Great Expectations: The Culture of WAC and the Community College Context

Mary McMullen-Light, Metropolitan Community College-Longview

Abstract: Recent surveys of WAC programs reveal that although programs at 4-year institutions are on the rise, many programs at community colleges struggle to move beyond a preliminary launch or initiative level. These findings seem counter-intuitive given the early promise of WAC in the community college context documented by WAC scholarship in the 1980s, especially since community college missions and focus on general education and vocational programs could be well served by the dual aspects of WAC: writing to learn and learning to write. This article explores why the promise of WAC has not reached its expected fruition in the community college environment, one that historically has been quite hospitable to myriad initiatives supporting teaching and learning. Diverse infrastructures and desires to meet the increasingly complex expectations now attached to community colleges do not always accommodate full recognition of the resources and personnel required to shift WAC from an initiative to a full-fledged program. The article also offers strategies for positioning and anchoring WAC programs within community college settings so they can be sustained.

Introduction

Reading Leslie Roberts' (2008) analysis accounting for the results of the TYCA survey on WAC in two-year colleges is as enlightening as it is unsettling. Few of the community college respondents indicated satisfaction with their institution's approach to WAC. Roberts observed a pattern among these comments which allowed her to categorize the reasons offered for failed WAC efforts: lack of administrative support, lack of faculty interest or enthusiasm, and lack of ongoing development and coordination. Susan McLeod (1992) identified these very elements, administrative support, faculty interest, and coordination, as essential features of a successful WAC program in her seminal article "WAC: An Introduction" which fronted the collection of essays in *WAC: A Guide to Developing Programs* (McLeod & Soven, 1992).

So how is it that community colleges which are known for emphasizing teaching and learning, for being particularly attentive to student development, and for offering primarily general education curriculum and well-defined occupational programs could miss the boat on WAC, which, in theory, would seem a perfect fit for just such institutions? This article explores several reasons why WAC in community college settings has not fulfilled the promise that many assumed it would when programs proliferated in the 1980s (Ambron, 1991).

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Though the cultures of WAC and of community colleges privilege consistent and similar values (i.e., inclusiveness, diversity, oriented to provide support, emphasis on learning), the structure and arrangement of community colleges do not typically accommodate independent WAC programs but rather promote the infusion of various new initiatives that emerge through other institutional agendas and don't require the same level of oversight a WAC program does.

Community college WAC programs that do last appear to have anchors tethering them to their respective colleges in significant ways beyond the confines of the program's direct offerings. They also appear to have shifted over time to adapt to the immediate contexts of their colleges as well as the broader contexts of higher education.

At least some of the difficulties in mounting an effective WAC program at all in a community college are those inherent when embracing all of the dualities of WAC: its two prongs---writing to learn and learning to write; its promotion of both formal and informal writing; its emphases on pedagogy and curriculum; its frames of critical thinking and communications skills; the critical mass and interdisciplinarity of the faculty group required to evince interest as well as the ongoing support required for individual faculty members who then seek to apply ideas and strategies garnered through professional development.

Before more closely examining some of the reasons why difficulties have outpaced the initial high interest and seeming promise of WAC in community colleges, it is beneficial to juxtapose the results reported in the two recent surveys of WAC programs with the expectations of WAC articulated twenty years ago through surveys and analysis by community college WAC pioneers.

Survey Results

One could argue that launching a successful WAC Program these days could be daunting in any environment, but the TYCA study shores up data to show it is exceedingly difficult to do so in a two-year college. The TYCA survey results that Roberts shares in her summary and analysis are necessarily more nuanced and detailed in consideration of the community college setting than the WAC survey results published in the February issue of *College Composition and Communication* (Thaiss & Porter, 2010, p. 534-570).

Thaiss and Porter do offer statistics on the presence of community colleges within the larger WAC picture nationwide, noting the "markedly low percentage (33%) of community colleges reporting programs" compared with 4-year institutions (p. 541). This is deemed low when compared with 4-year institutions reporting programs: PhD-granting (65%); MA/MS-granting (55%); BS/BA-granting (60%). Thaiss and Porter find that for community colleges, "this percentage nearly matches the percentage found" in Stout and Magnotto's (1988) survey of 1,270 community colleges, to which "401 schools responded positively" (Stout & Magnotto, 1988, p.22).

The implication here is exactly what Roberts' analysis found: the number of community colleges with WAC programs has not changed much even though few of those identified in 1988 are still in existence. While new programs have emerged, older ones have disappeared, possibly through loss of funding, administrative support, faculty interest, leadership, or some combination thereof. This cancelling out of growth represents a sharp contrast to the survey results in Thaiss and Porter's study which show that overall WAC programs nationwide have grown over the past twenty years by "roughly one-third" (p. 541).

The TYCA study further reports not just this decline in the number of WAC programs, but also the marked dissatisfaction respondents indicated with their college's approach to WAC. While only 18% (of 342) respondents had a WAC program at their institution, a mere 7% (of 333) of respondents

reported being very satisfied with their institution's approach to WAC (Roberts, 2008, p. 146). Respondents pointed to issues beyond the prominent three categories Roberts identified: lack of faculty interest, program leadership, or administrative support. The concerns voiced by respondents paint a dire picture of the viability of WAC in the community college setting and cite specifically these reasons for failure: the reluctance to allocate necessary resources and the lack of cohesion that is required to adhere to a best practices approach (Roberts, 2008, p.147).

Roberts shares that most of the respondents' comments "suggest the dearth of institutionally integrated, fully funded, coordinated programs as the main reason that a majority of two-year college faculty report being at least somewhat dissatisfied with their institution's approach to integrating WAC" (p. 140.)

A keen insight offered by one respondent might contain the key to the underlying issue causing WAC to vanish within community colleges. This respondent explained that WAC and Communication Across the Curriculum (CAC) initiatives had disintegrated at that two-year college largely because they had failed to cohere into a coordinated effort that would create "a culture of writing" (p. 140.) Thus, merely having WAC or setting up a WAC Program clearly does not ensure success in these environments. However, viewing WAC as the primary mechanism through which to create a true culture of writing may well be the best cornerstone in the foundation of any version or model of WAC or CAC in any community college.

Promise of WAC in Community Colleges

It is prudent to probe the historical context and promise of WAC in community colleges to fully appreciate WAC in this specific institutional context at its outset in the 1980s. Articles from the Jossey Bass series (Griffin 1982; McLeod, 1988; Stanley & Ambron 1991) describe the earliest iterations of WAC in several community college systems and the attendant concerns that had surfaced at that point.

In one analysis of their survey of WAC programs in community colleges, Stout and Magnotto identified the "community college realities" which they viewed as potential barriers to WAC. While the realities they exposed, such as "heavy teaching loads" and more class preps and larger class sizes without the aid of teaching assistants as graders, might have slowed the subsequent embrace of WAC by community college faculty after the initial wave of programs was launched in the 1980s, ultimately these realities probably did not figure significantly in the demise of programs. But these realities have shifted over the last twenty years into a set that could be construed as far more formidable.

For instance, the staggering 5-course or 15-hour teaching loads that most full-time faculty bear are now further weighted by special assignments to task forces and groups attached to the advancement of myriad higher education initiatives, including assessment. Community college faculty are palpably busier than in previous decades just as their institutions have more expectations and demands to meet than in previous decades. Current expectations of community college instructors around technology contribute to their workload as an MLA (2006) overview of the community college teaching career points up. These expectations include proficiency in uses of presentation software, smart classrooms, development of web materials and sites to supplement classes, and adeptness at teaching online or on television.

The MLA overview of the community college teaching career also suggests that class sizes at community colleges may be larger than average. Also, a 2004 study cited here contrasts community college instructors spending 18.1 hours per week teaching or 431 contact hours per week with

faculty at public doctoral institutions typically teaching 8.1 hours and having 287 contact hours per week.

While teaching loads may not have risen dramatically, class sizes in a crippled economy have. For teachers integrating writing experiences throughout a course, additional students in a course represent more than mere numbers. In writing intensive courses, those students can represent significant additional work by way of individual conferences, the time to read drafts and provide considered feedback, as well as final evaluation of the projects.

In addition, educational policies and other state-driven programs have refocused K-12 in many states on specific kinds of high-stakes performance assessments, the preparation for which sometimes becomes a priority at the expense of pivotal writing and critical thinking experiences. Many students arrive at colleges unprepared for those experiences at the college level and others even arrive significantly underprepared to perform basic literacy tasks. The 2009 ACT College Readiness Report shows statistically what many instructors intuit, that only about 23% of students entering college are actually ready to operate at a passing level in college in these four areas: English, math, reading, and science.

In general, the mission of many community colleges can be described as reflecting a philosophy of meeting people where they are and helping them get to where they want to go, whether that destination is a four-year college, an internship, or a job. This becomes a more complex mission when students need more prefatory and preparatory learning opportunities in order to develop the skills necessary to perform college level coursework competently.

Beyond these shifts, other transformations in higher education have changed the landscape of community colleges sufficiently so as to displace WAC as a primary means through which faculty from across a college could connect with each other. WAC in the 1980s provided powerful opportunities for faculty across departments to rally around universal concerns and to share pedagogical strategies in support of writing. WAC created face to face opportunities through workshops and gatherings in ways that no other change initiative had at that point.

From the earliest years of the WAC Program at MCC-Longview, the kind of professional development WAC offered was innovative and novel and created a safe space for busy faculty to have meaningful conversations with colleagues about pedagogy and encouraged them to establish relationships with instructors outside of their home department.

Since then, many other initiatives have followed WAC's lead in attempts to foster interest and garner support in service of institutional agendas. As Russell (2002) points out, at its inception during the 1980s as only one of many reform movements during the period calling for a curricular return to the general education core, "it served as a model for several: speech communications, critical thinking, ethics, computer literacy—all 'across the curriculum'" (p. 290). Many other newer initiatives now sponsor some kind of professional development activities in order to share the scholarship and best practices associated with them. Many have also adopted the WAC premise of voluntary participation though, depending on the size of the college, some instructors may be drafted to steer these initiatives.

But technology now affords instant and constant connections between colleagues, replacing at least a portion of the connections and gatherings that previously would have transpired face to face. Historically, community colleges have been at the front edge of technological innovation and their embrace of distance education continues that trend. Many are now actively offering online degrees in order to remain competitive in the higher education arena as well as to meet the needs of students who demand and quickly fill online courses.

Teaching online, however, is an extremely labor intensive endeavor for instructors. It requires training for instructors to become proficient with the college's chosen platform and additional training to understand how to orchestrate an online course differently than a face to face version. This training represents another area of professional development that has siphoned time and energy from other pursuits instructors might likely engage in, in part because the bulk if not the whole of the operation of the class is done through writing.

At MCC-Longview, for instance, it is recommended that new instructors, full-time and part-time, take a year to pursue the technology training before they become involved in WAC because it can overwhelm them to devote the necessary time to engage in both simultaneously. The technology training immediately positions them to be functional and versatile within their departments by enabling them to teach online and hybrid courses. Frankly, this training helps acclimate them to the larger institutional context. With that background, they are then better poised to participate in WAC workshops.

I do not mean to suggest that these changes I've described preclude WAC from finding its place among the initiatives supported at a community college, but it does mean that much thoughtful planning and design is required to ensure that the form of WAC pursued is sustainable beyond initial efforts when energy and interest is high and that the program is situated to support other initiatives rather than compete with them. There is no question from the TYCA survey results and the history of longstanding community college WAC programs that how they were set up initially made an enormous difference in the long run.

Problematic Infrastructures

Surprisingly, despite the missions and overarching philosophy of support guiding community colleges, the infrastructure manifest in many of them does not always lend itself to support WAC at a programmatic level. It should be pointed out that WAC is not like other endeavors in support of teaching and learning in part because it hails from a discipline even though ironically its home at a community college is likely best located outside of that discipline.

WAC is understood to be a specialty area within the field of Composition and Rhetoric, but this sometimes creates an awkward situation when English faculty are expected to mount a WAC Program since not all English instructors in community colleges are knowledgeable about or trained in WAC. The danger here is of WAC becoming or being perceived as English Across the Curriculum.

Ideally, the English faculty members are an important voice in a community college approach to WAC, but not made to feel overly responsible for it. English faculty can recognize the value of a WAC program at a general education level as a logical extension of their vital instruction in composition courses. However, WAC Programs in community college settings might work best if the coordination position can be placed outside of the English Department proper. That is, the program director convening stakeholders and coordinating the program is most credible to this faculty audience if he or she has the requisite Composition and writing instruction background, but it is not necessary to house the program in an English department.

Further, if this directorship is framed as a special assignment, then funding it with other than English department monies and housing it outside of the English department can strengthen the image that the position belongs to all departments. Since community colleges on average are smaller than 4-year colleges, faculty are often organized into units or divisions that combine several diverse disciplines, each of which may manage its own departmental resources. If WAC were housed within a single

department, it could be a financial burden to a department unless additional monies are allotted to cover WAC expenses.

On the other hand, learning communities and service learning initiatives may be led by faculty in any discipline with a special interest in that area. It is clear that professional development and conferences play a key role in helping foster interest in establishing and sustaining these kinds of efforts, and that there is important scholarship, best practices, and effective models of how to structure and provide these kinds of experiences for students which should be acknowledged and studied.

However, while they provide important learning experiences for students, it is difficult to argue that initiatives such as learning communities or service learning are on the same plane as WAC when considering the central role of writing as a fundamental academic process and unique mode of critical thinking. And yet that is often exactly how these other endeavors are regarded and situated in community colleges, especially when limited budgets place initiatives in competition for precious resources and finite, now dwindling, funds.

In some cases, if administrators aren't aware of the key differences in the work of a writing center and the work of a WAC Program, they may take the stance that it is redundant to have both a writing center director and a WAC Coordinator or expect a single position to cover both areas. In a community college setting, the writing center operates first and foremost as a key support of students in Composition courses. Though students from all courses may well take advantage of the services offered, especially if encouraged by their instructors, English faculty are likely to be the strongest proponents of and their students the primary users of the center. Many community college writing centers have a dedicated full-time director position. If a writing center has a full-time director, the decision may be made to approach WAC another way, possibly by rotating faculty in and out of the WAC director role through the use of released time.

Some colleges rely on less formalized coordination such as this or work with committee-level oversight. Writing centers can serve as a reasonable starting point for WAC programs in community colleges because it is where discussions about student writing are naturally occurring. But it is critical that WAC work and traditional writing center work—that of writing tutoring—be recognized as distinctive and separate roles even if they are housed together or conceived of as a unit within an institution. Some successful WAC models have married these two roles comfortably and this could be a legitimate course for other institutions, though not all.

WAC might be a better fit with sites offering other professional development experiences for instructors, like a teaching excellence center designed to support faculty. But even those set-ups can pose problems for a program like WAC if the WAC program leadership is not consistent or is based on the misguided notion that any faculty member can run a WAC program on a few hours of released time.

Other Key Factors in Community College Contexts

For reasons of funding and budgets and interests promoted through professional organizations, community colleges tend to highlight a set of specific initiatives at any given time, and these continue to change over time as schools seek to address new issues, different concerns, and changing student demographics and as accrediting agencies make different demands of colleges when new priorities come to the fore in higher education. For instance, assessment of general education outcomes was established as a high priority of some accrediting agencies for community colleges in the 1990s. This was a natural next step for many community colleges that revised general education curricula in the

1980s, but one that required much time and energy of faculty and administrators to ensure that authentic local measures were thoughtfully developed and ethical practices adhered to.

Another factor that can have an impact on the pursuit of new initiatives and programs is the shift of administrative leadership. New administrators coming into a college or a division are sometimes expected to advance new initiatives reflecting current institutional agendas. This phenomenon can have deleterious effects on existing programs if the administrators are not privy to a WAC program's history and purpose within the institutional context. Having administrators with different roles and perspectives connected to a WAC Program is advantageous in that it encourages the broad-based support and input of the entire academic community that is required to create and sustain the culture of writing beyond personnel changes, which are inevitable when colleges experience growth or reduction of budgets that may cause realignment of available resources or different management strategies.

Thaiss and Porter (2010) also raise the problem of competing initiatives, and in community college settings, this can be a very real source of internal institutional tensions. Higher education initiatives attractive to community colleges, such as learning communities, service learning, and distance education, compete not just for funding but also for the energy and good will of instructors which are necessary components for the implementation and subsequent demonstration of success for any initiative. Administrators are typically assigned to various initiatives and can be the decision-makers in terms of how available monies are doled out and even who is selected to be involved.

Professional development monies, too, were once more plentiful than now; the shattered economy driving many students to attend community colleges and exponentially swelling enrollments has not necessarily led to more revenue and does not replace the substantial budget cuts for higher education occurring in many states, including Missouri, that have decreased the number of teaching and support positions and increased class sizes. Community colleges rely heavily on federal, state, and local revenue for operating expenses. Tight budgets can make the necessary professional development WAC typically offers seem like a luxury that can be postponed easily.

Even accreditation cycles add another enormous layer of committee work as faculty feverishly complete self-study exercises and reports in order to document achievement of outcomes and compliance with accreditation criteria. Most community colleges rely heavily on faculty to lead comprehensive assessment efforts to document student achievement of all general education outcomes along with the regular program evaluations that are also part of a self-study report.

These are but some of the current community college realities that did not exist or to quite the same degree when Stout and Magnotto (1988) took stock of potential WAC barriers twenty years ago.

Anchors, Adaptations, and Multiple Access Points

Effective community college WAC programs that have persisted over time do seem to have something else in common: many have connected to other college efforts and enterprises deemed important by the entire academic community. In the case of MCC-Longview, the WAC program was linked in an integral way with general education writing assessment in the early 1990s as part of the work for the college's accreditation in 1995. This synergistic alliance proved transformative for the WAC program and ultimately led to the development of a writing intensive requirement for students.

When assessment mandates arose through the accreditation process and state pressures in 1994, the prevailing WAC culture strongly influenced the trajectory of the General Education writing assessment initiative which produced significant data collected from thousands of student writers

over a 4-year period in the late 1990s through an instrument designed by an interdisciplinary group of WAC faculty.

These assessment experiences led to the development in 2000 of a writing intensive model informed by best practices at 4-year colleges and designed by an interdisciplinary group of faculty who made necessary adaptations for the 2-year setting. For instance, in addition to a cap on class sizes which exceeded that of most 4-year models (28 students per WI course because that was the cap on the labs in science courses and speech courses), the decision was made to institute a practice of providing instructors with one non-instructional pay unit for each writing intensive course they taught per semester with a limit of two courses.

This acknowledged the increased workload and time required for WI instructors who were obligated to require revision on a substantial project and provide considered feedback to students on the drafts through individual conferences and commenting.

Subsequently, in the next iteration of writing assessment, faculty decided to honor the lessons learned through their original assessment experiences and create a new, more authentic and WAC-focused assessment instrument: electronic portfolios with artifacts culled from Writing Intensive courses which permitted a more nuanced investigation of student writing choices (2004-06).

It is worth noting that all faculty participation in writing assessment efforts was entirely voluntary and that instructors chose the degree to which they were involved. Many instructors who participated in the writing assessment efforts then became actively involved in WAC. Those already involved in WAC viewed their participation in writing assessment as an important professional responsibility and reported the experiences as intellectually and professionally rewarding.

Put simply, WAC shaped the college's initial foray into writing assessment, which turned out to have an enormous impact on the WAC Program, which again caused changes in assessment practices which have now created shifts in WAC practices. Ideas surfaced through assessment experiences have now been integrated into WAC and WI faculty workshops, especially those concerning the documentation difficulties novice writers typically exhibit.

These features now characterize both WAC and writing assessment at MCC-Longview: based on current theory and scholarship, voluntary, interdisciplinary, faculty-driven, multiple access points for participants who determine their own degree and kind of participation, an embrace of writing as a tool for student learning and the study of student writing as a source of faculty learning and professional development.

It is completely feasible for community colleges wishing to start a new WAC Program or restart an old one to find ways to fold WAC into existing college priorities and initiatives by demonstrating how it can assist with achieving their goals: Learning Communities, Service Learning, Distance Education, New Media, Assessment, First Year Experience, and the Writing Center. David Russell (2002) notes in his discussion of community college WAC in *Writing in the Academic Disciplines* that some WAC programs had merged in innovative ways with other initiatives, like critical thinking and assessment, or had seized on electronic and oral communication as dimensions of a more encompassing approach (p. 319-326). Russell also points to assessment as a natural driver for WAC (p. 322).

The best approach is one that invites those involved in these efforts to consider: What kind of writing works well and fits best in these environments? The next step, which is more specifically how to design and implement these writing experiences, is definitely the purview of WAC. Surely, those involved in these various areas are well-positioned to strategize and develop best writing practices in these specific academic contexts in tandem with a WAC coordinator. It is important for WAC to be

perceived as serving the entire academic community in support of writing, the central academic endeavor that crosses the curriculum in general education as well as vocational education.

New Strategies for the 21st Century

Finally, I would like to suggest practical strategies for how community colleges in the 21st century can beat the odds and bypass some of the obstacles that have prevented the tremendous promise of WAC from reaching fruition.

Stout and Magnotto (1988) presented examples of viable programs which illustrated different institutional strategies for dealing with load issues and faculty uncertainty about writing, each college or system highlighting one of these program components: intensive faculty institutes, one-to-one consultations, discipline-specific activities, resource materials, faculty support activities that would provide writing fellows or writing associates, and support for part-time instructors. This comprehensive list certainly reflects their prescience.

Today, however, in order for a WAC program at a community college to survive, it would likely need to offer all of these program components as the foundation for building a true culture of writing. Respondents to the survey conducted by Stout and Magnotto (1988) did believe that a thoughtfully designed program accommodating these realities could establish a strong base for future program development. The TYCA survey results were not nearly as optimistic. A primary reason cited is that approaches tend to be scattershot, not organized or developed in a way that allows phases of growth.

Practical Strategies for Establishing a Community College WAC Program

Here are some suggested strategies to consider when designing a WAC program that accommodates the community college context:

Allies

Identify and cultivate allies among faculty leaders and administrators. Find at least one of each who is willing to serve as an advocate at the tables where the WAC director is not present.

To create a culture of writing, there should be broad-based participation from all corners of the campus: the library staff who help educate students on sources and the search process and support student research; advisors and counselors who guide students into composition courses, WI courses, and courses that use writing as a learning tool; administrators who approve released time or pay units for WAC faculty participants, organizers, and directors; representative instructors from different disciplines and departments who all have a stake in helping students grow as writers and thinkers.

Explore tapping into existing professional development programs or support to find seed money or sponsorship. Do not reinvent the wheel at your own institution: it is worth affording time to study the existing professional development model and how it is accessed by instructors. Assuming goals have been developed for WAC, how do they dovetail, if at all, with other professional development activities or efforts? What initiatives does the office or center support? Which topics does it emphasize? Is there room for WAC within it or should WAC take root there and become independent as interest and campus awareness grows? Do other initiatives sponsor regular professional development activities or workshops for faculty?

Anchors

Study the ways in which WAC can help to support important institutional goals. Accreditation processes vary by region but all involve certifying that student outcomes are met. This can be a key area for WAC since writing in the context of general education is examined on a curriculum-wide rather than program level. The kind of professional development typically offered by a WAC Program can be the foundation for the work that instructors do to design or implement meaningful and authentic writing assessment.

For community colleges, implementing something at the level of a writing intensive requirement is not always a good starting point for launching a program. Achieving the consensus required to support such a requirement is but one of many challenges in pursuing a curricular change of that magnitude; it would mean that faculty across most disciplines agree on a definition of WI and are confident that they could offer a consistent WI experience for novice writers across a general education curriculum.

Because of the incredible diversity of goals of students typically served in any community college, it is difficult at best to set up a narrow path of writing experiences. Martha Townsend (2001) speaks of some of the limitations of selecting the curricular model of WAC, such as WI in her piece "Writing Intensive Courses and WAC" which appears in *WAC for the New Millenium* (McLeod, Miraglia, Soven, & Thaiss, 2001). Moving toward developing a WI model over time after an initial phase of establishing a WAC program in the context of general and vocational education might prove a more reasonable and attainable goal.

Place

Though space is always at a premium in good times and in downturns, it is imperative that some place be identified with WAC. If it is only an office for a WAC director or a corner of an existing site, like a Teaching Excellence Center or a Writing Center, there must be a place where an instructor can go outside of his or her office to seek the counsel of a director or use the resources that space can provide whether it's a computer or books or articles or colleagues. Our institution has chosen deliberately a site that is for faculty and staff, not students. Since this program is designed as a faculty consultancy model, it was apparent early on that instructors needed a private space where they could have frank conversations about their teaching and student writing behavior. Other colleges have successfully integrated WAC into a Writing Center where students are always present. Space availability could dictate location.

Grants

When WAC was first taking hold in higher education in the 1980s, many programs were launched with grant money, including the one at MCC-Longview which was started with a grant from a life insurance company. Seeking external funds can be a way of sponsoring activities without financially burdening the institution during a pilot phase. When using such funds, however, it is imperative to identify early on where you plan to seek internal funding when the grant expires. That is, building bridges to a line item of some budget should be a priority. One possible advantage of a grant is that is requires much planning and explicit details about goals, action steps, and suggested timeline as well as assessing how these are met.

It may be possible to secure funding through in-house grants or other sources of soft money to support the initial phase of a program. Administrators are well versed in budgets and thinking of

which ones might be best suited to support an endeavor like WAC, especially once connections to other programs or initiatives are established.

Practical Strategies for the Initiator/Director of a Community College

Identify and Exploit all Available Resources

Contact WAC directors at other colleges in the area/region. Contact WAC directors at other two-year colleges. Forging relationships with others with expertise in WAC is a vital way for directors to share information about state and institutional budgets, exchange ideas about what has or hasn't worked, troubleshoot problems with others in similar roles, become inspired to try new approaches to professional development or student projects. These peer relationships, whether formalized into a regional consortium marked by face to face or online meetings or consisting simply of the casual connections made by 3 colleagues getting together for coffee to discuss WAC, can serve as excellent sources of professional development for a WAC director.

Another avenue is that of observation. If at all possible, make a site visit to a healthy program in your area or within a reasonable traveling distance, whether it is at a 2 or 4-year college. Seeing the inner workings of a program can sometimes do more to illustrate how a program operates than just phone calls, emails, and research, however useful.

When our college was preparing to implement a writing intensive requirement after thorough research and deliberation, site visits to a very successful WAC Program at the flagship public university in our state were extremely helpful opportunities that directly affected some of the decisions we later made about the structuring the WI experience for students and the processes by which courses were designated as WI. The university program was very consistent with the best practices suggested in the scholarship on WI, but seeing it in action firsthand made an enormous difference in how we decided to frame our processes and the importance of an interdisciplinary faculty team to guide those processes.

Join relevant professional listservs: Writing Program Administrators for global and local issues concerning the WPA perspective as well as myriad composition, WAC, and rhetoric topics. WAC-L is far less active but even more useful for the times you seek an exclusively WAC audience for a post or want to see WAC-specific topics addressed.

In addition, the WAC Clearinghouse (https://wac.colostate.edu/) is another resource to be mined from its journals to articles to program descriptions and lists of program directors who would be glad to field questions. Through the WAC Clearinghouse site, you can also access another touchstone resource: the board of the International Writing Across the Curriculum Network, a group which itself serves as a clearinghouse for all things WAC. The expertise of its board members reflects the different kinds of institutions and programs each is affiliated with as well as their longstanding roles as WAC practitioners and program directors.

Attend professional conferences to learn firsthand about a variety of models and practices: CCCC offers a cornucopia of sessions devoted to every imaginable topic related to composition and is typically held mid-spring. The WAC thread can be made visible through the searchable online program and breakout sessions provide much insight into programs at other schools, especially regarding research. An even more valuable place to learn about the latest ideas in WAC research and program models is the biennial International Writing Across the Curriculum conference, a much smaller and more intimate environment in which to connect with other WAC directors and faculty affiliated with WAC Programs, have collegial conversations, and ask questions about other programs. This one is usually held in late May or early June.

Map out a plan for developing a WAC Program, taking at least one year to research and design a model.

Gather a Grassroots Group of Faculty with Significant Interest in WAC

Assemble a dream program by creating a dream team of faculty from across the disciplines and dividing the labor of the earliest stages of program development: share the responsibilities of researching, gathering, investigating, and disseminating information. Then solicit ideas from each member about the purpose of WAC at your institution—what needs could be met through a WAC initiative, i.e. to heighten awareness among discipline faculty of writing as a process, to promote the value of drafting and revision, to demonstrate strategies for using writing as a tool for learning, etc.

Brainstorm options for the design of a program that would privilege those purposes, especially considering the culture of the college and what it will likely support. WAC is always about the fit of the program with its place, about context at every level within the program as well as in terms of its overall place within the institution. Identifying the specific features a program should include and which are necessary at the outset of even a pilot phase can come once consensus is reached about purpose and overarching philosophical goals as well as some of the more pragmatic aspects, like how and when it should administer support to interested faculty. Faculty ownership of the program and its attendant processes is crucial to its survival.

Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the institution's history with and support of other initiatives. What can be learned from this analysis? How will you avoid known pitfalls in implementing a WAC initiative? How will you build a program that is systemic and organic?

Conclusion

There is hope. Community colleges are fully capable of creating and sustaining innovative and effective WAC programs for the long term. There are examples of these and though each may look very different from the others by virtue of having pursued different models and chosen different features, there is no question that they all share the fundamental elements McLeod (1992) identified: faculty interest, administrative support, and program coordination through an established leadership position.

Interest in WAC at community colleges has not waned over the past twenty years even if the attempts to sustain it have. But interest will only take any WAC program so far. A program must be designed not just to stir up faculty interest and enthusiasm or quell their resistance but to ensure faculty ownership and direction. It must be supported financially and philosophically by administrators with a hands-off approach who implicitly trust the judgment of the instructors who work day to day with students, using writing as a powerful tool for student learning and providing meaningful opportunities for novice writers to develop as thinkers and writers.

It requires leadership, ideally a full or at least part-time position dedicated to the overall consistent coordination and administration of what is a complex program involving connections of people, curriculums, departments, programs, and initiatives. It takes an entire community college to build and sustain a WAC program. It requires a budget to support the professional development essential to informing and engaging instructors across the disciplines whose voices are central to its operation.

In other words, all of the elements McLeod (1992) identified are still relevant and necessary. You will find evidence of them in every community college WAC program that works. The features of stellar community college WAC programs highlighted by Stout and Magnotto are still worth considering and

integrating into the design of new or existing programs since how a program is set up appears to have a profound effect on its lifespan.

In the early days of WAC, there was much discussion of the importance of seeing that programs became institutionalized, that they made the leap to being an official part of the college, not kept at the level of an initiative or a burdensome add-on that continues to scramble for funds. One telling factor was always the line of reporting: does the WAC Coordinator report directly to a dean or other appropriate administrator rather than to another faculty member or division chair? These are still vital considerations when launching a program.

If WAC is to succeed in a community college, it cannot be left to languish permanently as an initiative or be shelved prematurely as a failed initiative. It cannot be lumped with other kinds of initiatives born of very different kinds of pedagogical or political impulses. While there are obviously costs involved in setting up a program this way, these costs are minimal when considering them a long-term investment in the creation of a vital culture of writing and one that community colleges, given their missions and the diverse communities they serve, can ill afford to forfeit.

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Contact Information

Mary McMullen-Light
Writing Across the Curriculum Coordinator
Metropolitan Community College-Longview
500 SW Longview Drive
Lee's Summit, MO 64081-2105
Telephone: 816-604-2479
Email: Mary.McMullen-Light@mcckc.edu
Program Website: http://mcckc.edu/main.asp?L=WacMain
Blog: The Lake Effect: A WAC Blog (http://wacblog2010.blogspot.com/)

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