Where WAC is Heading

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Susan H. McLeod, Eric Miraglia, Margot Soven, and Christopher Thaiss, eds. *WAC for the New Millennium: Strategies for Continuing Writing-Across-the Curriculum Programs*. Urbana: NCTE, 2001. 345 pages. $37.95.

Chris M. Anson, ed. *The WAC Casebook: Scenes for Faculty Reflection and Program Development.* New York: Oxford UP, 2002. 290 pages. $21.95.

Mikhail Bakhtin describes the context for disciplinary conversations as a parlor in which the conversations have been going on long before one arrives and continue long after one leaves. Those newly entering the conversation work hard to understand what has come before, so they can enter the conversation and shape what will come in the future. Ideally, one has a guide to facilitate entrance, and, for many, graduate school serves that role. Part of that schooling is poring over texts that have shaped the discipline, so as to understand its history, trends, and tendencies. Those already in the parlor periodically need to reconsider where the conversation is heading. The two books reviewed here, *WAC for the New Millennium* and *The WAC Casebook*, offer an opportunity to reconsider where WAC is heading in the future. Both texts tack differently in the wind, but they both sail toward the same destination: sustained, successful WAC programs.

WAC for the New Millennium: Strategies for Continuing Writing-across-the-curriculum Programs, edited by Susan H. McLeod, Eric Miraglia, Margot Soven, and Christopher Thaiss, is a collection of articles written by some of the foremost WAC scholars. Each chapter addresses a different aspect of WAC from assessment to technology, and they vary from fairly practical descriptions of programs and approaches, like Martha Townsend's chap-

ter on "Writing Intensive Courses and WAC," to highly theoretical pieces, like the closing essay by Christopher Thaiss, "Theory in WAC: Where Have We Been, Where Are We Going?" In the latter chapter, Thaiss looks at the "core of consistent WAC principles" and "the theoretical influences that have worked changes on the concept [of WAC]." He brilliantly frames his discussion by taking each component of the name "writing across the curriculum" and exploring its implications. This provides a powerful and thought-provoking end to the book.

The collection also includes a skeptical voice, Victor Villanueva, who writes "The Politics of Literacy Across the Curriculum." Villanueva writes in an unconventional genre that includes personal narrative, poetry, and past professional correspondence, and he questions the politics of language education and the teaching and conforming to language conventions.

Despite each chapter's differences in content and style, all of the chapters have some similarities. To aid in the parlor discussion, each chapter provides a history of their topic, some extensively, like David R. Russell's "Where Do the Naturalistic Studies of WAC/WID Point? A Research Review," and Ann M. Johns's "ESL Students and WAC Programs: Varied Populations and Diverse Needs." Each of these chapters guides the reader, like one of many hosts, informing newcomers of the path the discussion has taken and, in many cases, where it began. These histories of WAC also recount the discussion for those who have been present, synthesizing them for focused reflection. In both cases, the background is an important element of this collection. As Elaine P. Maimon describes in her opening lines, WAC has staying power, even over other academic initiatives, and it is important to understand the history of WAC to understand its future.

The twelve chapters appropriately cover the most current issues being discussed in WAC literature such as assessment, technology, service learning, ESL, and learning communities, and this breadth of discussion demonstrates the WAC movement's ability to adapt and inform other educational initiatives (McLeod and

Miraglia 1). But there is a drawback to the currency of the collection, and it could simply be related to the title. When I finished the book and I thought back over the century-plus history of writing in the disciplines, I wondered what the next millennium might hold. Certainly even Nostradamus couldn't look one thousand years into the future, but I wished the book had really tried to look further into the future. The authors summarize the history of their respective topics well, and nearly all of the authors discuss programs with innovative approaches to WAC. But none really looks far into the future. What might the academy look like and what role might writing play in it, particularly in light of changing technology? How might political pressure alter the way writing is taught in higher education? What might voice-recognition software or highly intuitive grammar checkers hold for the future? What are possible futuristic forms of assessment that science fiction might dream up, and how will the aforementioned technologies affect assessment? These are questions that the book's title seems to imply.

In some ways, Chris M. Anson's *The WAC Casebook* cracks open doors to some of these questions through questions of its own. *The WAC Casebook* is a collection of 45 scenarios that faculty and WAC directors have found or may find themselves in. In many ways, the *Casebook* serves as a metaphorical moderator in Bakhtin's parlor. It raises questions and guides the discussion without showing bias. Anson, like the editors of *WAC for the New Millennium*, has tapped many well-respected WAC scholars to contribute scenarios. The book is broken into eight sections that range from very specific issues surrounding assignment design, like Anson's "Trudy Does Comics," to broader programmatic concerns, like Carol Peterson Haviland and Edward M. White's "'We Hate You!' WAC as a Professional Threat." This range of scenarios is one of the strengths of the book because it lends itself to so many uses. WAC directors can use the book with faculty individually or in workshops, and faculty can use the book in courses that help prepare future teachers.

Though the scenarios vary widely in topic, they have some commonalities that help make the book cohesive. Each chapter provides a detailed scenario, most with dialogue, of a difficult situation. No answers are given, and this is one of the strengths of the book. Most academic articles and books forward a particular theory or approach to these topics, but as most literature about faculty development initiatives advocates, each solution must be site-specific. So, these scenarios provide the fuel to find those local solutions. For example, Christine Farris's chapter, "Who Has the Power?" includes a dialogue among faculty discussing a political science colleague's assignment. The scenario provides dialogue and three student essay exam models; there is plenty of fodder for discussion. Fortunately, the contributors to the book do more than simply provide the scenario. They also provide discussion questions, like one would find at the end of textbook chapters. Farris's chapter includes questions asking if it's clear what the professor wants the students to do and how might the professor write a more successful assignment. The questions are not leading and most will stimulate discussion. I would encourage users of the book to develop secondary questions that address more site-specific needs. The questions are good, but alone might be too generic.

Better than the questions, though, is another addition the authors provide: "Readings for Further Consideration" for each scenario. The scenarios will stimulate great discussion, but faculty and students may want additional resources to better understand the problem and to help them find the best solution. The length of each list varies from three to ten sources. In fact, the reading lists are one of the strengths of the book because they almost serve as an annotated bibliography, referencing specific sources based on the topic. They point to past discussions that should influence future ones in the parlor. I wish the lists were longer, and I think the book would benefit from a bibliography at the end that could include the recommended readings and other readings that might not have been referenced. These criticisms are small,

and readers will find the book instructive and fun, particularly those who have experienced some of the scenarios presented and those who have the opportunity to discuss the scenarios in lively discussions.

Both books, *WAC for the New Millennium* and *The WAC Casebook*, will spur lively discussion, and readers can use the ideas within them to lead the discussions in the parlor and shape the future of WAC. They both serve the purpose of introducing readers to the world of WAC and guide readers to consider the future of WAC programs, and both books are indispensable for directors of WAC programs. Hopefully, they will inspire writers to look further into the future and dream of possibilities for better writing instruction and student learning.