Of Evolutions and Mutations: Assessment as Tactics for Action in WAC Partnerships

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In "A Taxonomy of WAC Programs," William Condon and Carol Rutz recently put forth a typology built on location and momentum for understanding WAC programs. Location, the authors explain, "is all about where WAC is: who is doing it, what courses it affects, where to find it in assignments, what resources it consumes, and so forth—the identity of the WAC program" (360). Momentum instead "involves outcomes; it is WAC in action, located in widely disparate sites, moving on many fronts at once—momentum is what WAC *does*" (360). Throughout this typology, we can see a natural progression that programs make as they evolve from a foundational type, to an established type, to an integrated type, to finally an institutional change agent type across five dimensions such as primary goals, organization, and indicators of success. It is clear that as a WAC program moves (or evolves) across this typology from a foundational type to an institutional change agent, the level of autonomy and influence expands, meaning that its work becomes more distributed across an institution.[1]

Ostensibly, this metamorphosis from one end of the spectrum to the other requires a slow, long-term, strategic plan for acquiring resources and expanding. Indeed, most of the literature involving WAC evolution and sustainability evokes this language of strategy and strategic efforts. This focus makes sense given that administrative endeavors typically involve shoring up resources and expanding programs. However, we think that there remain salient benefits to adding tactical thinking to strategic planning in WAC work. Borrowing from Michel de Certeau's framework on strategies and tactics, we argue that thinking tactically can 1) lead to increased administrative agency—particularly for WPAs and graduate WPAs (gWPAs) who spearhead WAC programs that are not on the path towards evolving—and 2) reveal new strategies that can aid in administrative work as particular WAC programs and partnerships mutate (rather than evolve). We begin by providing a brief overview of how strategies have come into play in WAC scholarship and then discuss examples from our own experiences of how we have brought tactics into our WAC contexts—both involving assessment work. We end with a discussion of what thinking tactically might mean more broadly.

WAC Strategies toward Expansion and Evolution

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau makes the distinction between strategies and tactics. A strategy, he writes, is "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. . . . As in management, every 'strategic' rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its 'own' place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an environment" (36). Strategies aim to create a space that one can call his or her own from which to plan further strategies. Moreover, once a place has been established—whether this place is physical (for example, space for the writing center on campus) or figurative (room in the general education curriculum for first-year English)—strategies are enacted that look to the future and impose a careful management of power relations to protect the space that has been secured and plan for future growth. As Lauren Andres notes, "Strategies are related to determinism and regulation [in that] they have an explicit aim in the production of space and the realisation of a set of objectives and of a specific action plan" (764).

Historically, WAC work has been focused on finding strategies to do just that. James Kinneavy, writing in 1983, when *writing across the curriculum* was a fairly new term in writing studies and across institutions, states that WAC was best situated to tackle the literacy crisis of the time because unlike the "Band-Aid" approaches that had been tried previously, WAC could "be a total immersion, horizontally across all departments and vertically at all levels of high school and college" (13). And of course, one would need careful planning and vision in order to create such an immersive experience far and wide. Much like de Certeau's description of strategy, which is "a triumph of place over time," we can see how WAC had/has the potential of carving out its own place spatially (across all departments) and temporally (at all levels of education).

Indeed, by 1989, Susan H. McLeod wrote that she was beginning to see WAC entering a new stage in its development—one in which programs were "moving toward permanence in their institutions" (338). Not surprisingly, this permanence takes place by expanding—for example, reaching out to both newcomers and veterans on campus to attend workshops and requiring a number of writing intensive courses in the general education curriculum (339). And in order to create permanent curricular implementation, WAC requires faculty to integrate writing into their courses. To illustrate, the University of Chicago's Little Red Schoolhouse has acted as a WAC resource on campus for several decades. In describing their WAC program in 1990, Joseph M. Williams and Geoffrey G. Colomb state that future work will focus on "expanding the size of the Schoolhouse in order to expand the pool of experienced graduate student lectors" as well as "hiring more faculty to train these programs"

(109). This last point is particularly important for Williams and Colomb given that they state that "unless we expand the number of faculty either by persuading others to participate (unlikely) or hiring new faculty, we will necessarily grow smaller because the faculty now involved in the program are overextended" (109). Such issues have continued to be relevant in all of WAC work across many institutions, not just at the University of Chicago.

Two things are salient here in this drive to increase size by getting more faculty on board WAC programs, which will allow WAC to spread across campus. The first is a move toward accomplishing the vision of WAC and gaining what de Certeau would describe as a *panoptic practice*. When McLeod and others discuss successful WAC programs as those that have cultivated a permanent presence on campus by becoming accepted and integrated throughout the curriculum or when Williams and Colomb visualize the resources that are necessary to enact a far-reaching WAC program, we are reminded that effective strategies not only create a vision but also take view of an entire terrain and learn how to "transform foreign forces [i.e., funding, faculty, curricula, etc.] into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and 'include' them within [this] scope of vision" (de Certeau 37).

Second, this effort for continual growth remains with us today. As we can see, this language is embedded within the evolutionary framework that Condon and Rutz use. In describing the differences between foundational, established, integrated, and institutional change agent WAC programs, they note the shift in goals, funding, and structures that embody each particular type of program. For example, in terms of funding, an established WAC program "has [its] own budget, though often on temporary budget" and uses this funding to make its presence visible in terms of space, staffing, and programming (362). An integrated program, on the other hand, has a budget that "grows to support a more substantial presence" in that an integrated WAC program "is able to become important to other efforts, other programs, other agendas" on campus (371).

And by the time a program evolves into an institutional change agent, it has a very large reach indeed. When describing Washington State University's Critical Thinking Project, the two writers state: "During four years of grant supported activities, the project reached more than 350 individual faculty and helped more than a dozen departments and programs redesign all of parts of students' critical thinking abilities in those concentrations" (375). Other programs such as the University of Minnesota's Writing-Enriched Curriculum project, also "infuse" writing throughout an institution by "engaging each and every department in designing curriculum reform" (375). Evident in both of these examples is the far reach that evolved WAC programs have and the ways in which otherwise foreign spaces are made readable in the pursuit of strategic moves that will help WAC grow.

More recently, Laura Brady has used this evolutionary framework to explore the concept of growth itself in WAC models. In "Evolutionary Metaphors for Understanding WAC/WID," she notes that "[e]volutionary metaphors [such as Condon and Rutz's] help explain and explore patterns, interrelationships, and the conditions under which a program can thrive. The metaphor can also help us understand that not all mutations are adaptive or successful, and that certain conditions threaten a program's survival" (8). That is, as important as developing a portable model for understanding WAC programs (one that can be applied from one institution to another) is tracking the local circumstances that give rise to programs. As Brady notes, "WAC programs do not spring forth fully formed" (11), and to explore how WAC programs change—whether through grand evolutionary transformations or as localized mutative innovations—she proposes a heuristic for exploring the genealogy of WAC programs. Not surprisingly, one of Brady's questions for such exploration focuses squarely on strategic alliances.

This is, of course, as it should be, given that WAC depends on strategic endeavors. However, in this article, we show that despite the necessities for enacting strategies, tactics can also serve as topoi for sustaining WAC partnerships—particularly when WAC initiatives on campus are formative. Some WAC initiatives, after all, may not necessarily "evolve" from one type to another. Rather, some foundational or established WAC initiatives may continue to change—or "mutate"—without necessarily evolving, despite the long-term strategic planning that Condon and Rutz mention (360).

Tactics and Space

That said, directors and coordinators of foundational or established WAC programs may find it useful to adapt a strategic lens when viewing their positionality. According to de Certeau, unlike strategies, which shore up resources and claim space, tactics are short-term bursts of "isolated actions" that capitalize on opportunities rather than on an extended vision (36). Moreover, tactics are connected to *kairos* in that one must have the wherewithal to identify and take advantage of the opportunities afforded by a particular situation (xx). This makes sense. One cannot plan for every eventuality. And in those moments that are out of one's control, one needs to be ready to seize the opportunity to gain an advantage.

In comparison to strategies, tactics are spontaneous and "based on the re-use and on the non-possession of space whose regulation and control is ensured by other stakeholders" (Andres 764). Tactics also do not promise anything over a long period of time; they are opportunistic, temporary, and lack what de Certeau refers to as "a proper locus" (37). Thinking of WAC work in this way changes how we approach long term (and short term) goals for our programs. If we expand our focus beyond

accumulating and redefining spaces into readable loci across campus, what exactly would that mean for administrators of WAC programs?

Recently, Elizabeth Wardle has noted how writing program administrators can benefit from paying attention to and seizing opportune moments that develop within their institutions. Specifically, Wardle details how the English department at the University of Central Florida was able to take advantage of a kairotic moment to implement a new "Writing about Writing" (WAW) curriculum and, at the same time, reduce class size, in large part due to the opportunities created by UCF's president to improve undergraduate education. Wardle's experience at UCF was not too different from what we would find at other institutions: first-year English courses were over-enrolled and taught by contingent faculty, and they covered a wide swath of content from course to course. Wardle's arguments to administrators allowed instructors to attend workshops on WAW pedagogy, which helped to mitigate the belief that anyone can teach writing, regardless of training and experience in studying writing; this change had the simultaneous effect of helping to create a more consistent curriculum. And Wardle is quick to note that such changes occurred in large part to being attuned to kairos. "Sometimes there are moments," she writes, "when change is more possible than usual, and as rhetoricians and writing program administrators, we can and must be prepared to take advantage of them" (n. pag.).

Although Wardle's example stems from first-year writing program administration, it does highlight how thinking tactically might look in broader writing administration contexts. Tactics may not necessarily come directly from the work one has invested in a program. Rather, the opening can emerge from outside circumstances beyond the immediate control of WAC administrators and WPAs. We expand on Wardle's experience by highlighting how tactical actions might look in a WAC context.

Animal Sciences WAC Partnership

There is no officially recognized WAC program at Purdue University, where both authors earned their doctorate degrees. We do not have a director of WAC nor writing workshops that faculty from other disciplines take to introduce writing concepts and assignments into their courses. Few campus-wide structures of this kind exist at Purdue because its individual colleges have traditionally established their own degree requirements. While Purdue instituted a core curriculum in 2013, establishing a mechanism for campus-wide requirements, the robust infrastructure required by a formal WAC program is not part of the history or culture of the institution. As founding Purdue Writing Lab director Muriel Harris puts it, faculty who do assign writing do so with "varying goals and varying awareness of what writing can do to enhance learning" (90).

In lieu of a formal WAC program, faculty and graduate students from the English department collaborate frequently with other departments on campus. Many of these collaborations involve the Writing Lab, which, as Harris wrote in 1999, often functions as a "de facto WAC Center." Harris argues that, while writing centers can take on a degree of faculty development work on campuses with no WAC program, limitations on their resources mean they cannot replace a WAC program. That said, she maintains that "there should be some recognition that there is merit in assisting with small changes even when there may be no likelihood of large-scale ones" (Harris 101). In the past, Writing Lab staff have consulted faculty in curriculum development, led classroom-based workshops, and given these collaborations a degree of permanence by hosting materials on the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL).[2]

Sometimes, ad hoc collaborations between the English department and other departments grow into long-term partnerships. However, because these partnerships have developed organically and not through any official, centralized program, they look very different depending on the department. For example, graduate students in rhetoric and composition have been able to serve as WAC coordinators for the School of Mechanical Engineering for the last several years, a relationship that grew out of Writing Lab-led workshops. In this role, a graduate student is responsible for leading workshops on writing instruction and evaluating writing assignments for teaching assistants who teach several sections of mechanical engineering courses.

While the School of Mechanical Engineering has instituted a workshop model of WAC, the partnership with the animal sciences (ANSC) department on the other hand has taken on a service model of WAC (see Jablonski 104–10 for the distinction between these types of WAC programs). This program has been described elsewhere (Sánchez and Nall) so we will not spend too much time detailing its intricacies or history here except to point out the following:

- This partnership has entered its second decade.
- Two graduate students serve as WAC consultants who are embedded in a specific ASNC course on Animal Breeding and Genetics (ANSC 311).
- Consultants are responsible for developing and grading student assignments in this course (such as professional memos, letters, and emails) as well as providing workshops and presentations on specific writing aspects (such as the language used in a beef simulation technical report).
- Graduate students typically spend two semesters in this role, but sometimes have stayed on for up to four semesters, which differs significantly from the mechanical engineering partnership, in which graduate students have stayed on for multiple years at a time.

In both of these roles (ANSC and mechanical engineering), graduate students are paid for their work through the different departments that are requesting WAC work. Goals for the WAC partnership are decided on collaboratively with faculty stakeholders. ANSC WAC coordinators do not have supervisors and are responsible for finding their own replacements once they have decided to move on. Seemingly, this partnership can be most closely classified as foundational, according to Condon and Rutz's taxonomy. In terms of its primary goals, it came about because faculty saw a need for incorporating more writing in the curriculum (365); its source of funding comes from the goodwill of an administrative entity (362); and its structure depends on a "small group of collaborators" to keep it going (362).

Below, we discuss how we each seized kairotic moments in deploying assessment and evaluation processes in tactical ways—not to expand the spaces that our WAC partnership with ANSC occupied (and thus shift how it can be categorized according to Condon and Rutz's typology)—but to safeguard it as it continued to mutate over time. A few pieces of information should be given before we proceed. First, to avoid confusion, it is important to mention that although we each served as coordinators for the ANSC WAC partnership, we did so during different time periods and with different colleagues as the second coordinator. Fernando served for three semesters from the fall of 2013 to the fall of 2014, and Daniel held the position immediately beforehand between fall of 2012 and spring of 2013. Additionally, we would like to point out that our primary intention in discussing these experiences is to showcase the work that can take place by thinking tactically. Even though our examples showcase the at times complicated and even frustrating work of handling formative WAC partnerships, we do not wish to use this piece to highlight the benefits of writing instruction to Purdue students or advocate for a more formal WAC program. Rather, our goal is more portable: namely, to showcase the strength of using resources from a liminal position of power in the face of larger structural threats within the context of shepherding formative WAC programs, which can be useful within other institutional contexts.

Tactics in Play

Fernando

Although lacking a centralized WAC program affords ANSC WAC coordinators the ability to create their own power structures on a micro-scale (developing curricula on their own with input from content faculty and making personnel decisions about replacements, for example), such a vacuum leaves the partnership susceptible to macro-level power structures. To illustrate, in the Spring of 2014, there was much discussion throughout our campus—a four-year public institution with an

undergraduate student population of approximately thirty thousand—that our new president would like to implement standardized assessment to measure how much our students were learning. In his discussions of student learning, our president had professed to subscribe to the points made by Richard Arum and Josipa Roska in *Academically Adrift*. Briefly, Arum and Roska argue that students are only learning minimally in college because they are not being asked to read and write enough. Many have taken issue with the authors' methods and findings, for example, in that they do not operationalize their terms sufficiently, make errors in statistical analysis, make sweeping claims, and rely solely on the Collegiate Learning Assessment exam for their data (Haswell; Gunner; Addison and McGee).

My major concern at the time was that if such standardized assessment were to be implemented across campus, it might occlude students' learning about writing in this ANSC course and the WAC component could thus be seen as disposable from a budgetary standpoint. As Martha Townsend has noted, WAC scholarship often cites the lack of programmatic and administrative support structures as a reason for why WAC programs struggle or fail . While the ANSC department has been willing to maintain a budget for WAC instruction, the lack of institutional or even English department investment in our WAC instruction means that we are vulnerable to outside forces attempting to eliminate the work of graduate student WAC coordinators if it is viewed as nonessential.

Without the layer of tenured faculty who are experts in writing to make arguments for the longevity of WAC on campus, I knew that our partnership with ANSC would be vulnerable when discussing it with upper administrators. Turning to de Certeau's conceptualization of tactics would be especially helpful in this particular instance given that de Certeau discusses these terms within the larger context of uneven power structures. Using urban planning, linguistics, and war as a few backdrops, de Certeau showcases how users within systems develop and use their own methods for accomplishing goals in the face of established and intended rules and regulations. This action characterizes a manipulation of a system "by users who are not its makers" (xiii) in the pursuit of a task.

A "way of operating" within a spatial and linguistic power structure might be reflected in the following example.

> . . . a North African living in Paris or Roubaix (France) insinuates *into* the system imposed on him by the construction of a low-income housing development or of the French language the ways of "dwelling" (in a house or language) peculiar to his native Kabylia. He superimposes them and, by that combination, creates for himself a space in which he can find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him,

> he establishes within it degrees of *plurality* and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation. (30).

Within my context, the purpose, then, was to make the necessity of the WAC partnership visible should the need arise to justify it. Tactically, this would mean using methods that borrowed from the values of the imposing system (namely assessment), but which would allow me to create a space to find "a way of using" the constraining order to showcase counternarratives that could speak against any reductive "students did not score high on writing" arguments. I set about looking toward the future of the partnership and to answer questions that spoke to WAC's relevance within the ANSC curriculum.

However, given my positioning as a transient graduate student with little authority, I had to, as de Certeau describes, "make do" with the few resources available to me. Specifically, this meant conducting a small-scale local assessment project which would connect the writing that students produce in the WAC classroom with the writing goals that are valued beyond the classroom. In this way, I could better showcase the ways in which the partnership addressed the values that the department placed on writing. And it would better showcase, in Condon's words, how "assessments designed locally to address local initiatives and contexts are more likely to portray those contexts accurately and treat the stakeholders fairly than are large-scale state, regional, or national assessments" (37).

The literature on approaches to WAC assessment has continued to expand in recent decades. In 1988, Toby Fulwiler argued that despite the fact that WAC programs had been around for over a decade, "no comprehensive evaluations of writing across the curriculum programs have been completed" (61), making it difficult for WAC directors and administrators to understand why programs succeed or fail. Since then, there have been a few more attempts to put forth robust conversations about WAC assessment. In 1997, Kathleen Blake Yancey and Brian Huot published their edited collection *Assessing Writing Across the Curriculum*. At the time, it was much needed, as one of the contributors, Meg Morgan reiterated Fulwiler's point, noting that "nothing much has happened in print that provides direction for WAC directors in their efforts to assess their programs" (143). While the collection indeed signaled a more focused attention to the issue of assessment in WAC, Bill Condon, writing four years later, lamented that "only two selections [in the collection] . . . address student outcomes from WAC, and only two others . . . address the administrative audience for WAC evaluation. The rest address the 'same old, same old' issues that surround faculty development *qua* curriculum reform" (32). Indeed, most of the texts on assessment did focus on WAC faculty and workshop evaluation and development.

More recently, however, there have been broader discussions of programmatic assessment in WAC. For example, in "Assessing Writing in Cross-Curricular Programs," Anson develops a model of WAC assessment that takes into account the

contexts within which WAC programs exist—from an individual context where "a lone teacher who assigns and supports writing in his or her course, outside of any systematic emphasis on writing" (102) to an institutional context wherein institutions develop and regulate requirements for WAC instruction—and the levels of assessment that can take place (from instructional interventions in the classroom to more formal investigations). The goal, as Anson explains, would be to find appropriate alignments between these two axes depending on one's context in order produce appropriate assessment projects that focus on the outcomes of each particular WAC program. Adding to that, in 2009, the journal *Across the Disciplines* published a special issue specifically focused on WAC assessment. In their introduction to their issue, the editors, Kistler, Yancey, Taczak, and Szysmanski, note that as WAC programs have spread and grown, they have looked very different depending on their specific contexts and therefore WAC administrators have implemented "a diversity of methods to meet their particular WAC/CAC assessment needs" (n. pag.). Yet, behind the different data-gathering techniques—whether they be qualitatively or quantitatively driven—the editors emphasize that a recurring theme is an interest in documenting the value of these programs. This interest is not surprising given how invested WAC administrators can become in their programs and how motivated they can become to showcase the importance of their program.

With this in mind, my assessment work began by consulting with writing assessment professionals at national and international conferences such as the Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference in Bloomington, IL and the International Writing Across the Curriculum conference in Minneapolis, MN, both during the summer of 2014. Three goals generally came up in these discussions within the context of the ANSC partnership:

- Conducting a "genre reality check" by contacting current employers and seeing what genres employees are asked to compose in to help determine the viability and applicability of the genres that are taught as part of the WAC partnership
- Contacting recent alumni from the program to obtain the same information regarding genre and purposes for writing that they experience
- Bringing in outside animal sciences professionals who had graduated from Purdue's program and asking them to talk to current students about the type of writing that they perform on a regular basis.

In essence, my main research questions were how the WAC curriculum for Animal Science 311: Animal Breeding and Genetics was meeting the needs of animal science majors and what changes might be necessary to implement in order for it to align more closely with the types of writing that they may be asked to perform in the

workforce. In this way, I wanted to collect data on a local level that would describe how our partnership functioned and could function in line with the goals of professionals in the field of animal sciences.

Human subjects approval was obtained to distribute surveys to employers and recent ANSC alumni who had taken ANSC 311 within the last ten years. A list of employer representatives (mostly recruiters) and alumni to contact were provided by the alumni coordinator. To further aid with response rates, the coordinator and I agreed that surveys to both populations should be kept short. Therefore, the following questions were asked to ANSC employers:

1. Name of your company (optional).
2. Please describe the type of work that your employees with backgrounds in animal sciences do on a regular basis at your company.
3. Please describe the writing that your employees with backgrounds in animal sciences have to do on a regular basis at your company.
4. Whom do your employees with a background in animal sciences have to write to on a regular basis in your company?
5. How often would you estimate that your recent employees with a background in animal sciences have to write to these people?
6. What writing skills or writing experiences do you look for when hiring new employees with a background in animal sciences?
7. What writing skills or experiences do you wish your new employees with a background in animal sciences learned while still in school?

ANSC alumni were asked the following questions:

1. Name (Will not be shared, will be de-identified)
2. What year did you graduate from Purdue?
3. What was your major at Purdue?
4. Briefly describe your job responsibilities and the type of company that you work for.
5. What types of writing do you do at work for your job?
6. Rank how much time you spend performing each of these types of writing.
7. Whom do you write to or for on a regular basis on the job?
8. Briefly explain why/what you write to each of the following people (from question 7).
9. What are your strengths as a writer?
10. What do you wish you could improve as a writer?

Initial requests to complete the surveys were sent out to both population groups during November 2014; a subsequent reminder was emailed in January 2015. In total,

twenty employer surveys were sent and seven were received. Fourteen alumni were contacted and eleven responded.

While this article is not necessarily about the results of the assessment project, I include the results obtained from a few questions to highlight how those results will help to further the conversation about the value of WAC in ANSC—in essence, what was gained from this tactical work. In regards to what genres writers compose on the job, alumni noted that they wrote "medical forms" for certain audiences while others communicated that they wrote to a certain audience to "influence or explain." Much like animal science employers, alumni mentioned descriptive workplace genres or description itself as being valuable in the writing that they produce. However, alumni also indicated that persuasive writing was just as necessary for their writing in the workplace—much more than employers seemed to mention. I should note that there was nothing to link these particular alumni with the employers that responded, meaning that the alumni respondents could work for different companies from where employer respondents work. What became clear, however, was that ANSC 311 students will have to write for multiple purposes through various genres once they work in the professional world.[3]

Another notable finding is the split between the skills that alumni and employers value. In their responses, alumni mentioned a range of different skills that they use or wish that they could improve. These range from being "grammar-minded" to an ability to "speak to many audiences" in terms of current strengths (Appendix 1) and a desire for better stylistic clarity and creativity as far as strengths alumni would like to develop (Appendix 2). Employers, on the other hand, only seem to be concerned with graduates' grammatical abilities (Appendix 3). Clearly, based even on these few responses, we can already see the work that needs to be done from a pedagogical and an administrative perspective.

While this assessment tactic began as a way of reality-checking the genres that are taught in the WAC component of ANSC 311, the tactic changed over the course of the months when it was implemented. The fact that alumni, much like employers, reported a wide range of genres did not necessarily mean that we needed to teach students to compose for every eventuality. Rather, when it came to building arguments for the importance of the WAC partnership, we needed to shift gears and refocus on the overall skills that students reported using or desiring to possess. More so, with these sample responses (as limited as they might have been), future WAC coordinators would have a roadmap of what to concentrate on when they revised assignments or provided lesson plans. To illustrate, although we provided students with opportunities to write to different types of audiences—for example, the memos were written to inside supervisors, while letters were sometimes written to outside clients—could there be a way to expand on this need for students to practice reaching

different audiences, which many alumni emphasized? Perhaps more could be done to connect students with actual scenarios that alumni experience in the animal science field rather than having the instructor of the class create a scenario for students to respond to. In this way, their writing might be seen as fitting an actual need in the community of practitioners where they may one day work.

Similarly, a takeaway from the data was that WAC coordinators should not overlook grammatical issues, as nearly all of the employer respondents stated that this was something that ANSC writers needed to improve. This takeaway poses the challenge of how to address grammar productively, as research indicates that grammar instruction is ineffective when taught without the proper context (see Hartwell; Harris and Rowan). At the same time, the responses from employers provide an opportunity to explore further what was meant by the term "grammar." This term could refer to spelling, mechanics, sentence construction, or even appropriate vocabulary and style. Having a more concrete understanding of what grammar errors occur most frequently, and how style may be implicated in this discussion, may help WAC coordinators prioritize instruction in a way that connects grammar and style to students' writing context. From an administrative and research perspective, future WAC coordinators could reach out again to employers and determine what exactly the term "grammar" might mean for this specific population. While the threat of standardized assessment still looms over the institution as a whole even after I have graduated and serve as assistant professor at another institution, I am confident that I have contributed to the tools that future WAC coordinators will need to argue for the continued funding of the ANSC WAC partnership should they need to.

Daniel

During roughly the same time, having already acted as a WAC coordinator for ANSC 311, I also became interested in how the partnership between English and animal sciences could continue to improve and to demonstrate its efficacy. With this goal in mind, I knew that agriculture and animal sciences scholarship primarily values writing instruction in terms of career preparation, in its promise to prepare students for workplace writing (Barry and Orth) and to instill the habits of mind needed to continue learning on the job (Orr). Given this priority, I, too, focused an inquiry on the college-to-career transition. However, while Fernando gathered survey data pertaining to writing skills and genres that employers and alumni value, my assessment project centered on collecting students' perceptions of how the ANSC 311 course was preparing them for their future careers. In this way, although these two projects were in no way coordinated, they provided complementary bursts of input that helped reveal a larger dimension of our WAC partnership.

I was mostly interested in studying student perceptions of their coursework's future relevance because much of the research on transfer of learning has demonstrated a connection between how undergraduates perceive the future relevance of writing assignments and their ability to transfer their learning across varied contexts (Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak; Driscoll & Wells). Moreover, as educational psychologists Kevin Pugh and David Bergin suggest, motivational factors influence transfer in terms of initial learning, the initiation of transfer attempts, and persistence on transfer tasks (156). This meant devising a protocol that would assess both perception and motivation in ANSC students on the coursework that they produced. As mentioned previously, students in the course produce a technical report, which seemed like the most appropriate assignment about which to collect information given that it occupies a very discipline-specific place in the curriculum. This beef simulation report, or "beefsim," as a simulation, is meant explicitly to replicate an out-of-school experience with animal breeding. In the simulation, students are given a "herd" of cattle and make selection decisions over ten "years" with the goal of increasing yearling weight. Students then report on their selection process and findings in a technical report. Through focus groups, I wanted to learn what connections students were making between this classroom simulation and their future work on the job. I also wanted to begin to see whether those perceptions of relevance affected students' approaches to completing the work. My overarching goal was to help future WAC coordinators identify existing successes and marshal students' own language about college-to-career transitions to better support this transition.

Focus groups were a natural choice for this inquiry because they allowed me to elicit opinions and memories participants would not think of on their own and broadly ascertain consensus. More importantly, they provided an opportunity to collect data from a large number of participants in a short time, to take the pulse of as many students in ANSC 311 as possible in order to relay that input to the program and ask new questions. In April 2014, I conducted focus groups with twenty-one out of sixty-two enrolled ANSC 311 students. All participants were juniors or seniors majoring in animal sciences. At the time, students had just submitted their beefsim reports less than a week before and had not yet received grades. I developed these focus groups with three research questions:

1. What connections, if any, do students see between their work on the beef simulation assignment and their future professional work?
2. How do students use resources, particularly teacher talk, to complete the beef simulation assignment?
3. How do students' perceptions of future transfer relate to their resource use, if at all?

I asked questions such as:

- Tell me about your future career goals.
- How do you see your beefsim work applying to or preparing you for your future work?
- Think back to when you were working on the beefsim project. What was it like?
- What was the most helpful in completing the report?
- What would you want future students to know about the beefsim project?

Here, I will highlight a few key points from the results that might help future WAC coordinators make situated judgments. First, participants disagreed considerably about the beefsim's relevance to their careers. This is perhaps unsurprising given the variety of career goals they reported: most said they plan to attend veterinary school after graduating, while others said they want to attend graduate school in animal nutrition, return to their family farms, pursue sales, or do agricultural extension work, while a few said they were undecided. This means that a majority of participants do not plan to be breeders (or "producers," terms they used interchangeably), though they expect to have varying degrees of contact with breeders.

There was also significant disagreement about relevance even within a pre-vet track. These students connected the relevance of the beefsim to the ways they expected to work with breeders and how they saw the relationship between breeding and care. The focus groups contained multiple exchanges in which participants debated whether, as veterinarians, they would only need to understand general breeding concepts such as "knowing what affects what" or if the more advanced quantitative analysis required by the beefsim would also be useful when working with breeders.

In addition to seeing vet/breeder relationships and the value of quantitative knowledge differently, participants also understood relevance in terms of the genre of the research report. Many participants did not expect to write a similar scientific report in the future, leading them to adamantly reject the assignment, while a few did expect to write more, such as one student planning to attend graduate school for animal nutrition. Whether they valued the report assignment or not, they widely understood genre acquisition and transfer as one-to-one application.

The participants with the most negative feedback demonstrated an underlying rejection of ANSC 311 even having a writing component. A few particularly vocal participants suggested that any "bad writers" who still needed feedback on their writing as juniors and seniors should seek it on their own time. Good writers, in contrast, should not need writing instruction at this level, and forcing it on them is a kind of punishment. These attitudes are a reaction not only to specific assignments but also to the very premise of WAC and suggest a view of writing as a basic skill.

Other participants expressed a milder resistance to the WAC component, suggesting instead that the connections between course content and writing assignments were not always clear, and some assignments might better fit courses earlier in the animal sciences curriculum. This discussion provided a window into students' larger experience of writing in their major, however brief or subjective. Such insight is vital to making informed judgments when presenting the WAC curriculum to students and administrators.

The focus groups were not intended to answer big questions conclusively, but rather to get a quick snapshot of what students that semester were experiencing and thinking. They did not motivate large scale redevelopment of the ANSC 311 writing curriculum, but instead small adjustments to the assignments' rhetorical situations and to how writing was "pitched" to students. These adjustments were made in order to make connections to workplace needs more tangible. Moreover, the focus groups provided insight into many students' fundamental beliefs about writing instruction, such as writing as a basic skill and genre acquisition and transfer as one-to-one application. These beliefs are beyond the reach of pedagogical interventions to neatly resolve. However, an understanding of these beliefs and students' language to describe them can inform WAC coordinators' judgments when making in-the-moment, tactical decisions while meeting with students and faculty, providing written feedback, or arguing for the value of the WAC partnership.

Discussion

By engaging in short, isolated, and uncoordinated bursts of activity, we were able to contribute to the WAC partnership in unique ways from different perspectives. While we had discussed the projects related to the ANSC WAC partnership in passing, we were independent in the work we undertook. This was most likely because of the different roles that we held at the time of each of these projects. Fernando was still a WAC coordinator and thus had a different interest in the future curriculum of the partnership before leaving. Daniel had stepped down as WAC coordinator a year prior to the time of his project. It was only during a meeting in the spring of 2015 with the ANSC instructor and coordinators that we produced our results and began to talk about our work as tactical. Fernando brought up five recommendations which included being aware of grammatical concerns, developing assignments that were descriptive rather than focusing entirely on any particular genre, and emphasizing rhetorical awareness, among others. Daniel's primary recommendations were to frame school-to-work transitions directly and deliberately, tweak assignment guidelines to make relevance explicit, emphasize transferable skills and knowledge, and present genre acquisition and transfer in a nuanced way. Reporting findings to ANSC faculty and then-current WAC coordinators provided an occasion for both groups to

confer on matters of shared concern and discuss each of our perspectives on the issues raised. Our conversation was particularly empowering given the little power we had as graduate students to help the WAC partnership evolve into something other than a foundational enterprise. In this way, we were able to showcase the expertise that we had developed by, as de Certeau describes, converting our competence into authority (7). The knowledge that we had gained about ANSC students and the WAC partnership through our tactical assessment work allowed us to speak with authority and to advocate for certain changes going forward.

Such issues of building authority should not be overlooked within contexts where coordinators have minimal influence within larger power structures. To illustrate, in "Thinking Liminally," Phillips, Shovlin, and Titus argue that graduate WPAs usually occupy a paradoxical space of lack. This means that graduate WPAs lack the "status markers such as a terminal degree, a job description, or a permanent position" (42) that typically come with WPA positions. Such liminal positions might take the form of graduate students having access to writing program budgets but not being able to use those funds or a faculty member with a master's degree running a writing center despite a lack of credentials. Occupying a space of lack (a no-place), the writers note, can result in feelings of powerlessness for liminal WPAs in these various writing program administrative roles. Phillips, Shovlin, and Titus offer a few recommendations for thinking liminally in these instances—assessing how much power one has, assessing other available power, and using institutional impermanence and invisibility to one's advantage (55). These are certainly important suggestions to keep in mind, particularly when positions offer little room to exert institutional power. However, we hope that thinking tactically can help to expand this particular framework—for liminal WPAs or otherwise.

That is, adopting a tactical lens provided us with a larger sense of agency, as we were able to work within our limitedly defined job description and determine how much power we could exert for the sake of helping preserve and improve a writing partnership. As WAC coordinators, we worked with and for the ANSC department but as consultants whose positions could be terminated at any point. We also coordinated with the ANSC 311 faculty member, but we lacked any infrastructural guidance from the English department. Given that tactics naturally spring from an absence of a "proper locus" to call one's own (de Certeau 37), it isn't surprising that we turned to thinking tactically to create knowledge and new narratives about our WAC partnership.

At no point, however, were we under the impression that our work would evolve the writing partnership with ANSC 311 into a something that was more established, or that we would strategically expand into new territory via our methods. Indeed, Fernando undertook his project to help accumulate evidence that the program should

remain the same. While it would be tremendously helpful if more resources were put in place to expand WAC to truly reach across the curriculum, the infrastructure is simply not there. Given that there is no supervisory body composed of established and long-standing associate or full professors overseeing this partnership and that a revolving door of graduate students have been responsible for maintaining it, we saw value in thinking tactically to help keep our partnership viable in the long-run (and to allow for more strategic thinking in the long run). We should be clear that we do not view this partnership in any negative light. While forces beyond our control may improve or worsen the conditions of our WAC partnership, our tactical assessment projects remind us to accept the current circumstances of our WAC work as they are and to remember the constraints within which we navigate.

Since our meeting with ANSC faculty and administrators, some of our recommendations have been implemented and some have not, but our tactics have added to the conversation surrounding the ANSC WAC partnership. Taking advantage of an opening allowed us to showcase the work that still needs to happen within our partnership and continue our discussions of how it might change in the future—without any illusions that it would expand beyond what it already is. Indeed, to illustrate how this partnership continues to change, changes in ANSC faculty availability have caused the WAC component to shift from being embedded in the Animal Breeding and Genetics course to the senior seminar. WAC coordinators teach the same number of students, and teach mostly the same types of assignments, but the context of their work is different now. At the same time, the College of Liberal Arts has begun to take steps toward a writing intensive requirement within the college. Because the English department is housed within Liberal Arts, time will tell how this change will affect its partnerships across campus—whether this means the ANSC WAC partnership will evolve or mutate we cannot tell at this point.

We end by cautioning that thinking tactically does not mean being sloppy with one's methods for engaging in this work. We should keep in mind Toby Fulwiler's cautious words that "measures that are quick and dirty do not seem to prove much" (63). Although Fulwiler is speaking mainly of using qualitative measures to "prove" that WAC initiatives are improving student writing, it is still important to stress the importance of adopting methods that are holistic, robust, and non-reductive across all assessment-based endeavors. Within our particular context of tactical assessment, this meant taking the time to be inclusive of various viewpoints and perspectives, collecting as much data as we could without overwhelming our participants, and listening to the stories that emerged from our results in order to push forward with recommendations.

Local assessment measures can act as tactics that can both help give more valid information on what students value when it comes to writing and be more inclusive

of stakeholders beyond students and administrators. What we have tried to show through these particular interventions is how we, as McLeod and Miraglia encourage, can "jump on the assessment bandwagon and attempt to steer it in the right direction. The danger of all assessment initiatives in education is that they become reductive" (6). WAC programs need to balance stakeholder needs with collecting data that "reflect the complexity of both student learning and the WAC programs, which are structured to facilitate that learning" (6–7).

We have focused in this article on one particular case, but from here we can argue that all WAC administrators and WPAs in general—especially those liminal and graduate WPAs serving in constrained positions—should pay close attention to infrastructural opportunities that present themselves to form meaningful tactics for obtaining stakeholder buy-in; particularly, as Barbara Walvoord has mentioned, when the future of WAC looks to be highly dependent on securing funding and concentrating on institutional concerns (69–70), we may need to look for momentary bursts of activity to help guide our programs along. While thinking tactically may not necessarily allow a WAC program to gain new ground and evolve (as de Certeau notes, a space of tactics cannot build on its own position, as "what it wins, it cannot keep" [37]), it can coordinate rather than distribute—meaning that it can rely on multiple temporary yet deliberate actions to show long-term value.

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Notes

1. While we do not have enough space here to explain in detail the four different types of WAC programs that Condon and Rutz describe in their taxonomy, we provide an overview of each. Foundational programs take hold when the need for more writing instruction is identified; funding for these types of programs largely depends on upper administration; faculty workshops are voluntary. Established WAC programs have their own (often temporary) budget; may have a more visible WAC office space and support staff and may even have course offerings in the curriculum institution-wide. Integrated WAC programs function as part of an institution; they are regularly assessed and have a growing budget; more so than with the previous two types, these programs upper administration

sees the value of integrating and requiring WAC throughout the curriculum. Institutional change agents can drive change on campus independent of upper administration; faculty outside of WAC turn to the WAC program as an entity for guidance (see Condon and Rutz 362–79 for a more detailed account of these types).

2. For further discussion of WAC on Purdue's campus, see Rutz, "Considering WAC from Training and Hiring Perspectives: An Interview with Irwin 'Bud' Weiser of Purdue University" and Bergmann, "The Writing Center as a Site for Engagement."

3. Among the genres reported by ANSC employers and hiring managers were: emails, project plans, Prezis and other presentations, reports, Excel spreadsheets, permits, popular articles, operating procedures, job descriptions, summaries, abstracts, and scholarly peer reviewed papers.

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Appendix 1. Self-reported Strengths of ANSC Graduates.

Detail-oriented; punctuation and grammar-minded; thoroughness; able to express in an articulate manner via written word; professionalism; combining scientific conversation with understandable language.
Concise and literal writing that is easy to understand. Elaborate on activites [sic] when needed
Word structure, choice of words
Ability to articulate my point, and provide great detail. I am also able to speak to many audiences, and use interpersonal savvy to allow communincations [sic] to be understood and not taken the incorrect way.
I believe I have strong content to my pieces of writing.
Technical communication comes easily to me—breaking down a complex subject and making it easier for farmers and producers to understand why they should know about a topic.
I had 7 semesters of Latin in high school and received A's in my English and communications classes. I feel that I am an around decent writer.
I am never at a loss for words
Making difficult or more scientific topics easy to understand.
Being able to relate complex information in an understandable manner.

Appendix 2. Self-Reported Areas for Improvement as Reported by ANSC Graduates.

So much email can be misconstrued—I am constantly trying new ways to bring clarity and focus to the exact meaning of my messages.
Writing more articles instead of just policies and lesson plans
Communicate my thoughts better
The ability to write more scientifically. A larger vocabulary.
I wish to improve spelling and sentence structure.
I wish I had more experience in a diversity of writing styles. My strength in writing lies in technical communications, but I wish I had more creative writing work to showcase for clients.
The ability to write abstracts is always a challenge.
To be able too [sic] flawlessly have a better wording and to be able to communicate my emotions through the message that I am trying to relay.
Specific types of writing—writing for the web, for example, is a different skill than writing for a display or writing for a news release. It would be nice to have a refresher of each of these types.
I wish I was better at technical writing. The most difficult part for me is how simple and boring it is. I like to utilize more complex writing.

Appendix 3: Necessary ANSC Writing Skills as Reported by ANSC Employers.

How to properly address and write, grammar, proper use of punctuation
Grammar, sentence structure, proper punctuation, and writing to different comprehension levels
AS LONG AS REPORTS UTILIZE GOOD GRAMMER [sic], SPELLING AND PUNCTUATION WE ARE GOOD TO GO
New employees that possessed the ability to think and write critically would be an asset. The ability to read, understand, write company policy and enact new regulatory guidelines throughout the company or a department will be an important aspect of our company moving forward.
GOOD GRAMMAR
Business writing
Although this is looking backward, I wish I had more practice writing business and marketing pieces, or even how to structure contract language. Most of the stuff I had to do was pretty scientific in nature. However, perhaps some of this is due to the "Science" emphasis and not the "Agribusiness" emphasis? Perhaps there is more cross-training now. Side note on generalized communications . . . . Maybe there is a need for basic refresher courses/classwork geared toward basic writing skillsets? (Ex/Emails should not be written like an informal texts). Hypocritically and ironically, please ignore the poor grammar usage in this survey.