

WAC Program Vulnerability and What To Do About It: An Update and Brief Bibliographic Essay

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Introduction—Update

TWO YEARS AGO I HAD the honor of being Carol Rutz's interviewee for her annual series on WAC leaders in this journal. With that honor, though, came a good deal of intimidation. My interview followed those of John Bean, Chris Anson, and Bill Condon, a prestigious lineup to be sure. There was a factor beyond these esteemed colleagues' reputations, however, that contributed to my intimidation: I chose to speak frankly about an issue that was foremost in my professional life at that moment—the possible demise of the WAC program that my colleagues and I had guided for over fifteen of its twenty years.ⁱ

In her introduction, Carol describes the interview as having a “subtext [that] might require an elegy for Missouri’s wonderful, long-standing WAC/WID program” (43).ⁱⁱ At the time of my interview, Campus Writing Program (CWP) had for several years been under pressure to make changes that CWP staff, members of the Campus Writing Board, and writing-intensive (WI) faculty found unsettling. Indeed, the scenario was sufficiently dire that it was difficult to imagine that the Program could survive. Among the issues CWP faced were physical relocation of our office, loss of our well-established tutorial component to another campus entity, pressure to implement assessment procedures that were contrary to acknowledged best practices, and strained relations with the administrator to whom we reported.

Remarkably, however, MU's Campus Writing Program has not only survived, but, following two years of excellent interim leadership, is undergoing a renaissance. The hire of a new permanent director is pending; two new staff members who serve as liaisons to WI faculty have been hired; a new administrator has been appointed to whom

the Program reports; and there has been no lessening in the number or quality of WI courses being offered. The future of CWP looks very bright indeed. Reporting these developments, as an update to the 2006 interview, gives great pleasure to all of us who were associated with CWP.

Former CWP staff is crafting a local history of the Program, with which we have a combined forty-four years of involvement. In it, we speculate on factors that may have led to our successful Program's difficult period and its subsequent recovery. But the larger point is that CWP is not alone among WAC programs that experience vulnerability. If faculty resistance to WAC is legion, programmatic vulnerability is just as common. In 1991 David Russell posited that "on an institutional basis, WAC exists in a structure that fundamentally resists it" (295).

Perhaps one of the best-known devolutions of a well-established WAC program is that of the English Composition Board (ECB) at the University of Michigan. Founded in 1979 and perhaps the earliest WAC program at a major university, it became a prototype for numerous programs around the country. It acquired a solid reputation for, among other things, the scholarly productivity of the non-tenure-track associates who worked with it. Despite ECB's widely respected work and its success at Michigan, however, the program was dismantled quickly and easily by Michigan administrators who had other priorities. A similar example is the writing program directed by Chris Anson at the University of Minnesota, about which he has written, "What strikes me . . . is how easily all the things that have taken so much negotiation, planning and hard work are dismantled" ("Who" 168).

Other examples abound, as anyone who reads WPA-L or WAC-L can attest. In 1994, Ed White comments on the phenomenon, as well, in writing about WAC programs that rely on "flagged" courses, which are specially designated with a "W," or "WI," and the like. "The 'W' program usually begins with a strong vote of confidence from the faculty and the administration," White writes, "since its advantages are many and obvious. . . . But the 'W' program is filled with traps for the unwary and usually leads to unimagined fiasco" (161). He goes on to describe in grim detail one of many such programs he has seen over the years that failed to live up to its initial expectations. The net result, he reports, was "less writing throughout the new curriculum, cynical faculty, mocking students, [and] graduates even less prepared to do critical thinking and writing than before" (163).

There already exists a good body of literature that speaks to how and why WAC programs struggle, along with various sources for addressing the problems. This essay summarizes several of the representative sources, the "classics" as it were, and then offers additional suggestions not found in earlier work, suggestions that could perhaps enable WAC programs to avoid, manage, and/or overcome their vulnerabilities.

WAC programs, it is good to remind ourselves, are highly idiosyncratic. It is an axiom within WAC initiatives that if WAC is to be successful it must respond to the exigencies of each institution—mission of the school, fiscal resources, student demographics, and faculty governance, to mention a few. Toby Fulwiler pointed out, in 1988, the challenges that WAC’s idiosyncrasy presents for *evaluating* WAC programs. This idiosyncrasy also makes it difficult to prescribe a one-size-fits-all set of suggestions for *sustaining* WAC. Inasmuch as this essay cannot be a comprehensive “how to” manual, readers are encouraged to delve more deeply into all of the literature and to call on their counterparts at similar programs who are nearly always willing to lend an ear and share experience.

Compelling reasons exist to consolidate some of the old with some of the new at this moment in WAC’s history. By most accounts, the number of WAC programs is growing; and, many institutions are looking to revitalize existing programs. At the 2008 Writing Across Research Borders conference, for example, Chris Thaiss delivered preliminary results from the national and international WAC surveys he and his colleagues are engaged in. To date, they have 1250 respondents from the U.S. and 207 international respondents from 47 countries. Sue McLeod’s 1987 WAC survey indicates that 418 institutions at that time had WAC programs.ⁱⁱⁱ The current number is 608, an increase of 48%. Plus, 209 recent respondents indicate that their institutions are planning to begin WAC programs. Of the Ph.D.-granting institutions represented, 59% report having WAC programs of some kind. And surprisingly, a large number of programs are directed by tenured faculty.^{iv} Research from WAC programs was well represented at sessions throughout the three-day conference.

WAC Program Vulnerability and Possible Solutions—The Early Literature

The seven citations in this section—a partial list, to be sure—each address WAC program vulnerability and possible solutions in different ways. They appear in chronological order.

In “Evaluating Writing Across the Curriculum Programs” in *Strengthening Programs for Writing Across the Curriculum* (1988), Fulwiler itemizes seven “obstacles” to evaluating WAC programs. He notes that these obstacles are “inherent in the programs themselves” (62). That is, program vulnerability and evaluation are integrally interconnected. The seven obstacles are as follows: WAC means different things at different institutions; WAC programs are result oriented, not research oriented; WAC programs grow, evolve, and mutate at alarming rates; WAC program administration varies from institution to institution; measures that are quick and dirty do not seem

to prove much; WAC programs are amorphous and open ended; and evaluating successful WAC programs is as complicated as evaluating good teaching or successful learning (63–64). Fulwiler follows with five “dimensions” that could provide measurable data (or, as I read it, suggestions for addressing potential vulnerability): the institution’s community of scholars; pedagogy; improving student learning; improving student writing; and improving faculty writing (65–72). His overarching suggestion is to “look at everything that is happening at your university (everything within your capability and resources, that is), document it, and see what patterns emerge when you study this information” (72).

Just two years later, in the concluding essay to *Programs That Work: Models and Methods for Writing Across the Curriculum* (1990), co-editors Fulwiler and Art Young itemize six “enemies” of WAC: uncertain leadership; English department orthodoxy; compartmentalized academic administration; academe’s traditional reward system, which does not value teaching; testing and quantification; and entrenched attitudes (287–294). The challenge for WAC, they say, “is to change attitudes, ways of thinking, and academic structures”—no easy feat, as anyone who works in any sector of academe knows (294). Still, they point out, the fourteen programs featured in *Programs That Work* managed to do so to some degree. The key is developing “a more or less permanent structure whereby writing-across-the-curriculum advocacy is ever renewed and expanded” (294).

Margot Soven’s concluding chapter in *Writing Across the Curriculum: A Guide to Developing Programs* (1992), which she co-edited with Sue McLeod, points to the “road-blocks” and “dangers” WAC faces, in spite of the many positive outcomes that programs produce. Among them are cynical faculty who have given up on students and efforts to help them; English department faculty, in particular, who don’t trust that discipline-based faculty will follow through on writing instruction; and administrators who look to WAC programming as a means of saving money spent on writing instruction (135–136). Soven’s chapter embeds two other often-cited sources: Ed White’s “The Danger of Innovations Set Adrift” and Mike Rose’s myth of transience. In the former, White describes various WAC program innovations undertaken at one institution and then adopted by another, unsuccessfully. “In each case,” Soven notes, “the cause of failure was imagining that ideas that work well at one institution can be transported to another without considerable attention to the substructures in place at the school” (136). Soven quotes Russell who describes the myth of transience—“the convenient illusion that some new program will cure poor student writing, that there is a single pedagogical solution to complex structural issues” (qtd in Soven 136)—as “perhaps the most insidious threat to WAC.” Soven ends the chapter with yet another sobering

problem: a great deal of any WAC program's success relies on the person directing it. But she also offers a possible solution. "The hidden danger to writing across the curriculum may not be faculty burnout but writing administrator burnout; the cure is the mutual support and encouragement writing program administrators provide to one another" (136).

In addition to Soven's concluding chapter, McLeod & Soven's entire 1992 volume warrants inclusion in this list. Although not structured as a "problems and solutions" manual, the book includes twelve chapters, along with appendices, by experienced WAC program developers, each of whom address various components of WAC programming. The book is now out of print, but was published on the World Wide Web in 2000 and can be downloaded from the WAC Clearinghouse.

John Ackerman, not writing as a proponent of WAC but instead calling attention to one of its weaknesses, nonetheless, informs readers how a shortcoming can be re-cast to better ends. In "The Promise of Writing to Learn" (1993), he writes about one of WAC's most prominently espoused pedagogies, noting that writing-to-learn is widely acclaimed, but little proved. "[W]riting as a mode of learning' (Emig, 1977)," he says, "is at best an argument yet to be made" (334). Most of his essay demonstrates the lack of research WAC proponents can marshal for this pedagogy, yet he does not mean to "untrack or devalue teachers and advocates of WAC who have found ways to invigorate their teaching, classrooms, and professional status with write-to-learn practices" (362). Rather, he suggests posing the question of how writing enhances learning differently: "How, why, and with what consequence do you and your students carry on the work of daily classroom, disciplinary, or everyday practices?" (363).

Writing in observation of WAC's twenty-fifth anniversary in 1995, Barbara Walvoord (1996) argues that, "the 'enemies' frame may limit WAC's responses to the complexities of its next quarter century" (58). Instead, she suggests that seeing WAC within the paradigm of social movements is a more positive way to frame the challenges, each of which then suggests a possible solution: work with other movement organizations; define WAC's relationship to institutional administration; define WAC's relationship to technology; reexamine the meaning of key terms; and deal with assessment (68-74). The advantage of this framing, she suggests, "is the power that [social] movements sometimes have to change individuals, to change a culture" (74).

Eric Miraglia and Sue McLeod also write in celebration of WAC's twenty-fifth anniversary, and they present results from a 1995 survey of WAC programs. This survey looked at mature WAC programs to see what factors might account for programmatic staying power or, conversely, demise. "Whither WAC? Interpreting the Stories/Histories

of *Enduring WAC Programs*” (1997) is useful, then, for three key findings that lead to WAC program longevity: administrative support, including funding; grassroots and faculty support; and strong, consistent program leadership (48). “Cast in negative terms, the bottom line could hardly be simpler: lack of administrative support and lack of funding are the two most oft-cited causes of program discontinuance” (50). Faculty disinterest ranked third among cited causes for discontinuance (52). And, a “significant subset of respondents” tied absence or departure of a director to a program’s discontinuance (54). These findings, both positive and negative, point to what WAC programs need in order to endure.^v

WAC Program Vulnerability and Possible Solutions—Recent Literature

In this section, bibliographic sources are embedded within a list of characteristics that describe successful WAC programs. Not all of these characteristics must be obtained for programs to become successful, but a combination of some of them certainly does, and the first three are absolutely essential. Again, the axiom applies that each institution must grow the program that works within its own constraints and possibilities. These characteristics derive from WAC literature, from CCCC and WPA annual conferences and workshops, from WAC-L and WPA-L exchanges, and from my observations of over twenty years of working in and consulting for WAC programs in the U.S. and abroad. For the most part, these sources are post-2000. Rather than appearing in chronological order, citations are included under the entry to which they pertain. Entries appear under Institutional, Classroom and Teaching, and Program levels.

Characteristics of Successful WAC Programs

Institutional Level

1. **STRONG FACULTY OWNERSHIP OF THE PROGRAM** Grassroots and faculty support is one of Miraglia and McLeod’s three key findings from the 1995 survey on mature WAC program longevity, cited above. Such things as faculty-requested help to use writing in their teaching, faculty-established policies for writing requirements, and faculty representation on writing committees are signs that faculty care about student writing and want WAC to succeed. In the University of Missouri’s case, faculty concern about student writing led to the formation of its WAC program, and faculty ownership resides in the Program’s proactive governance organization, the Campus Writing Board. Conversely, as Miraglia and McLeod point out, when faculty are disinterested, WAC programs wither. In “Enlivening WAC Programs Old and New” (2007), Joan Mullin and Susan Schorn describe how UT Austin’s program needed

rejuvenating after it had begun to run on “auto-pilot” because WAC course approval was relegated to staff, leaving faculty out of the loop (5–6).

2. **STRONG PHILOSOPHICAL AND FISCAL SUPPORT FROM INSTITUTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS, COUPLED WITH THEIR WILLINGNESS TO AVOID MICROMANAGEMENT** Administrative support, with funding, is another of Miraglia and McLeod’s key findings from the 1995 survey. WAC programs require influential officers who understand that writing is much more than grammar and correctness, officers who are willing to advocate for good writing instruction at all levels of institutional decision making. Administrators must take an active role in securing resources for adequate staffing and program operation; they should not see WAC as an easy or cost-effective substitute for composition. At the same time, if administrators interfere with day-to-day management of the program, faculty will perceive an inappropriate top-down meddling with curriculum, which is traditionally faculty’s purview. Maintaining a healthy balance is critical.

3. **ONE AND TWO ABOVE, IN COMBINATION** Neither is sufficient without the other; both must be present and operate synchronistically. If either faculty or administration is unwilling or disinterested, the WAC program will likely fail. This point recalls Fullan and Miles’s Lesson Six in “Eight Basic Lessons for the New Paradigm of Change” summarized by McLeod and Miraglia in *WAC for the New Millennium: Strategies for Continuing Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Programs* (2001): “both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary” (20).

4. **SYMBIOSIS WITH THE INSTITUTION’S MISSION AND LINKAGES WITH OTHER PROGRAMS** One of the enduring lessons from the 1990 Bryn Mawr Summer Institute for Women in Higher Education Administration is tying programs firmly to institutions’ mission statements. Thus, Missouri’s Campus Writing Program selected four university missions that intersected closely with our WAC work, which we then highlighted in on-campus publications. (See Townsend, 2001, 250–253.) In “A Reflective Strategy for Writing Across the Curriculum: Situating WAC as a Moral and Civic Duty” (2003), John Pennington & Robert Boyer describe how their Catholic, liberal arts college situates WAC as a moral and civic duty, a strategy that “complements our mission to provide for a values-centered curriculum” (87). In “Transforming WAC through a Discourse-Based Approach to University Outcomes Assessment” (2005), John Bean and his co-authors describe how Seattle University’s Strategic Plan assessment mandate provided the impetus to reform writing and critical thinking. In “The Future of

WAC” (1996), Barbara Walvoord recommends that WAC programs establish closer relationships with campus leaders in technology, assessment, administration, and even with other social movements. Obviously, any WAC program should articulate with its institution’s composition program, so that students see the writing requirement(s) as parts of a whole, rather than disconnected items to be checked off a graduation requirement list.

5. **AUTONOMY, FOCUS, AND GOALS** WAC programs require a clear understanding of what they aim to accomplish and an appropriate measure of autonomy that allows them to do it. Walvoord advocates “constant clarification of goals at both the national and local levels” (67). Recognizing the success that Clemson and North Carolina State universities had experienced when incorporating communication into their WAC programs, staff at Missouri debated whether we could add communication to our overall program goals. Ultimately, we decided that we lacked sufficient personnel and resources; keeping our WAC focus allowed us to maintain the strength of our current work. Lillian Bridwell-Bowles’s fairly new CXC program at Louisiana State University, on the other hand, is making excellent progress with *four* emphases (written, oral, visual, technological) that it undertook from the very outset. Wendy Strachan’s *Writing-Intensive: Becoming W-Faculty in a New Writing Curriculum* (2008) describes how the lack of autonomy adversely affected Simon Fraser’s newly developed Writing-Intensive program. When an administrative mandate required it to integrate into an already existing teaching and learning center, the new partners “discovered they had less in common than had been hoped or assumed,” and the forced integration created a “concretely diminished visibility of the [Writing-Intensive] unit as an individual entity with a distinctive, campus-wide mission” (227–229).

6. **A REWARD STRUCTURE THAT VALUES TEACHING** Faculty need to perceive that their work is valued by their colleagues, departments, institutions, and disciplines. Those who haven’t previously used writing as part of their pedagogical repertoire will undoubtedly experience an increase in workload, if for no other reason than they are restructuring their teaching practices. The rewards are often not immediate or concrete, especially at research extensive institutions where the most notable rewards come from publication. The work begun by Ernest Boyer and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in the 1990s, now popularly known as the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL), is making inroads on some campuses. The lesson from Strachan (admittedly a single example) seems to be to work closely with teaching and learning programs,

but not be subsumed by them. As the University of Missouri's case has shown, WAC can succeed in research extensive environments, but those leading the programs have to work harder and be prepared to counter more opposition. Stipends for attending workshops, individualized consultation with WAC leaders afterward, and TA support can provide meaningful incentives and demonstrate institutional support.

Classroom & Teaching Level

7. ONGOING FACULTY DEVELOPMENT Once WAC programs are up and running, administration may look to reduce fiscal support on the grounds that the faculty development component has been accomplished. Not so. Faculty change institutions or drop away from their WAC involvement; new ones arrive; previously uninvolved faculty become interested; committed WAC faculty want new ideas or a more sophisticated understanding of how writing and learning intersect. The need for faculty development never goes away. An effective resource, cited by WAC personnel across the U.S., is John Bean's *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (1996). We give a copy to every faculty member who attends our semi-annual workshop and we base workshop sessions on selected readings. Another resource is Chris Anson's *The WAC Casebook: Scenes for Faculty Reflection and Program Development* (2002) with dozens of examples based on real WAC problems. Specific answers aren't provided, but plenty of suggestions for discovering them are. Faculty who are drawn to teaching with writing are often the same ones drawn to teaching with technology. "WAC Wired: Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum" (2001) by Donna Reiss and Art Young is a good source for helping WAC leaders to hone that connection if they haven't already.

One of the most important components of faculty development is creating relationships between the WAC program and the faculty who are doing the teaching. Campus Writing Program personnel eagerly invested time in getting to know the faculty in the disciplines who were doing the hard work in the trenches. Exiting a local bank recently, I ran into an animal science professor, T. Safranski, who we had worked with. Acknowledging the transition the Program is undergoing, he lamented that, "If I went over to CWP's office right now, no one would know who I am." WAC programs can—and should—become welcoming places where faculty can go to talk about teaching, particularly if their departments or colleagues don't value those conversations. These relationships are an often-overlooked aspect to faculty development, one that can be difficult to explain to administrators, but which experienced WAC leaders understand.

8. **LOW STUDENT-TO-INSTRUCTOR RATIO, WITH TA HELP IF NECESSARY** Even with the best advice on managing the paper load that accompanies writing-based teaching, WAC faculty still need time to read and respond to student papers. Granting that many variables enter into the equation, the optimum class size is likely fifteen to twenty-five students per instructor. If conditions require larger enrollments, graduate teaching assistants, preferably from the same discipline as the course, should be employed. This kind of work for faculty and TAs, though, is far from intuitive, as Lisa Higgins and Virginia Muller point out in “An Other Teacher’s Perspective: TAs in the WI Classroom” (1994). They offer a list of eleven questions the professor and TA should discuss. Beth Finch Hedengren recommends that professors read her TA’s *Guide to Teaching Writing in All Disciplines* (2004) with their TAs. Each chapter has a “Working with Your Professor” section with suggestions for discussing the content.

9. **INTEGRATION OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS WITH COURSE GOALS; STUDENT ENGAGEMENT** If there is one single principle that applies to all WAC teaching, it is that the writing assignments (whatever form they take) must reinforce course learning goals. It follows that the writing must conform to the instructor’s comfort level with using a variety of assignments. Bean’s *Engaging Ideas* is an excellent source for showing faculty the myriad ways they can integrate writing into their discipline-based teaching. Mary Segal and Robert Smart’s co-edited *Direct from the Disciplines: Writing Across the Curriculum* (2005) shows how faculty members from eleven different disciplines developed WAC courses at Quinnipiac University. The faculty examples range from “fairly modest” to “more radical” (5–6); Art Young describes the book as “reader friendly . . . a welcome contribution to faculty in specific disciplines” (Back Cover). Katherine Gottschalk and Keith Hjortshoj’s *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines* (2004) is also a useful resource.

Closely related to student writing and learning is higher education’s relatively recent focus on student engagement. Nearly all of the researchers in this field tout writing as one of the top means of ensuring student engagement. George Kuh, the developer of the National Survey of Student Engagement, and his co-authors of *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter* (2005) are unequivocal: “Writing across the curriculum encourages interdisciplinary efforts and challenges students to think critically and holistically about their assignments. Required coursework in writing ensures that everyone benefits from the extensive writing experience, and discipline-specific writing helps students realize the importance of writing well in their future professions” (185). In *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds* (2001), Richard Light

writes, “Of all skills students say they want to strengthen, writing is mentioned three times more than any other” (54). He notes that the relationship between the amount of writing for a course and students’ level of engagement is “stunning . . . The simple correlation between the amount of writing required in a course and students’ overall commitment to it tells a lot about the importance of writing” (55–56). In separate publications in 1992 and 1993, Alexander Astin reports that “[Writing] proved to have significant effects on nine of the 22 general education outcomes” (38) and that “the number of courses taken that emphasize the development of writing skills is positively associated with self-reported growth [in a number of areas] . . . The pattern certainly reinforces the idea that the current emphasis on ‘writing across the curriculum’ is a positive force in undergraduate education today” (243). In *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More* (2006), former Harvard University president Derek Bok affirms that “good writing—like critical thinking—will never be a skill that students can achieve or retain through a single course [like first-year composition] . . . sustained improvement will require repeated practice” (98). These few examples represent only a small portion of the support for WAC available in the literature on engagement and student success.

Programmatic Level

10. **KNOWLEDGEABLE, DIPLOMATIC WAC PROGRAM LEADERSHIP AND STAFF** Faculty in the disciplines need access to well-informed WAC specialists when they are designing writing assignments and grading criteria, coordinating assignments with course goals, and matching the myriad WAC pedagogies to their own teaching styles. At the same time, well-trained WAC personnel must be confident enough to sublimate their own knowledge when working with faculty who are, of course, the experts in their own disciplines. Strong, consistent program leadership, as Miraglia and McLeod’s survey demonstrated, is key to WAC program longevity. WAC programs require more than just a director; they also require staff members who, Strachan argues, need to be highly qualified and permanent. “Short-term hiring and turnover of [staff],” she says, “means loss of experience and continuity, a loss that can weaken an initiative . . .” (233). As Mullin and Schorn point out, WAC leaders must be able to recognize when programs have stagnated and then be willing to renew and re-invigorate when those signs occur. It takes strong leaders to acknowledge, as they did, that, “We needed . . . a renewal of the institution’s WAC culture” (6).

11. **BUDGET AND RESOURCES** This characteristic, from the Miraglia and McLeod survey and embedded above in item two, bears repeating as a separate item. High quality higher

education is not cheap, and high quality WAC programs do not develop without adequate resources, which the administration must provide. WAC, however, should not be a hard sell. Academe as a whole, along with virtually every discipline, avows the necessity for graduates to communicate clearly. Writing is at the center of general education and of every disciplinary major higher education offers. Writing is one of the few universally agreed upon aspects of a quality education. Among the resources WAC programs need are a well-staffed writing center; leadership and staff plus professional development for them, to ensure they stay current in the field; incentives and instructional materials for faculty development; a campus WAC newsletter; and perhaps awards for exemplary student writing.

12. RESEARCH AGENDA Every WAC program, no matter how modest, should undertake some effort to conduct research about the work it is doing. In-house publication of positive findings can reinforce and reward faculty accomplishments. Conversely, negative findings presented sensitively can enable classroom improvement. Student voices and opinions can be included in these reports. Conference presentations and refereed publications by WAC personnel and WAC instructors can positively impact WAC program credibility, especially at research-oriented institutions. Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki's *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life* (2006) is an excellent example of two WAC WPAs who studied the faculty and students in their program and report on what they learned. Administrators take note when WAC programs contribute new knowledge to the field. At the very least, the WAC program itself should model to its constituents the same intellectual curiosity and critical inquiry that WAC courses are intended to foster in students.

13. FLEXIBLE BUT SOUND GUIDELINES, IF FLAGGED COURSES ARE USED Criteria for certifying "W" courses if they are part of the curriculum must be flexible enough to accommodate all disciplines, rigorous enough to ensure course and programmatic integrity, and be informed by current theories and best practices within the field. Daunting though this may sound, numerous programs have arrived at workable standards. Not surprisingly, these guidelines tend to be somewhat similar across programs. An overview of features that typify "W" courses as reported by Christine Farris and Raymond Smith appears in Townsend's 2001 article "Writing Intensive Courses and WAC," along with the guidelines used by the University of Missouri since 1984.

14. **REGULAR INTERNAL ASSESSMENT COMBINED WITH PERIODIC EXTERNAL PROGRAM REVIEW** The assessment culture that permeates higher education now may mean that these essential functions are less overlooked in WAC programs than was formerly the case. Often, institutions have regular cycles for *departmental* reviews; *programs*, however, can sometimes slip through the cracks, so WAC WPAs may need to lobby for administrators to commission and pay for external program reviewer visits. Institutional re-accreditation can be one impetus for requesting an external review. Internal assessment should be part of any WAC program's ongoing agenda. William Condon's "Accommodating Complexity: WAC Program Evaluation in the Age of Accountability" (2001) is an excellent place to start. "Integrating WAC into General Education: An Assessment Case Study" describes how Missouri's Campus Writing Program used both a new general education initiative and hiring a new director as impetus for internal and external reviews. (See Townsend, 1997.) Administrators will sometimes urge WAC leaders to give writing competence tests as part of the WAC program's assessment agenda. Resist strongly. In "Dangerous Partnerships: How Competence Testing Can Sabotage WAC" (2005), Doug Brent calls his attempt to link competence testing and WAC a "total failure" (87), noting that "their seemingly complementary approaches ... mask some deeply divided pedagogical assumptions that threaten to undermine the benefits of a WAC program" (78).

15. **PATIENCE AND VIGILANCE** When all is said and done, WAC "attempts to reform pedagogy more than curriculum ... It asks for a fundamental commitment to a radically different way of teaching, a way that requires personal sacrifices, given the structure of American education, and offers personal rather than institutional rewards" (Russell, 295). WAC programs and commitments grow slowly, and reforms take time. WAC leaders must be simultaneously patient and perseverant while programs evolve.

Conclusion

Strachan's *Writing-Intensive* is the most recent and most in-depth account of a WAC program's vulnerability. Her narrative will make for instructive reading for WAC WPAs and for graduate students in WAC WPA training or seminars—as would all of the entries in the bibliography. But because many of Strachan's points mirror the situation Missouri's Campus Writing Program experienced not long ago, the positive update at the beginning of this essay is all the more meaningful to report. It has been seventeen years since David Russell (in 1991) wrote, "[W]ithout structural changes to integrate writing into the disciplinary fiber of institutions, without a commitment to permanent change in the way academia values writing in pedagogy, WAC programs will always

work against the grain”(304). Based on some of the sources above, one could say his cautionary words have been validated once again. But in those WAC programs that have found solutions to the particular vulnerabilities they have experienced, those of us who practice, promulgate, and research WAC can find ample encouragement and inspiration to move ahead with our work enthusiastically.

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ENDNOTES

- ⁱ At the time of my interview I had accepted an offer to develop a new WID program at another university and was stepping down from my Campus Writing Program directorship at the University of Missouri. During a one-year hiatus in the English Department at MU, I realized that after fifteen years of WAC/WID program administration a shift in my career was warranted, and I am now a regular faculty member in my department. My CWP colleagues, Marty Patton and Jo Ann Vogt, also

left CWP after twelve- and seventeen-year tenures respectively. Marty is also fully in MU's English Department, and Jo Ann is now director of Indiana University's Writing Center.

- ii The distinctions between WAC and WID aren't crucial for this article. Rather than the "WAC/WID" formulation, I simply use "WAC" to refer to programs that may have characteristics of either or both.
- iii See "Writing Across the Curriculum: The Second State, and Beyond," *College Composition and Communication* 40 (October 1989): 337–343.
- iv Chris Thaiss, Tara Porter, and Erin Steinke, "The International WAC/WID Mapping Project: Objectives and Current Results," Writing Research Across Borders conference, Session E16, University of California-Santa Barbara, February 22, 2008. See <http://mappingproject.ucdavis.edu> for more information.
- v All three of Miraglia and McLeod's findings are reflected in the six reasons that MU's Campus Writing Program was seen as having been sustained. Steve Weinberg, a journalist and member of CWP's 1992 Internal Review Committee, wrote in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 16, 1993, B2-B3) that CWP had likely survived because the program has a regular line in the campus budget and the support of the provost; has a staff housed outside in English, and is therefore perceived as belonging to the whole campus; has a director and staff who are specialists in WAC; offers TA and faculty development skillfully; students learn in first-year composition about MU's larger writing requirement; and faculty members see the rewards from their extra work.
- vi This list reframes and enlarges on an earlier version for W-flagged courses. (See Townsend, 2001, 242–245.) Thanks to Lynn Bloom for the assignment that led to the 2001 concept and to Wendy Strachan for the inspiration to add "levels" and broaden the characteristics to WAC programs generally.
- vii Marty Patton is the first in our Program to have pointed this out.