ONE

Writing Across the Curriculum

An Introduction

SUSAN H. McLEOD

WAC IN THE NINETIES

It may seem strange, in the nineties, to publish a guide to developing writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs. After all, the WAC idea can be dated from the mid-seventies, when the first such programs were developed in the United States. The number of flourishing programs now seems legion; a 1985 survey by the Modern Language Association reported that 46% of all Ph.D.-granting institutions, 48% of all B.A./M.A.-granting institutions, and 28% of all two-year colleges had a WAC program of some sort (Kinneavy 362). More recently, a 1988 survey found that just under 50% of all postsecondary institutions in this country now have WAC programs (McLeod "Writing"). Writing across the curriculum has, in the space of a decade and a half, become a familiar part of the academic landscape.

Another way of looking at the national WAC picture, however, is that just over half of the colleges and universities in the United States do not yet have a WAC program, and the success of WAC elsewhere has made many of these institutions interested in developing such programs themselves. A 1991 videoconference titled "Issues and Conflicts in Writing Across the Curriculum,"

broadcast by the Public Broadcasting Service and produced by Robert Morris College, attracted the largest audience in the history of such videoconferences—401 downlink sites in 48 states and Mexico, with an estimated audience of 15,000.[1] This continuing interest in WAC is a testimonial to how successful the WAC movement has been.

But there are two significant differences in the way WAC programs are now being instituted, both of which have prompted the writing of this book. Ten years ago, it was common to get extramural funding and to bring in outside consultants to start a WAC effort. Today, except for a handful of programs funded by private agencies, most new programs must rely on internal funding. The fact that many institutions are now cutting rather than increasing their budgets means that outside consultants are sometimes out of the question. This volume, although it will not substitute for a visit from a WAC expert, will nevertheless answer some of the questions that would-be WAC directors might ask such a consultant.

The second difference in the way WAC programs are being started is clearly evident at the twice-a-year informational meetings held by the Board of Consultants of the National Network of WAC programs.[2] Ten years ago, the typical attendee at these meetings was a faculty member with a gleam in her eye who wanted advice about gaining administrative support for a WAC program; WAC was still very much a bottom-up phenomenon, led by a few dedicated faculty who had to contend with some administrative skepticism about the idea. Now, however, the situation seems almost reversed: Many attendees report that they have been sent by enthusiastic administrators who want to institute WAC, in spite of some faculty misgivings. (One rather desperate writing program administrator confided that her dean ordered her to "ram WAC down the faculty's throats, if necessary.") It is gratifying that the WAC idea now has wide administrative support, but as many contributors to this volume point out, faculty must own WAC programs in order for those programs to succeed. This book aims at giving interested administrators as well as faculty a guide to developing WAC programs that have both grass-roots and central administrative support.

The contributors to this volume are all involved in successful programs at a variety of institutions—large research institutions, small liberal arts colleges, comprehensive state universities, and

community colleges. Most are long-time WAC directors; several have served as outside consultants to institutions starting WAC programs. Several serve on the Board of Consultants of the National Network of Writing across the Curriculum Programs. Some are or have been administrators, and some combine faculty and administrative duties. Because WAC programs are institution specific, readers are encouraged to skim all chapters and then focus on the sections discussing components that best fit with their own institutional structures and missions.

DEFINING WAC: WRITING TO LEARN AND LEARNING TO WRITE

In Chapter 2, Barbara Walvoord gives specific, practical advice about the first steps to take in starting a WAC program. Before taking any of those steps, however, would-be WAC directors need to define—for themselves as well as for their constituents—what the term means, because it often means different things to different people (see McLeod "Defining"). Recently, for example, I was accosted by an administrator from a small liberal arts institution who told me that the history of WAC programs needed to be rewritten, since his school had WAC before anyone else did: Faculty had been assigning term papers in every class for the last 25 years. Most WAC directors would argue with his notion of what defines a writing across the curriculum program. WAC does involve writing in all disciplines, but it certainly does not mean simply assigning a term paper in every class. Nor does it mean (as some faculty in the disciplines fear) teaching grammar across the curriculum. WAC programs are not additive, but transformative—they aim not at adding more papers and tests of writing ability, but at changing the way both teachers and students use writing in the curriculum.

To understand the changes WAC programs aim to make, it is useful to look at the theoretical bases for these programs. There are two approaches to WAC, approaches that are not mutually exclusive but complementary, as two of the main proponents of WAC have pointed out (Maimon, "Writing"; Fulwiler, "Friends"). We might think of them as being along a continuum in terms of the kinds of writing they advocate: in James Britton's terms, from

expressive (to the self as audience) to *transactional* (to another audience, usually the teacher, for a grade). The first approach, sometimes referred to as *cognitive*, involves using writing to learn. This approach assumes that writing is not only a way of showing what one has learned but is itself a mode of learning—that writing can be used as a tool for, as well as a test of, learning. The work of James Britton and of Janet Emig undergird this approach, which is based on constructivist theories of education. Knowledge is not passively received, the theory goes, but is actively constructed by each individual learner; these constructions change as our knowledge changes and grows. One of the most powerful ways of helping students build and change their knowledge structures is to have them write for themselves as audience—to explain things to themselves before they have to explain them to someone else. In the curriculum, this approach advocates write-to-learn assignments such as journals and other ungraded writing assignments aimed at helping students think on paper (for examples of such assignments, see Fulwiler's *Journal Book*). The best-known program using this approach to WAC was developed by Toby Fulwiler at Michigan Technological University; it is described in Fulwiler and Young's book *Language Connections: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*.

It is important in discussing writing-to-learn assignments with faculty that we clarify what we mean by *learning*. One of the first questions a WAC director hears from colleagues is this: "What empirical evidence do you have that writing aids learning?" If one defines *learning* as simple recall of facts, the answer to that question is that we have little such evidence (Ackerman). In fact, if we are interested in having students only remember information, we would be better off instituting other kinds of assignments—memorization of mnemonic devices to aid recall, for example. But most of those involved in WAC efforts use the term *learning* as synonymous with *discovery*, as a way of objectifying thought, of helping separate the knower from the known; as a little girl once put it, "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" (Wallas 106). We might think of writing to learn as a "knowledge-transforming" rather than a "knowledge-telling" task (see Bereiter and Scardemalia). For those interested in this question of how writing aids knowledge transformation, a recent article discusses how we might go about measuring such learning (Schumacher and Nash).

The second approach to WAC, sometimes termed *rhetorical*, involves learning to write in particular disciplines, or in what researchers have begun to think of as *discourse communities*. Although this approach does not exclude writing-to-learn assignments, it emphasizes more formal assignments, teaching writing as a form of social behavior in the academic community. The work of theorists on the social construction of knowledge, summarized by Kenneth Bruffee, underlies this approach. Knowledge in a discipline is seen not as discovered, but as agreed upon—as socially justified belief, created through the ongoing "conversation" (written as well as oral) of those in the field (see Maimon et al.). Our task in WAC programs is to help introduce students to the conventions of academic discourse in general and to the discourse conventions of particular disciplines—much as we would try to introduce newcomers into an ongoing conversation. (An example may clarify the notion of discourse communities. In writing about literature, we can use the present tense when quoting literary figures from the past—"Shakespeare says"—because for us the poet's words are not of an age but for all time. In writing about history, however, one uses the past tense: "Gibbon said." The words of those who write history are not taken by historians to be ageless, but must be considered in the context of the time in which they wrote.) Because this approach to WAC sees the discourse community as central to the process of writing as well as to the form of the finished product, it emphasizes collaborative learning and group work—attempting to model in the classroom the collaborative nature of the creation of knowledge. In the curriculum, this approach manifests itself in two ways: the freshman writing course that aims at introducing students to the general features of academic discourse and the writing-in-the-major (or writing-intensive) course that emphasizes the lines of reasoning and methods of proof for a particular discourse community. The best-known program taking this approach was established by Elaine Maimon at Beaver College, and is described in *Writing in the Arts and Sciences* and in "Talking to Strangers."

Writing across the curriculum may be defined, then, as a comprehensive program that transforms the curriculum, encouraging writing to learn and learning to write in all disciplines. Before discussing the possible components of such programs, it is worth reemphasizing the basic assumptions of WAC: that writing and

thinking are closely allied, that learning to write well involves learning particular discourse conventions, and that, therefore, writing belongs in the entire curriculum, not just in a course offered by the English department. There is also an implicit assumption that WAC is a faculty-driven phenomenon, involving changes in teaching methods; WAC assumes that students learn better in an active rather than a passive (lecture) mode, that learning is not only solitary but also a collaborative social phenomenon, that writing improves when critiqued by peers and then rewritten. Faculty must see these as important and useful ways of teaching before they will institute them in their own classrooms; they will never be convinced by having WAC imposed on them—in fact, experience suggests that they will usually do their best to resist it. A WAC program needs strong administrative support, but it also has to be a bottom-up phenomenon, usually starting with a few committed faculty members and growing as others see how successful these faculty have been. Profound curricular and pedagogical change can come about as a result of a WAC program, but such change will not take place unless it comes from the faculty themselves. And change takes time. Successful WAC programs start slowly, phasing in various components over a period of years as a consensus develops that the program is useful (see McLeod *Strengthening*).

SETTING UP A PROGRAM: POSSIBLE COMPONENTS

Writing across the curriculum programs affect both faculty and students. The most successful programs are multifaceted, combining faculty development components with support systems and components that ensure curricular change. Which components are the best for your particular campus? The first step is to study your own institution, asking questions about the present administrative structure and budget (Which administrative office would support WAC on campus? What sort of budget is already in place for faculty development or curricular reform?), the curriculum (Where is writing already used in the disciplines? What kinds of writing courses exist inside and outside the English department?), any moves toward curricular reform (How could WAC figure into

the reform of the general education curriculum? of restructuring a major, a department, a school?), and personnel (What faculty might be interested in a WAC program? Who is the best person to organize and spearhead the program?). After studying the institution and thinking about where a program could be built, housed, and funded, one should start talking to faculty. Barbara Walvoord, who has been advising faculty and administrators for nearly 20 years about starting WAC programs, deals with the issue of faculty dialogue in Chapter 2, "Getting Started." Whether *faculty* means the full professor at a liberal arts institution or a graduate teaching assistant at a research institution, those most involved in undergraduate instruction need to talk about how writing is taught and learned before instituting a program to improve that teaching and learning. Walvoord gives specific practical suggestions about how this dialogue can get started and how it can lead into productive program planning. She also gives advice to those who want to start a program after a hiatus.

The following chapters of the book deal with various components of WAC programs. It should be emphasized, however, that none of these components can exist entirely independently of the others. Successful WAC programs incorporate faculty and student support systems, curricular elements, and some administrative structure. Faculty development is an essential part of writing across the curriculum—almost all programs at one time or another hold workshops for faculty to discuss WAC concepts and to demonstrate techniques of assigning and evaluating student writing. In Chapter 3, Joyce Magnotto and Barbara Stout describe such workshops; discuss planning, funding, and evaluation; and offer advice about sustaining an ongoing series of workshops to engage faculty in productive discussion of writing and learning. As Magnotto and Stout point out, one of the most important things that a faculty workshop does is model WAC values for faculty by having them write themselves and share that writing with one another. The spirit of collegiality and sense of shared purpose that develop as a result of these workshops are important outcomes, especially at institutions where faculty morale needs a boost (see Weiss and Peich). In Chapter 4, Karen Wiley Sandler discusses WAC from an administrator's point of view. As a member of the French department at the University of Vermont she took part in Toby Fulwiler's WAC workshops; she has been an administrator

at two other institutions, both of which had WAC programs. She discusses how administrators can support and nourish WAC efforts.

Once faculty are engaged in a WAC program, there are a number of possibilities—depending on the particular institution—for permanently integrating WAC into the curriculum, usually through some configuration of required courses. The curricular elements of WAC programs are various and institution specific, differing widely from campus to campus. The most obvious—and most neglected—course in WAC planning is freshman composition. Because WAC is thought of as existing apart from and outside of the English department, program planners often overlook one of the largest potential WAC populations. But this course is where our students get their first university-level writing instruction; it is only logical that any examination of possible WAC courses should begin at the beginning. Furthermore, any WAC program needs the support (or at least the benign neglect) of the English department to succeed. A lack of understanding of WAC principles in the department traditionally linked to writing instruction can eventually damage, perhaps even destroy, a WAC effort. In Chapter 5, Linda Peterson discusses a model that focuses on freshman composition as an introduction to academic writing, showing students how to analyze and then use the rhetorical conventions of various disciplines. In this model, the English department asks for help from other disciplines, help that those disciplines are usually very glad to give. Asking faculty for help in redesigning the introductory composition course can be the basis for subsequent WAC efforts.

Many WAC programs require students to take writing-designated courses outside the English department, either as part of general education requirements or as part of the students' major requirements. A common curricular element is the now-familiar writing-intensive (WI) course. Christine Farris and Raymond Smith (Chapter 6) define what *writing intensive* means and discuss models in which students are required to take a certain number of WI courses in their college careers, often in their major. They also suggest that a research component be connected to the consultation/follow-up model they propose for course design. The chapter by Christopher Thaiss (Chapter 7) defines the many purposes served by writing in general education courses and discusses ways to integrate writing into general education requirements

across the disciplines. Because many schools are now in the process of revising their general education requirements, Thaiss describes a workshop model that lets WAC directors use the enthusiasm of curriculum planners to make writing an integral part of the new curriculum. Those who are thinking of starting a WAC program at large research institutions will find that there are models that work for their institutions as well; Joan Graham (Chapter 8) describes courses involving writing components (writing as an integrated part of a course), writing adjuncts (separate courses carrying less credit than the lecture to which it is attached), and writing links (autonomous courses attached to lectures and carrying equal weight). She also discusses the experiences of particular institutions with such models.

Once a WAC program is under way, support systems are needed to continue the program. In Chapter 9, Peshe Kuriloff describes one sort of model for faculty support in which the WAC director works closely with faculty in the disciplines on designing the course and assignments, consulting, collaborating, and sometimes even team-teaching the course. Faculty in the disciplines can be expected to assign and evaluate student writing, but unless their courses are very small, they cannot be expected to give the intensive one-on-one feedback to writers that well-trained tutors can give. In Chapter 10, Muriel Harris shows how a writing center is an essential support element for teachers and students alike. As Harris points out, a well-staffed writing center can be the hub of a WAC program. She also gives practical advice on how to set up and run a writing center, along with examples of such centers at a number of different institutions. A different model for support of faculty is discussed by Tori Haring-Smith (Chapter 11); the writing fellows programs she describes have been successful at Ivy League institutions, comprehensive state universities, and small liberal arts schools alike. In such programs, peer tutors do not work out of a writing center but are attached to particular courses. They respond to—but do not grade—drafts of student papers, giving students extensive feedback before the final version of the paper is due to the teacher. Finally, once program elements are in place WAC directors need to plan for the future. Margot Soven concludes with a chapter providing an overview of continuing WAC programs, discussing both the pleasures and the pitfalls of sustaining successful programs once they are launched.

A final word on starting WAC programs. As many of the contributors to this book would attest, being involved in WAC program development may have its frustrations, but it also has enormous rewards. As a WAC director, the best thing about WAC for me is what I have learned from my colleagues in other disciplines. It is all too easy for those of us in composition studies to subscribe to what Barbara Walvoord calls the *conversion model* of WAC—to think that we have The Word on words, and our task is to go forth to enlighten the heathen in other disciplines. Those who subscribe to this model will discover that they are the ones who become enlightened; when leading my first faculty workshops, I found that my idea of what constituted "good" writing was challenged and then expanded through lively discussion with chemists, political scientists, zoologists, historians, and engineers. WAC directors are—or must become—listeners as well as talkers, learners as well as facilitators of learning. Those who are starting WAC programs will find, I am sure, that what they learn from their colleagues in the disciplines about writing, learning, and teaching will be one of the most rewarding parts of their involvement in writing across the curriculum.

NOTES

1. For information on how to obtain a tape of this two-hour videoconference, contact William Sipple, Dean of Learning Resources, Robert Morris College, Narrows Run Road, Coraopolis, Pennsylvania 15108-1189. Dean Sipple's office also has a series of five half-hour faculty development resource tapes for use in workshops.

2. The network meetings are held at the National Council of Teachers of English Conference in November and the Conference on College Composition and Communication in March. For information about both these conferences, contact the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. The members of the Board of Consultants of the National Network of Writing Across the Curriculum Programs are Christopher Thaiss, coordinator, George Mason University; Toby Fulwiler, University of Vermont; Bernadette Mullholland Glaze, Fairfax County Public Schools (Virginia); Carin Hauser, Fairfax County Public Schools (Virginia); Joyce Magnotto, Prince George's Community College (Maryland); Susan McLeod, Washington State University; Lex Runciman, Oregon State University; Margot Soven, La Salle University; and Barbara Walvoord, University of Cincinnati. For further information about the network, contact Christopher Thaiss, Department of English, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia 22030.

WORKS CITED

Ackerman, John. "The Promise of Writing to Learn." Unpublished manuscript.

Bereiter, Carl, and Marlene Scardamalia. *The Psychology of Written Composition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1987.

Britton, James, et al. *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1975.

Bruffee, Kenneth A. "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind.' " *College English* 46 (1984): 635-52.

Emig, Janet. "Writing as a Mode of Learning." *College Composition and Communication* 28 (1977): 122-28.

Fulwiler, Toby. "Friends and Enemies of Writing Across the Curriculum." Conference on College Composition and Communication. Chicago, 1990.

———. *The Journal Book*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton, 1987.

Fulwiler, Toby, and Art Young, eds. *Language Connections: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1982.

Kinneavy, James. "Writing Across the Curriculum." *Teaching Composition: 12 Bibliographical Essays*. Ed. Gary Tate. Fort Worth: Texas Christian P, 1987. 353-77.

Maimon, Elaine. "Talking to Strangers." *College Composition and Communication* 30 (1979): 364-69.

———. "Writing Across the Curriculum: Reexamining False Dichotomies." Conference on College Composition and Communication. Chicago, 1990.

Maimon, Elaine, et al. *Writing in the Arts and Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: Winthrop, 1981.

McLeod, Susan. "Defining Writing Across the Curriculum." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 11 (Fall 1987): 19-24.

———. "Writing Across the Curriculum: The Second Stage, and Beyond." *College Composition and Communication* 40 (1989): 337-43.

———, ed. *Strengthening Programs for Writing Across the Curriculum*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988.

Schumacher, Gary M., and Jane Gradwohl Nash. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Knowledge Change Due to Writing." *Research in the Teaching of English* 25 (1991): 67-96.

Wallas, Graham. *The Art of Thought*. New York: Harcourt, 1926.

Weiss, Robert, and Michael Peich. "Faculty Attitude Change in a Cross-Disciplinary Writing Workshop." *College Composition and Communication* 31 (1980): 33-41.