The (In)Visible World of Teaching Assistants in the Disciplines: Preparing TAs to Teach Writing

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Abstract: WAC scholars have demonstrated a strong commitment to faculty professional development in WAC programs but have yet to engage in much conversation, at least in scholarly literature, about the training of TAs in the teaching of writing. The rising number of TAs in doctoral-granting institutions and WAC programs suggests their role in teaching undergraduates how to write effectively is becoming more important and more prevalent, and because these TAs, like WAC faculty, engage in multiple interactions with student writers, they should also be considered teachers of writing. This article explores the history of TAs in WAC programs and several reasons why TAs have been virtually ignored in WAC discussions, arguing that WAC scholars must now turn their attention to disciplinary TAs, engage in discussion about the role of TAs in the teaching of writing, and develop WAC TA professional development programs.

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)[1] administrator-scholars have produced a plethora of scholarship about WAC faculty professional development. Scholars and administrators have documented faculty professional development models used at their respective institutions (Fulwiler, 1981; Maimon, 1981; Fulwiler and Young, 1982; Blakeslee, Hayes, and Young, 1994; Stewart, 2000; Shaver, Bowles and Beemer, 2009); identified and debated the effectiveness of various approaches (Walvoord, 1992; Martin, 2001; Holdstein, 2001); and described successful models and methods (Fulwiler and Young, 1989). They have also presented guides for the development of WAC faculty professional development programs (Anson, 2002; McLeod and Soven, 1992); offered teaching strategies and techniques for disciplinary faculty (Bean, 2001; Moss and Holder, 1988; Walvoord, 1986; Young, 1999); and discussed faculty apathy and resistance in WAC programs (Fulwiler and Young, 1989; Fulwiler, 1984; Martin, 2001). Although WAC administrator-scholars have clearly demonstrated a strong commitment to WAC professional development, they have surprisingly yet to engage in much discussion, at least in scholarly literature, about the training of disciplinary TAs in the teaching of writing, TAs' role in teaching disciplinary writing, and TA participation in WAC efforts.

Although the focus on faculty professional development in WAC is logical for reasons that I will discuss later, disciplinary TAs work with students and their writing, sometimes to a greater extent than faculty, and thus need to be considered in WAC discussions. I broadly refer to disciplinary TAs as graduate students who either teach a course or work with a professor in a lecture or writing-intensive class in his/her respective discipline. Both autonomous and assisting disciplinary TAs respond to and grade essays and essay exams, discuss writing assignments with students, and facilitate students' writing process during office hours, scheduled conferences, via email

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correspondence, and sometimes during class. In addition to direct interaction with students and their writing, many assisting TAs also have student-centric responsibilities that indirectly guide students in their writing such as leading discussions, holding recitations, supervising laboratories, and running slide presentations. John Andrews (1985) positions these TA responsibilities into three categories: "interactive learning, coaching in the higher thinking skills, and providing a communication channel to integrate the course" (p. 49). Ellen Strenski (1988) argues these three categories—and by extension all of the duties I've listed above—relate to writing instruction. Disciplinary TAs, she argues, are in fact teachers of writing. By extension, then, these TAs should also be considered de facto WAC faculty.

As TAs clearly play a significant role in teaching students how to write in the disciplines, WAC administrator-scholars need to turn their attention to disciplinary TAs, engage in discussion about pedagogical approaches for the training of TAs in the teaching of writing, and develop WAC TA professional development programs[2] that address graduate instructors' distinct pedagogical and disciplinary needs and concerns. The need to do so is pressing due to our current and future economic and institutional climate. The number of both graduate student instructors and WAC programs are on the rise, which will likely result in an increase in TA responsibility in the teaching of writing and a stronger reliance on TAs for WAC efforts in the future. According to a recent US Department of Education report (June 2009) published by the American Federation of Teachers, contingent labor, including TAs, has increased over the past ten years, while tenured and tenure-track faculty positions have plummeted (p. 5). The statistics about TAs at public research/doctoral-granting institutions are astonishing: TAs, according to the report, made up 41 percent of instructional staff in 2007, while faculty members comprised 28.9 percent (p. 5).

Like the number of TAs, WAC programs are growing across institutions of higher education. In "The State of WAC/WID in 2010: Methods and Results of the U.S. Survey of the International WAC/WID Mapping Project," Chris Thaiss and Tara Porter (2010) reported "substantial growth" in WAC and writing in the disciplines (WID) programs over the past 20 years (p. 540). Of the 1,126 US institutions surveyed, 568 had a WAC program. Institutions that grant PhDs had the highest percentage of WAC programs (65 % of the 131 PhD-granting institutions surveyed) in comparison to institutions that grant MA/MS (55 %) and BA/BS (60 %) (p. 541). 27% of the 558 institutions that did not have a program indicated they intend to develop one (p. 541). Of the existing WAC programs, 29% indicated they "maintain their presence at the institution through relationships" with writing fellows or TAs (p. 560). The combination of the increase in WAC programs and the growing number of TAs will likely result in an increase of TA WAC participation in programs across institutions of higher education, particularly at doctoral-granting institutions where TAs already outnumber faculty. As a result, the discussion, exploration and implementation of WAC TA professional development programs should be a top priority for WAC scholars.

The Absence and Presence of TAs in WAC

There are multiple institutional and situational factors that help explain the paucity of discussion and scholarship about disciplinary TAs' roles or potential roles in WAC programs. On the broadest scale, WAC administrators have had to contend with institutional factors that inherently resist WAC efforts such as the emphasis placed on research and publications, particularly at doctoral-granting institutions, which often overshadows excellence in teaching and TAs' participation in teaching efforts. Although faculty gain intrinsic rewards for WAC participation such as "collegiality and the satisfaction of improving one's teachings," the lack of extrinsic rewards for "teaching excellence" serves to counteract the core WAC goal of improving teaching and incorporating the teaching of writing in the disciplines (Walvoord, 1996, p. 64). Other institutional factors that have been potential

obstacles include faculty workload, the department and disciplinary divides in higher education, the historical value of testing as a means to assess learning, and historical assumptions about writing and its role in the disciplines.

As a result of one or many institutional realities, the most challenging obstacles WAC administrators face are faculty resistance, particularly to the movement's pedagogical reform goal, and faculty disinterest in WAC participation. These obstacles have led WAC administrators to focus their efforts on disciplinary faculty; many have sought to ease tension, garner interest, and persuade faculty of the value of WAC. Faculty have historically been targeted WAC participants because they, unlike TAs or part-time instructors, have the authority and cultural capital to influence and implement the kind of changes the movement calls for, and thus possess the ability to carry out WAC goals. Without faculty support, the survival of the WAC movement and WAC programs would be in danger. A closer exploration of the movement's history will reveal some specific reasons for faculty resistance, show the attempts made to persuade faculty of the movement's worth and TAs' role in these efforts, and ultimately shed light on why faculty have been spotlighted in WAC scholarship. Such a historical examination helps explain why TAs have received little attention in the movement.

At its core, WAC is a pedagogical reform movement that seeks to eradicate banking pedagogy (Russell, 2002). The incorporation of writing instruction in disciplinary courses calls for a transformation of teaching and learning in the content areas. The movement has called for instructors to dismantle two established notions about subject matter and writing: [that] content and writing are separate and distinct, and good writing is defined in terms of correct grammar. These notions were birthed after the adoption of the German model of higher education in the late 1800s. The model emphasized specialized knowledge in individual disciplines, and thus departments sought to teach students disciplinary content, which was understood as separate from writing. Writing was identified as a skill, one that involved mastery of grammar and mechanics, and in turn, writing instructors were perceived as grammarians (Russell, 2002, pp. 3-6). The current traditional model that emerged in the twentieth century with its focus on grammar, syntax, and mechanics reinforced this conceptualization of writing and writing instruction (Berlin, 1987, p. 38). Disciplinary faculty have historically embraced banking pedagogy, the content/writing divide, and the definition of writing and writing instruction. They have also, particularly at doctoral-granting institutions, focused more on publishing research than teaching, as mentioned above, because of the university reward system. As a result of these attitudes and practices, faculty have frequently expressed resistance to the WAC movement.

In the 1970s, WAC administrators recruited disciplinary TAs in an effort to ease faculty resistance. TAs were trained to teach writing courses that were linked with faculty-taught lecture classes (Russell, 2002, pp. 288-289). The intention for TA training and linked courses was "to influence faculty to use and value writing in their teaching by creating an atmosphere where writing is used, valued and expected" (p. 289). In 2001, the training of disciplinary TAs in the teaching of writing was similarly positioned, although to a lesser extent, as an attempt to persuade faculty to participate in WAC efforts. Beth Hedengren, one of the few compositionists who has advocated for WAC TA training, defined TA professional development as "a somewhat covert way to improve writing instruction at our institutions" (p. 12). In her 2001 talk at the National Writing Across the Curriculum (NWAC) conference, "TA Training Across the Curriculum: Covert Catalyst for Change," Hedengren said training TAs to teach and assess writing is not only beneficial to TAs and undergraduate students, but also to faculty. She declared that TAs can help faculty "standardize their grading criteria, to sequence their assignments to provide for intervention at early stages in writing, and to explain disciplinary writing expectations more clearly" (p. 11). Hedengren also stated that "trained TAs can be a professor's own personal writing consultant" (p. 11).

One might argue that training TAs for the purpose of delivering knowledge about writing and pedagogy to faculty is problematic; after all, TAs are instructors in their own right, not WAC mules. Yet in the beginning of the movement, and even now, it is understandable that WAC administrators would exert the most energy toward persuading faculty to join in WAC efforts. First and foremost, easing faculty resistance is important for the survival of the movement, and faculty participation is also essential for pedagogical reform. Full-time faculty, unlike other instructors, have the most influence in promoting an institutional culture that values writing and the teaching of disciplinary writing because of their presumed long-term employment and tenured status. Furthermore, faculty have the power to change curricula via participation in committees and faculty senates. Disciplinary TAs, on the other hand, are a transient population with relatively little authority to alter institutional policies or curricula.

Challenges to TA Inclusion in WAC

In addition to WAC challenges and institutional realities, the dearth of discussion about TAs in WAC may be due to challenges WAC administrators have consciously or unconsciously faced in considering TA participation, namely TAs' institutional identities and the perceived purpose of graduate education. By definition, TAs, even those who are instructors of record, are "assistants"—those who help someone they are ranked below. Positioning graduate student instructors as "assistants" has stigmatized them as inexperienced scholar-teachers. For WAC administrators, TAs' positionality in the academy presents a significant obstacle for their inclusion in WAC programs. If TAs are not recognized as legitimate teachers and teachers of writing by their institution or their departments, WAC administrators would likely encounter resistance to enhanced WAC TA professional development, making it difficult to garner support and funding for the endeavor.

Further, disciplinary perceptions of the goal of graduate education also present challenges for WAC administrators. Depending on the institution and discipline, scholar-teachers have diverse opinions about the goal of graduate education. Many disciplinary professors encourage graduate students to focus more on research than teaching, helping them gain disciplinary knowledge needed for future careers inside or outside the academy. These disciplinary values and attitudes have immediate consequences for TAs and undergraduate students; TAs might not be supported in any kind of teacher training, let alone the training in the teaching of writing. For this reason, some disciplinary faculty, particularly those who embrace such values and the content/writing divide, may object to WAC TA training.

Disciplinary TAs themselves may resist WAC professional development for the same reasons as disciplinary faculty, especially if they do not plan to pursue a career in higher education or do not have a monetary or professional incentive to participate in a program. Another challenge could simply be a lack of resources and staffing needed to run a WAC professional development program that specifically caters to TAs. These potential challenges and roadblocks for WAC TA professional development can perhaps explain why WAC administrator-scholars, who already face significant difficulties trying to work with faculty, keep programs afloat and secure funding, may not have focused their efforts on TAs.

Consequences of TA Exclusion From WAC

Although there may be legitimate and logical reasons why WAC scholars have historically focused on faculty in WAC, the lack of discussion about disciplinary TAs in WAC has unfortunate consequences. The focus on faculty has obscured TAs' role as disciplinary writing teachers because WAC participants have become synonymous with disciplinary faculty. This notion has been perpetuated

in the use of "faculty" as designated WAC participants in "how-to" books and guides such as Fulwiler and Young's *Programs That Work*: *The Guide to Developing WAC programs* (1989) and McLeod and Soven's *Writing Across the Curriculum: A Guide to Developing Programs* (1992).

The use of "faculty" as a universal term for instructors in various WAC guides and WAC resource websites has further obscured TAs' roles as teachers of writing and also their unique needs in professional development programs. Several survey findings reveal[3] that many TAs are inexperienced or first-time teachers when entering graduate school, and thus are likely to need significant assistance, instruction, and guidance in developing pedagogical philosophies and practices. Disciplinary TAs also have disparate levels of disciplinary expertise. Some TAs begin graduate school with superficial knowledge, and sometimes without any knowledge, of their field or discipline. In the worst case scenario, a TA might simultaneously have to learn a new discourse and body of knowledge, determine how to teach undergraduate students content they have recently learned or have not yet learned, help students transition into discourse communities they themselves are just entering, and learn how to write in various disciplinary genres while guiding students in their writing development. Such factors would need to be considered in the development of a WAC professional development program for disciplinary TAs.

The identification of faculty as primary teachers of writing fails to acknowledge the instrumental role disciplinary TAs have in working with student writers and perpetuates the stigmatized institutional identity of graduate student instructors as mere "assistants." TA inclusion in WAC scholarship and WAC programs is needed to halt the perpetuation of TAs as illegitimate instructors, bring attention to their role as teachers of writing, help them build strong writing pedagogies, and ensure undergraduate students have effective writing instruction.

Learning from Existing Scholarship

Although few WAC administrator-scholars have focused on TAs in WAC scholarly literature, Ellen Strenski and Beth Hedengren, have done so in three distinct pieces—Strenski's 1988 article in *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* and 1992 journal article in *Writing Program Administration* and Hedengren's 2001 presentation at the NWAC conference (mentioned earlier in this essay). Each attempts to make graduate instructors visible by advocating for WAC TA training. In doing so, they legitimize TAs as instructors in their own right and bring recognition to the important role disciplinary TAs have in the teaching of writing.

Strenski (1988, 1992) and Hedengren's (2001) early scholarship about WAC TA training offers ways to think about future WAC TA training programs. They illustrate the value in conducting and using qualitative research to determine the needs of TAs, and subsequently the content and methods that would be most appropriate in a professional development program. They give examples of how to position empirical data in relation to WAC goals, and thus provide a method and process that other WAC administrator-scholars may use in the development of their own programs.

In her *Writing Program Administration* article, Strenski (1992) presents research she conducted at UCLA. She distributed surveys to UCLA teaching assistants to determine their pedagogical concerns and "real-life situations" (p. 70) and discovered they were most concerned about time management, grading a large number of essays, and undergraduate students' "organization" in their writing (p. 70), the first of which is a concern for TAs at many institutions. Hedengren (2001) concluded that Strenski's graduate students' concerns and needs were common across institutions, including her own, Brigham Young University (BYU). She drew on an unpublished 1998 study at BYU to determine why these concerns, specifically paper load, might exist. The unpublished study revealed that only 17% of 1,505 disciplinary TAs whose primary responsibility is to grade writing have "formal"

training in the grading of writing. Thus, she determined that disciplinary TAs' concerns are likely a result of a lack of training (p. 7).

Both Hedengren and Strenski argue that teaching TAs the value of teaching writing as a process can address these concerns and have developed ideas about WAC TA training based on their research. Hedengren (2001) implemented a pre-fall three-day intensive workshop and a Saturday workshop every semester. The workshops focused on teaching TAs how to teach the writing process, how to comment on and evaluate papers, and how to "identify criteria for grading" (p. 8). WAC workshops, which are the most popular way to carry out WAC initiatives (Thaiss and Porter, 2010, p. 554), clearly have strong potential to be productive for disciplinary TAs and are already being used in WAC TA training programs. Strenski (1992), on the other hand, used her qualitative data to make general claims about what may be included in an all-university TA handbook, which many times, she claims, is the only pedagogical guidance for TAs in the teaching of writing (p. 70).

In conducting qualitative research for a WAC TA training program today, detailed descriptive studies like Hedengren's and Strenski's, along with a more comprehensive exploration of local TAs, would be productive in thinking about a WAC TA professional development program. The details of a case study conducted at one's institution—the number of participants, disciplines involved, the process of recruiting, the nature of the school and the department, faculty opinions about TAs and the teaching of writing—afford the opportunity to discuss the unique needs of TAs in an even more precise way than survey results. In addition, the distinct institutional, disciplinary, epistemological, and pedagogical needs of TAs are important to consider in relation to needs and concerns revealed in qualitative research. When attending to disciplinary TAs' need to learn how to assess and evaluate student essays, for example, WAC administrators might want to consider that the development of this ability is largely dependent on understanding pedagogy, disciplinary knowledge, and disciplinary writing. This kind of instruction would therefore be extremely valuable in the development of a WAC TA training program.

Hedengren (2001) and Strenski (1992, 1988) teach us that WAC administrator-scholars would benefit from considering programmatic goals in relation to qualitative data about disciplinary TAs; the analysis of this relationship can inform the development of a WAC TA training program. Hedengren and Strenski sought to achieve the common WAC goal in the 90's and early 2000's of teaching writing as a process, yet many new goals have arisen in the past decade that WAC administrator-scholars might consider when developing a WAC program. As of 2010, the most popular approach is teaching WAC participants the value of teaching disciplinary ways of communication (commonly referred to as WID). According to The U.S./Canada survey of the International WAC/WID Mapping Project, most WAC programs seek to teach students "disciplinary conventions of writing and/or speaking" (76%, 432 institutions). An emphasis on "writing and/or speaking to learn" (75%, 427 institutions) and "critical thinking" (71%, 403 institutions) closely follows. Other WAC programs focus on teaching students "proficiency in standard written English" (61%, 346 institutions) and preparing "students for the workplace" (36%, 204 participants)—goals that are not typically discussed in recent WAC scholarship—and applying "new technologies to learning" (32%, 182 institutions) (Thaiss, 2010, p. 566).[4] The creation of WAC TA professional development programs calls for WAC administrators to consider goals they seek to achieve as well as goals that correspond to TAs' needs and concerns.

Learning from Existing WAC TA Professional Development Programs

Although discussions about WAC TA professional development programs are few and far between in scholarly publications, existing programs such as those at Cornell University and the University of

Minnesota can help WAC administrator-scholars think about program development, pedagogical practices, and approaches. I explore these programs not to argue they are perfect or ideally effective for every institution, but to present possible transportable models and/or methods of two significant WAC TA professional development programs. I also investigate how the democratic, dialogic professional development model—which many WAC scholars claim is the most effective way to train faculty— might be equally productive for the training of disciplinary TAs.

Cornell University's John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines is an independently funded and administered writing program. The Knight Institute houses the Writing in the Majors Program, First-Year Seminar Program, and Writing Workshop (tutoring and workshops for students), and orchestrates the teaching and pedagogical training for First-Year Seminar instructors across the disciplines ("History," 2006). The Knight TA training program, which is heavily documented in scholarly literature,[5] has extensive and mandatory training for disciplinary TAs. Knight TAs are graduate students who autonomously teach First-Year Seminars, which are described as disciplinary writing-intensive courses with specified writing requirements. As of 2009, close to 50% of the TAs are master's or doctoral students in disciplines other than English. The graduate student instructors are selected by the Knight program and funded by the university. The intensive WID training includes a pre-fall four-week long composition pedagogy class, "Teaching Writing," an assigned faculty mentor in the TAs' corresponding discipline, and professional development opportunities in the form of presentations, workshops, programs, and discussions throughout the year (Gottschalk, 1997, p. 32-36; Gottschalk, personal communication, 2009).

The pre-fall four-week long composition pedagogy course consists of "seminar discussions and readings on pedagogical theories and practices" that "provide an overview of the teaching of writing within a disciplinary context" ("Writing 7100: Teaching Writing," 2006). Graduate students also design course materials, written assignments, and a teaching plan for their First-Year Seminar course ("Writing 7100: Teaching Writing," 2006). The pedagogy course is co-taught with a Knight instructor and a veteran TA. The graduate instructors, as of 2009, read articles from T.R. Johnson's *Teaching Composition: Background Readings* in the course (Gottschalk, personal communication, 2009).

In addition to reading composition scholarship in the "Teaching Writing" seminar, disciplinary TAs work closely with a faculty mentor who also teaches a First-Year Seminar in the same department. The mentor helps the disciplinary TAs "plan syllabi, consult on the selection of readings and development of assignments (or share syllabi for an established seminar), call meetings for discussion of teaching, visit classes, and examine essays to which TAs have responded" (Gottschalk, 2003, p. 32). The mentor and the mentee determine the nature of their relationships; administrators in the Knight program do not supervise or assess the productivity of the mentorships (p. 32).

The participation of faculty in TA training at Cornell is instrumental to the success of TA professional development. Gottschalk (2003) says the Knight program administrators continuously "remind" participating faculty and departments about their commitment to mentoring graduate students. This reminder helps them recognize "that faculty participation is the bedrock of a program based on the belief that writing is embedded in the disciplines," and that "faculty participation provides a foundation for the development of graduate instructors, who look to faculty as exemplars of academic life and for support in their teaching" (p. 30-31). Gottschalk also claims that the more involvement faculty have with WID TA professional development, the more likely the "culture surrounding the teaching of writing gradually changes" (p. 33)—a message that echoes the historical importance of faculty involvement in WAC and early attempts to create productive TA-faculty relationships for the purpose of achieving WAC goals.

The third component of the TA professional development program is ongoing workshops, discussions, and other programs for continuing conversations about the teaching of writing. Knight's Peer Collaboration Program has several programs that TAs can choose to participate in while simultaneously earning a small stipend. Disciplinary TAs have the opportunity to work collaboratively with one another doing "team teaching, team-grading, team conferences, and team observation" for a small stipend ("Peer Collaboration Program," 2006). In addition, TAs can submit a proposal to participate in a TA mentorship program, where first-time graduate instructors work with a veteran graduate instructor. In this mentorship relationship, the mentor helps the mentee with assignment and syllabus design, assessment practices, and discussion leadership.

The mentorship component of this program in conjunction with the composition practicum provides a strong knowledge foundation for TAs to teach writing in the disciplines. This kind of program provides a harmonious balance between a "top-down" and a "bottom-up" WAC professional development model. A "top-down" model is a structured, organized program that is led by WAC administrators or boards/committees. Scholars define a "bottom-up" model as one where faculty share "power and ownership" and "everyone learns and everyone contributes" (Walvoord, 1992, p. 26). A "bottom-up" program, which has proven to evoke interest in WAC, is meant to honor and respect an instructor's intelligence, knowledge, and experience (Slevin et. al., 1990, p. 26), and enrich, not alter, their pedagogical practices. Mentorships can provide TAs with direct instruction while fostering an environment where they can engage in conversations with multiple disciplinary teachers and peers. The disciplinary TAs at Cornell have access to various pedagogical approaches for the teaching of disciplinary writing, and thus have a strong pool of information from which they can construct their own pedagogical approaches in their First-Year Seminar course and in future courses. In addition to their own graduate studies, TAs' close relationships with faculty also have the potential to help TAs learn disciplinary knowledge, which is valuable in teaching writing in disciplinary courses. In parallel form, faculty may benefit from the relationship just like WAC administrators envisioned with the concept of linked courses in the early days of the movement.

Although the Cornell program seems like an extremely productive way to train disciplinary TAs, other institutions may not be able to replicate this approach for several reasons. First, disciplinary TAs at Cornell have financial incentives to participate in training because their tuition is waived and they earn stipends for participation in professional development programs outside the composition practicum; disciplinary TAs at other institutions might not have this kind of motivation. Also, the Cornell disciplinary TAs autonomously teach a course based on their own interests and do not have direct faculty supervision. Thus, they have responsibilities in addition to working with student writers and teach them in a different context than disciplinary TAs who work with faculty.

Some aspects of The University of Minnesota's Teaching With Writing (TWW) TA training program are more easily replicable at other institutions. TA professional development manifests in workshops, consultations, and seminars, which resembles the most common WAC faculty professional development model. The program is similar to Cornell's in that it is a combination of a "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches. It also has similar training methods such as mentorship and exposure to composition theories and practices. Yet the University of Minnesota program is largely voluntary and does not require the same amount of funding, time, and commitment for disciplinary faculty and disciplinary TAs as Knight Institute's TA professional development program. Although this program might be more financially feasible, the voluntary nature of the training program, like many other WAC professional development programs, and some training methods may present challenges for WAC administrators.

The TWW program seeks to help instructors—faculty, part-time instructors, and TAs—incorporate writing in their courses and bring awareness to the role of writing in student learning. Another goal

of the program is to help instructors "recognize that language use and text production take place within disciplinary language communities" ("Teaching with Writing," 2010). The program is directly connected to the University of Minnesota's Writing-Enriched Curriculum (WEC) project that seeks to "ensure that "discipline-relevant writing and writing instruction are intentionally infused into… undergraduate curricula" (Center for Writing, 2011, p. 1). The WEC team members have guided departments since 2007 in composing writing plans that document "discipline-specific writing values and curriculum-specific innovations," as well as plans for "assessing writing" and "supporting instruction" (Center for Writing, 2011, p. 2). In the writing plans, departments make fiscal requests of the Office of Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education, and "service" requests of the WEC team, some of which are geared to the training of disciplinary TAs (Pamela Flash, personal communication, July 18, 2011).

In order to achieve TWW goals and contribute to the larger WEC effort, TWW offers training for disciplinary TAs. The majority of TAs are graduate students who fall into three categories: "those who assist with a course by running discussions or a lab section, those who assist with a course by serving as a "reader-grader," and those who teach stand-alone courses as instructors of record" (Pamela Flash, personal communication, July 20, 2011). The TA training includes a pre-fall two-day interdisciplinary seminar, "Commenting on and Grading Student Writing," for novice and veteran disciplinary TAs who teach autonomously or with a faculty member." The two-day workshop is a large-format event and is capped at 100 TAs; TA participants enroll on a first-come, first-served basis. The TWW also offers a week-long seminar, "Teaching with Writing: A Five-Day Seminar for Graduate Instructors" ("Seminars," 2010). While TA participation in these seminars has historically been voluntary, Pamela Flash, Director of Writing Across the Curriculum, said that much to her satisfaction, departments are increasingly requiring TAs to attend (Pamela Flash, personal communication, July 18, 2011).

In addition, the program offers individual teaching consultations with WEC specialists, either face-to-face or online and "discipline-specific TA workshops" related to writing and writing instruction at the request of faculty or TAs "framed at least part of the sessions on samples of student writing and writing assignments…" (Pamela Flash, personal communication, 2009). TWW also invites disciplinary TAs to workshops and panel discussions, which occur 5-10 times a semester (Pamela Flash, personal communication, November 5, 2009).

The "Commenting on and Grading Student Writing" seminar focuses on helping TAs develop assessment practices that reflect the understanding that writing functions as a means to learn. "Teaching Writing: A Five-Day Seminar for Graduate Instructors" covers a broad range of topics and issues related to disciplinary writing. The seminar offers disciplinary TAs an overview of WAC concepts and "disciplinary- and course-specific modes of writing instruction" ("Seminars," 2010). The hands-on and discussion-based seminars also guide TAs in writing assignment design, assessment practices, and "time-saving" techniques for grading student work. The seminar also devotes time to "the 'balancing act' between (TAs') roles as scholars, writers and researchers, and instructors" (Pamela Flash, personal communication, July 18, 2011). These workshops cover a gamut of topics and issues related to disciplinary writing instruction that have strong potential to prepare disciplinary TAs for their pedagogical responsibilities.

The University of Minnesota TWW also has an impressive website with multiple writing-related resources for disciplinary TAs (http://writing.umn.edu/tww/resources.html). The website dedicates pages to course design, assignments and activities, responding and grading, grammar and mechanics, preventing plagiarism, and discipline-specific material. The page also has samples of assignments and activities from the disciplines. Such a website can prove to be a phenomenal resource, but the use of the websites as preparation for disciplinary TAs to work with student writers

has the same challenges as the all-university handbook that Strenski (1992) advocates. The existence of resource websites does not mean that disciplinary TAs will actually view them, or if they do, that they will be able to understand and apply the material effectively in their pedagogies. Yet, websites, like all-university handbooks, can be a strong pedagogical tool when used in combination with hands-on training.

The one-on-one consultations that TWW and WEC team members offer to train disciplinary TAs have tremendous value that extend beyond learning about the teaching of disciplinary writing via handouts or a website. Consultants are able to give disciplinary TAs personal attention and individualized instruction as well as a platform for asking questions about their responsibilities, the course they are currently teaching, and the writing in that course. At the same time, the one-on-one discussion fosters an environment where consultants and disciplinary TAs engage in conversation and learn from one another about writing and the teaching of writing in the disciplines. Also, the one-on-one consultations could work well in combination with disciplinary faculty-disciplinary TA mentorships; disciplinary TAs can simultaneously learn about disciplinary approaches and general composition approaches to the teaching of writing in one-on-one settings, use this knowledge to build their pedagogies over time, and develop and share new generalized and specialized knowledge about writing pedagogy with composition specialists and their faculty mentors. Regular consultations could be a good alternative to intensive composition workshops or a composition practicum like the Knight program's "Teaching Writing" course.

In general, the University of Minnesota's TWW program has been constructed to guide disciplinary TAs in becoming better writing teachers. A difficulty the TWW program may face is that all disciplinary TAs will not or cannot (due to workshop participation restrictions) attend professional development events. As a result, many might not receive adequate instruction in teaching writing. In addition, the brevity of some training methods such as workshops or limited consultation sessions might equip students with only temporary or fleeting knowledge that is minimally helpful. Yet these concerns apply to faculty WAC instructor participants as well as TAs, and without a systemic change in higher education, these methods are likely the best we can hope for in spite of their potential weaknesses.

In addition to the existing WAC TA training programs, the concepts and practices in the most popular kind of "bottom-up" WAC faculty professional development model—a democratic, dialogue-based program—may be useful for the training of disciplinary TAs. Although a voluntary program might not be as effective for disciplinary TAs as it is for faculty, an approach that emphasizes dialogue has many benefits. The engagement of multiple minds and varying experiences in dialogue inevitably fosters learning, whether it is in professional development programs, the classroom, or the act of writing itself. In WAC TA training programs, it is important for TAs to be valued as colleagues with experiences deemed worthy of sharing with others. In addition, an approach that emphasizes dialogue will help WAC administrators listen to and determine the needs and concerns of TAs, and develop appropriate professional development programs. At the same time, the democratic, dialogue-based approach used for faculty professional development is probably not directly transportable to TA training because voluntary participation and equal "ownership and power" (Walvoord, 1992, p. 26) does not reflect disciplinary TAs institutional status or their unique pedagogical, disciplinary, personal, and professional needs.

Conclusion

TA professional development in the teaching of writing is essential for undergraduate education. As the number of teaching assistants grows and WAC programs flourish, institutions will depend more

heavily on TAs to provide undergraduates with a quality education. A WAC TA professional development program also has the added benefit of enriching graduate education. Preparing graduate students to teach writing will prepare them for their future careers inside and outside the academy. TAs who participate in WAC TA training will be prepared for the professoriate in several ways. As professors, they will carry a heightened awareness of the role of writing in the disciplines, be equipped to teach undergraduate students how to write in the disciplines, and have the ability to mentor graduate instructors on how to work with student writers and student writing. If they work at an institution with a WAC program, they will likely be more invested in participating in WAC, or at least helping to achieve programmatic goals. Graduate instructors who become professors might also be more willing to play a role in other TA training programs that incorporate writing instruction like a Future Professoriate Program[6] or an all-university TA training program. For graduate students who do not pursue a teaching career, WAC TA training will prepare them for writing in their profession and equip them with mentorship skills they might utilize in the workplace.

While this essay has attempted to provide some insight into disciplinary TAs, their roles as teachers of writing, and WAC TA training program development, there are other research avenues WAC scholars can pursue in efforts to promote conversations about WAC TA training. For example, though I've explored here a few WAC TA training programs that were discovered via an informal WAC-L survey and some Internet research, other programs are sure to exist. A nationwide survey on WAC TA training, similar to the 2010 WAC survey conducted by Thaiss and Porter, could identify other programs and potential models and methods, and perhaps more importantly, help us gain a holistic sense of the state of TA professional development in the teaching of writing. Such a survey could also identify the extent to which disciplinary TAs are being trained to teach writing and participating in WAC programs, the kinds of institutions that promote and support the training of disciplinary TAs, and the degree to which people are, overall, interested in TA inclusion in WAC. This knowledge could help WAC scholars interested in WAC TA training determine where they might begin and/or identify problem areas where they can focus their efforts. For example, if the survey reveals little interest in TA participation at particular campuses, program administrators could begin their efforts by persuading colleagues about the benefits of a program, perhaps focusing on the relationship between WAC TA training and undergraduate education or WAC TA training and the goals of graduate education. If the survey reveals many faculty are already interested in WAC TA inclusion and need help creating a program, WAC administrators with existing programs (which would be revealed in the survey) could share information about the process of program development and give advice. A nationwide survey has strong potential to provide immediate insight for WAC TA training as well as multiple springboards for related research avenues.

Other research initiatives, site-specific investigations, and cross-disciplinary approaches that bring visibility to disciplinary TAs and their role in the teaching of writing can be envisioned. Hopefully, this essay will encourage others to engage in conversations about TAs in WAC and in turn, strengthen our dedication and commitment to promote the teaching of writing across the curriculum.

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Notes

[1] There are multiple and competing definitions of WAC. In this essay, I define WAC as an umbrella term that refers to research, pedagogical, and institutional movements, as well as particular initiatives related to disciplinary writing and disciplinary writing instruction in institutions of higher education. Historically, scholars have made distinctions between "writing across the curriculum (WAC)" and "writing in the disciplines (WID)." Some claim WAC and WID are separate research traditions with different initiatives and goals. WAC often refers to promoting the use of writing in disciplinary courses and teaching writing as a means to learn and think critically. WID often refers to promoting disciplinary writing instruction and teaching students disciplinary-specific genres. Hence, many administrators have subscribed to either WAC or WID research or a particular movement, and have constructed either a WAC or WID program. Yet often times, WAC scholars draw on research that some have designated as WAC or WID, and have blended what some have designated as distinct WAC or WID initiatives and goals. There is a wide range of theories, practices, goals, and purposes that deny a binary categorization, as they that can be used together in various ways to meet individual institutional and programmatic goals, and to achieve particular goals of the movement. As a result, I use WAC, in the form of a noun or adjective, as an all-encompassing term, unless otherwise indicated,

that references the various components, factors, and conversations about writing and writing instruction related to the disciplines.

[2] When discussing TA "training" in this essay, I alternate between using the word "training" and the phrase "professional development." Many scholars (Walvoord, 1992; Dobrin, 2005; Fulkerson, 2001) have advocated against the use of the term "training" in WAC, as it insinuates that instructors are untrained or in other words, do not have knowledge about writing and the teaching of writing. According to Richard Fulkerson (2001), teacher "training" suggests that there is a correct way to teach and a singular way to learn how to teach, as "training" is "the rote behavior for which one can be trained with some sort of Skinner-like stimulus/response conditioning" (p. xi). Rather than "training," scholars have advocated the use of the word "professionalization" or "professional development". I use the terms "training" and "professional development" interchangeably for three reasons. Historically, "TA training" is a commonly used phrase to discuss TA pedagogical development and to identify TA pedagogical development programs—"all-university TA training" and "departmental TA training," for example. Alluding to this tradition, the use of "WAC TA training" in this essay has the potential to engage with and expand these conversations about graduate instructors. Second, "WAC TA professional development" is used to acknowledge TA WAC participants' valuable knowledge and experiences, and situate TAs within the many conversations about faculty in WAC programs. Lastly, I alternate between using "training" and "professional development" as a reminder of the historical tension surrounding TAs' institutional identities; they are simultaneously students and instructors, and often times deemed illegitimate teachers.

[3] See Pamela Gray and Nancy Buerkel-Rothfuss (1991) and Jody Nyquist, Robert Abbott, Donald Wulff, and Jo Sprague (1991).

[4] Other WAC goals include promoting rhetoric as central to writing, learning, disciplinary knowledge, and formation; using writing in the classroom as a vehicle for rhetorical invention; positioning writing as rhetorical, and in turn, teaching writing from a rhetorical perspective; using writing to teach disciplinary source use; and promoting critical pedagogy.

[5] Katherine Gottschalk (1997, 2003, 1991) has written several articles about TAs in the Knight's Writing in the Disciplines program.

[6] The Future Professoriate Program (FPP) is a nation-wide program dedicated to graduate student preparation for the professoriate. The program goals are to prepare graduate students for a "range of responsibilities they will assume as future members of the professoriate" and "to effect a change in faculty culture by fostering recognition of the importance of teaching as a dimension of graduate education" (Syracuse Graduate Program).

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