Panel Summaries
Plenary Panel
Processes for Thinking about WAC's Future

Linda Driskill, Professor
Rice University - Moderator

Panelists
Chris Thaiss, Professor
George Mason University
Carl Lovitt, Associate Dean
Pennsylvania State University
Julie Zeleznik, Doctoral Candidate
Iowa State University
Carol Holder, Director
*California State University Institute for
Teaching and Learning*
Susan McLeod, Professor
University of California Santa Barbara

Faculty often tell their students that conversations contribute to the collaborative writing process. The first plenary session was planned as a generative activity: conversations, first, among the panelists, and then involving the whole audience, to begin collaboratively writing the future on a grand scale. The result of these conversations should impact policy makers, leaders in many institutions, and legislators who control state funding.

Chris Thaiss — At any phase of a program's evolution, a leader is always starting and restarting; some faculty are advanced and experienced with writing across the curriculum, while some are beginning. However, if we compare program planning twenty-five years ago and now, the big difference is the amount of support available. Now we have many places to turn:

- A huge array of schools' web sites that show what other schools are doing

- The on-line WAC Clearing House at Colorado State University
- Hundreds of professional books and articles
- Issues of *Language and Learning across the Discipline*, which are on-line at the WAC Clearing House
- A strong research tradition
- National conferences, where we work together and answer questions
- Special interest groups at national conventions, such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication
- A small army of very experienced WAC people who can be used as consultants
- People on every campus who, by their experience and reading, are familiar with the concept and who can be sources of support.

These connections create a new context for planning, whether the program is new or old, and allow us to avoid the frustrations of really "reinventing the wheel."

Carol Holder – Changing institutional contexts present opportunities for those who are starting or maintaining a language across the curriculum program. These new initiatives are very important as partners for WAC and CAC programs. Furthermore, these new partners are more likely to succeed if they incorporate writing and other forms of communication instruction into their activities.

- *Faculty centers for professional development.* Many, many dollars go into faculty professional development programs. WAC leaders can suggest the impact that would be made on faculty development if centers would put a high level of funding into helping faculty use writing activities in their classrooms to improve teaching. After all, where does the learning happen? – through discussions, e-mail exchanges, bulletin boards, writing assignments, journals, and new forms of texts.
- *Service learning initiatives.* Service learning courses with a backbone of writing assignments enable students to make connections between service experiences, academic learning, and personal growth.
- *Assessment centers.* These centers' staffs are concerned with how to assess a broad range of learning. WAC leaders can assist them with how to assess stu-

dents' skills, confidence, and competence as writers and speakers. In turn, such collaborations provide plenty of opportunities for working with colleagues to examine assessment outcomes and improve the curriculum through WAC.

- *Scholarship of teaching initiatives*. These initiatives foster classroom research and help faculty discover more about learning processes in their classrooms and the impact of writing on student learning.

Linda Driskill — Chris Thaiss mentioned how writing links us to people outside the institutions, while Carol Holder mentioned new connections to people within our institutions. These people are all potential stakeholders in WAC programs, but they have different types of experience with WAC and with writing and communication instruction. As a result, they have different expectations and definitions that can cause them to propose activities or policies that are not enriched with the many forms of knowledge that Chris has noted. In considering how to make connections with stakeholders of all kinds, it could help us to apply the principles of a perennial best-seller, Fisher and Ury's book, *Getting to YES*, which distills lessons learned from the Harvard Negotiation Program.

Key points from that process include

1. Ask what's driving the person's (or group's) proposed vision for the program – forestall criticism and find out motivation. Once that is known, the many resources Chris Thaiss mentioned can be put in the service of the discussion.

2. In a separate step, find options for mutual benefit. In this step one forestalls all criticism and evaluation but tries to develop possibilities that have not been considered earlier.

3. Figure out the alternative each side has to a negotiated agreement. If no agreement can be reached, what will others do? What will your program do? In considering this matter, you may find reasons that enable you to persuade others to agree to a solution or you may find additional options.

4. In a separate step, choose criteria that can be applied to evaluating options. You can insist on a principled decision and avoid intimidation. There will be fewer roadblocks, and you can make the feasible connections more quickly.

5. Finally, make the agreement and include provisions for what everyone will do if the agreement needs to be changed or renegotiated.

Carl Lovitt – In planning for new or ongoing programs, I see additional connections that programs can make, partnerships with people outside the institution. This is a different kind of partnership, but an equally integral one. Specifically, I suggest creating off-campus advisory boards and involving them in planning. These people are often very concerned with improving student writing. Accrediting agencies and businesses want to see improvement, and having an advisory board off campus as well as one on campus can get practitioners involved.

You may want to choose people who can communicate powerfully to students and faculty about what it means to communicate well in the workplace. Bring them in for a day. Have panels from different industry sectors and sessions that both students and faculty might attend. Programs can match up managers' skill sets with student courses – these professionals can do a lot to help students understand what they will need in the future. Furthermore, such industry partners can review resumes and counsel students about how to position themselves to be employable. Professional fields often have advisory councils of their own. Advisory board members can be involved in watching final presentations or reviewing video tapes of student presentations. They may help conduct workshops, too. People who say students can't communicate may want to do something about it, from coaching to teaching to providing endowments.

Sue McLeod — Having recently moved to the University of California at Santa Barbara, I'm once again involved in planning and "thinking anew" about the future. One change that people have not been taking into account in their planning is the dramatic shape of student demographics. In many universities, students who speak multiple languages now constitute a large proportion of the student population. At school, they speak English, but at home they speak another language. Although they are adept at speaking English, their written English is a kind of an interlanguage, affected by the patterns of their home language. These are not traditional English as a Second Language students, and their problems are not ones English faculty are used to dealing with. They don't belong in ESL classes. In planning for WAC programs, we need to de-

velop expertise in helping these students and helping faculty who work with them.

Julie Zeleznik — Involving graduate students in planning can have multiple benefits for universities. Having been undergraduates recently themselves but having recently taken courses in teaching writing and writing across the curriculum, graduate students can be advocates for undergraduates. At the same time, they are not as completely assimilated into the university and have some critical distance. Working with industry representatives as I did at Iowa State, graduate students can serve as research staff at the same time they are gaining a better understanding of the employers their students will communicate with in the future. Such experience helps graduate students later when they plan their own courses, as well.

Conclusion. The panel's discussions of the stakeholders, negotiation processes, issues, and personnel prepared the audience to engage in conversations throughout the conference as topics of leadership, technology, and many other aspects of WAC's future were foregrounded in presentations and panels. Tables in the Duncan Hall lobby were full throughout the conference with participants engrossed in discussions. We hope these conversations will continue as readers respond to the summaries and papers in this special issue of *LLAD*.