CHAPTER 6

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD: WHAT MAKES A COMMUNITY COLLEGE-SECONDARY SCHOOL CONNECTION WORK?

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In June of 2011, the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program at Metropolitan Community College-Longview provided a unique professional development experience for two-year college WAC coordinators, The WAC Institute for Community Colleges. The institute offered a hands-on, highly practical approach to designing and sustaining a WAC program within a two-year college setting. Bolstered by the success of the WAC Institute, Longview's WAC Program agreed to take on a very different kind of challenge the following year. At their request, create a meaningful WAC professional development experience for middle and high school teachers from a local Christian school (K-12). Responding to this request led to a relationship between the two schools, which yielded mutual pedagogical and intellectual benefits.

This chapter describes core elements of this pilot in partnering: sharing resources, helping establish a sustainable high school writing center, and providing meaningful WAC professional development opportunities for middle school and high school teachers, as well as the college instructors who helped facilitate the WAC workshop sessions.

The best way to establish such a relationship is to ground it with the premise that both groups enter the partnership with the belief that they have much to learn from each other. For example, significant time on the front end of this engagement involved putting people at ease, given that these academic environments are constructed very differently and have radically different missions: a private K-12 institution serving a very specific population of children and teenagers, all Christians; and a public open-admissions college serving a very diverse population of adults of all ages from varied socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Such consideration and planning permitted a genuine synergy to emerge when the groups met for the first time and explored WAC topics together in a workshop setting. Beaumont, Pydde, and Tschirpke "strongly agree

with the author's suggestion to take time at the beginning of a collaboration and acknowledge each other's experiences and realities. In fact, we experienced that omitting this step can lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings as we describe in Chapter 7" (Chapter 7).

CONTEXT: TWO DIFFERENT SCHOOLS—ONE SHARED INTEREST

When Summit Christian Academy began a writing initiative, one of their history instructors, Ruth, remembered her WAC experiences as an adjunct at a nearby college, Metropolitan Community College-Longview (MCC-Longview). She contacted her administrators and suggested they request support from the WAC Program at MCC-Longview at the outset of their writing initiative. Next, Ruth initiated contact with the WAC director at the college. Within a few months and several dozen emails, Summit Christian Academy (SCA) and MCC-Longview were positioned to pilot a relationship over student writing.

Shared interest quickly morphed into the kind of shared inquiry described by Danielle Lillge in her discussion of secondary WAC as a resource for supporting Common Core State Standards (CCSS): "As teachers struggle with how to meet CCSS expectations, WAC advocates can invite them to the table by considering their pressing questions" (6). Though SCA was not seeking to subscribe to CCSS, they were eager to understand how best to support the writing initiative they had already developed. They had pressing questions about reasonable expectations of teachers, students, and parents, as well as questions about addressing error and cultivating critical thinking through writing.

Those pressing questions were a wonderful way to begin the conversation. However, because context is key in all aspects of WAC, it is important to understand these questions within the curricular context in which they arise. Moreover, on the front side of any WAC collaboration, it is essential to take into account the specific context of each school. These two schools are located within a few miles of each other in Lee's Summit, Missouri, a suburb on the southeast edge of the Kansas City metropolitan area. Prior to this experience, they had little by way of a formal connection, though some SCA graduates attend MCC-Longview. It only took one person with a tie to both schools to forge the connection.

In his essay "Whistling in the Dark," Merrill J. Davies asserts the value of secondary and college English teachers in the same geographic area finding ways to communicate regularly in order to better mitigate the gap between high school and college writing experiences. He suggests that such dialogue would benefit both groups of faculty as they grapple with articulating what constitutes col-

lege-level writing. His idea can and should be broadened to apply to instructors across the disciplines as well, because such conversations about writing would otherwise be unlikely to occur.

Initially, there was some hesitation and even a small amount of trepidation on the part of those responsible for the WAC Program at MCC-Longview. The prospect of responding to the request for support from SCA by offering even basic WAC professional development to an audience of middle school and high school teachers seemed daunting on a number of levels. The primary concerns emanated from the sensitivity the community college personnel had about their limited knowledge of teaching at K-12 levels.

In their *WAC Journal* article "Building Better Bridges: What Makes High School-College WAC Collaborations Work?" Jacob Blumner and Pamela Childers note patterns of such collaborations which show that successful relationships between schools must involve "joint commitments," whereby schools *seek* to work together (93). If joint commitments don't exist, misunderstood agendas can undermine all of the best intentions. They explain that a frequent complaint of secondary school teachers is that "university people want to 'come down' and tell them how to teach writing" (94). Community college personnel are acutely aware of this phenomenon from a slightly different perspective, one that reflects their position in the education universe sandwiched between high schools and four-year colleges. Because they operate from primarily a teaching-focused rather than a research-focused mission, community colleges can be caught in a similar predicament in their relationships with four-year institutions, especially if key features of the two-year college setting and curriculum are not fully understood.

Myelle-Watson, Spears, Wellen, McClellan, and Peters (Chapter 5) state:

> As researchers at a public high school in Illinois, we discovered a substantial advantage in having an experienced high school faculty member who could act as a colleague and a liaison to help build bridges and establish joint commitments between our institutions. The National Writing Project model of "teachers teaching teachers" resides at the heart of such an arrangement so that a difference of perspectives and missions do not get mistaken as symptoms of an unhelpful hierarchy. (Peters)

It was precisely this concern that caused those affiliated with the MCC-Longview WAC Program to want to be certain that they were equipped to offer what SCA was seeking. Follow-up questions asked of the SCA administrative contact person to clarify their purposes and goals quelled fears rather quickly,

though it wasn't really until the teachers met face-to-face in the WAC workshop that all lingering concerns were eradicated.

However, the difference in grade levels was not the only source of concern; the significant differences in missions and student populations made these two schools an unlikely pairing. It is useful to understand just how different these two schools are in terms of demographics and missions. As one campus of a large, multi-campus district serving a metropolitan area, MCC-Longview is a secular, public, two-year institution with an enrollment of approximately 6000 students that serves the Lee's Summit suburban community. Like most community college environments, MCC-Longview offers both general education and vocational curriculums for a wide range of adult learners, including those who have just exited high school, as well as those returning to school after years away, and often with substantial work and family responsibilities. Student skill levels range from developmental to honors, and student goals and reasons for attending college are quite diverse.

By contrast, Summit Christian Academy is an independent, nondenominational Christian school serving over 685 preschool through high school students. It is accredited both through the North Central Association and the Association of Christian Schools International. The school boasts a 13:1 student-teacher ratio, and has a stellar reputation in the Kansas City area. SCA is noted for its academic rigor and offers 46 college-credit hours each year to high school students; in 2011, SCA graduates averaged a score of 25.2 on the ACT. In addition to pursuing a writing emphasis, the school has embraced a technology initiative. Google Chromebooks and interactive whiteboards have been provided to elementary classrooms, and individual iPads are a required school supply for high school students.

SCA's mission is "to inspire students to achieve their God-given potential through excellent academics and Christian training in a compassionate environment" (Summit Christian Academy, Mission Statement). The school teaches from a biblical worldview, and seeks "to prepare students spiritually, morally, socially, and academically, so they will grow in grace and the knowledge of God and affect their world for Christ" (Summit Christian Academy, Our Mission and Philosophy).

Cox and Gimbel point out in their article on secondary-college WAC collaborations that "college and university WAC programs are uniquely positioned to offer local school districts support in developing and sustaining WAC programs" (3). They are absolutely correct, as long as a joint commitment underpins the relationship. The common ground SCA and MCC-Longview found was their mutual dedication to providing exceptional educational experiences for their students through writing. Both schools were passionately committed to gradu-

ating critical thinkers who were confident in their writing skills, and this bond diminished any differences that existed in missions and constituencies and ultimately provided the necessary foundation for fruitful collaboration.

Though common ground and mutual aims are paramount, so too is the assumption that both groups stand to gain insight and knowledge through their partnership and collaboration. Henry A. Luce explains that "collaboration between the sectors, then, becomes the means for bridging the gap between high school and college, for ensuring the continuity of excellence throughout the system (129). Although he wrote his article "High School-College Collaboration," over twenty years ago, his further point resonates even more deeply now: "So if American education is to improve to the extent now demanded by public and private sectors alike, then collegiality must become the most natural act of all" (Luce 129).

BACKSTORIES: THE PATH TO COLLABORATION

In addition to the demographic and mission context, it is helpful to consider specifically each school's writing context. Schools just beginning a writing initiative or WAC program don't always recognize the complex ways writing exists in a school setting, because they focus solely on where writing instruction takes place in the curriculum. Also, schools sometimes overlook activities and endeavors that reflect WAC principles and practices, because they fall outside of language arts instruction. In this case, SCA had already dedicated itself to a focus on writing in order to enhance the college-readiness of their graduates, improve test scores of their students, and directly engage their broader community of teachers and parents to support the development of their students as writers and critical thinkers. Beaumont, Pydde, and Tschirpke (Chapter 7) comment:

> The importance of considering the writing context of collaborating institutions cannot be emphasized enough. Fostering communication about each specific writing culture helps collaborating partners to shed light on potentially deviant writing practices that, when unnoticed, make it difficult to design writing programs that are acknowledged and supported by all collaborating parties equally. (Herkner)

With those goals in mind, the school had adopted a grading procedure that applied to students beginning in January of their junior year of high school and held them accountable for editing papers for which rough drafts were produced. The grading policy covered content, organization, grammar, and mechanics. The administration created a FAQs document explaining the policy that was distrib-

uted to teachers and parents. The policy encouraged students to consult resources, like peers, teachers, handbooks, and parents, and included the opportunity to revise for credit. The school also used Turnitin.com for seventh to twelfth grades as a tool for detecting plagiarism. By the time SCA and MCC-Longview connected, the SCA school community was familiar with the grading policy and accustomed to submitting student work to Turnitin. SCA had also integrated a comprehensive literacy program into the elementary grades that encouraged critical reading and analysis of written texts.

In contrast, the WAC Program at MCC-Longview began in 1986 and has since been considered a best practices model of WAC for community colleges. The primary goal of the program has always been to support faculty directly in their efforts to integrate writing into their courses as a tool for learning, and to provide significant writing experiences for students beyond the composition curriculum. To those ends, the program offers introductory WAC workshops for faculty, follow-up workshops for faculty interested in teaching writing intensive courses, a myriad of kinds of forums to foster campus-wide discussion of writing-related topics, and individual consultations for instructors led by a full-time WAC director. Faculty participants had a long history of engaging fully in writing assessment efforts from design to implementation, including a large-scale portfolio project that captured authentic artifacts from courses across the college. Faculty members were able to access the WAC program in multiple ways and determine their own level of involvement, which was entirely voluntary. The program had sponsored a writing fellows program for fifteen years that attached peer tutors to WAC courses, and had hosted a student project showcase event, Imagination Longview, for the past five years.

Just a few months prior to the email query from SCA, MCC-Longview offered a comprehensive, three-day learning experience for new WAC directors called the WAC Institute for Community Colleges. The desire to develop and host such an experience arose during the celebration of the 25th year of MCC-Longview's WAC program when faculty attached to the program and cognizant of the institutional and administrative support the program had always been afforded, wanted to give back by helping other colleges create a blueprint for a sustainable program. The WAC director, along with the WAC Cadre, a representative, interdisciplinary group of WAC faculty who helped guide the MCC-Longview WAC Program, spent considerable time over an 18-month period planning and implementing the WAC Institute, which drew attendees from across the country. They wanted to stress practical strategies that could guide any community college program and decided to do so through the lens of the theme, "Creating a Culture of Writing: What Works."

What is crucial to note is that this effort represented a unique opportunity

for some high-level professional development for veteran WAC faculty, as well as for the WAC director. None of them had ever been involved in creating a WAC program from the ground up, because all had joined the Longview community after its WAC Program was established and flourishing. The planning of the institute was based on the idea of honoring all situations that drove interest in WAC at the attendees' colleges, whether it was a full-fledged institutional commitment to a QEP, an administrative mandate, or the interest of a few faculty members to help students write more effectively. And, importantly, this endeavor and approach required each of those involved in this planning to reexamine the fundamental features of thriving WAC programs from the point of view of starting from scratch and assuming limited resources. Consequently, the instructional content of the institute emphasized the decision-making processes attendant to WAC programs, strategies for prioritizing program goals and creating reasonable expectations, and concrete ways to engage faculty and identify administrative allies.

The WAC Cadre had become extremely facile in serving as resources to their peers at MCC-Longview, and especially at helping facilitate WAC and Writing Intensive workshops. But the success of the WAC Institute bolstered their confidence and heightened their awareness of how to communicate broader WAC ideas to colleagues from other institutions. This, in turn, positioned them to serve in a similar role with SCA by helping the school take its writing initiative to the next level, shifting from a culture *emphasizing* writing to a true culture *of* writing.

Finally, proximity alone invites such collaborations. Cox and Gimbel note in Chapter 2 that "too often, educators are separated by level and by discipline." The narrow universe that educators typically work in is organized in ways that can limit exposure to and contact with other disciplines and other grade levels; teachers tend to meet those primarily on their own campus, and attend conferences with those in their own discipline. Creating a WAC community of teachers within driving distance of each other could have huge implications for their teaching and for student learning as the students move from one segment of the educational system to the next.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Logistics

The initial emails were critical in establishing the relationship between the schools; there was a lot of discussion to try to nail down the details of when and where. One consideration when working with K-12 faculty is timing, both in terms of when during the school year the teachers are available, and at what

time of day. MCC-Longview and SCA negotiated the optimum time first based on SCA's available in-service days that could be dedicated to WAC workshops, and then to accommodate the MCC-Longview teacher availability. A second consideration is location. It was clear at the outset that having SCA faculty come to MCC-Longview campus was the best option, because it meant that WAC instructors from across the college would be available to help facilitate around their class schedule. Another advantage of going to the college campus was that the high school teachers were distanced from the everyday distractions at their own school. Myelle-Watson, Spears, Wellen, and Peters (Chapter 5) state:

> Such logistics can be contingent upon a number of factors. When Northern Illinois University tried to host high school faculty in a similar way, the high school faculty soon lost interest in sacrificing their Saturdays to workshops. The best results came from university faculty going to the high school on a mutually convenient weekday, where professors saw first-hand the conditions and exigencies that existed in the teachers' professional lives. Yet there is still a lot for all participants to learn from site visits that go both ways, as McMullen-Light later suggests. (Peters)

Another key logistical decision was to have the high school teachers attend one day and the middle school teachers attend the following day for the first WAC workshop in October. This separation allowed them to work with colleagues who were teaching at similar grade levels for their initial WAC exposure, something that is never necessary to consider at the college workshops. However, for the second workshop in the spring, both middle school teachers and high school teachers attended the half-day session, but worked primarily in discipline-based groups, which permitted vertical planning and course content discussions. This strategy proved particularly effective, as both sessions yielded full and active participation.

Splitting the SCA faculty into two groups permitted the workshops to be conducted in a way that allowed maximum engagement and interaction, especially in the large group setting, where conversations are critical to the efficacy of the workshop.

Planning

In order to develop suitable and relevant materials for the workshops, the WAC director and the WAC Cadre at MCC-Longview spent time discussing the plethora of activities and exercises they had developed and used previously

in WAC workshops with college faculty and in the WAC Institute with WAC directors. It was this decision-making process and the desire to match materials to the needs and interests of the SCA teachers that provoked valuable discussion and cultivated new insights regarding WAC theory and practice for the planners. For instance, the WAC Cadre determined that an assignment critique exercise featuring a hypothetical college learning community course typically used in the MCC-Longview WAC workshops wouldn't work as well with the K-12 teachers, because it assumes conditions that don't exist at lower levels. Instead, they developed an assignment design exercise that invited interdisciplinary teams of teachers to generate an assignment in response to a more credible scenario (Appendix A).

WAC Workshop I

The first workshop was an all-day session in October and covered traditional WAC topics, like assignment design principles and strategies for responding to and evaluating student writing. The day included a mix of informational presentations on WAC, small group activities and discussions, large group discussions, responding to scenarios, collaboratively creating assignments and rubrics, writing and sharing individual responses, and viewing the brief film *Shaped by Writing*, produced by Harvard's writing program. Other unplanned conversations naturally related to writing emerged throughout the day, especially because the SCA teachers were instructors keenly interested in how college instructors view and use writing. Seeing actual college assignments and real student responses inspired animated discussions of writing expectations among all present.

WAC Workshop II

The second session took place in February and was designed to revisit ideas related to responding to student writing, giving SCA instructors an opportunity to get collegial feedback on any projects they brought to the table. The session began with a review of how to respond to student writing by using the heuristic of higher order and lower order concerns. After viewing the film *Across the Drafts: Students and Teachers Talk about Feedback*, also produced by Harvard's Writing Program, participants read and analyzed two college student texts and brainstormed how to provide useful feedback to students and best communicate with students to encourage revision. The second half of the session was spent brainstorming any ideas/strategies/projects the teachers had brought with them with the intent to solicit peer feedback, using a tool called "WAC Chat**:** A Guide to Collegial Conversations," designed to maximize each group's time (Appendix

B).

One SCA teacher described the powerful impact both of these sessions had on her, noting it was "unlike any in-service I have ever experienced." She said she was struck by the way the first session started with everyone seated at tables arranged in a circle, with all participants making eye contact and conversing, taking in information, applying the ideas, sharing personal insights in different ways, moving in and out of small groups, and watching the films.

Though more difficult to arrange with colleagues who are not on your own campus, follow-up sessions ensure impact and ownership (Cox and Gimbel, Chapter 2). Having SCA teachers come to MCC-Longview twice gave the high school teachers an opportunity to apply the strategies they had learned and reflect on their effectiveness. The conversations were decidedly more pointed and specific at Workshop II.

WRITING CENTER CONSULTATION

After the first workshop, SCA's academic dean invited MCC-Longview's WAC director to consult with key staff about the possibility of creating a writing center. Having directed a writing fellows program, the director felt comfortable sharing information about the value of peer tutoring, tutor selection and training, desirable center space and arrangement, and useful resources and materials in an on-site meeting. The WAC director framed a brief set of guiding questions to assist SCA personnel in prioritizing considerations related to creating a writing center in a secondary school (Appendix C).

In "The Natural Connection: The WAC Program and the High School Writing Center," Joan Mullin and Pamela Childers explain that since high school writing centers are able to involve all of the stakeholders—students, teachers, administrators, and even parents—they "can create community support for curricular change in ways often unavailable to universities (24). Once the key SCA staff and administrators made their initial logistical decisions about how the writing center could be set up to support SCA's WAC efforts, student and parent input was sought to ensure that the center could effectively and efficiently serve all constituents.

IMPACTS

SCA TEACHER PERCEPTIONS FROM SURVEYS

During the final minutes of the second workshop, teachers completed a written survey asking them to assess their professional development experiences.

Overall, responses were quite positive and very much in sync with what MCC-Longview instructors convey after workshop experiences, and what other WAC programs typically report about their faculty. Some of the questions are listed below with a smattering of representative comments:

Did you find the WAC workshops worthwhile?

> "Yes, I enjoyed seeing colleagues enthusiastic about a topic that is promised to generate more work."

> "I appreciated the opportunity to 'check in' with other teachers and identify with their joys and frustrations. I feel that I benefitted in some practical and philosophical ways."

> "Yes, totally made writing relevant and helped give me confidence in all aspects of trying to initiate."

Which topic of the workshops was most beneficial to you and why?

> "Light bulb moment: It should have been obvious, but it had not occurred to me to put the majority of my effort as the teacher/evaluator into responding to drafts. I spent a goodly amount of time writing intently to my students' final products, but really it makes far more sense to use that effort in a draft that they'll actually pay attention to later (and conference about). —critical use of technology—which tasks are better suited to it, and which are not."

Would you recommend this workshop (one or both sessions) to your colleagues at other K-12 schools? Why or why not?

> "Yes – practical tools; stuff relatable and took fear out of writing; multidisciplinary staff helpful in seeing possibilities across curriculum."

> "Yes. It was helpful in terms of explaining the writing process and evaluation for non-English teachers."

> "Yes—it has been very encouraging and could be a help to others."

> "Absolutely! The balance of inspiration and practicality was superb. I left feeling, 'I can do this!'"

"Yes. Writing encourages higher level thinking. If students are not able to think critically, they won't do as well in college."

IMPACT: SCA TEACHER PERCEPTIONS FROM INTERVIEWS

At the end of the school year, SCA teachers were invited to share their perceptions about the impact of WAC on their pedagogy and the SCA teaching community. The teachers interviewed acknowledged that they saw positive impacts on their teaching and on student learning, and some shared plans for next year, as well as changes they had incorporated this year. Some teachers were interviewed individually and some in a small group.

Ruth, Tenth-Grade History

When asked if she had incorporated an idea or strategy from the workshops or from discussions with SCA or MCC-Longview colleagues, she responded, "I can't begin to tell you how many ideas and strategies I've been inspired to incorporate following WAC workshops. In many ways, it's been overwhelming to consider all of the possibilities. I felt like I was trying to take a drink from one of those giant hoses firefighters use to battle skyscraper blazes."

She then shared her strategy for constraining that vast universe of possibilities:

> Getting back to the tyranny of the immediate in the classroom, I quickly realized I'd have to start by taking three steps: 1) being more aware of whether or not I was giving students multiple opportunities to use writing as a way of thinking, of learning material, and as a gauge of their own understanding; 2) teaming up with a colleague in the English department who would be a combination of accountability partner and bridge to increasing the number, variety, and depth of writing students would tackle; 3) and setting time aside this summer to come back to the workshop material and bringing focus and intentionality to the task of weaving writing into my lesson plans and course curriculum spreadsheet.

Myelle-Watson, Spears, Wellen, and Peters (Chapter 5) agree:

> Both the wisdom and the rhetoric this teacher gives voice to reflect the "aha moment" that teachers also experienced in our Illinois project. While intimidating to launch and sustain such a collaborative venture, such an experience can also be

tremendously liberating from a "tyranny of the immediate" (Siskin 29)—which includes so many pressures that isolate from rather than connect teachers to productive professional relationships with their colleagues. (Peters)

Anthony, Ninth-Grade English

Anthony identified one critical shift he made this year in working with his English students after he attended the WAC workshop: expending more energy on assessing and providing critical feedback on drafts, rather than spending that energy on the final product. He realized that the draft represented the best time to "really coach the students." He envisions that next year he will be "more intentional" in working with students on their drafts by conferencing with them individually over their drafts during class as they obtain peer feedback. The iPads make this a tenable activity, especially if students are working with their assignment checklist in hand. He anticipates shifting his classroom time to accommodate important in-class experiences like this.

He likes that WAC promotes writing in all classes and thinks a consistent expectation level regarding writing is present throughout the school and catching the attention of the students. He has already had conversations with a history teacher about how they can collaborate on projects when he teaches Elie Wiesel's *Night* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. He was enthusiastic about working with the history teacher to make overt connections between the literary analysis and the historical context, and sees further opportunity for collaboration with this teacher in relation to their overlapping coverage of Greek mythology.

An interesting application of the ideas that surfaced for Anthony through the workshops was a project for the ESL students he teaches. He decided to have the students write in pairs to encourage their collaboration and to provide increased opportunity for conversing. Though the students were a bit frustrated by this exercise, Anthony says it achieved the goal he had in mind: the paired students talked extensively to each other during the process of creating a single paper. It heightened their awareness of key language features and of the writing process. He stressed that the final draft wasn't nearly as important as the consistent communication that occurred throughout its development. He plans to repeat this project in the fall.

Anthony is still thinking about what he learned through WAC, especially as it plays out against the reality of teaching high school. He wonders about striking that appropriate balance between valuing the ideas and the "grammar piece." He realizes this is an essential topic for discussion next year with his colleagues.

Thomas, Twelfth-Grade English and Dual-Credit

Thomas presently teaches twelfth-grade English, dual credit courses, and online college-level composition courses. For him, the impact of WAC was manifest in greater collegiality, and he sees the opportunity for learning groups, collaboration in writing, and common assessment of students as outgrowths of the school's engagement with WAC:

> We have been in the process of upping our writing game over the last year and a half. Every teacher was required to assign an essay per semester in their discipline and the 75% rule regarding grammar was put into force. Now, we are in the process of establishing a writing center and using both teachers and students to staff the center. Additionally, grammar and writing norm workshops are in the works for next year. Teachers I have spoken to are excited and more interested in collaboration and WAC assignments than they have ever been before.

Tom will be released from some of his teaching load to coordinate the writing center and from that vantage, will encourage the cross-discipline projects other teachers are creating and begin collecting assignments and rubrics to help the peer tutors understand the assignments they will be working with. He will also offer mini-workshops, called "Grammar Slammers," for his colleagues to help them clarify and troubleshoot grammar issues.

Ramona, Ninth-Grade-Science

Diane, Tenth-, Eleventh-, Twelfth-Grade Science

Donna, Middle School Science

Three Science teachers gathered in a conference room at SCA at the end of the school year to share their observations and plans related to WAC:

They plan to meet over the summer to formalize some of their vertical planning which began during the follow-up WAC session at MCC-Longview in the spring. There, in the discipline brainstorming sessions, they spent time identifying writing projects and genres that serve their varying levels of instruction. These and other "eye-opening" conversations led them to discover much more about what other science teachers were doing at other grade levels. For example, one of the high school teachers was surprised to learn that a lower grade teacher had been sending students to the local science fair. They see their collaboration as colleagues as an opportunity to coordinate and build on all of the science experiences SCA students have.

They plan to visit MCC-Longview in the fall to re-connect with Keet, the Biology instructor who facilitated their brainstorming session where they began

their vertical planning and observe the lab setting context in which he has his students write.

Some of the changes they instituted this year as they became engaged in WAC:

Donna mentioned that she had set up next year's units to include one writing day per unit, approximately every ten days. On this day, her students will focus on writing and gain experience in several genres relevant to science, including summary, compare and contrast, and creating definitions. Students will have opportunities to use iPads for in-class research, which will be included in one-paragraph write-ups they will produce during class. She gave a sample prompt: What is aquaculture and what are its costs and benefits?

Donna came away from this school year believing that students felt more relaxed and less tense about the prospect of writing; she attributes her integration of informal assignments as the key to taking the fear out of writing for the students. She says, "For some, the writing became more inviting and they could see that they got more out of it." She watched the in-class paragraphs become more focused over the year, and she believes informal assignments like these were "more organic" and "allowed students to put their thoughts down and to focus on learning the science."

Ramona said that her mindset had shifted significantly and that writing had not at all been the burden she'd feared it would be. She offered the example of having her ninth-grade students watch a documentary on Nikolai Tesla and write a brief informational report using only ideas gleaned from the film. She issued a rubric with the assignment via the iPad, and was quite pleased with the student performance on this task. She felt the writing was clear. She had no plagiarism issues because students were acknowledging the ideas they used from the film, and the students were far more invested in their viewing of the film because they knew they would be using it as a source. From her perspective, this exercise yielded "strong writing and better learning."

Diane teaches anatomy and physiology and asked her students to write their notes by hand. She is sold on the value of the kinesthetic experience of writing and received positive results by having students create their notes this way, which was a challenge, given the iPad initiative. She says there is a temptation for students to default to rote memorization if she issues PowerPoint notes. She believes their fundamental understanding of symptoms, causes, and science terminology in this course is enhanced by this approach. Interestingly, very recent research on college students and the positive impact of handwriting course notes (Mueller and Oppenheimer) was mentioned during the first workshop.

Greg, Eleventh- and Twelfth-Grade History

According to Greg, "There are natural conversations occurring between

teachers, especially about prospective collaborations." He says they are tweaking assignments and even exploring ways to work around classes that include both juniors and seniors when they seek to devise grade-specific writing experiences. Here's how he knows that the topic of writing is becoming more organic: "Around the lunch table or at the copy machine, teachers used to ask each other, 'How're your kids?' or 'How are the Royals doing?' Now it's become more normal to ask about your writing assignments."

A CONVERSATION:

Around the conference table, this conversation about the effect of WAC on their teaching community emerged:

History (Greg): "The more cohesive faculty become, the less opportunity there is for students to play one teacher against another."

History (Ruth): "This school-wide approach rescues us from the tendency to say my little classroom is my world and not consider the larger context."

Science (Ramona): "Without WAC, it always made the English teacher look like the bad guy."

English (Andrea): "WAC lets the English classroom expand and explore even more because other classes are supporting these ideas."

History (Ruth): "Also, I would not have had the confidence to tackle some of the assignments without the support of the English composition teachers."

English (Andrea): "I found enjoyment in working with colleagues. It can get lonely in your own room."

The high school teachers also pointed out natural connections that could be made to the literacy program that SCA offers at the elementary levels, which focuses on critical reading and analysis. They planned to consult with elementary teachers for strategies to cause students to review the skills they learned in this program, and apply them overtly to discipline-specific reading at the high school level.

REFLECTIONS BY MCC-LONGVIEW WAC CADRE MEMBERS

The MCC-Longview instructors responded to an email interview after the second session to capture their perspectives as facilitators. The interview prompts focused exclusively on the second workshop, but insights that emerged in meetings and discussions throughout the year signaled that the connection with SCA represented a valuable and worthwhile experience on a number of levels for the WAC Cadre members.

Matthew, Psychology instructor

Matthew first explained how the teachers at his table responded to the task of evaluating the two student papers:

> Our focus was on the Hierarchy of Concerns and how difficult it is to stay high on the list when reading papers with multiple lower level concerns. I suggested reading with empty hands—no correcting pen, in order to focus on the ideas rather than allowing one's self to be distracted by spelling or sentence errors. There was debate over which paper needed more revision, and what types of revision, how meeting with the students to discuss their papers would go. We talked about whether one type of error, done repeatedly through the paper was really one error or multiple, and how to count it.

> The discussion of justifying the points subtracted from a perfect score, and writing enough comments to show the reason for the subtraction, was topic. There's the trap of only showing what is wrong because that's all the teacher has to justify, leaving any compliments or strengths unmentioned. It's no wonder students don't like to write, or receive their papers back.

As expected, each group responded differently to the WAC Chat Exercise, tailoring it to the needs of those present around the table. In describing how his group handled the WAC Chat exercise, Matthew explained:

> Our group took turns giving and getting feedback. One member had to leave early, so another chimed in that she really wanted his feedback because they teach the same subject, though at different grade levels. This collegiality was great to see and foster.

> Another wanted feedback on a rather complex, multi-part assignment examining culture, language, history, etc. We considered the timing of parts, rather than doing a group assignment, because the ability to do each part was one of the goals for the students. We ended up talking about spacing segments over the semester, so it wasn't overwhelming to students to receive it all at once. I referred back to Cathy's music appreciation assignment, which the faculty member then recalled from the first workshop session in October, and

we talked about her connecting with Cathy for brainstorming or other ideas.

Another instructor wanted brainstorming and problem solving with a combined English/history paper. She wanted to provide students with one grade for the paper, jointly arrived upon by both instructors. There were several questions before any advising, which was good to see. It ended up with encouragement to try, and let the students know they are experimenting, and that if it doesn't work the way they want it to, they'll change the grading process. Most couldn't see how to make it a single grade, but that it was worth experimenting with."

In terms of his overall impression of the engagement with SCA teachers, Matthew shared this:

What surprised me at this session and at the original workshop in October was the way the Cadre performed. I had a real concern going into it that we didn't have specific things to say, or points to make, but it turns out we didn't need to because we have been so embedded in WAC for so long that we can be fluid in responding to questions or needs.

I was also very impressed with the creativity, depth, complexity, and appeal of the assignments I heard these faculty present. There were many moments I found myself wanting to either participate or copy. The assignments were intriguing and should help meet the educational goals they have established.

Unquestionably, his comments reflect a veteran WAC instructor's deep understanding of the concepts presented and applied at the workshop sessions.

Anne, Physics Instructor

Anne writes of the collegial brainstorming the teachers at her table engaged in, and offered the example of a sixth-grade history teacher who had prepared for the exercise by bringing student work to share, but seemed reticent about bringing it up to the group, thinking that it wasn't as deep or important as some of the other assignments the group had considered:

We collectively convinced her that she began the foundation for future work and we were interested. She has her students journal about being on a wagon train. Her project is very realistic in that if it doesn't happen at that period in history then they

aren't going to do it. Historical records show that ten percent of the people died during their journey, so she has 10% pretend to die during the journaling about the journey. They have various hardships along the way and have to overcome those. They hit key places and times in history and journal about that. Her questions centered around whether she is doing enough and what else she could add. I think the upper grade history teachers were impressed with her work—they really validated what she was doing. They actually had a hard time giving her any new ideas. The one idea that they came up with was taking a class sharing and instruction time and becoming the Indians around a campfire and telling the events and histories.

Another brainstorming success occurred when a dual credit government teacher sought a way to create a meaningful assignment combining current events with Articles of the Constitution. Anne recounts the discussion:

He said that it sounded like a good idea but most times it ended up dry and uninteresting (my words, not his but that is the gist). He wanted ideas that would liven up his class. We suggested he ask the students to become Supreme Court justices and write briefs on the current events using the Constitution; we suggested they may also become lawyers arguing in the Supreme Court, or become legislators trying to get a bill made into law about these current events; or compare our constitution with another country's and see how the current event would look based on the two different constitutions. It seemed like he was pleased with the ideas and it gave him the opportunity to think about it in a new light and come up with some of his own ideas, too.

Anne summarized her experience as a facilitator:

I was really pleased that the sixth-grade teacher went away with some validation of her project when she initially felt intimidated by topics of the first person in the group. I also think the last teacher to share didn't think he'd get any good ideas, but I could see the slight surprise on his face when we started giving him some fresh ideas. I think those two things—validation and fresh ideas—are some of the best things that can happen when teachers share their ideas, desires for objectives, and projects. Having others with a teacher's

perspective but little direct knowledge and no personal in-
volvement look at your work can really strengthen the project.

Again, a seasoned WAC teacher is in a unique position to guide other teach-
ers and not only fully appreciate the value of collegial feedback, but also orches-
trate a conversation so that it can occur.

Cathy, Music Instructor

Cathy facilitated a table of music and arts teachers who had no trouble gen-
erating rich and productive discussion of assignment possibilities. Cathy report-
ed that there was "so much exchange that we ran out of time." She further writes:

> It was so exciting to see the engagement of Longview folks
> with SCA. I was looking for ideas as much as the SCA art/
> music faculty. The choir teacher needed some ideas for devel-
> oping the historical context for music. I suggested the Time
> Period project we used in Music Appreciation. She is going
> to adapt it for use in her concerts. For instance, she will have
> students develop a digital collage around the context of a
> particular piece of music and present it to the audience during
> a concert. All kinds of things were discussed—everything
> from performance art to poetry slams. The art, drama and
> music faculty had no lack of things to talk about. They have a
> fully-developed collegial relationship.

In discussions at meetings after both sessions, all of the WAC Cadre mem-
bers indicated that they had felt invigorated by these sessions and had come away
from them with solid ideas they planned to incorporate in their own teaching.
One of the most poignant and quite unexpected elements of the workshops that
touched these college instructors was the profound way in which the spirituality
of the SCA teachers so naturally marked their discussions of their pedagogy and
the ideas they shared in this context.

WRITING CENTER UPDATE

Mullin and Childers note that "no writing center or WAC program can be
simply lifted from one institution and used successfully in another; it must be
adjusted to each school's objectives and demographics" (25). To that end, SCA
spent the spring semester designing a plan for a writing center that suited their
ongoing writing initiative and WAC. At the end of the school year, the academic
dean reported that critical space had been identified and dedicated as the loca-

tion of the new writing center, to be staffed by ten student tutors, called Writing Fellows, who would be supervised by two teachers to cover both before and after school times. One of the teachers would be released from a class to coordinate the center when it opens the following year.

The Writing Fellows are excited to be the first at SCA to serve in the role of writing tutors. They met as a group and determined the name of the center: The Writer's Corner. The Writing Fellows also chose a Scripture foundation from 1 Corinthians 14:33, *King James Version*: "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace ..." The dean explained that the Writing Fellows wanted every student to remember that they didn't have to be stressed when writing, "that it would all come together." Clearly, the students involved already have ownership of the idea as well as the space since they have imagined it having a coffee-shop atmosphere-replete with a Keurig coffee machine.

Chad E. Littleton lays out the benefits of shared training between the college and high school writing centers and promotes engagement with local affiliates of the International Writing Centers Association. The MCC-Longview WAC director identified a comprehensive tutor training opportunity and accompanied SCA staff and writing tutors in August to a valuable, day-long tutor retreat developed and hosted by Kansas City area college writing center directors who gather regularly to support one another professionally. This group, "The Greater Kansas City Writing Center Project," includes writing center directors from area two and four-year colleges and universities who are members of IWCA.

One primary project they have developed is an annual tutor retreat. It is run like a conference, with seasoned student tutors, along with writing center directors from each college, conducting breakout sessions on a wide range of relevant topics offered in various formats. Through mock tutorials, presentations, and discussions, they provide a rich training experience with "writing, role-playing, listening, questioning, observing, and information-sharing" (Luce 134). The participation of both high school and college tutors establishes the authentic "community of writers" that Luce calls for (133). As luck would have it, the keynote speaker and presenter this year was a highly regarded high school writing center expert, Andrew Jeter, founder and coordinator of the Literacy Center at Niles West High School in Skokie, Illinois, who generously shared his expertise with SCA administrators over lunch.

STRATEGIES/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING A K-12-COMMUNITY COLLEGE CONNECTION

What follows is a set of general, guiding principles for connecting with a

high school or community college in your area. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it does convey key strategies for a successful high school-community college connection:

- Reach out to another school in your area and suggest a WAC collaboration based on what each has to offer by way of expertise, and what each is interested in learning from the other school.
- Talk early and often in the process to determine needs, and get a sense of the other institution; consider this part of the relationship (phone, email, text, in person).
- Overcome fear about saying/doing the right thing, because you don't know each other's context; if each institution enters into the partnership in an authentic way, good things will happen.
- Plan for interactions that permit open, honest discussion in a safe environment.
- Give faculty time and space to process and apply ideas beyond the initial professional development experiences.
- Reconnect at a later point to dive deeper into topics covered.
- Negotiate: don't let dictates of school calendars get in the way of getting teachers together; find comfortable and convenient spaces in which to have interactions.
- Don't be surprised when you get much more than you give. Teachers are resourceful and imaginative by trade. The process of putting teachers in touch with WAC enriches everyone.
- Honor the good work going on at both places and be prepared to learn.
- Be collegial and respectful by thinking of concrete ways to express and promote collegiality.
- Make site visits in both directions.
- If you have a WAC Program, consider ways in which planning such experiences can provide significant and valuable professional development for veteran WAC faculty.
- Document all interactions; assess effectiveness through surveys and interviews and other means.
- Develop mechanisms for keeping track of what happens with both schools once connections are established (email, website, blogs, updates, Skype, social media, newsletters).

TEACHER TO TEACHER, SCHOOL TO SCHOOL

Finally, what came out of this successful pilot partnership were vital teacher connections within each school and between the two school environments, en-

hanced collaborations between disciplines at SCA, vibrant and transformative professional development experiences for all of the participants and facilitators, genuine appreciation of the challenges teachers face at each grade level, openness on the part of all to sharing ideas and resources and providing collegial feedback, and the promise of new beginnings with the launch of the SCA writing center, The Writer's Corner.

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APPENDIX A: ASSIGNMENT DESIGN SCENARIO

A new Department of Secondary Education and Department of Conservation policy has determined that all Missouri high school students will be provided an opportunity to learn about native flora and fauna of the state. This effort is intended to heighten awareness of the environment and can be incorporated into **any** course. There is no expectation of student assessment regarding this experience, but innovative teaching and learning approaches will be showcased in local forums throughout the state.

Choose the grade level and at least two design principles from the list to feature.
Grade Level:
Course(s):
Purpose:
Idea:
Kind of product:
Process/Steps for completion:
Principles to be featured:
Signal if this experience is high stakes or low stakes:

APPENDIX B: WAC CHAT: A GUIDE FOR COLLEGIAL CONVERSATIONS

This exercise affords each group member the opportunity to serve once as an initiator of a discussion and multiple times as a respondent in a discussion. Each initiator should be granted ten minutes of group attention.

As an initiator, you will choose to solicit from your group ONE of three responses:

- feedback on an existing project, rubric, idea, strategy, task, assignment
- brainstorming for a new project, rubric, idea, strategy, task, assignment
- troubleshooting for a problem or concern

INITIATOR-Choose one of these options:

FEEDBACK
Describe in detail the project, rubric, idea, strategy, task, assignment.

BRAINSTORM
    Describe the context of your class (subject, level, learning outcomes).
    Describe any relevant circumstances or conditions.
    Share the idea you want to develop.
TROUBLESHOOT
    Identify the problem or concern.
    Explain any complicating factors.
    Share solutions you have tried thus far.
    As a respondent, you will actively listen to each initiator and respond according to the parameters indicated in the guidelines below.

RESPONDENT-Provide one of the following:

FEEDBACK
    Actively listen to description of project, rubric, idea, strategy, task, assignment.
    Ask questions until you fully understand nature of it.
    Imagine you are a student and consider: what else do you need to know to be successful?
    Is this subscribing to WAC principles of assignment design and evaluation/response ?
BRAINSTORM
    Actively listen to context and conditions shared by initiator.
    Pitch ideas as they occur to you.
    Piggyback onto ideas of others.
    Examine trends if any emerge.
TROUBLESHOOT
    Actively listen to problem presented.
    Survey solutions tried thus far.
    Imagine alternative solutions.
    Offer advice.
    Consider options.
    Poll and pool resources of group: what can you offer your colleague by way of support?

APPENDIX C: WRITING CENTER CONSIDERATIONS

1. Premises:
- All writers benefit from feedback.
- All writers should learn to be critical readers of their own work.
- Tutoring is not simply about remediation or editing; it focuses on

supporting the process of writing and revising.
- There are substantial benefits derived from peer-to-peer contact.

2. Logistics
- Where will it be located?
- How will students access it?
- When will students access it?
- What will it be called?
- What will be its services?

3. Staffing

Tutors
- Who are the tutors?
- How will they be selected?
- What are the necessary qualifications?
- What training will be provided and how often?
- What do they receive for serving? (Service hours, credit?)

Faculty
- Who trains tutors?
- Who supervises tutors?
- How is their workload accommodated?

4. Oversight
- Who guides the development of the center?
- Is there a designated director—permanent/rotating?
- Is there a faculty advisory group?
- (an interdisciplinary mix of faculty from different grad levels; some centers include other community stakeholders—parents/business community, etc.)

Connecting to writing center resources-regional/national
- Will they interact/collaborate with nearby WAC-based writing centers at other academic levels?