

## A Conversation with a WAC Colleague: An Interview with Art Young

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TO SOME EXTENT, it was the Communication across the Curriculum (CAC) program under the leadership of Art Young that attracted me to Clemson University to finish my Ph.D. study. Before I joined Clemson, I had read from various sources that the CAC program helped Clemson receive the *Time* Award for Public College of the Year for 2001. A year later, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) honored Dr. Young with the Exemplar Award for his contributions to the field of rhetoric, composition, communication across the curriculum, and technical communication. In 2007, *Princeton Review* and *U.S. News and World Report* recognized Clemson as one of the best universities in the nation, in large part owing to its CAC program.

Art Young came to Clemson from Michigan Technological University in 1987 as the first endowed Campbell Chair in Technical Communication, a joint appointment with the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Engineering which seeks to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and effective communication. In 1989, he founded Clemson's Communication across the Curriculum program and in 2000 began their Poetry across the Curriculum initiative. In May 2006, he organized and hosted the Eighth International Conference on Writing Across the Curriculum, which was attended by 450 participants from 12 countries and 41 states. Over 70 colleges and universities in the United States and abroad have invited him to conduct workshops and make presentations. His monograph *Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum* is in its fourth edition (by Prentice Hall Resources for Writing, 2006, and online at the WAC Clearinghouse).

Because of all his honors and accomplishments, for quite some time I approached him in awe though he smiled and greeted me very warmly. He is one of the most modest persons I have ever known. His commitment to teaching, his attitude toward students, and his individualized guidance set a good example for us young scholars in the field. From him we learned that the CAC program here at Clemson thrived because

of his personality and his magic of creating a community of colleagues. That's why I chose this title for the interview.

XIAOLI LI: As with a number of WAC figures, you were trained in literature. You received a Ph.D. in Romanticism from Miami University. How did you get involved in writing across the curriculum?

ART YOUNG: I got involved in WAC in the 1977–1978 school year in a very interesting way. I was at Michigan Tech and the new provost wanted a program that would improve students' communication skills, mostly in the colleges of engineering and science. I was the department head of Humanities, which included writing and speaking, literature, music, art, theater, foreign languages, and philosophy. He charged me to develop a plan. My colleagues, Toby Fulwiler, Bob Jones, Randy Freisinger, Elizabeth Flynn, and later Cindy Selfe, Dickie Selfe, Diana George, and Nancy Grimm all helped me in the process to plan and develop a program.

WAC was not very much known on the national scene at all. We talked to deans of engineering and others about requiring a junior-level course of scientific and technical writing. There was already a full-year of composition in the first year. One professor proposed a junior-level writing course. The Dean of Engineering suggested testing all students at the end of sophomore year. Those who failed would have to take a remedial course to get up to speed. But just about that time, Toby Fulwiler went to a three-week National Endowment for Humanities (NEH) summer program in New Jersey, run by Lee Odell, Dixie Goswami, and Robert Parker. Toby came back with ideas about writing across the curriculum, particularly those that have been developed in the United Kingdom by James Britton, Nancy Martin, and their colleagues. So we began to think about writing across the curriculum rather than required tests and courses.

We also touched base with some other schools that were doing WAC or thinking about doing it. Most important for us at Michigan Tech was Beaver College in Pennsylvania, where Elaine Maimon had a grant from NEH to develop a WAC program. Another place was the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, which started an English Composition Board with a goal to strengthen communication skills throughout the College of Arts & Science, run in those days by Dan Fader, Jay Robinson, Bernard Van't Hul, and Richard Bailey. We began to develop our own WAC program, and we chose to go that way because our students at Michigan Tech were quite bright and fairly good writers. But they saw their writing courses like an extra hurdle they really didn't need but were just required to do. They assumed someone else would be writing

reports for them. It was the days before desktop computers and word processing for everybody. So we wanted to get faculty of different disciplines involved, having them say it is important to learn to write, speak, and think like an engineer. To do well, they should be given assignments to help develop their skills within their discipline, to begin writing like an engineer or a scientist. Under the leadership of Toby Fulwiler, we began a program with faculty workshops. Funding from the General Motors Foundation enabled us to take people off campus for two or four days to work on teaching writing and integrating writing into classes, which also included collaborative learning, group work, and critical thinking. We were fortunate that we attracted some good teachers to these very first workshops. They came back to campus and told their colleagues and administration that WAC was a good and necessary program. And so the program took off from there.

**XL:** When you were at Michigan Tech, it seemed that you had some institutional support and support from colleagues. Still, when the program first took off, what was the biggest challenge you faced? Was it the doubt from some faculty or was it the lack of enthusiasm from students? How did you solve it?

**AY:** There were many faculty doubts, as you might expect, and many were the same as today: (1) Many people say that it is the English Department's job to teach students how to write. "I don't have time and I have to cover the material." Why can't "they" just do it? (2) They blame the high schools that students didn't learn how to write. (3) Many complain primarily about grammar and spelling, and yet, when we looked closer, faculty were not really happy with the way students were organizing, developing, providing evidence, or writing a coherent report or essay. There was still concern about editing, but it turned out not to be the major concern.

We liked to talk about the conversion experience. People who were doubtful but open-minded came to one of our workshops for a couple of days and then gave WAC a chance in their classes. Many of those early adaptors from the departments of Metallurgy, Biology, and Mechanical Engineering said they had never thought about having students revise their reports. They were "converted" and spread the word.

It wasn't all easy. After the program had been going on for two or three years, a motion was introduced to the Faculty Senate at Michigan Tech for the English Department to stop doing workshops that encouraged free writing. The motion ordered us to suspend this program and go back to grammar drill, to concentrate on having students write correctly and precisely. So we had to defend our WAC program. Fortunately, some of

the people in this faculty senate had been to our workshops and knew what was going on. Randy Freisinger took a leading voice, representing our position, and the senate defeated that motion. This meeting was a very tense moment in which the senators felt that because first-year English was required for all students, then they should have a say in how it is taught. Some senators didn't want writing to be taught with brainstorming, freewriting, revising, and editing. They wanted it to be taught as spelling and grammar.

**XL:** To some extent, we could say that this incident caused public attention. Some who went to the Senate meeting and heard the debate began to think about WAC. In this sense, it helped promote the development of WAC. Do you agree?

**AY:** Sure, more people were aware of WAC and more people defended it and a lot of unpredictable things happened. We proposed WAC instead of a junior-level required writing course, but the university community required a junior-level writing course and WAC. In other words, there were more students taking writing courses, not just students in Humanities and English, as well as doing WAC. We believed that was a good approach. First, people who were really professionals in rhetoric, composition, and technical communication were teaching students in the first year and the third year, not only how to write, but audience analysis. In addition, instructors in the disciplines were teaching students how to write to disciplinary professionals, using evidence and citation the way that people in their specific fields do.

One professor from the department of Metallurgy, quite famous nationally as a researcher, was considered a good and popular teacher and sometimes taught the basic course, Metallurgy 101. He was doubtful about WAC, but he gave a couple of days of his time to see what it was all about. He came back so excited that he went to the Provost and the President and wanted to speak to the Board of Trustees, impressing upon everyone else how important this program was. Because he was a major professor on campus, people listened to him.

**XL:** When you first came to Clemson in 1987, there was no WAC. How did you persuade the higher administration to consider WAC?

**AY:** There was no cross-the-entire-curriculum writing program at Clemson in 1987. The ETC (Effective Technical Communication) program in the College of Engineering included faculty from the liberal arts and engineering working together on writing and speaking across the engineering curriculum.

I was brought in as the Robert S. Campbell Chair to help with writing in the College of Engineering by working with faculty and students. Bob Campbell was a 1937 Clemson Alumnus who endowed the program. Then in 1989, I invited everyone on campus to a full-day off-campus workshop at the Clemson Outdoor Lab on the lake. To my surprise, 60 faculty members from a variety of disciplines signed up.

Faculty members asked for more, so we started doing workshops on topics that people were interested in, such as assignment design, assessment, and collaborative learning. I had support from colleagues in English like Dixie Goswami, Mark Charney, and Carl Lovett, as well as people from the College of Engineering like Dan McAuliff, Wayne Bennett, and others.

In 1990, some colleagues and I had the opportunity to present a proposal to Roy Pearce, a graduate of Clemson's Class of 1941, most of whom were veterans of World War II. This proposal established the Pearce Center for Professional Communication to house Communication across the Curriculum. Mr. Pearce wanted speaking as well as writing to be included. As we thought more about the Center's mission, visual and digital communication were incorporated into our communication across the curriculum program, with academic writing still central as the way we learn how to communicate with each other.

The Pearce Center endowment provided ongoing funding for special projects with faculty, to assess whether our program was working, and to bring in workshop leaders from outside. For example, Kenneth Bruffee did a workshop on collaborative learning; Peter Elbow did one on the significance of audience in writing; we had Deanna Dannels on speaking across the curriculum; and Toby Fulwiler on writing to learn and journals across the curriculum. And we continued working with disciplinary faculty, including workshop leaders from Chemistry, Biology, Horticulture, and Chemical Engineering. They were able to show other faculty members that effective writing was not just an English project but integral to all disciplines.

When Clemson was recognized as the 2001 Public College of the Year by *Time/Princeton Review*, over 300 of Clemson's 1,000 faculty had gone to at least one workshop voluntarily. We tried to look at writing from the students' perspective. If two of their four or five courses each semester were communication-intensive, that would be a major improvement. Back in 1986, many classes gave just scantron tests, or maybe essay tests, but that was all the writing. Students might have done one paper, but that was one draft of a paper. So a lot of things have changed from 1987 until today. I don't think Communication across the Curriculum deserves all the credit, however. Nationally and on our campus, people were interested in service learning and started

projects where every student had a laptop. Faculty in English often took a lead in these initiatives; for example, Clemson has award-winning client-based projects in technical writing. All of these activities emphasize our mantra: *active learning by the students and interactive teaching by the teachers*. Before this, a teacher often came to class, gave a lecture, and took a few questions, if there were any. Students mainly took notes with little discussion. That approach to teaching is no longer dominant at Clemson for a lot of reasons. I think Communication across the Curriculum helped pave the way, and now many people have started projects that really emphasize active learning and interactive teaching.

In 2003, the Clemson Class of 1941 endowed the Class of 1941 Studio for Student Communication and became the second phase of our CAC program, where we would work directly with students. A decade ago, WAC and CAC were more faculty-centered. But now they are both faculty centered and student centered. At the Studio, students get help with a variety of multimodal projects such as slide shows, posters, and making videos. That's why we call it a studio, not a writing center. It also is a research facility where a faculty member or Ph.D. student can teach a class or study the effect of classroom configuration on learning. With the Pearce Center and the Studio, we are integrating teaching and research with program administration, serving students and faculty.

XL: To sum up, as an administrator (Department Head at Michigan Tech, the CAC coordinator at Clemson), how did you motivate your colleagues to join the WAC/CAC/WID team?

AY: It wasn't all administration: workshops, personal lobbying, going to colleagues and inviting them to work with me. As the Campbell Chair at Clemson, I had funding to buy lunches for people who went to the workshops, to bring in speakers, and to print brochures for advertising. This was before universal email. When I was recruited by Clemson as the Robert S. Campbell Chair, my role was to work with faculty across disciplines to integrate communication into their courses. It was a high-visibility appointment, so some people might have gone to the workshops for the first time out of curiosity.

XL: As one of your students I can say that we all like the way you treat each student and the very specific guidance you give to each individual student based on his/her research interest and background. What's the rationale?

AY: Certainly I try to establish a community of learners in my classroom. I'd like to think that I treat all students—first-year students, MA students, MAPC students, RCID PhD students—as colleagues. We are all in the same community in terms of trying to learn, whether it is Victorian poetry or communication across the curriculum. I see myself as a learner trying to communicate what I have learned. The students are learners trying to communicate what they have learned. So this approach is very deliberate. I write each student a letter in the middle of the term, evaluating their work. I am really having a conversation with them about their work.

What really helps me at Clemson is that my teaching load is only one course per semester and part of my salary comes from the endowment so that I can run the CAC program. I can spend more time and effort on that one course than a teacher who is teaching three or four courses. Another thing that affects my teaching is that I have been doing communication-intensive work across the curriculum. I am always trying new things. For example, I am teaching a literature class this semester. I am experimenting with multimodal assignments and blogs between my students and students in Sweden. Then I try to look at the results carefully. I take that experience to workshops and show faculty from other disciplines that this approach might work in their disciplines, and of course, I try to contribute to the research on WAC and WID, teaching with writing, focusing on things I am learning from my classes as well as the theoretical and other work. I don't see myself as a theorist in the sense of writing high theory. I try to integrate theory into a coherent approach to teaching, recognizing that theory is always evolving, expanding, and contracting. In other words, not be a slave to theory, but see what is happening in my class with my students. We may have to modify our theories to make sure we reach our students.

XL: You use your teaching experience to inform the workshops. You always share your experience with other colleagues through your research work, which seems to characterize your research style. Am I right?

AY: I have been fortunate to be able to integrate teaching, research, and service. I teach the way I do and also I write the way I teach. Together, they help me design the next stage of the CAC program.

Most recently, I have been interested in what I call the middle-ground, which means conversational learning and conversational writing. I try to place this middle ground between expressive, personal writing (which is the kind of writing and general speaking you do for yourself like journals or freewrites with no real audience except

yourself) and public or academic writing (where you help students learn the discourse conventions and how to think and write in a public way what they know in their learning, whether it is engineering or literary studies). So I have been talking and writing about this middle ground such as letters back and forth, blogs, and discussion boards. It is the middle ground in the sense that you have to recognize your audience, so you write to be understood. For freewrites, you don't have to do that. Yet you are still in the discovering stage of trying to learn about a particular subject.

This year my classes are trying this kind of learning on a discussion board, about a poem by T.S. Eliot. Another assignment is blogs with students in Sweden about poems by Emily Dickinson. We have groups of six students, half from Sweden and half here at Clemson. I am interested in the power and potential of the assignment when I am designing it. Students learn about the subject matter by participating in that kind of written conversation. I think they gain confidence and motivation. Many students, including M.A. level students, said that they had never written for a fellow student before. I think they begin to improve their level of academic discourse because they are writing about an academic subject. They are using and watching other students use a vocabulary and conventions and come up with an opinion about what the poem means. Maybe they quote a line or two from the poem that gives them that idea. Of course, these are scholarly habits of the mind that literary critics use. I like to think of the middle ground in terms of learning collaboratively and conversationally as well as a movement toward helping students become sophisticated academic writers. And technology helps tremendously. I have been assigning conversational writing for 30 years. It used to be students' passing paper letters back and forth. When photocopies came in, I could put students in groups to share their writing. The Internet opened up a world of interaction and interculturality where students are not in the same physical class.

**XL:** Your service to the community is very impressive. From your CV I learned that you have been invited to many schools to conduct workshops, both in and outside the US, which surely takes lots of time. You also do lots of university service. How do you balance all this?

**AY:** Lots of my travel is connected to everything else I do. I bring back ideas that will help Clemson, and my work at Clemson gives me ideas to share with other schools and with other colleagues. So I do see the travel as part of the process for my work at Clemson and for WAC and CAC.

XL: What are the common questions you have received from workshop participants?

AY: If I give a workshop on ways you can integrate writing to learn in courses across the discipline and on assignment design and assessment, hopefully people walk out with something they can really implement. The kinds of questions I get are: How can you cover all the content? How do you handle the paper load? All these students are doing the writing and they want teachers to read them, but teachers don't have time to read them. With multiple drafts, students turn in writing, and teachers need to read it, give feedback, ask students to revise, and read it again. How can this be done?

I try to show faculty that if students have to look at your comments and do something with them, and if part of the grade is how they revise, then they will learn. It is difficult, though. I give suggestions such as have the students critique each other the first round, then give you the final draft. Sometimes these suggestions work, but sometimes teachers say it is not for me.

XL: Your book *Programs that Work* in 1990 was very helpful for over a decade for schools that were considering WAC programs. Do you think the programs in 2008 are still following the same models as shown in your book?

AY: By 1990, there was a sense of community among people doing WAC. We knew each other by going to 4Cs and other conventions. We asked people to write essays to describe their programs in a way that would help others think about doing a program themselves. The main difference between that 1990 book and some of the things going on right now is the rise of the writing in the disciplines (WID) aspect of writing across the curriculum. Certainly it existed in the 1990s, but now WAC is studying it more carefully and working more individually with particular departments on establishing their curriculum and assessing their own students and programs. For example, as a result of helping a business administration department with their curriculum, their students learn how to write the way business professionals should.

Of course another main change is technology. There is more adaptation of WAC online. Some say that for an online class you just put your notes online and still teach the usual way; however, others think that online classes can be more effective if they are interactive and communication intensive where students write back and forth and learn together.

XL: Can we say that there has been a climate change since the 1970s now that WAC is better understood and practiced?

AY: It is hard for me to estimate any more. A recent survey suggests about 50 percent of colleges have a WAC program or are considering one. There is a lot of interest in WAC now globally, in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and in particular, the Middle East. Many of my colleagues are consulting and conducting workshops in places like Dubai. And obviously through work like yours and Wu Dan's and some others, WAC and CAC will be spread to China and Asia. The Internet, of course, contributes to the internationalization of WAC and CAC.

XL: What do you see as the new trends in WAC development?

AY: (1) Technology, (2) international or transnational, (3) research that embraces both WAC and WID, and (4) more sense of being broader, that is, WAC is connected or collaborating with writing centers and service learning projects, changing the name of WAC at some schools to CAC to include writing and speaking across the curriculum or to ECAC to include electronic communication across the curriculum. Instead of focus on individual teachers to integrate writing into their class, we're now looking at the entire four years of a college education. For instance, we look at the entire chemical engineering curriculum. We look at our university's goals for their students to have international experiences. WAC is involved in those initiatives. In 1990, people weren't thinking that we could learn from Europe and they could learn from us, but now we do.

XL: There is a rumor that you are retiring after 42 years of teaching. What are your plans afterwards?

AY: I taught my first class as a graduate student in 1966, and now I plan to retire in December 2008. I haven't made specific plans about my retirement, but I will begin to think about it seriously this summer. I do know that I plan to stay active in the academic community and in writing across the curriculum.