

## CHAPTER 8

# INSCRIBING JUSTICE: IWPs AND INCLUSIVITY EDUCATION

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When a college or university transitions from a writing program embedded in a Department of English to an independent writing program (IWP), the experience is analogous to high school or college graduates seeking “independence” from their parents. In both cases, important life questions arise: “Do I have a budget? Who will my supporters be? Where will I be housed? Who’s my new boss? How will I measure my success?” All of these questions entail direct confrontation with the personal stakes of independence—or those encountered when a college or university engages in the transition from a traditional first-year writing program to a more complexly conceived IWP. Any school working in this direction feels these growing pains. A young person’s shift to independence fosters growth, learning, and leadership—and so too with writing programs. A shift from a single first-year English course to a series of developmentally sequenced writing courses administered through an IWP can create opportunities for improvement in curriculum design, implementation of outcomes-based assessment, data-driven faculty development, and increased inclusivity education. This chapter will explore the role of an IWP in facilitating: 1) a new WAC initiative and faculty support for it; 2) broad assessment of student academic achievement; 3) inclusivity awareness at the institutional level; and 4) the creation of a new framework for writing program administration in the liberal arts context.

## ONE: COLLEGE AND CORE HISTORY

Cabrini University is a small Catholic liberal arts institution, the only institution of higher education worldwide run by the Cabrinian order, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Approaching its sixtieth year—a youngster by institutional standards—the College has a committed academic history grounded in the historical Cabrinian commitment to issues of social justice and the provision of service to poor and underserved populations.

In the mid-1980s, with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), our faculty adopted a then new general education program

organized around the fashionable work of Ernest Boyer and his colleagues at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Boyer's work—along with the work of Fred Hechinger, Arthur Levine, and others—was astonishing in its challenge to the then-evolving emphasis on higher education research at the expense of the more traditional (even Socratic) teaching orientation of the American professoriate (Boyer, 1997). Boyer's contribution rests with his endorsement of general education and teaching excellence at colleges and universities that only then were opening their doors to emerging populations of American and international students who historically had not enjoyed the privilege of higher education. And while the accommodation of Boyer's ideas had arguably little short-term impact on faculty professional orientation at that time, small colleges and universities across the country embraced his message. At Cabrini, a reimagined core curriculum was established—one, like many others established in the 1980s, that was composed of a series of Boyer-inspired competency or proficiency requirements (i.e., at Cabrini the 4 Rs—reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion) with foreign language and the natural sciences thrown in for good measure. These base requirements were then coupled with a more complex and more heavily weighted distribution requirement covering everything from Contemporary Issues and Aesthetics, to Heritage, Values, and course categories (Diversity among them) that have since outlived their usefulness. Diversity, for example, is no longer addressed explicitly within our core. The former 3-credit course requirement has been replaced by a broad-based campus-wide approach to “inclusivity,” similar to attempts in the 1980s and 1990s to substitute Writing-Across-the-Curriculum initiatives for basic English courses. At Cabrini, the focus on social justice was distilled into a sequence of two seminar courses taken in the first and third years—and these two centerpiece seminars, in conjunction with a bread-and-butter English 101, represented the primary vehicles and venues for writing instruction at the college. (Other WAC initiatives are described by Hjortshoj; MacDonald, Procter & Williams; Thaiss et al., in this volume.)

It wasn't a perfect core (we doubt that any core is). However, like so many institutions of higher education that adopted Boyer's ideas, the development of a progressive general education requirement provided Cabrini faculty with a more or less clear curricular articulation of the college mission and brought them (fewer than 40 full time instructors at the time) onto one page with regard to core writing instruction in our undergraduate program.

## **TWO: THE NEW CORE**

But more than 25 years later the innovative reforms of the 1980s had become antique. It wasn't just a question of patina, the worn and weathered wear of

years: the general education curriculum our younger faculty inherited a decade ago was broken and, some argued, beyond repair. And while the new curriculum we've established since carries forward much of the trademark innovation of the past (we've maintained traditional competency requirements as a part of an integrative reform), in substantive respects it represents an altogether different approach to writing instruction and social justice education—one based less on discrete, calculated requirements than a more broadly-conceived developmental model. This new model incorporates experiential and service learning, community-based research, a healthy regard for the co-curricular dimensions of the undergraduate experience, and, most significantly, an IWP that represents the centerpiece achievement and, if we're honest, most vexing problem for Cabrini faculty teaching today.

Faculty hired by the college in the last seven to 10 years come to the table with a very different background than educators of a generation ago. For many, higher education is a second career—and ever-responsive to the economic realities of becoming a professor, junior faculty are alert to (and in many cases already adept at) the institutional responsibilities they must assume if promotion, tenure, or employment longevity are to be insured. They believe that the liberal reforms in higher education of the 1970s and 1980s haven't worked—and that this closeted constellation of failures has precipitated the tough love environment (of assessment and accountability) within which we now ply our trade. So in important respects, the decision to revise the core and core writing program was a function of an important generational shift at our college. Faculty hires had virtually flat-lined in the early 1990s. But as the college grew (we've nearly doubled our faculty in the last twelve years), we found ourselves, like most colleges and universities, relying increasingly on adjunct faculty to provide instruction at the 100 and 200 level—on adjuncts and on newly recruited full-time hires who had no real stake in the core courses to which they were assigned. For the sake of ascendant full- and part-time faculty, a reevaluation of core assumptions at the college seemed overdue if we were to instill in them the sense of faculty ownership that is essential to any successful general education program and the labor-intensive writing instruction it entails.

One reason for redesigning our core curriculum (and its embedded writing program) had to do with its age. Twenty-five years is a long time for anything to remain in fashion—and if core programs like ours were sustained, it had at least something to do with Ernest Boyer and the adoption of ideas that were “classic” from the get-go. The language of Boyer's work was so compelling—and its cross-disciplinary appeal so great—that even decades later it seemed unreasonable to mess with a good thing. The old core was perennially re-imagined as the “new black”—and that wasn't a bad thing. The fact that something is old

(we're now old enough to believe) isn't reason to discard it. But age does speak volumes, and at Cabrini we found that in the end change is a good thing—that it may be in the nature of institutional structures to change (given the transience of academic administrations), even if it is institutional nature to resist change as consequential as general education reform.

In addition to what we are characterizing as generational factors among faculty, there is the related matter of evolving institutional identity. Core curriculums—those places where our students' cognitive growth and development matters more (or at least as much as) their mastery of content—are not and should not be fixed propositions. They ought not be (as they have too often become) a standard set of requirements unyielding over time and ignorant of the dynamic forces that shape institutions of higher education every day. Admissions, tuition, branding, retention, the economy, the shifting sands of American politics—these are massive forces that mold colleges and universities, but to which curriculums, including core and composition programs, have generally not responded. At Cabrini, the fixture of our core had weathered our transition from a predominantly women's college of commuting students to a fully co-ed residential college enrolling nearly as many graduate students as undergraduates at no fewer than seven satellite locations for graduate study. Furthermore, the growth during this transition of our pre-professional programs, particularly Education, Communication, and Business (which together account for 70% of our current graduates), fully identified us as a comprehensive college and not the small liberal arts community we had once been. In an important sense, the process of writing program reform was a kind of wake-up call to what we were and what we had become. In this respect, it created an opportunity not only to embrace a new institutional identity, but also to better provide for a new kind of student who was already through the front door: the millennial undergraduate whose basic writing ability did not compare to that of students entering American colleges and universities a decade ago. A product of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, the millennial generation—as College Board, Teagle Foundation, and Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) briefs have long documented—was now ready for college, even if institutions of higher education were not quite ready for the millennials themselves (AAC&U, 2002).

Interestingly, these shifts—in faculty composition, institutional identity, and ideas about student writing proficiency—coincided in the last decade with burgeoning fields of academic research. After Boyer and his Carnegie Foundation colleagues made their mark, Composition and Rhetoric as fields of research and scholarship of teaching enjoyed astonishing growth and growth in respectability—and the deeper issues we invoke here have thrust general education (and critical thinking and writing) into the limelight encouraging scholars, young

and old, to mine the new ideas, new pedagogies, new technologies, and the new administrative structures that now drive research in these historically marginalized fields. The sources of inspiration and intellectual encouragement are everywhere apparent, scattered across the professional landscape whether we're teachers, administrators, or engaged students who wish to become partners for important change.

And then there's assessment, which, given our experience as educators, isn't such a bad thing. The curious revelation of our writing program reform was that once we scratched the surface, we discovered that among our veteran faculty there were large disagreements about what our core writing curriculum had been designed to accomplish, what elements of it were allied with specific general education goals, and what level of proficiency our students were supposed to achieve. Arguably the most productive aspect of the reform process was the establishment of an agreed upon set of student learning outcomes that were both explicitly related to the College Cabrini mission and formulated upon a contemporary appreciation for the role of writing instruction at the college and university level. For the first time really, our faculty were developing a thoughtful methodology for outcomes assessment which, in our case, was a sister project to the development of outcomes for the new core and the creation of a new model for writing program administration. In short, the conversation about 1) core learning outcomes (especially in the area of written communication) and 2) the institutional assessment required for our periodic and decennial Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) reviews collided to create for our faculty and administration a sense of shared purpose for the development of an independent writing program (IWP).

### **THREE: PROGRAM TRANSITION**

We noted previously that in addition to the two core seminars of the “old core,” students arriving at Cabrini enrolled in a standard English 101: Basic Composition (ENG 101) course in their first semester. The first of the two seminars (SEM 100: Self Understanding) was then taken in the second semester of the first year (a de facto ENG 102 equivalent), and SEM 300: The Common Good (the second core seminar) was taken in the third year and incorporated a service-learning component. The three courses were tethered conceptually, even if they bore little relation to one another. The justice emphasis of the seminars was not drawn into the disparate theme-based ENG 101 offerings (e.g., Writing about Politics, Writing about Film, Writing about Sports)—and while all three courses were identified as part of the college core writing program (a nascent WAC initiative), administrative fractures were drawn across the program. As one would

expect, ENG 101 was administered by the Department of English, and an English Department faculty coordinator position was established for the course, less out of a concern for its programmatic integrity than to relieve the English Department chair from the burdensome responsibility of supervising the 15 to 18 English faculty (full- and part-time) who taught the 25 plus sections each fall. And the seminars? Well, the seminars didn't have a home, save in the minds of the senior faculty who created them—a revolving parade of writing principals who sat on the various college committees that had a hand in the writing-justice pot (e.g., the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, Academic Leadership Team, Program Review Board, Assessment Subcommittee, and so forth). But in truth, English faculty—the majority stakeholders given their writing expertise and the number of sections they taught—held sway, though not in any official capacity.

As the question of writing program administration evolved, it would have made perfect sense for the English Department to assume responsibility for the newly conceived nine-credit sequence of writing-justice seminars that were to become the hallmark of our new core. In fact, this trio of seminars—the Engagements with the Common Good (ECGs)—was designed to make more explicit the links between the existing Basic Composition and SEM 100 and 300 courses. ENG 101, SEM 100, and SEM 300 (taken in the first and third years) became the sustained nine-credit ECG 100 (our basic composition equivalent), ECG 200, and ECG 300 writing requirement drawn across the freshman, sophomore, and junior years of our undergraduates' education. This developmental sequence, which we discuss below, was centrally implicated in the move to an IWP, but two fundamental questions presented themselves at this juncture: 1) Why would an English Department, especially in an era of declining enrollment in the humanities, choose to eliminate its signature ENG 101: Basic Composition course?; and 2) How could English faculty convince their faculty and administrative colleagues—who complained bitterly about declining student proficiency in writing—to abandon the easy comfort an ENG 101 represents? Why should they now have to assume the difficult burden of first-year writing instruction? “Isn't that what we hire the English part-timers to do?” (see also Rhoades et al. and Davies, this volume).

For years, colleges and universities have looked to the first-year (and almost exclusively first-semester) Basic Composition course as the standard-bearer for writing and writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) investments at the undergraduate level. For decades, no self-respecting institution could claim their commitment to writing without touting the aims (if not always the accomplishments) of freshman composition—and in many cases, the delivery of a coherent basic composition curriculum was identified as the existence of a legitimate

first-year writing program. However, faculty and administration conversations regarding the merits of traditional first-year instruction persisted, in part because our national commitment to writing has not, over the long-term, produced a more literate cohort of undergraduates. In fact, in recent years complaints about our students (e.g., “they can’t write,” “they’re not willing to do the work”) have become louder and more numerous as educators struggle to understand the root causes of this disconnect. While students often view “*rewriting* [as] a dirty word,” (Lindemann, 2001, p. 189) not only should they be rewriting, but also they need multiple interconnected courses on writing. Becoming a proficient college writer cannot be achieved through a first-year writing “vaccine.” It is, rather, a skill set that must be cultivated and crafted over a period of time like a runner training for a marathon.

It was in this context that English faculty at our college sought to implement a radical revision of our traditional and, admittedly, ineffective model for writing program administration. This core group of faculty, working with invested others, sought to put an end to the finger pointing and the endless rounds of blame that effectively diagnosed student writing as the disease we couldn’t cure. At Cabrini, we wanted to pull the plug on dead-end conversations about student writing and turn our attention instead to creating new opportunities for faculty to engage in writing instruction itself. By no longer front-loading writing instruction, we hoped to cultivate both student writing proficiency and the broad faculty commitment to writing instruction that is critical to its development. And in conjunction with these goals—and in alignment with the revised core curriculum that was emerging—the IWP we substituted for what was a collaborative ENG-WAC initiative would serve as the primary home for the social justice aims of our college academic program.

When the Cabrini University Board of Trustees suggested that our students needed to write better—when they indicated to faculty and administrative partners that any revision of our core curriculum must be committed to that primary outcome—none of us could have anticipated it would be the death knell for our ENG 101 Basic Composition Program. Looking back it seems like a counter-intuitive decision on the part of our faculty and, especially, our English faculty who were prepared, against their better disciplinary judgment, to relinquish this bread and butter course. Only the problems were so severe—and our readiness for curricular reform so apparent—that we dropped our traditional safety net by disrupting entrenched models and assumptions concerning writing program administration, and by abandoning both the single-course approach to first-year writing and the disciplinary home that writing program had historically enjoyed. Our IWP is an outgrowth of this basic risk-taking—and by capitalizing on the absence of any monolithic structure (an invested department of

English or entrenched first-year writing program), our college devised a successfully unorthodox means for getting the job done. The Cabrini IWP represents a way of doing business that draws on more various resources and expertise than is common for more traditionally administrated writing programs. It is part of our own unique “separation narrative” (Maid, 2002)—a mission-based narrative that required the creation of an IWP that has more profoundly informed our academic program than its most ardent supporters could have imagined.

## **FOUR: IWP STRUCTURE**

As the college migrated away from a Basic Composition program housed within the Department of English, there needed to be a shift in administration of our core writing courses. In the initial stages, the Academic Affairs administrators and the faculty were so fully preoccupied with the adoption of a new general education program and the development of learning outcomes for it, that few were thinking about the administration of courses that did not fall within specific academic departments, let alone the centerpiece writing instruction that was dear in our collective hearts, but not on our minds. Simply put, an independent writing program was not on anyone’s radar except, perhaps, for the Department of English chair who, as a former WPA, knew all too well the labor-intensive administrative work that would be required for the new ECG courses—courses that were primarily to be delivered by non-English full-time faculty and a select few part-timers. Understanding this, the Department of English advocated for a new full-time tenure track professor—and in anticipation of the hurdles ahead, projected identifying this faculty member as a WAC director (a replacement for the previous ENG 101 coordinator). However, our administrators had a different view. The Dean for Academic Affairs was identified as director of the ECG series in what amounted to a fiscal move designed to defer administrative costs associated with the new core until those costs could more accurately be projected. Acknowledging this (and recognizing his own limitations), the dean then recruited five faculty members to serve as “coordinators” to assist him in the administration of the program. The coordinators consisted of five faculty: one for each course level (ECG 100, 200, and 300), a diversity coordinator, and a writing coordinator (very similar to the “committee-based advisory or reporting structure” described by Ross, this volume). Like writing, diversity would no longer remain a discrete requirement within our general education program. Our faculty perception about both had changed substantively as evolving conversations about our new core curriculum progressed, and diversity (or, rather, inclusivity) would be drawn across the developmental sequence of courses in much the same way that writing was.



In the short-term, this was an effective administrative approach, but at the end of the first year of implementation, the dean—understanding even more clearly the inherent difficulties in this short-term fix—appropriately stepped back from the ECGs and amplified the writing coordinator’s role to include administration of the entire program. In this new configuration, the ECG Coordinator (an English faculty member) became responsible for faculty development, writing assessment, curriculum integrity, and so forth—all the responsibilities one would associate with the newly created role of WPA for an IWP. One of the ECG Coordinator’s immediate innovations was to call for monthly meetings of all ECG faculty to discuss logistical issues, assessment results, teaching methodologies, etc.—a consistent interdisciplinary meeting (not unlike regular academic department meetings) that was unprecedented at the college. In fact, this regular meeting schedule has become a model approach for other areas of the core to address the persistent difficulties associated with general education—difficulties that curriculum reform alone won’t likely resolve (e.g., student investment, shortfalls in institutional resourcing, etc.).

Prior to each faculty meeting, the ECG Coordinator convenes the other ECG leaders (100, 200, 300, and diversity), the Academic Dean, and the Community Partnership Coordinator of the Wolfington Center (our social justice institute) to collaborate on the agenda for the month’s meeting and to address on-going issues facing both faculty and students in the program. These issues range from simple logistics (e.g., matters like obtaining vans for travel to off-site service locations), to more complex issues pertaining to faculty workload and student “buy in” to the Cabrini social justice project. But beyond any specific accomplishment, the ECG faculty meetings have been crucial to the success of our IWP because they have seeded ongoing faculty development and support around the areas of writing, critical thinking, social justice, inclusivity, and information literacy.

## **FIVE: THE ECGS**

The matrix of five administrators has been serviceable to the rich curriculum of writing, information literacy, service, and community-based research the ECG courses entail (see Appendix for ECG learning outcomes). At the 100-level, students are introduced to theories of social justice and are asked to reflect on their own personal values and social identities. Each ECG 100 course has a specific theme that allows students to consider issues of power, privilege, and difference as they relate to themselves and their communities. For example, in one ECG 100 course students learn about the child welfare system and what happens when an 18-year-old foster youth “ages out” of the system without being adopted. In

this course, members of the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board, a group of current and former foster youth, serve as guest speakers in the course. In another ECG 100 course, students participate in a “Reacting to the Past” game module that employs role-playing to teach students about issues of injustice associated with women’s suffrage. Students embody a specific historical character throughout the course, which allows them to critique their own values in comparison with those enacted by their role. In these examples and others, instructors at the 100-level work in partnership with the college research librarians to establish the baseline proficiencies for writing and information literacy that will facilitate student mastery of the various modes of academic writing.

At the 200-level, instructors build upon the skills students developed in their first year and provide students with an experiential learning opportunity in the community. ECG 200 incorporates a required service-learning component that allows students to reflect upon the college social justice mission in light of the real-world realities that inform the community or organization where they serve. At the 200-level students might volunteer at “Crabby Creek” to learn about watershed citizenship, or they might participate in an “inside-out” classroom experience on criminal justice at a nearby state prison. In these examples, ECG 200 instructors extend students’ writing abilities by administering processed-based writing assignments and encouraging student engagement with our peer tutors and Writing Center professional staff. Students are also provided with various forms of with diversity training that allows them to interact with community members with greater sensitivity and compassion than would otherwise be the case.

In the junior year, students take ECG 300, which builds upon the social justice instruction and service experiences from the previous two years. Here students are called upon to think about systemic issues—and doing so builds-out the learning achievements of ECG 100 and 200 by encouraging students to become more informed citizens in an increasingly complex and demanding world. If they witnessed poverty in ECG 200 when they served at a homeless outreach center, they now question why socio-economic inequities exist in the first place and interrogate legislation that affects those who are most in need. ECG 300 instructors again work with institutional partners as students conduct community-based research or actively advocate for specific social change. For example, the college has established an ongoing partnership with Laurel House, a nationally recognized domestic violence shelter in our area. Through this partnership, students receive training at Laurel House, and in collaboration with their ECG instructor they conduct research that benefits the Laurel House program and, more powerfully, challenges their own perceptions about domestic violence, its causes, and the possibilities for reducing its prevalence in their own communities. Significantly, in each example (ECG 100, 200, and 300), contem-

porary writing pedagogies (e.g., process-based assignments, peer collaboration) are utilized to promote both college-level writing proficiency and our students' development of a values informed appreciation for issues of social justice.

## **SIX: IWP AND WID**

Beyond these course-specific achievements of the ECG sequence, our reimagined IWP curricular and administrative structures have facilitated a re-evaluation of major-area curriculums as well, especially with regard to our thinking about departmental capstone courses. It's important to note that the reform in our writing program (the creation of our IWP), while independent and inter- or, rather, cross-disciplinary, has a disciplinary face. However, that face is not that of a traditional Department of English or English-driven first-year writing program. While it is true that our English Department has enriched its writing curriculum in the wake of the IWP (i.e., the creation of our IWP freed English faculty to pursue development of new writing courses and certificate programs), the more significant gain is that the student-learning outcomes and assessment protocols associated with the IWP have informed the development of major-specific writing courses and writing opportunities across academic programs. Our IWP writing goals and measures have been accommodated in fundamental ways into how faculty and students understand the value and place of major-area studies. Curricular innovations have transpired within disciplines—and not only in humanities studies—that are directly owed to the creation of the IWP. By establishing a commonly articulated set of core writing outcomes, and by linking the development of those outcomes to collaboration among a wide array of faculty and academic support personnel, faculty within departments were able to carry back this “portable expertise” and apply what they had accomplished in their ECG courses to instruction at the 200- and 300-level in their departments (e.g., in Religious Studies, Business, and Fine Arts). This disciplinary instruction (roughly equivalent to that associated with traditional Writing In the Disciplines or WID programs) has since been extended to the major area capstone seminars where writing achievement is now tethered to specific disciplinary accomplishment in ways that extend student performance in their majors. For example, the learning outcomes promoted by our IWP have become staple expectations for students in our Math and Science programs, where the student capacity to convey content-based learning is now regarded as being as important as what they learn given contemporary expectations for communication in accelerated, technologically-driven professional environments. In capstone courses across majors, writing achievement is now a college-wide expectation—and faculty teaching these upper division major-specific courses have grown in their exper-

tise through their participation in the IWP. In this respect, the creation of our IWP has underscored both a new general education program and discipline-specific reforms in writing instruction that intentionally move students through a developmentally appropriate series of learning outcomes from matriculation to graduation. Our students are the real beneficiaries—and their success is owed to the creation of an IWP and the risk-taking among collaborative partners that made it possible (see also Schendel & Royer, this volume).

## **SEVEN: IWP AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT**

In order for our IWP and WID initiatives to flourish, we have implemented a robust and on-going series of professional development opportunities for faculty at our college (see also Kearns & Turner, Rhoades et al., and Thaiss et al., this volume). As the “new” core curriculum moves from its infancy to 5–10 years old, our faculty development needs have shifted as veteran faculty learn more about the new learning outcomes in practice, and as new faculty coming to the college are integrated into the IWP program. In order to advocate for the pressing faculty development needs of the IWP, the ECG Coordinator sits on a task force that coordinates campus-wide faculty development efforts. In this capacity, the coordinator has been able to advocate for workshops, seminars, and retreats that have specific value for writing instruction. This effective resource support for the IWP has been critical to its success in the absence of a dedicated budget similar to those associated with departments and first-year programs.

In the early stages of the IWP, the ECG Coordinator hosted a college-wide development retreat that was well attended by faculty from all departments. At this meeting, faculty read sample student essays and moved through a norming exercise using a standardized writing rubric. This exercise allowed faculty to deepen their understanding of the rubric domains (the domains for writing proficiency), as they learned how to provide feedback to students. While some research indicates that “simply creating a forum for dialogic communication to occur may not be enough to secure success in interdisciplinary writing initiatives” (McLeod, 2008, p. 1), we saw how this meeting helped to reduce the stigma associated with writing instruction by honoring both veteran and novice instructor opinions. By seeing themselves as somehow “expert”—or, at the very least, capable of becoming “expert”—faculty were able to engage in conversation across disciplinary divides that allowed them to conceptualize a unified understanding of undergraduate writing proficiency: a common core standard that would be serviceable to the specific disciplinary proficiencies faculty wished to cultivate within their departments. In effect, faculty were invited to deconstruct what many viewed as the “closed community” (Martin, 2001, p. 279) of writing

experts in the English Department. A start only, it was nonetheless the beginning of an ongoing conversation we have sustained and which has become the hallmark of faculty development programming for our IWP.

Based on the positive feedback from the first event, the ECG coordinators have since hosted a series of faculty development sessions on writing. These smaller sessions are oriented to specific areas of writing instruction, such as the transition from high school to college writing, teaching revision and the writing process, methods for commenting on student papers, video feedback, methods for peer review, and the creation of “signature assignments” for assessment (see below). While these smaller workshops targeted IWP faculty, the ECG Coordinator sought to address global concerns among faculty about the teaching of writing through professional development programs that have enriched what is now an explicit culture of writing and writing instruction at Cabrini University.

## **EIGHT: IWP AND ASSESSMENT**

Part of what drives faculty development is assessment of the program. The creation of an IWP catalyzed broad assessment within our general education program—a powerful achievement whose institutional value cannot be overstated. The ECG Coordinator is responsible for collaborating with the Assessment Subcommittee (a part of our governance structure) to implement an assessment plan for both inclusivity and writing in the ECGs. Collaborating with the Department of English, she and ECG faculty from across the college collaboratively developed various assessment instruments (including rubrics and assignment and syllabi guidelines) and worked to develop a sustainable assessment protocol and timeline for the IWP. The assignment guidelines in particular proved to be of value to subsequent faculty development and would influence the creation of the ECG signature assignments that are now the mainstay for writing assessment at our college (see Appendix). ECG faculty members create a “signature assignment,” which is approved by the ECG leadership team and the College Undergraduate Curriculum Subcommittee. These signature assignments are developed according to specific guidelines that, nonetheless, allow for flexibility and, critically, academic freedom appropriate to individual instructor iterations of each course. The signature assignment guidelines provide faculty with page-length expectations and instructions for creating process-based writing assignments that are aligned with ECG student-learning outcomes. Essentially, papers must be four to six pages, include three appropriately cited research sources, and explicitly engage the constellated social justice aims associated with each course (ECG 100, ECG 200, or ECG 300). Significantly, the ECG signature

assignment has become a model for similar assessment protocols being applied in other areas of our general education program.

While the signature assignment guidelines were fairly easy to develop, achieving consensus about rubrics was a more complicated project. Because the ECG courses cover so many skills—from research and information literacy, to writing, to understanding concepts of social justice and diversity—it was challenging to develop a rubric that could properly assess discrete elements of the sequence and still express the common vocabulary required for program integrity. However, through an extended process of conversation and collaboration, regular norming sessions, and faculty development workshops, ECG coordinators and faculty were able to agree upon the adoption of a writing rubric that incorporates the language of social justice and inclusivity (see Appendix). Similarly, related rubrics (e.g., for information literacy and oral communication) were developed and are now selectively applied to student artifacts as particular assessment data is required.

IWP faculty established a three-year assessment cycle for the program that began in the Fall of AY 2011–2012. Each December the Assessment Subcommittee and ECG Coordinator convene a half-day calibration session for all ECG assessment readers, as well as for readers evaluating other areas of the core that involve writing outcomes. These readers score artifacts in January, and in May the calibration session is repeated with the same team of interdisciplinary readers and scoring process. Significantly, in the initial cycle very few artifacts needed to be triple scored, which is evidence of effective calibration among readers participating in the assessment process. Fall and spring data are combined for a final report each year—and it should be noted that in AY 2012–13, the IWP piloted an electronic portfolio interface for use in assessment that has since been extended to all areas of our general education program.

To further understand and amplify our assessment findings, the ECG Coordinator hired an outside consultant to conduct qualitative focus groups. The consultant conducted focus group interviews with faculty and with students who had completed the entire core curriculum. These focus groups centered on issues within the IWP program—and subsequently the college expanded the scope of the focus group questions to include the entire general education program to better understand how students are making connections across courses and between the core curriculum and their major-specific instruction.

This “feedback loop” involves the data from one year of assessment being distributed to major governance committees and our faculty. Those entities meet, discuss the report, and respond to data, specifically noting what resources and support are required to improve student performance across courses. The Assessment Subcommittee in collaboration with the ECG coordinators then

synthesize those responses, make recommendations to the appropriate committees within the college governance structure, and provide oversight for redress in areas of deficiency or need.

Blending the areas of assessment and faculty development has been a real asset to the success of the IWP and, more generally, the college. IWP inroads in the area of signature assignments helped faculty to gain a better understanding of both the academic mission of the college and the merits of outcomes-based instruction in their teaching practices. The interdisciplinary conversations that began at that initial writing retreat continue—and the gains are not solely program-based or limited to thinking about writing. The linked IWP protocols for faculty development and assessment now inform strategic planning for accreditation within programs (e.g., Social Work and Education), as well as at the institutional level in the development of self-study materials for our MSCHE reviews.

## **NINE: IWP CONCLUSION**

One of the challenges facing the creation and maintaining of an IWP is the issue of budget. As Cabrini's new IWP developed, our Office of Academic Affairs earmarked funds for small stipends for course development and a modest budget for supplies, speakers, and transportation for social justice-oriented writing classes. Yet in spite of this support, resources have been too limited to truly incentivize writing instruction in ways that honor the importance of this work within our general education program. In this volume, Bill Lalicker describes the important equity issues for an IWP and the question of resourcing is at the heart of equity for the ECG series. Because Cabrini's IWP does not have a "home" (a concern for IWPs generally), laying claim to increased budget will continue to be a struggle, even as we acknowledge that the justice connection—the extent to which our IWP curriculum is tethered to the core values of the college—has been significant in our example. However limited resources are, we have enjoyed some measure of institutional support for development of our program given the mission cache the ECG courses represent. In this respect, the IWP commands institutional respect we have been able to leverage as resource dollars (e.g., for faculty development) that might otherwise not have been available to a newly established program.

The project of general education reform and, more specifically, our creation of an IWP has involved much more than a program of curricular or administrative change. Our work at Cabrini University reflects an attempt to re-imagine our college culture—an effort on the part of our faculty and administration to institutionalize Cabrini students' commitments to social responsibility and

the writing accomplishment that is essential for it (see Everett and Thaiss et al., among others in this volume, for other approaches to re-invention). It is arguably the first time that we, as a college, have abandoned the time-honored practice of pouring old wine into new bottles. Rather, the creation of an IWP represents our attempt to move writing and an informed understanding of justice and inclusivity center-stage. The project of general education reform and the establishment of an IWP at Cabrini University and other institutions point the way to a more fundamental rethinking of the liberal arts in an era of increasing, not decreasing requirements for good writing in our students' personal and professional spheres. The IWP ensures that the intellectual and fiscal economies of faculty hires, faculty development, and faculty administrative roles are based in this fundamental expectation for student achievement—an achievement that the creation of our IWP both invited and ensures. By risking the transition from a traditional WAC program, we were able to reimagine our institutional responsibility to writing instruction to better prepare students to become change agents in an increasingly diverse world.

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