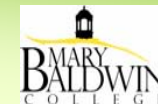


URSC and WAC: A Mutual Future?

Lydia Petersson¹, Molly Petty², Anne McGovern³, Chloe Lemons⁴, and Francis Whitesell⁵
 MARY BALDWIN COLLEGE, STAUNTON, VIRGINIA



Convergences

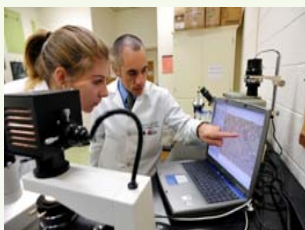
Philosophical Sympathies

- Constructivism: “writing to learn”; “becoming a scientist”
- “Situated cognition”: knowledge as a set of domain-specific conceptual tools (Kardash 2000)
- Shared dilemmas: correctness vs. creativity; fostering habits of mind; encouraging independence
- Active learning
- Authentic problems



Interdisciplinary Histories

- Both movements instigated by academic departments or splinter factions (WAC – English; UR – Chemistry) before spreading
- Pedagogical advocacy; limited power



Overlapping Activities

- Faculty workshops
- Undergraduate journals

Institutional Barriers

- Inconsistent funding, leadership
- Securing disciplinary / interdisciplinary ownership and balance



Background

With a required senior project for students in all majors, a growing program of undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative activity (URSC) and a WAC program in need of a fresh look, we began to study how perspectives from URSC and WAC could provide new insights to improve students' abilities to produce high-quality senior projects. We conducted a survey of faculty, studied senior exit surveys, and conducted a literature review. Not surprisingly, faculty were more satisfied with their students' writing and research skills as expressed in the senior project than they were in freshman or writing emphasis courses, but even at the senior level they identified severe problems in using evidence to support generalizations. In senior surveys, students rated their overall satisfaction with gains in writing only slightly higher than did faculty.

Lessons from the Literature

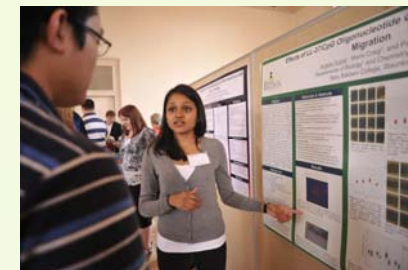
Although little work has been done on the intersections between URSC and WAC, we found useful parallels in the literature. Philosophically, the movements are both rooted in constructivist approaches to knowledge creation. Both face institutional barriers such as securing consistent funding and ownership. However, WAC and URSC arose from differing disciplinary perspectives and have evolved to occupy different niches in institutional hierarchies, with URSC more often associated with honors programs and elite status.



Works Cited

- Kardash, CarolAnne M. "Evaluation of an Undergraduate Research Experience: Perceptions of Undergraduate Interns and Their Faculty Mentors." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92.1 (2000): 191-201. Print.
- McLeod, Susan H. "Writing Across the Curriculum: The Second Stage, and Beyond". *Landmark Essays on Writing Across the Curriculum*. Ed. Charles Bazerman and David Russell. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Divergences



Evolving Differences

- WAC: humanities origins; early emphasis on diversity, empowerment, voice, broad reach. Led by large universities; growth in 1970s with NEH funding; later reliance on institutional support; little governmental lobbying
- URSC: science origins; early emphasis on “cognitive apprenticeships”/professionalization; end products; elite students. Led by small colleges; growth in 2000s; range of federal funders for science projects; lobbying presence in Washington (Council on Undergraduate Research)

Programmatic Emphases

- WAC: writing emphasis/intensive courses in the disciplines; standalone Writing/WAC Centers
- URSC: incorporating undergraduates in ongoing faculty research projects; summer enrichment programs; festivals

Institutional Positioning

- WAC: high percentage of part-time, adjunct, administrative faculty
- URSC: high percentage of tenured faculty in established departments

¹Director of Sponsored Programs and Undergraduate Research and Adjunct Assistant Professor of English
²Assistant Professor of English
³Associate Professor of French
⁴First-Year Student, Residential College for Women
⁵Graduate Student, Master of Letters Program

This work was partially supported by a Changemaker fellowship from the Spencer Center for Civic and Global Engagement at MBC and the Extramural Associates Research Development Award (EARDA) Program of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).