT the clout it needs to be an effective change agent in the long term. From its inception, WIT has collected and analyzed student, TA, and instructor data in the form of surveys, interviews, and writing

samples to show impact. WIT has been the object of a published study of TA training undertaken by faculty and staff from the university's Faculty of Education (OISE) and its Center for Teaching Support and Innovation (Rolheiser et al, 2013). WIT participants are increasingly engaged in research about how students learn to write in the disciplines. From the initiative's beginning, many WIT course instructors have studied their own classrooms, examining student grades and student writing. Members of the first-year biology teaching team have been studying the role of TAs' written feedback on teaching students to write lab reports, which they recently reported on at the Western Conference on Science Education. The Department of Chemistry LWTA and the department's Undergraduate Coordinator (also a WIT course instructor) have presented on WIT at the Canadian Society of Chemistry national research conference (Toronto 2010, and Calgary 2012). The WIT Coordinator and members of the teaching team for a first-year anthropology course are investigating the impact of writing-to-learn activities in discussion groups; the Coordinator is also a member of a research team conducting a nationally funded study of undergraduate writing assignments across the curriculum; and she and a former LWTA for chemistry recently co-organized a symposium on scientific writing at the International Conference on Chemistry Education. The Coordinator is now involved in an ethics-approved study of WIT's LWTAs, focusing on the impact of participating in the program on their professional identities and teaching philosophies as they transition from graduate studies to their first academic appointments. These and future research initiatives will help WIT achieve its goal of disseminating writing cultures beyond the University of Toronto context.

## **TRACING CULTURAL CHANGE: ACHIEVING MOMENTUM**

Much of the foregoing discusses what Condon and Rutz (2012) call the *location* of WIT; this section will focus on what they term *momentum*, looking more closely at some of the evidence of WIT's impact on the culture of writing instruction in Arts and Science (see also Kearns & Turner, Gopen, Rhoades et al., and Schendel & Royer, this volume, for narratives of institutional change). Changes in how units conceive of writing and writing instruction are evident in both the ways they discuss writing (for example, in the Statements of Writing Goals which they must provide when applying to WIT) and the ways they translate their ideas into practice. By prompting departments to formulate Statements of Writing Goals when they apply to WIT, develop writing goals appropriate for their own particular disciplines and students and then determine how best to achieve these goals, WIT has facilitated change from within rather than imposing change from without. As Anson argues, true change cannot be

## Wordles (based on counts)

2008 proposals

**skill**  
 consult improve teaching  
 improve writing  
 communication

2012 reports/proposals

communication: subject **consult**  
 improve writing  
 improve teaching teacher skill  
 benchmarking  
**student skill**  
 communication: participants

*Figure 5.2: Diagram using the Wordle “word-cloud” software, comparing word counts from the 2008 departmental proposals (the first year of WIT) and the 2012 departmental reports and proposals for expansion (the fifth year of WIT).*

mandated (IWAC 2012 Keynote). One indicator of momentum in the change achieved within departments can be traced in the shifts in the language about writing in departmental documents, both administrative and pedagogical; another is found in the evidence that TAs involved in the initiative have become more fully engaged members of the teaching teams in which they participate.

Departments starting in WIT tend to formulate learning outcomes for writing in elegant abstractions that reflect the disciplines’ self-conceptions and echo “eduspeak” terms used in the administration’s calls for application and its official statements. However, as departments gain experience and confidence in WIT, their documents begin to address more concrete teaching problems. The Wordle™ diagram in Figure 5.2, based on word counts from two sets of departmental documents, depicts differences in word frequency and meaning between the first and fifth years of WIT.

The reliance on mandated key terms from the official curriculum report changes measurably between the 2008 and 2012 documents. Equally striking is a shift from a focus on student deficiency to one that emphasizes teaching responsibilities. The vague term “communication,” for instance, starts to describe a challenge of course management as well as something students need

to learn. The goal of improvement begins to be one shared by both students and teachers, and the term “skill” is applied to both. A new and prominent word is “benchmarking,” the norming sessions where instructors and TAs examine sample student papers that have become a standard part of WIT courses.

Before WIT, the inventory studies (MacDonald, Procter & Tallman, 2008) showed that it was rare for course syllabi to mention writing except as a source of grades and the occasion for warnings about plagiarism; even assignment instructions tended to focus on rules rather than aims for learning. Course documents failed to capture the eloquence with which most instructors can in fact articulate the writing goals for their courses and assignments. From the first, WIT has prompted instructors to share their aims much more explicitly in course documents. These changes are sometimes radical; at other times they involve only a few words, but make a crucial difference through position and tone. For example, course assignments that once started with warnings about plagiarism penalties now more typically open with a few sentences addressing the role of writing in exploring the course material, promising that the experience of writing will enhance students’ engagement with the key material they are studying. The syllabi of other courses now explicitly name major assignments as capstone experiences, opportunities to build on skills and ideas honed in previous work. Increasingly, social science writing assignments give students specific audiences and relate tasks to future workplace writing. A mathematical science course also asks students to keep a log throughout the term to reflect on problems encountered and milestones achieved, with transferable skills in mind. WIT’s dissemination of writing cultures beyond participating departments is especially evident in the many courses that are not officially part of the WIT initiative but have adopted the types of assignments and the more explicit communication of expectations typical of WIT participation: TAs take ideas from WIT to their grading and teaching in other courses, and instructors exchange ideas informally as well as hearing about WIT successes at departmental meetings and the WIT Showcase. It is no longer surprising to see writing presented as part of course learning experiences.

WIT benchmarking meetings, which bring together course TAs, the course instructor, the LWTA, and sometimes the WIT Coordinator to discuss grades and feedback on samples of student writing, have played a critical role in changing grading practices and associated aspects of curriculum. Though these meetings sometimes start with humorous complaints about students’ tendency to misinterpret assignment prompts and to misread or misuse sources, they move quickly to discussion of teaching issues such as unclear or ambiguous assignment instructions and the reasons certain kinds of evidence carry more weight than others in particular kinds of argument. In some cases, these discussions result in



instructors restructuring their assignments to provide more initial guidance to students and enable formative feedback earlier in the writing process.

Above all, participation in benchmarking meetings transforms course TAs from mere graders, working in isolation, to more engaged members of the teaching team. In the case of the sessions that bring LWTAs from different departments together, the program helps create a community of practice centered on writing instruction for Graduate Teaching Assistants. For example, many WIT course TAs now prepare and deliver in-class workshops about upcoming assignments, and many create handouts presenting discipline- and assignment-specific tips, resources and guides. Several years of student surveys and statistical analyses of grades have confirmed the efficacy of these contributions, and they have become part of the departments' teaching cultures. A formal study confirms that the TAs themselves are more invested and engaged in their teaching in WIT courses than in their other teaching experiences (Rolheiser et al., 2013).

## **TAKING STOCK: THE RISKS AND REWARDS OF WIT SIX YEARS ON**

As this chapter has shown, three distinctive features—all of which relate to Condon and Rutz's (2012) notions of “location” (“particle”) and “momentum” (“wave”) in their WAC taxonomy—have contributed to WIT's success as an independent writing program. First, allowing departments to set their own goals and develop their own approaches to writing instruction fosters change from within departments, rather than imposing or enforcing it from above or outside. This strategy has proven highly compatible with the diverse and politically powerful departments that comprise the Faculty of Arts and Science. Secondly, focusing financial and pedagogical resources on disciplinary graduate teaching assistants not only improves undergraduate writing instruction across the curriculum, it better prepares graduate students for their future roles as teaching faculty. Finally, having a program coordinator who is independent of departmental affiliations helps to promote cross-faculty and institution-wide collaborations.

These are the rewards WIT has yielded, but as we have shown there are also risks attending this model, which concern both WIT's location and momentum. Holding units accountable—and within them, individual instructors and TAs—in a distributed structure can be challenging. Requiring departments to reapply annually for funding has fostered commitment on the part of administrators, who in turn can encourage faculty to live up to the promise of their applications. However, with rotating faculty leaves, evolving teaching responsibilities, and changes in departmental administrators, hard-won achievements can sometimes dissipate.

The second risk concerns the role of the disciplinary teaching assistants. The success of WIT is in large part the result of work done by Lead Writing TAs who are committed to teaching students to write in their disciplines and can engage course TAs along with them. Although this leverages the expertise of a key group of novice teachers and prepares future faculty, it also relies on the least powerful members of the institution to effect change. As we have shown, many course TAs have been empowered by WIT to rethink their grading and other teaching practices, and have contributed significantly to changing teaching practices in their departments. However, it is still possible for other TAs (even occasionally including a Lead Writing TA) to feel sidelined by faculty unwilling to treat them as full-fledged members of the teaching team. Moreover, although the revolving door of TAs brings fresh ideas and practices that enrich teaching, it can also make achieving long-term goals more difficult. Yet many of these TAs will go on to become faculty members elsewhere and take their expertise in writing pedagogy with them.

Finally, the WIT Coordinator, being located outside a department and engaging almost exclusively in collaborative work, risks isolation within the institution. However, the WIT Coordinator is now associate professor in U of T's teaching stream, which is focused more on teaching than research but should not be confused with teaching-only or adjunct roles at other institutions. Furthermore, the positioning of both the initiative and its Coordinator in the central administration of the Faculty of Arts and Science ensures ongoing support from the dean. In terms of physical location, after initially having an office in the faculty's administration building, the Coordinator has since been housed in one of the constituent colleges, which affords opportunities for building collaborative networks beyond WIT, including with the writing centers, which are situated in the colleges. The program's continued growth (most of the faculty's 32 departments have participated), strong results (including a growing body of research), and positive publicity generated by events and awards show that the program has achieved a critical mass of participation, success and recognition. However, burnout for the WIT Coordinator is a risk, particularly if the current rate of growth continues. Much of the Coordinator's energy each year is devoted to preparing and mentoring a new crop of LWTAs and working with new instructors and administrators, which constrains the time available for assessment and research.

WIT is now recognized as a key part of the curriculum in the Faculty of Arts and Science. The success of its distributed structure supports McLeod's call for WAC leaders to "braid" their programs with other important institutional initiatives such as assessment, technology, and general education to ensure their continued relevance (1997, p. 72). WIT's great strength is its flexibility, its respon-

siveness to widely varying departmental and disciplinary priorities; it is thus a program model with significant potential for adaptation to the needs of other institutions. Through its strong connections with leading teachers in departments across the curriculum, through the Writing Committee and other outreach activities, and through its recent awards, WIT has achieved a visibility at the University of Toronto that keeps administrative decision-makers aware of its value. Nevertheless, to maintain its relevance and visibility, like any writing program WIT must engage in continued assessment, research, and self-reflection. This chapter is one effort towards that self-study.

## REFERENCES

- Anson, C. (2012, June). *Artificial turf or the new grass roots? Exploring departmentally localized models of WAC*. Keynote address, 11th International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference. Savannah, GA.
- Anson, C. A. & Dannels, D. (2009). Profiling programs: Formative uses of departmental consultations in the assessment of communication across the curriculum. [Special issue on Writing Across the Curriculum and Assessment] *Across the Disciplines*, 6. Retrieved from [http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/assessment/anson\\_dannels.cfm](http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/assessment/anson_dannels.cfm).
- Artze-Vega, I., Bowdon, M., Emmons, K., Eodice, M., Hess, S. K., Coleman Lamonica, C. & Nelms, G. (2013). Privileging pedagogy: Composition, rhetoric, and faculty development. *College Composition and Communication*, 65(1), 162–184.
- Bean, J. C. (2001). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Beaufort, A. (2007). *College writing and beyond: A new framework for university writing instruction*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Boyer Commission, Carnegie Institute. (1998). *Reinventing undergraduate education: A blueprint for America's research universities*. Stony Brook, NY: State University of New York at Stony Brook.
- Brammer, C., Amare, N. & Campbell, K, S. (2008). Culture shock: Teaching writing within interdisciplinary contact zones. *Across the Disciplines*, 5. Retrieved from <http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/articles/brammeretal2008.cfm>.
- Condon, W. & Rutz, C. (2012). A taxonomy of writing across the curriculum programs: Evolving to serve wider agendas. *College Composition and Communication*, 64(4), 357–382.
- Curriculum Review and Renewal Committee (CRRC) (2007). *Final report*. Toronto: University of Toronto, Faculty of Arts and Science.
- Dias, P., Freedman, A., Medway, P. & Pare, A. (1999). *Worlds apart: Acting and writing in academic and workplace contexts*. Portsmouth, NH: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Faculty of Arts and Science Ad Hoc Committee on Writing (2004). *Writing in arts and science*. Retrieved from [http://individual.utoronto.ca/procter/reports/2004\\_FAS.pdf](http://individual.utoronto.ca/procter/reports/2004_FAS.pdf).
- Faery, R. B. (1993). Teachers and writers: The faculty writing workshop and writing across the curriculum. *Writing Program Administration*, 17(1–2), 31–42.

- Gallagher, C. W. (2012). The trouble with outcomes: Pragmatic inquiry and educational aims. *College English*, 75(1), 42–60.
- Graff, G. & Birkenstein, C. (2010). *They say, I say: The moves that matter in academic writing* (2nd ed.). New York: W. W. Norton.
- Graves, R. (1994). *Writing instruction in Canadian universities*. Winnipeg, MB: Inkshed.
- Graves, R. & Graves, H. (Eds.) (2006). *Writing centres, writing seminars, writing culture: Writing instruction in Anglo-Canadian universities*. Winnipeg, MB: Inkshed.
- Hedengren, B. F. (2001, May). *TA training across the curriculum: Covert catalyst for change*. Paper presented at the National Writing Across the Curriculum conference, Bloomington, IN.
- Hedengren, B. F. (2004). *A TA's guide to teaching writing in all disciplines*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Hubert, H. (1995). Babel after the fall: The place of writing in English. *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 64(3), 381–397.
- Huntzinger, M., McPherron, P. & Rajagopal, M. (2011). The TA consultant program: Improving undergraduate instruction and graduate student professional development. In Miller, J. E. & Groccia, J. E. (Eds.), *To improve the academy: Resources for faculty, instructional, and organizational development* (Vol. 29). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hyland, K. (2006). *Academic discourse across disciplines*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Jablonski, J. A. (2006). *Academic writing consulting and WAC: Methods and models for guiding cross-curricular literacy work*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Light, R. J. (1990). *Explorations with students and faculty about teaching, learning, and student life—First report*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Light, R. J. (1992). *Explorations with students and faculty about teaching, learning, and student life 2*. Cambridge, MA: Kennedy School of Government.
- Light, R. J. (2001). *Making the most of college*. Cambridge MA: Harvard.
- MacDonald, W. B., Procter, M., Tallman, K. (2008). *Integrating writing instruction in Arts and Science courses: Practical findings from the 2007–2008 departmental writing initiatives*. Retrieved from [http://individual.utoronto.ca/procter/reports/2008\\_JointFAS.pdf](http://individual.utoronto.ca/procter/reports/2008_JointFAS.pdf).
- McLeod, S. H. (1997). WAC at century's end: Haunted by the ghost of Fred Newton Scott. *Writing Program Administration*, 21(1), 67–73.
- Procter, M. (2011). Talking the talk and walking the walk: Establishing the academic role of writing centres. In D. Starke-Meyerring, A. Paré, N. Artemeva, M. Horne & L. Yousoubova (Eds.). *Writing in knowledge societies*. Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press. Retrieved from <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/winks>.
- Rodrigue, T. K. (2012) The (in)visible world of teaching assistants in the disciplines: Preparing TAs to teach writing. *Across the Disciplines: A Journal of Language, Learning, and Academic Writing*, 9. Retrieved from <http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/articles/rodrigue2012.cfm>.
- Roen, D., Goggin, M. D. & Clary-Lemon, J. (2008). Teaching of writing and writing instructors through the ages. In C. Bazerman (Ed.), *Handbook of research on writing: History, society, school, individual, text* (pp. 347–364). New York/ London: Erlbaum.

- Rolheiser, C., Seifert, T., McCloy, C., Gravestock, P., Stewart, G., Greenleaf, E., . . . McKean, S. (2013). *Developing teaching assistants as members of the university teaching team*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.
- Russell, D. R. (2002). *Writing in the academic disciplines* (2nd ed.). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Segal, J., Pare, A., Brent, D. & Vipond, D. (1992). The researcher as missionary: Problems with rhetoric and reform in the disciplines. *College Composition and Communication*, 50(1), 71–90.
- Sommers, N. (2002). Shaped by writing: The undergraduate experience. *Harvard expository writing program* [VHS]. Cambridge, MA: Telequest.
- Sommers, N. (2005). The case for research: One writing program administrator's story. *College Composition and Communication*, 56(3), 507–514.
- Strachan, W. (2008). *Writing-intensive: Becoming w-faculty in a new writing curriculum*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Thaiss, C. & Porter, T. (2010). The state of WAC/WID in 2010: Methods and results of the U.S. survey of the international WAC/WID mapping project. *College Composition and Communication*, 61(3), 534–570.
- Townsend, M. (2008). WAC Program vulnerability and what to do about it: An update and brief bibliographic essay. *WAC Journal*, 19, 45–61. Retrieved from <http://wac.colostate.edu/journal/vol19/townsend.pdf>.
- Waldo, M. L. (2004). *Demythologizing language difference in the academy: Establishing discipline-based writing programs*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Walvoord, B. (1997) From conduit to customer: The role of WAC faculty in WAC assessment. In K. B. Yancey & B. Huot (Eds.), *Assessing writing across the curriculum* (pp. 15–36). Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Zawacki, T. M. (2008). Writing fellows as WAC change agents: Changing what? Changing whom? Changing how? [Special issue on Writing Fellows]. *Across the Disciplines*, 5. Retrieved from <http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/fellows/zawacki.cfm>.