Economies of Place and Power: Lessons from One Regional University's Writing-Intensive Initiative

Polina Chemishanova and Cynthia Miecznikowski, University of North Carolina at Pembroke

Abstract: This article offers a critical examination of one regional institution's endeavor to imagine, develop, and implement a sustainable campus-wide writing-intensive program. Grounded in local and institutional contexts, our narrative elucidates how WPAs at rural and regional institutions can reconcile the processes of negotiation and concession to secure adequate funding and program resources for developing WAC/WID initiatives. Institutional locale, we argue, circumscribes the potential affordances and risks that can befall writing-intensive programs and necessitates reconciling the delicate balance of negotiation and concession while attending to institutional "fit" and needs. At rural and regional campuses, in particular, the concept of "fit" within local exigencies is paramount to capitalizing on the affordances that geographical and organizational positionality generates.

The long history of writing across the curriculum programs speaks to their potential as sustainable enterprises that can significantly impact student learning and success. Although such programs take many forms, they all require more than simply assigning students greater numbers of papers or designating some courses as writing-intensive. WAC-like initiatives offer the promise of infusing writing into the college curriculum and subsequently increasing opportunities for students to develop their facility with writing in academic and professional contexts, to support their learning, and to demonstrate their knowledge in the courses they take. The vast body of WAC scholarship documents the multiple rewards students and faculty reap as a result of their participation in various forms of writing-intensive courses and programs, whether across the curriculum or within specific disciplines. When grounded in the most effective practices in writing across the curriculum, such endeavors enact what the WAC pioneers envisioned as the movement's primary intent: to provide students with meaningful and relevant writing experiences across the curriculum with the ultimate goal of improving students' written communication skills and rhetorical awareness.

The vast corpus of WAC scholarship makes a compelling case for embedding such programs into college curricula in order to foster an institutional culture committed to integrating critical thinking and writing in productive ways across a broad range of academic disciplines. To become a sustainable enterprise, however, a cross-disciplinary, writing-intensive program necessarily depends on support and commitment from faculty, university administrators, and students from the start. Indeed, without such shared commitment, WAC/WID endeavors can—and sometimes do—wither away as the initial momentum fades or funding dwindles when institutional priorities shift. Undoubtedly,

institutional locale—both geographical (e.g., rural) and organizational (e.g., regional)—circumscribes and constrains the potential affordances and risks that can befall WAC/WID programs—the benefits and costs, opportunities and problems that can render such efforts precarious or worse when the particular elements of a program's sustainability have been neglected.

In this article, we present a critical examination of one regional institution's endeavor to imagine, develop, and implement a sustainable campus-wide writing-intensive program and to foster ongoing support for writing instruction at a time when funding reductions in higher education have begun to threaten many well-established WAC programs. Through the lens of David Orr's (1992, 1994) framework of ecological design for sustainability, we describe and discuss the structural components that were essential for creating a sustainable writing-intensive program at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP). Specifically, our narrative focuses on the administrative and professional dynamics of establishing a viable, institutionally-embedded, programmatic structure and explains how the newly emergent writing culture on our campus holds promise for student success and program sustainability. Orr's ecological design for sustainability framework offers a lens through which to (re)examine and (re)consider the ways in which UNCP's geographical locale, diverse student body, and institutional positionality afforded opportunities to recast writing instruction as part of a wider project of possibility. UNCP's status as a midsize, regional campus and one of the seventeen constituents of the University of North Carolina system made it both possible and necessary for the larger social, economic, and political structures and exigencies within which the institution operates to collaborate and converge for the mutual benefit of our students and the communities they inhabit. While our narrative is grounded in local and institutional contexts, it elucidates how WPAs at rural and regional institutions can reconcile the processes of negotiation and concession to coalesce with the larger institutional structure and mission to secure adequate funding and program resources for developing WAC/WID initiatives.

Ecological Framework and Institutional Context

Within writing studies, broadly defined, there is a strong tradition of using the ecological metaphor as a framework for discussions of literacy, assessment, language, and writing development in general (see for example Barton, 1994; Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, & Papper, 2008; Syverson, 1999; Wardle & Rozen, 2012). Simply put, the ecological framework conceives of phenomena, participants, and activities as symbiotic clusters or "knots of nonhierarchical, locally enacted semiotic-material," interconnected elements within a larger system that operate independently and together in ways that sustain their shared environment (Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, & Papper, 2008, p. 394). Applying this framework—and specifically its focus on sustainability, or "the fit between humanity and its habitat" (Orr, 1992, p. 83)—to WAC programmatic discourse allows us to begin to address some of the paradoxes surrounding this discourse, which, as Deborah Holdstein (2001) points out, "subverts our best pedagogical intentions" (p. 38). In her analysis of WAC discussions on the WPA-Listserv, she argues that when it comes to university-wide curricular initiatives like WAC,

> the stronger the pronouncement on part of the institutions that students need to write more effectively and the more resounding the cry for effective writing in the disciplines (and the greater the budgetary and philosophical commitments these pronouncements entail), the less substantive and supported and "real" the writing-related and WAC efforts actually become. (Holdstein, 2001, p. 39)

Inevitable contingencies such as changes in leadership, lack of budgetary stability, and emergence of conflicting goals as these initiatives are redefined and reconceptualized in an effort to cast them as

one solution to improving students' writing beyond the composition classroom precipitate what Holstein calls the paradoxes of "crisis" and "excellence."

Though peripheral, perhaps, to the program's ecology, they imperil not only the underpinning premises on which WAC initiatives are built but also their potential and likelihood for survival and sustainability in the long run. Well-intended writing-intensive programs, which grow out of desire to serve students' needs both academic and professional, could meet their demise when a "crisis of sustainability" ensues.

Orr (1992) identifies sustainability crises as the result of "rational behavior in 'situation(s) characterized by multiple but conflicting rewards [and] social traps [which] draw their victims into certain patterns of behavior with promises of immediate rewards and then confront them with consequences the victims would rather avoid'" (p. 5). Chris Thaiss and Tara Porter's (2010) recent survey of the International WAC/WID Mapping Project illustrates the phenomenon vividly. While Thaiss and Porter report significant growth in WAC/WID programs in U.S institutions of higher education, they also note that "well over half of the 418 programs identified in the 1987 survey no longer exist or have been 'restarted' in the years since" (p. 558). The discontinuance, even if temporary, of such a large number of WAC/WID initiatives signals the need for methodical and systematic focus on strategies that can help institutions identify and accommodate the many "symbiotic clusters" involved in such system-wide endeavors in order to improve program longevity. Such strategies might enable higher education institutions to identify "what aspects of our existence we want to sustain, how much we are prepared to compromise with others' needs, and what unexpected results might arise from our actions" (Morris & Martin, 2009, p. 160).

To ensure the longevity of writing-intensive initiatives, WPAs at regional universities must take advantage of their institutional locality and explore the economies of place and power it provides while also recognizing that achieving true sustainability involves "complexity, uncertainty, multiple stakeholders and perspectives, competing values, lack of end points and ambiguous terminology" (Morris & Martin, 2009, p. 156). One way to accomplish this goal is to adopt and adapt Orr's (1992) sustainable design framework with its focus on "the careful meshing of human purposes with the larger patterns and flows of the natural world and careful study of these patterns and flows to inform human purposes" (p. 9). Good designs, Orr (1994) maintains, are part of the institutional fabric and are by definition "in harmony with the larger patterns in which they are embedded" (p. 105). They are place specific and represent what John Todd calls "elegant solutions predicated on the uniqueness of place" (qtd. in Orr, 1994, p. 105). They also require "a breadth of view that leads people to ask how human artifacts and purposes 'fit' within the immediate locality and within the region" (Orr, 1994, p. 106). By contrast, poor designs "undermine those larger patterns, creating pollution, higher costs, and social stress in the name of a spurious and short-run economizing" (Orr, 1994, p. 105).

Orr's framework provides the foundational basis for regional institutions of higher education to capitalize on their situational affordances and simultaneously respond to external exigencies within larger institutional and economic structures. Our narrative, grounded in Orr's principles of good design for sustainability, offers one approach that regional universities can adapt to devise campus-wide writing initiatives that maximize institutional resources while minimizing the potential for dysfunction. Our example illustrates how sanctioning regionality and rurality as essential elements in assessing the "fit" of a writing-intensive program and integrating it within the "larger patterns and flows" of an institution's core values—as well as its physical, symbolic, and social environments—provide the fundamental building blocks for identifying, compelling, and organizing stakeholders and resources that are pivotal to the initiative's longevity and success. Moreover, when exigencies imposed from the outside happen to converge with exigencies perceived from within, an opportune

moment can provide incentive and motivation for change. At UNCP, we responded to the kairotic urgency of a mandated accreditation requirement, namely the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), in hopes of "making things that fit" while addressing the needs of a diverse student population (including a large number of both first-generation and non-traditional students) by designing a project that could be integrated within the "larger patterns and flows" of our institution's stated mission and vision, its service region, and the state.

UNCP is a regional university and one of the seventeen constituent institutions of the University of North Carolina system. Founded over 125 years ago as a normal school for the education of Native Americans, UNCP offers baccalaureate and master's degrees and serves an eleven-county region in south central and southeastern North Carolina. Among the most diverse institutions of higher education in the South, UNCP has a student body comprised of 16.22% American Indian, 31.9% African American, 40.68% White, 3.99% Hispanic, and 1.52% Asian (UNCP, 2013b). Many of these students transfer from two-year community colleges and technical schools or enroll at the university after years in the labor force and away from school. The institutional mission identifies "service to and appreciation of our multi-ethnic regional society" and enhancement of "the intellectual, cultural, economic, and social life of the region" as its core values (UNCP, 2013a, p. 6). Additionally, the institution's "Vision Statement" declares a promise to "challenge students to embrace difference and adapt to change, think critically, communicate effectively, and become responsible citizens" (UNCP, 2013a, p. 6).

Designing a writing-intensive program for a rural, regional university with a commitment to serving such diverse student demographics and preparation has presented many different kinds of challenges because it involves and implicates so many different "symbiotic clusters" of diverse stakeholders. For one, Robeson County, the county of origin for about one-third of the student body, is the primary settlement of the Lumbee Indian Tribe—the largest Native American tribe east of the Mississippi (Torbert, 2001)—and is one of the most ethnically diverse counties in the nation and also one of the poorest, with approximately 30% of the population living below the poverty line, according to the 2013 U. S. Census Bureau. The three major ethnic groups in the county are American Indians (39%), Anglo-Americans (32.8%), and African-Americans (24.7%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Robeson County's unique tri-ethnic southern rural setting not surprisingly begets diverse ethnolinguistic identities among its population groups. Linguists have long argued that there is no single "Southern dialect" and that a great deal of linguistic diversity exists among social groups within a region and as well as among regional groups within the South (Bernstein, 2000; Montgomery & Bailey, 1986; Bernstein, Nunnally, & Sabino, 1997). Walt Wolfram (2003), in particular, maintains that "there is great diversity in the English language of the South, with arguably more intra-regional diversity than any other region in the United States" (p. 124). The linguistic landscape of Robeson county is even more noteworthy because, as Wolfram and Sellers (1999) explain, there are "few longstanding tri-ethnic contact situations in the eastern United States where the Native American community is the largest ethnic group in the county" (p. 96). In his extensive study of Lumbee Vernacular English, Wolfram (2002) argues that Lumbee English represents a "unique dialect niche" and "a distinctive variety deeply embedded in the ethnic identity of the Lumbee people" (p. 9) whose dialect differs from written and spoken conventions of Standard English in grammar construction, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Dannenberg & Wolfram, 1998; Wolfram, 2002). What makes Lumbee English distinctively unique is "its collocation of features in the context of local and regional contact varieties. In many cases, features found in Lumbee English clearly overlap with those of the comparative varieties [Robeson County African-American and Anglo-American Vernacular English]; however, no other variety configures these variety features precisely as Lumbee English does" (Wolfram, 2002, p. 32). Lumbee dialect, Wolfram (2002) explains, overlaps to an extent with the

surrounding southern white and African-American varieties though each of these dialects has its distinguishable characteristics. Nevertheless, all three dialects diverge from the conventions of Standard English and their linguistic markings are sometimes mistakenly perceived as erroneous or incorrect application of English grammar.

It is within the context of this rural, regional locale and diverse linguistic landscape that the design of what we envisioned as an ecologically sound and sustainable writing-intensive program commenced. True to the mission of the university to serve our multi-ethnic region and to challenge students to think critically and communicate effectively, we embarked on developing a writing-intensive program that complements the first-year composition sequence and enculturates students with diverse linguistic backgrounds into the conventions of academic writing and discipline-specific discourse. To communicate effectively, we believed, our students required overt and methodical writing instruction over time in order for them to develop general and disciplinary writing proficiencies and to recognize the rhetorical impact that speaking and writing in non-standard forms of English have in both academic and professional settings. Sensitive to the ethnolinguistic identity of our students, we purposefully framed the goals and scope of the campus-wide writing-intensive program as inculcating students' rhetorical awareness and knowledge of conventions rather than "correcting" their writing skills.

Designing for Sustainability

The development of the writing-intensive program at UNCP was precipitated, to a large degree, by an impetus to hone students' writing proficiency and by a kairotic urgency to meet the new accreditation requirement mandated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Since 2007, the SACS Commission on Colleges has required member institutions to demonstrate ongoing "quality enhancement through continuous assessment and improvement" (SACS, 2008, p. 3) as part of their re-accreditation process. Core Requirement 2.12 of SACS accreditation compels institutions to develop acceptable Quality Enhancement Plans (QEP) that focus on performance outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning. SACS (2011) initiated the QEP accreditation component as a vehicle for measuring institutional effectiveness over time to "ensure that [the institution] has the capacity to implement and sustain the QEP, that a broad base of stakeholders was involved in the process, and that the QEP identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievements" (p. 12). Prepared internally for external review, a QEP proposes a 5-year long plan to strengthen and improve an institution's commitment to and performance of its academic mission. As a document, the QEP:

> (1) includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. (SACS, 2008, p. 7)

In response to this newly instituted accreditation mandate, UNCP faculty agreed to develop a writing-anchored QEP that could create and support an institutional culture committed to improving students' facility with and appreciation for writing as a tool for learning as well as communicating in academic and professional contexts. Given the diverse linguistic identities of our students and the surrounding communities, designing a writing-based QEP provided the means to establish a formal

writing-intensive program and simultaneously to reaffirm the school's commitment to serving the multi-ethnic region within which it exists.

During the 2007-2008 academic year, University administration began eliciting faculty support for a course of action to focus on enriching educational quality in general and improving student writing in particular. As our official QEP document *Write to the Top: Enhancing Student Writing Through a Writing Intensive Program* (2010) explains, the process of identifying the topic for the QEP was long, deliberative, and sometimes contentious. Led by the director of the campus Teaching and Learning Center, the initial QEP leadership team was charged with introducing the new concept of a QEP to faculty across campus and inviting their input on what its focus might be. Throughout the 2008 fall semester, the campus community contributed formally and informally, directly and indirectly to the QEP process via conversations, surveys, and emails. Once writing was officially selected as the topic for the QEP, an interdisciplinary planning committee was formed to begin the work of defining, articulating, and promoting what would become UNCP's writing-anchored QEP: a campus-wide writing-intensive initiative designed to improve student writing and foster a culture of writing to enhance learning.

The interdisciplinary planning committee in charge of the next phase of development included faculty from several disciplines, many of whom taught writing in their home disciplines. For nearly two years, faculty from Nursing, Social Work, Education, Criminal Justice, and Business were invited to collaborate with colleagues from English, Chemistry and Physics, Philosophy and Religion, and Mass Communication. They convened bi-weekly during summers and throughout regular semesters to devise and design a writing-intensive program that would not only satisfy SACS' accreditation mandate but, in the long run, meet the needs of our diverse student body and the expectations of faculty across the disciplines. The process included developing strategies for promoting faculty buy-in, negotiating philosophical differences, redefining notions of expertise, and fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration—all in an effort to cultivate and establish a shared vision for this campus-wide initiative. Without commitment to such consensus building, we argue, WAC/WID administration at regional institutions risks triggering apathy and disjunction among the campus community.

In anticipation of the SACS-QEP reviewers' initial site visit scheduled for the spring of 2010, the QEP Planning Committee invited Michael Carter, then Associate Director of the Campus Writing and Speaking Program at North Carolina State University, to conduct a two-day workshop on teaching writing-intensive courses and teaching writing from a disciplinary perspective for interested UNCP faculty across the campus. His visit was part of a strategy to de-emphasize the role of our resident composition specialists, on the one hand, in order to reinforce, on the other, the conviction that the responsibility and accountability for the teaching of writing on our campus extended beyond the English department. Though at times our composition specialists found it hard to reconcile with this strategy, it was seen as essential to the program's long-term sustainability for several reasons, the most significant of which was the need to redefine expertise. The committee believed that in order to meet the expectations of faculty across the university and eventually the demands of their chosen professions, students needed writing instruction and practice throughout their academic careers and in disciplines other than English as well. Rather than delegate the teaching of writing to faculty in the English department, the committee envisioned a viable, sustainable campus-wide writing culture, anchored in the disciplinary expertise of faculty across campus.

Inviting outside experts to facilitate professional development workshops in support of our QEP would, it was hoped, sent the important message that faculty across campus had to engage in a systematic and methodical focus on writing instruction if we were going to realize the performance gains we sought and preclude what Orr (2002) describes as the "greatest impediment to an ecological

design revolution"—the transformation of human intentions and attitudes in relation to the larger political and institutional structure (p. 22). Admittedly, the decision to outsource faculty professional development risked undermining the expertise of our own rhetoric and composition faculty. Similarly, ascribing expertise in the teaching of writing solely to faculty in the English department imperiled one of the foundational premises of the writing-intensive initiative—that faculty in the disciplines had the expertise to teach students the writing conventions of their disciplines. The delicate balance of openness to redefining notions of expertise in disciplines outside English studies with conscripted expertise consigned almost exclusively to composition courses, presents an ecological challenge of the kind that has sometimes threatened to jeopardize the program's long-term sustainability. While these concerns might be local and site specific, questions of expertise in teaching are not unique to our campus and are certainly traditionally pronounced at small and regional teaching institutions where "faculty members have a great stake in their image as good teachers" (Donahue, 2002, p. 37). Recognizing differences in perceptions of expertise and promoting dialogue for consensus-building represent essential tactics for WAC/WID administrators at teaching institutions like ours if they are to succeed in creating a campus writing culture.

Dynamics of Sustainable Writing-Intensive Program at a Regional Institution

Reviewers of our QEP judged it both an ambitious undertaking and a "model" for other regional institutions, thus simultaneously endorsing our project and cautioning us against setting our goals too high. Grounded in the concept of a vertical approach to writing instruction, UNCP's writing-intensive program aims to facilitate students' transfer of learning from composition courses to upper-level writing-intensive courses. The goal of the QEP—and the writing-intensive program in general—is to enhance students' ability to write "effectively and appropriately" across the curriculum and in their chosen discipline. As such, the initiative focuses on cultivating and honing undergraduate students' both general and discipline-specific writing skills through the implementation of a new graduation requirement that includes Writing Enriched (WE) and Writing in the Discipline (WD) courses. Together, these WE and WD courses inculcate rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, reading practices, and knowledge of conventions, both general and specific. Equally important, they provide students opportunities for ongoing, relevant practice and application of this knowledge and conventions throughout their college career.

Beginning with the 2011-2012 academic year, a combination of WE and WD courses became a graduation requirement for undergraduate students at UNCP as a way to promote the sustainability of the writing-intensive program beyond the 5-year timeframe of the QEP. After all, as Orr (2002) stipulates, designing for sustainability "is not so much about how to make things as about how to make things fit gracefully over long periods of time in a particular ecological, social, and cultural context" (p. 27). The QEP provided an opportunity for launching a writing-intensive program; sustaining this program beyond the timeframe of this accreditation mandate, however, required integrating it within the institutional structure and the local context. To this end, in addition to the first-year writing sequence, UNCP students must complete an additional nine hours of writing-intensive coursework, at least three hours of which must be a WD course, in order to satisfy the requirements for a baccalaureate degree. The writing-intensive program stipulates that students who graduate having met the writing-intensive requirements will have learned to see their writing as purposeful and authentic. As conceived and implemented, our writing-anchored QEP, we believe, will in time reshape attitudes toward writing on our campus by cultivating 1) our students' appreciation for the ways in which writing shapes thinking and error impedes their ability to convey what they want real readers to know, and 2) our faculty's conception of students' writing as process

of thinking and learning as well as a summative performance or presentation of what they have learned.

The writing-intensive program was purposefully designed with the full recognition that essential to the program's sustainability is the degree to which it becomes an integral part of the interconnections within and between the environments in which it must necessarily exist and even thrive. When initial conversations about the QEP began, it became clear that many faculty across the university had long assumed that the first-year, two-semester composition sequence was all the writing instruction students needed and that the lamentable writing performances of juniors and seniors must be the result of weak instruction in those composition courses. What most faculty did not know was that students often failed those courses the first time they enrolled, and many repeated them more than once—sometimes into their junior year. Furthermore, many of those who did not complete Composition II with a C or better postponed retaking the course until their senior year. The 2008 Assessment Report of the Composition Program indicated that approximately 23% of students either withdrew or received a failing grade in the course while another 12% completed the course with a non-passing grade final grade (D/C-). Not until conversations about writing began in the process of developing the writing-intensive program did we come to realize how limited the faculty's perception was of what the first-year composition courses entailed or how often they perceived students' manifestations of ethnolinguistic identity as erroneous usage of Standard English. Without open conversations about writing and discourse conventions, faculty from various disciplines had not had the chance to discuss how to recognize the linguistic markers of the predominant dialects of Robeson county and the surrounding areas and respond to student writing.

With its acknowledgment of the fundamental and foundational nature of the two-semester composition sequence, the writing-intensive QEP signaled to students and faculty across the campus that successful writing is an ongoing expectation and that faculty in every discipline not only assess but teach and expect their students to write purposefully and effectively in academic and professional contexts. New assumptions, attitudes, and expectations about the purpose and relevance of writing and writing instruction, we hoped, would begin to permeate and reshape campus culture in ways the two-course composition sequence could not do. Designing the writing-intensive program as a tiered vertical approach to writing instruction represented our attempt to create what Orr (2002) calls "a real design revolution … to transform human intentions and the larger political, economic, and institutional structures" (p. 22-23). This design revolution sought to instill an emphasis on writing that would inspire students to strive to complete the two-semester requirement in their first-year, as initially intended, knowing that they would need to enroll in more discipline-specific writing courses thereafter.

One important outcome, we trusted, of a campus-wide writing initiative would be greater potential for students to transfer what they learned about writing in the first-year writing sequence to writing situations in other courses, from General Education to courses in their major, and to develop their foundational knowledge and skills further, along with an appreciation for the persistence and pervasiveness of demands for effective writing, even—perhaps especially—beyond their classroom walls. But for this to occur, faculty across the disciplines needed to incorporate direct instruction of writing and guide students to produce the kinds of compositions and documents they assigned and expected. More importantly, this underpinning premise of the writing-intensive initiative represented an essential component necessary for the establishment of a sustainable writing initiative—the procurement of the kinds of cross-disciplinary support that helps entrench—and thus sustain—the initiative firmly within the cultural fabric of the institution by "cultivat[ing] a deeper sense of connection and obligation without which few people will be willing to make even the obvious and rational changes in time to make much difference" (Orr, 2002, p. 23). The QEP aimed to transform

faculty's perceptions towards the teaching of writing and to promote open dialogue and commitment to writing instruction. In the context of regional universities, such transformation is imperative for WAC/WID programs as their sustainability often depends heavily on the faculty's investment in and continuous commitment to these initiatives rather than on the limited and increasingly shrinking institutional resources.

A critical component of the QEP initiative on our campus was the renewed commitment of the institution to support the PlusOne component of our first-year composition program. Capitalizing on UNCP's historic commitment to the education of Native Americans, its core values and mission, and its regional positionality within a predominantly Native American community, in 2008 faculty from the Department of English and Theatre secured funding from the Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTI) grant program from the U.S. Department of Education to expand the PlusOne program in order to improve student performance in first-year writing courses. The program had been previously developed and piloted on a much smaller scale with support from a Teaching Enhancement Award from UNCP's Teaching and Learning Center. The PlusOne Program provides students in Composition I and Composition II with an additional credit hour of instructional time in the form of a co-requisite one-credit "Writing Lab" course. Students enrolled in what is considered a PlusOne section of Composition I or Composition II in effect take a three-credit hour composition course and an additional one-credit hour mandatory writing lab. The PlusOne option targets students who desire additional writing support or who have been previously unsuccessful in completing the composition courses though any student may enroll in a PlusOne section of Composition I or Composition II.

The writing lab sections are capped at seven and are taught by the same instructor as the regular classroom component. This allows instructors to synchronize their teaching activities between the composition and laboratory courses so that the weekly laboratory sessions build on the classroom instruction to support each student's needs. In the weekly small-group writing lab periods students can ask questions about their particular work-in-progress and elicit advice specific to their own writing, work one-on-one with the instructor or other students on shared problems with a particular composition assignment, dissect difficult readings, or exchange drafts for peer review and reader response. The smaller class size encourages students to ask questions about their own work and offer constructive criticism to others. Oftentimes instructors use the writing lab time to discuss conventions of Standard English or focus on addressing issues of usage and mechanics. While the teaching of Standard English grammar is not an explicit course objective for our composition courses, given the needs of our diverse student body, composition faculty often incorporate explicit grammar instruction in their writing labs in order to help students recognize the rhetorical impact that their language choices hold both in the academic and professional arenas.

Assessing Impact on Student Learning

Early assessment of the PlusOne program indicated higher success rates of PlusOne students compared to students enrolled in the traditional composition classes. Students enrolled in the PlusOne sections, we found, often received higher grades in first-year writing courses than those enrolled in the traditional, three-credit, freshman composition sequence. Overall, the between 70% and 80% of the students enrolled in the PlusOne Program completed the composition courses with a final grade of "C" or better compared to the 60% of students who did not enroll in the PlusOne program. Moreover, the grade point average of PlusOne students ranged from 2.45 to 2.65 versus 2.09 and 2.23 for students in the traditional sections of Composition I and Composition II.

The success of the PlusOne component in achieving student learning objectives and the strategic move to embed it in the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)—and the writing-intensive program specifically—generated ongoing faculty and administrative support for the program. These provisions ensure that the first year writing program and the university continue to meet the needs of our students in the crucial areas of written communication and critical thinking while also promoting a culture of writing across campus that will sustain the writing-intensive initiative well into the future. With the development of the writing-intensive program and its emphasis on writing instruction, the PlusOne component of the composition program has expanded considerably from a few sections a semester to more than 15 PlusOne sections of Composition I and Composition II every semester. When federal funding for the program from NASNTI ended after the initial three-year grant period, the university committed to supporting and expanding the program to sustain the writing-driven QEP.

As the writing-intensive program has grown, and with it the number of WE and WD courses offered, so has the PlusOne program. In 2010, UNCP administration allocated additional funding both to enable the Department of English and Theatre to meet student demand for PlusOne composition courses by offering additional sections and to convert three non-tenure track positions into tenure-track rhetoric and composition faculty positions. We see this allocation of resources as additional evidence of support for sustainability which occurs when the "capacity for continuous improvement becomes built-in" (Fullan, 2003, p. 91) within institutional structure through ongoing efforts to remain salient and effective over time. Since one of the core requirements of a successful QEP, according to SACS, is to demonstrate "institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion" of the plan, each institution developing a QEP is required to secure the financial support for the initiative. This requirement proved particularly useful for us at a time of substantial funding reduction at our institution.

Therefore, leveraging the institutional and financial support that accompanies the QEP accreditation requirement allowed us not only to implement the campus-wide writing-intensive program and to strengthen the emphasis on writing across campus but also to secure on-going support for the composition program as well, particularly the PlusOne component. Building relationships with faculty undoubtedly strengthens writing-intensive programs at rural and regional campuses and increases students' and faculty's access to resources and opportunities. To become fully integrated into university culture and sustained over time, however, WAC/WID programs must be seen by stakeholders as filling a particular niche within the institutions essential for meeting their students' needs. More importantly, to achieve sustainability (in times of financial cutbacks) beyond the implementation phase—in our case, the QEP timeframe—such a program needs to forge strategic relationships with other institutional entities, enhance the institution's mission statement and core values, and demonstrate positive impact on student learning. Doing so puts WAC/WID administrators in a position to negotiate allocation of resources and garnish on-going institutional and administrative support.

Emphasizing UNCP's geographical and institutional locales, we have been able to embrace unique affordances while negotiating the challenging constraints our particular ecology represents as we accommodate both our local institutional needs and the "larger patterns and flows" that we trust are moving us in the direction of our goal—a campus-wide writing culture that supports student learning across the disciplines and affirms the school's commitment to serving its multi-ethnic region and diverse student body. Ultimately, the adoption of Orr's ecological framework and design for sustainability has allowed us to reconsider how we might revision traditional notions of structural components, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and other strategic relationships (both internal and external) necessary to foster an institutional environment where a viable and sustainable writing-

intensive program would not only emerge but also flourish. Leveraging the QEP accreditation requirement as the exigence and impetus for a writing-intensive program anchored in a strong first-year writing foundation, forging collaborative relationships with faculty across the campus, and integrating the program with other established writing-focused initiatives have permitted us to root a WAC/WID-like entity firmly within our institutional ecology and plant the seeds of its sustainability.

While institutional contexts undoubtedly vary from one rural or regional university to another, UNCP's approach to developing a sustainable writing-intensive program attests to the value of reconciling the delicate balance of negotiation and concession while attending to institutional "fit" and needs. At rural and regional campuses, we argue, the concept of "fit" within local exigencies is paramount to capitalizing on the affordances that geographical and organizational locales generate. Rural and regional institutions possess unique dynamics of place and power which impact WPA work and define allocation of resources. By identifying these local dynamics, WPAs can begin to devise strategies for configuring institutional scenes and spaces to build consensus among stakeholders based on shared interest in and commitment to student learning; to integrate writing initiatives within the wider institutional environment; and to enact Orr's framework of sustainability in relation to WAC/WID design.

References

Barton, David. (1994). Literacy: *An introduction to the ecology of written language*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bernstein, Cynthia, G. (2000). Misrepresenting the American South. *American Speech, 75*(4), 339-342.

Bernstein, Cynthia, Nunnally, Thomas, E., & Sabino, Robin. (Eds.). (1997). *Language variety in the South revisited.* Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.

Dannenberg, Clare, & Wolfram, Walt. (1998). Ethnic identity and grammatical restructuring: *Be*(s) in Lumbee English. *American Speech, 73*(2), 139-159.

Donahue, Patricia. (2002). Strange resistance. *The WAC Journal, 13*, 31-41.

Fleckenstein, Kristie, Spinuzzi, Clay, Rickly, Rebecca, & Papper, Carole. (2008). The importance of harmony: An ecological metaphor for writing research. *College Composition and Communication, 60*, 388–419.

Fullan, Michael. (2003). *Change forces with a vengeance.* New York: Routledge.

Holdstein, Deborah. (2001). "Writing across the curriculum" and the paradoxes of institutional initiatives. *Pedagogy*, *1*(1), 37-52.

Montgomery, Michael, & Bailey, Guy. (Eds.). (1986). *Language variety in the South: Perspectives in Black and White.* Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.

Morris, Dick, & Martin, Stephen. (2009). Complexity, systems thinking and practice: Skills for managing complex systems. In Stibble, Arran (Ed.), *The handbook of sustainability literacy: Skills for a changing world* (pp.156-164). Foxhole, UK: Green Books Ltd.

Orr, David. (1992). *Ecological literacy: Education and the transition to a postmodern world*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Orr. David. (1994). *Earth in mind: On education, environment, and the human prospect.* Washington, DC: Island Press.

Orr, David. (2002). *The nature of design: Ecology, culture, and human intention*. Oxford University Press.

SACS. (2011). *Handbook for institutions seeking reaffirmation.* Decatur, GA: SACS. Retrieved from http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/Handbook%20for%20Institutions%20seeking%20reaffirmation.pdf

SACS. (2008). *Principles of accreditation. Foundations for quality enhancement.* Retrieved from http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/PrinciplesOfAccreditation.PDF

Syverson, Margaret. (1999). *The wealth of reality: An ecology of composition*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Thaiss, Chris, & Porter, Tara. (2010). The state of WAC/WID in 2010: Methods and results of the U.S. survey of the International WAC/WID Mapping Project. *College Composition and Communication, 61*(3), 534-570.

Torbert, Benjamin. (2001). Tracing Native American language history through consonant cluster reduction: The case of Lumbee English. *American Speech, 76*(4), 361-384.

University of North Carolina at Pembroke. (2013a). *Academic catalog 2013-2014.* Pembroke, NC: UNCP.

University of North Carolina at Pembroke. (2013b). *2013-2014 Fact book*. Retrieved from http://uncp.edu/ie/fact_book/13-14/index.htm

University of North Carolina at Pembroke. (2010). *Write to the top: Enhancing student writing through a writing intensive program*. Retrieved from http://uncp.edu/qep/draft/documents/QEP_Final_2-23-2010.pdf

U.S. Census Bureau. (2013). *Robeson county quick facts*. Retrieved from http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37/37155.html

Wardle, Elizabeth, & Rozen, Kevin. (2012). Addressing the complexity of writing development: Toward an ecological model of assessment. *Assessing Writing, 17*, 106–119.

Wolfram, Walt. (2002). The roots of Lumbee language. *Publication of the American Dialect Society, 81*(1), 9-35.

Wolfram, Walt. (2003). Language variation in the American South: An introduction. *American Speech, 78*(2), 123-129.

Wolfram, Walt, & Sellers, Jason. (1999). Ethnolinguistic marking of past be in Lumbee vernacular English. *Journal of English Linguistics, 27*(2), 94-114.

Notes

Contact Information

Polina Chemishanova, PhD
Assistant Professor
Director of Composition
Department of English, Theatre, and Foreign Languages
University of North Carolina at Pembroke
One University Drive, PO Box 1510
Pembroke, NC 28372-1510
Email: polina.chemishanova@uncp.edu
Phone: (910) 775-4256

Cynthia Miecznikowski
Associate Professor
Department of English, Theatre, and Foreign Languages
University of North Carolina at Pembroke
One University Drive, PO Box 1510
Pembroke, NC 28372
Email: cynthia.miecznikowski@uncp.edu
Phone: (910) 522-5749

Complete APA Citation

Chemishanova, Polina, & Miecznikowski, Cynthia. (2014, July 21). Economies of place and power: Lessons from one regional university's writing-intensive initiative. *Across the Disciplines, 11*(3). Retrieved from https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/rural/chemishanova_miecznikowski.pdf