

# The Tables Are Turned: Carol Rutz

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The tables are turned, Carol Rutz. When I suggested to Roy Andrews and Carol that she herself was long overdue as the subject of a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)-leader profile, she recalled that I'd made this table-turning "threat"—or promise, as I prefer to call it—back in 2007 when she interviewed me for what has become, since her 2003 interview with John Bean, a regular feature in *The WAC Journal*. Well, it's taken me seven years to fulfill that promise, but with this interview, I'm happy to say, readers will now have the opportunity to learn more about Carol's impressive background as a scholar, teacher, and director of Carleton College's highly regarded The Writing Program, which has been recognized every year since 2006 in the *US News and World Report* college issue as one of the best in the country for writing in the disciplines.

While Carleton's WAC genealogy dates back to 1974 when the college is credited with being the first to establish cross-curricular writing requirements and to hold workshops to prepare faculty across the disciplines to teach with writing, the program was languishing when Carol became director in 1997. She set out to change that state of affairs, starting by working with key colleagues to secure grant funding to develop a sophomore portfolio requirement that involved extensive faculty development and a now nationally recognized writing assessment process (Condon and Rutz 373-74). The portfolio initiative proved to be so successful that it provided data for a quantitative reasoning initiative, which Carol and colleagues quickly and astutely linked to the importance of using data rhetorically to make effective arguments and which has now become another hallmark of her many WAC accomplishments at Carleton.

As those of us in WAC know well, collaboration is at the heart of our program-building work; that Carol is a consummate collaborator can be seen not only in her programmatic accomplishments at Carleton but also in her scholarship. Of the forty-plus "selected publications" she lists on her CV, nearly all are co-authored, including, for example, the 2007 co-edited collection *Building Intellectual Community through Collaboration*. While Carol may be best known for her scholarship on writing assessment, WAC, and quantitative reasoning, she's also written widely on faculty and WAC program development, most recently with Bill Condon in the 2012 *College Composition and Communication* article "A Taxonomy of Writing Across the Curriculum Programs: Evolving to Serve Broader Agendas." And, of course, she has

contributed her deftly conducted interviews with WAC professionals to *The WAC Journal* for the past twelve issues, counting this one.

Having noted Carol's skill as an interviewer over the years, I confess that I felt some trepidation about whether I could meet the high bar she has set, so my first step was to call her to ask how the interview series got started and how the heck she does it so well. It wasn't intended to be a series, she said, just an interview with John Bean, which she thought would be fun to do since he's "so famous and yet so modest," but Roy Andrews, *The WAC Journal* editor, liked the interview and asked for more of the same. Speaking of modesty, Carol told me that the questions she asks come out of "twenty years of hanging out and having the honor of associating with lots of really good colleagues." So, she advised me, I should just start with the highlights of the person's career and then turn it over to the interviewee to let responses to one question lead to another and another, and then all I had to do was "go back and insert transitional questions to amplify and clarify." How easy, she makes it sound, but how expertly she does it.

**Terry Zawacki:** How did you get started in WAC?

**Carol Rutz:** I was fortunate to do my graduate work at the University of Minnesota (U of MN) at a time when composition program teaching assistants from all over the university were trained to teach required writing courses at two levels: first-year writing and junior-level courses tailored to disciplinary areas; Writing for the Arts, Writing for the Social Sciences, Critical Reading and Writing for Management, and Writing about Science. The advanced courses made a lot of sense to me, even though I would have preferred to see disciplinary faculty teaching them—which is now the case in Minnesota's new Writing Enriched-Curriculum. I benefited from teaching courses at more than one level with more than one disciplinary emphasis, and through doing so I became a WAC groupie.

**TZ:** So your interest in teaching science-related writing courses dates back to your training as a TA. Any other influences?

**CR:** As I said, I had the chance at Minnesota to teach upper division writing courses, and two of my favorites were Writing about Science and Writing for the Health Professions. I gravitated toward them thanks to my family of origin. Both of my parents were teachers; my mother taught first grade and my father taught biology at a small liberal arts college for nearly forty years. He was a field biologist with expertise in entomology, evolution, and animal behavior. Consequently, my brother and I were immersed in field study by default. For example, walking to church included commentary on and the capture of interesting insects that were poisoned in a little pocket bottle, dumped out on Dad's desk in the evening, labeled, and pinned

as specimens in cigar boxes lined with balsa wood. We couldn't observe that ritual, among others, and not pick up a lot of knowledge through question and answer as well as flat-out osmosis.

In college, I majored in English but took several biology courses, served as a lab assistant, and often worked summers doing menial fieldwork for research projects. The most memorable of those was the summer I worked for a parasitologist on two projects: one on the parasites of wild ducks and the other on the leeches of Minnesota. For the first, I dissected freshly-killed ducks, isolating, identifying, and preserving all parasites, including liver flukes, tapeworms, and other dainties. For the second, I stomped around various lakes in chest waders, overturning rocks and logs to collect and preserve leeches. As you might imagine, this job required overcoming an atavistic aversion to these bloodsuckers. I take pride in getting past the "ick" factor. Anyone who wants the lowdown on the four species of Minnesota freshwater leeches should give me a call.

Much later, I worked for eight years for a residential treatment center for psychotic adolescents as the medical records person. I learned a lot there about psychotherapy and developmental theory, and I also earned certification as a medical records professional. As a result of these varied experiences, I have a brain tuned to the scientific method, and when WAC called, I was happiest at first to answer in a scientific idiom. At Carleton, in addition to WAC outreach to scientists, I have been fortunate to team teach with an astrophysicist as well as develop a course for environmental studies on public rhetoric and environmental science.

**TZ:** You've written extensively about faculty development, and clearly, you enjoy teaming with faculty in other disciplines to develop and teach courses. What experiences equipped you with the confidence to work with your peers across the curriculum on how to teach effectively with writing?

**CR:** Your question takes me back to graduate school once again. I was an elderly grad student with considerable experience in the work world when I showed up at the U of MN in 1992—I was the second oldest person in my cohort. I paid close attention to TA training and learned a great deal from it. After a few quarters of teaching and observing fellow TAs as they taught, I decided to apply for an administrative job on the team that planned and delivered TA training. I was also invited to work with Chris Anson, who directed Minnesota's composition program at the time, on a dual enrolment program called College in the Schools. He and I planned and delivered workshops for the high school teachers who taught the equivalent of the Minnesota first-year writing course in their schools for college credit.

Those years of TA training and working with (and observing) the high school teachers persuaded me that faculty are the smartest, best, and most challenging students anyone could ask for. As such, they deserve the best that leaders have to offer—a message that Steve Wilhoit from the University of Dayton and I tried to convey last summer for the Writing Programs Administrator (WPA) workshop on faculty development. Teaching one's peers cannot be done on the fly. Careful preparation of materials and respect for that audience foster a positive climate for learning on the part of all involved. All of this boils down to a personal mission to take all students seriously, from the nervous fall term frosh to the seasoned and brilliant colleague.

**TZ:** Even with this background, it must have been a little daunting to take on the direction of the very first WAC program in the country. According to Chuck Bazerman and his co-authors' *Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum*, for example, not only was Carleton's the first WAC program but also, in 1975, Carleton's program was the subject of one of the first accounts of WAC as a writing movement in an article written by Harriet Sheridan in the *ADE Bulletin*: "Teaching Writing Extra-territorially: Carleton College." And, in yet another first, Carleton's program linked peer tutors with Writing in the Disciplines (WID) courses, a model Sheridan brought to Brown University when she established their Writing Fellows program (Bazerman et al 26, 110). Can you tell us about your own first steps when you took over direction of what you and Bill Condon characterized as a static program in your "Taxonomy" article?

**CR:** Terry, what you don't know is that I have a complicated relationship with Carleton. I worked there as a staff member in several different jobs for about ten years before I decided to do grad school. I left assuming I would not be back. I hoped to finish the degree and find a job somewhere, doing something that involved teaching writing. To my great surprise, just as I was finishing my dissertation research, a part-time, one-year position opened up at Carleton, and friends encouraged me to apply. I'd been gone five years, and I contacted the associate dean in charge of the search to see if my application would be welcomed. I was urged to interview and I got the job, which was mostly faculty development in WAC, complete with an office, a computer, and time to work on my dissertation. That one-year stint developed into a hybrid administrative-teaching position, and I'm still there.

In addition to the good fortune of landing a job, I returned to a place with which I was already well acquainted and also knew where the bodies were buried. Furthermore, I was supervised by associate dean Elizabeth Ciner, a lively and imaginative career administrator with a background in writing instruction as part of her own graduate study. Neither of us knew much about assessment, but we did know that Carleton had

outgrown part of the innovative early WAC model described in the Sheridan piece you cite. Assessment was that program's weakness, as Clara Hardy, Bill Condon, and I explain in a 2002 piece in *The WAC Journal* ("WAC for the Long Haul: A Tale of Hope"). It was Liz Ciner who latched on to an invitation from the Bush Foundation in St. Paul to submit a proposal for faculty development that would address our WAC program somehow. She wrote the planning grant, and I wrote most of the subsequent full grant proposal, which was funded for three years and renewed for three more. The goal of the planning grant was to learn about writing assessment; to do so we invited Bill Condon, Marty Townsend, and Kathleen Blake Yancey to campus to work with faculty, writing tutors, and our Learning and Teaching Center to educate us. Prepared by those brilliant tutorials, we were able to put together a proposal that linked faculty development to writing assessment through the vehicle of a sophomore portfolio.

For the full proposal, we were wise enough to request course releases for three senior faculty to do a lot of the heavy lifting as we extended education about writing assessment through faculty workshops, brown bags, visiting speakers, and the faculty governance system. Neither Liz nor I were tenure-able, and we were well aware of the need to proceed carefully. Our faculty ambassadors from classics, economics, and physics and astronomy represented the program, answered questions, offered reasoned positions, and defused anxiety. They also took a fair amount of flak, and for that I owe them my profound gratitude. Without their collaboration and persistence, writing assessment at Carleton would look very different than it does today.

**TZ:** While the influence of Kathi Yancey and Bill Condon can be seen in your decision to use portfolio assessment, what made you decide that a sophomore portfolio was the place to begin? Why not a junior or senior portfolio, in other words?

**CR:** Carleton's previous writing assessment was often postponed until the eve of graduation, effectively pulling whatever teeth the writing requirement had. The decision on writing proficiency came through one course (any WAC course) and was rendered by one professor, period. Most students passed easily, yet they complained that the requirement was inconsistent and arbitrary. Faculty complained that students did not take it seriously. Everyone was right.

Therefore, we wanted to place the assessment early enough in a student's career that shortcomings could be addressed as the student worked through advanced courses in the major as well as the capstone. Carleton students declare a major at the end of the sophomore year. Timing the portfolio assessment to coincide makes sense to students and gives faculty a heads up if new majors have writing weaknesses as evidenced through the portfolio.

**TZ:** Carleton's assessment process has been recognized by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Council of Writing Program Administrators in a white paper and in their gallery of model programs (<http://wpacouncil.org/CarletonColl>). While readers may be familiar with your portfolio assessment process (or can read about it on the WPA site), I'm interested in what has drawn you to writing assessment as a process and as the subject of much of your scholarship. What's most interesting and engaging to you about assessing writing?

**CR:** Maybe it's engaging because I learned about it out of exigency. It was the work that had to be addressed when I came on board in my current role, and there was no avoiding it. Now that I sort of get it, I tend to be a bit evangelistic. Connecting assessment with faculty development would never have occurred to me had we not worked closely with the Bush Foundation. Having to plan activities within the grant budget and report annually on results focused the work. As I wrote those reports and contracted with visitors and planned workshops, I could perceive the college changing around me. Assessment became—in most of my colleagues' minds—a means of enacting their strong sense of responsibility to their students. For them to encounter student work in the variety that a college-wide portfolio makes possible meant that they actively sought out colleagues with innovative assignments. Talking about teaching and specifically about teaching writing has taken on an importance that I did not imagine to be possible. Consequently, courses and assignments exhibit more specific, measurable goals, and faculty have adopted teaching practices to improve their students' experience.

Simply put, I speak and write about assessment with the convert's zeal—particularly as it informs faculty development.

**TZ:** In your and Bill Condon's "Taxonomy" article, you note that the sophomore portfolio became a model for quantitative reasoning across the curriculum. Will you talk a bit about the Quantitative Inquiry, Reasoning, and Knowledge (QuIRK) initiative you've been involved in? What is it and what is your role?

**CR:** Conversations about what we now call QuIRK originated in the early 2000s among natural scientists who lamented the disinclination of students to apply their knowledge of mathematics in courses that followed, say, the calculus sequence. Faculty were frustrated by having to re-teach concepts and techniques. As discussion continued, the focus shifted from sophisticated math knowledge to the use of data as evidence in arguments as a measure of critical thinking. The typical example: no one can read *The New York Times* without knowing how to read a graph, as well as interpret ratios, percentages, and claims about probability. This version of quantitative

literacy spoke eloquently to social scientists, particularly in psychology and economics, who picked up the ball and ran with it.

Research on quantitative literacy (QL) or quantitative reasoning (QR) programs elsewhere revealed that most schools administered a test to new students during orientation and directed those who performed poorly to a QR or QL course to cover the basics. As I attended these discussions, I was thrilled to hear my colleagues observe that “inoculation” was inappropriate for true QL, citing literature that urged across-the-curriculum programs in QL—similar to WAC. But, the question became, how to fund a program with WAC-ish machinery that would have to educate faculty broadly and provide some sort of assessment.

At this point, a colleague in geology piped up and observed that the sophomore portfolio welcomes data-driven prose. We could grab a random sample of student papers and look at them. We did, and we learned that students did a fine job of using QR when the assignment specifically required it. If they were not cued, they not only overlooked QR, but they passed up opportunities to use it, even if their sources were QR-laden. This evidence, based in writing assessment, proved persuasive for funding.

My role has ranged from sponsoring early WAC/QR workshops (before QuIRK had funding) to learning how to import QR into my writing courses to participating in QR assessment to continuing to co-sponsor workshops. I have consistently served on the ad hoc collective that administers QuIRK. What I have learned has transformed my teaching by pointing students toward the power of data to lend precision and authority to their work.

**TZ:** I know you’ve been working with John Bean in the area of writing and quantitative reasoning. How did you two happen to begin working together on QuIRK initiatives?

**CR:** I don’t remember exactly how our collaboration all went down, but I was able to interest John in putting together a workshop on Writing With Numbers. The emphasis, you will not be surprised to learn, was on using data rhetorically. For example, he would provide a table from the U.S. Census, and we worked in groups to find the “stories” in that table and express them as arguments. We’ve had variations on that workshop at Carleton several times, including a recent one on Speaking With Numbers. Before his recent retirement and after working with Carleton faculty, John Bean was doing a lot of work on QR at Seattle University, where he was their long-time WAC director. He has published on some of that work with colleagues from both natural science and finance programs.

I'm planning a workshop soon on responding to student writing (everyone's favorite anxiety) with attention to helping students improve their use of data as evidence. As I slowly learn more about statistics, I am getting better about responding to students' attempts to employ data rhetorically. Many of my colleagues are way ahead of me, and I think the workshop could benefit all of us.

**TZ:** You clearly have plenty on your plate, but I'm wondering if you have another project in the works that you'd like to talk about.

**CR:** Well, yes. Carleton has landed external grants for a bunch of curricular initiatives. In addition to WAC and QuIRK, we have or have had programs in Visual Learning, Global Engagement, Arts and Technology, Civic Engagement, and more. These efforts have offered students and faculty rich educational experiences. However, the only ones that are staffed and have budget lines are WAC and Civic Engagement. When funding lapses, either the initiative limps along informally for a while, or perhaps a faculty member accepts short-term leadership responsibility, compensated by a course release and a summer stipend. Because our colleagues are energetic and scrupulous, this system sort of works. However, groups can find themselves at odds over support staff, workshop dates, facilities, scheduling speakers, and other programming efforts that splinter audiences and dilute the effectiveness of the programs. As independent contractors, faculty enjoy being in charge of their programs. To some extent, alas, the autonomy that faculty cherish is preserved at the cost of the big picture.

I am trying to make the case that we could achieve some administrative and programmatic coherence through something like a Communication Across Campus (CXC) Program that would coordinate as many initiatives as are willing plus formalize an initiative on public speaking and fold in some co-curricular programs. Communication can mean pretty much anything, right? Both our institutional assessment plan and our strategic plan emphasize communication, broadly construed, so a foundation exists. Whether this idea will sell in any general way remains to be seen.

**TZ:** Well, building a new program is certainly an ambitious undertaking, especially when added to all that you're currently doing, including, if I may shift focus, your contributions to *The WAC Journal*, as a member of the editorial board and as author of the regularly featured WAC-leader interviews. You've now conducted twelve interviews. How do you decide whom to interview? And whom would you still like to interview?



**CR:** It varies. I ask people I know well, trying to vary gender, kind of school, scholarly interests, age, and so on. As is my habit, I work through relationships. So far, no one has turned me down. Call it a lack of imagination, but I would hesitate to interview someone I do not know. Why? Because I would have a hard time knowing what to ask without some shared personal connections. I'm glad you asked whom I'd still like to interview because I am kicking myself that I never interviewed Greg Colomb, who, as you know, died way too young. We became close friends, personally and professionally, and his work has influenced me a great deal. I miss him.

**TZ:** Is there any one thing you've learned from all those good WAC colleagues that really stands out for you?

**CR:** All of the interviewees have been generous with their time and shown abundant interest in everything. They have also cracked me up in one way or another. Laughing with friends is always a good thing. I've learned in detail about programs at other places, mostly large universities, which helps me put our work at a tiny place like Carleton in perspective. I'm in awe of what some of our colleagues, yourself included, have accomplished at huge universities with required writing courses, hordes of graduate students, and, increasingly, large numbers of adjuncts. I have none of that to manage at Carleton. Partly as a result of the interviews, I see my campus as a small laboratory where an experiment in connecting assessment and faculty development has succeeded. The same experiment might well have failed in a larger institutional context with fewer campus-wide relationships.

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