SEVEN

WAC and General Education Courses

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TENDENCIES IN GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES

Doing WAC in general education courses has something in common with doing it in upper-level major courses—in both situations WAC can help people write better and learn better, and successful techniques that teachers use in their major courses can be adapted to general education. But adapt teachers must, because the differences between major courses and general education courses create big differences in WAC teaching and WAC program planning.

Here are some key differences:

1. People do not major in general education, but are "forced" to take it. Prior motivation is low; resistance may be high.
2. General education courses tend to enroll freshmen and sophomores, people less comfortable and confident in the institution.
3. Especially in universities, class size tends to be larger, maybe much, much larger, than in major courses.
4. Courses are "introductory" or, in some programs, "interdisciplinary," so students lack knowledge of discourse and methods in the subject area of the course.
5. In four-year colleges and universities, faculty who teach general education tend to have less experience, less job security, and less

chance to communicate with other faculty than those who teach major courses.

6. The goals of general education courses tend to be vague and idealistic—e.g., "cultural literacy," "the ability to write in college," "appreciation of scientific method"—whereas goals of major courses tend to be specific and preprofessional.
7. Most general education requirements come in three- or six-hour chunks; there is neither continuity from one chunk to another nor any explicit connection between them.

Because of larger class sizes and because of relative lack of attention paid by full-time faculties to the general education courses in universities, examples of WAC programs focused on general education and core curricula are fewer than those of programs centered on the major, most commonly in writing-intensive courses. These tendencies create difficulties for WAC planners, but it is these tendencies that make writing so important a tool in general education. Writing can be the tool that helps us overcome the impersonality of large classes. It can help give confidence to the inexperienced, unsure new student. It can help students make connections between courses that seem arbitrarily chosen and isolated. Let me explore each tendency in turn and describe some WAC teaching techniques and faculty workshop practices that seem particularly relevant.

1. People Do not Major in General Education, but Are "Forced" to Take It. The most crucial thing to remember about general education is that people do not major in it. Faculties decide which subjects are essential toward producing a well-rounded individual and, therefore, require one or more courses in these areas. To varying degrees, choice is restricted. One school may have a large core curriculum of specific courses; another may follow the cafeteria model, wherein students choose from a list of courses within designated areas of the curriculum, for example, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and communication. Whatever the arrangement, someone besides the student is choosing what it is good for the student to know.

Hence, students often resist these courses. They treat general education requirements as something "to get out of the way" before the real work of the major. Moreover, even if a student is

not hostile, the lack of choice implicit in general education requirements means that the student is not likely to have thought much about the course before writing it into the schedule. So students enter the course having made no mental connections between it and anything of importance in life. Intrinsic motivation tends to be low.

If faculties genuinely believe in the usefulness of the general education requirements, then they need to find ways to (1) help students see the work as meaningful and (2) include definite choices that students can make within the course structure. Writing can help bring about both objectives. For example, early in the semester teachers might ask students to write honestly and reflectively about the course: Why do they believe that this subject is required? How does it relate to other courses that are required? How does it relate to other things that interest them? How, do they suspect, might it be of use to them in the future? These writings can spark a class discussion, or at the very least clue the teacher in to issues to address in explaining and organizing the course.

In regard to choice, teachers can create writing assignments that allow students to exercise their individuality. Even in the course that rushes to cover a mass of prescribed material and tests students through standardized vehicles, it is possible to allow students to express themselves. Midterms and finals, for example, can include at least one essay question that asks for an application of knowledge to something else of interest to the student, or present a problem situation that allows real options. Better yet, teachers can give longer-term assignments that encourage an investment of self and that reward uniqueness. If they want to spark outside reading, for example, they can let each student choose a text (do not require that all choices be made from a list you provide) and ask the student to write a review both for the teacher and for others in the class. Provide at least one class hour in which students can share their reviews with peers. Use the student choices to build a resource list to distribute to everyone.

In responding to student writing, teachers should keep in mind the need to stimulate motivation and make connections. Even a brief comment can specify attention to *this* writing by *this* student. Teachers should address students by name, comments should point out specific passages that interested the teacher, teachers should note connections that the writing sparked in them and perhaps suggest further sources for the writer to explore. Albeit

concise, such a format expresses the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject and asserts the student's uniqueness.

2. General Education Courses Tend to Enroll Freshmen and Sophomores, People Less Comfortable and Confident in the Institution. Although a few colleges, such as Brooklyn College, have created core curricula that extend over four years, and although some schools such as the University of Maryland and George Mason have created upper-level required courses in writing, most colleges urge students to take general education course work early in their careers, so that the last two years can be devoted to the major. I realize, of course, that the increase in part-time students has made the "four-year" concept all but obsolete and that the lack of available sections in crowded schools has forced some students to put off general education courses until the last semester before graduation. Nevertheless, general education courses tend to enroll students either new or almost new to the institution.

Thus the general education course, regardless of the subject, serves as part of the student's "welcome" to the school. I put "welcome" in quotation marks because most institutions, particularly universities, devote to general education few regular full-time faculty and burden it with proportionately larger class sizes. Only recently, as drastic rates of attrition in the first year have generated concern, have schools begun to pay real attention to the quality of the welcome we provide new students, as witnessed by the rapid growth of the conferences on the freshman experience and by reports on general education from the Carnegie Foundation and the Association of American Colleges (Katz et al.).

How can WAC respond to the new student's need for welcome? If we take seriously the oft-reported values of writing in helping people explore their emotions, clarify their thinking, and establish relationships with others, then pertinent uses of writing come to mind, among them:

1. "Rapport" assignments
2. Constructive comments by teachers and peers on drafts
3. Electronic mail networks on and off campus

"Rapport" Writing. At the very least, writing should be suggested to faculty as a means for building rapport with new students. As an introductory exercise, teachers can ask students to introduce themselves: What are their interests and plans? What questions do they have about the course at this point? What strengths and weaknesses do they feel they have in relation to this subject? Even if they can't feel too comfortable writing about these things at the start of a course, at least the exercise will show that the teacher values their information and it gives the teacher the opportunity to respond with a word or two of welcome. Teachers of math and science frequently use assignments such as this as periodic checks of student morale during a tough course: What's problematic for you now? What do you have questions about? Math professor Stanley Zoltek of George Mason uses this technique as a standing assignment for an electronic journal that he uses to converse with his students via the computer (Thaiss et al.). Biologist Anne Nielsen of Blue Ridge Community College (Virginia) found that such invitations to students improved their morale and clued her in to student difficulties with concepts and vocabulary.

Faculty sometimes balk at the notion of encouraging students to write to them about such touchy-feely subjects as their personal relationships or their troubles adapting to college life. But as colleges and universities grow, and especially as they attract part-time and commuter students who are unlikely to use such campus services as counselors and dorm advisors, faculty of general education courses on occasion have to be willing to listen, lest their institutions lose many potentially successful students. This is not to say that writing in courses across the curriculum should be dominated by discussion of personal issues—far from it. Periodic checks of student morale are just that—maybe three times a semester. Within a required journal, for example, students can be assigned to write primarily about course concepts and data, but a few entries may be designated "free choice" or "anything you want to write about." Such entries may not even require a response, unless the student requests one; what's important is the opportunity to write.

Still, if students use such opportunities to write about issues that deeply trouble them, some thoughtful response is called for (Singer 72). Faculty often resist "how are you feeling?" assignments, because

they fear the responsibility that accompanies the question and they recognize their lack of expertise in responding to emotional crises. For this reason, it is useful to invite to a faculty workshop a member of the counseling center staff to help the group discuss ways to be responsive to such writing without the teacher's having to take on the counselor's role.

Constructive Comments on Drafts of Papers. While feedback on drafts has become standard practice in courses devoted to the improvement of writing, we shouldn't overlook the importance of this practice in building rapport with students. Many teachers of composition find the one-on-one conference and the writing of helpful comments on drafts the most rewarding aspects of their teaching of writing, not only because of the growth this work occasions in student writing skill but also because of the sense of belonging that students derive from the personal attention. Later in this chapter I recommend that general education curricula be planned to include at least one course per semester in which students receive this kind of attention to their writing in progress.

This "rapport" role for feedback suggests again that teachers in their responses need to be sensitive to the writer as well as to the writing. We comment on and about papers, but we respond to people. In faculty workshops in WAC, it is essential to practice mutual responses to one another's writing and to stress that the same courtesy and thoughtfulness we grant one another needs to be granted students.

The need to show welcome through comments on drafts also points out the importance of the writing center on campus (see Harris, this volume). How many students come to the center initially on a teacher's referral to get help on a paper and then return to the center because of the genuine interest shown by the tutor!

In discussing feedback as instrumental both in the building of writing skill and in establishing rapport, I do not want to separate these motives. Indeed, this building of relationships through dialogue about writing is part and parcel of growth in writing, as I note later when discussing Tendency 4. When, for example, we ask students to elaborate points made in a draft of a critical paper or show how a draft of a laboratory report may be revised to fit classical form, we help initiate students to the language and con-

ventions of disciplines, and so help them become better writers in those contexts.

Electronic Mail Networks. At more and more schools, local area networks (LAN) allow students to converse in writing with one another and their professors on topics as limitless as the imaginations of the writers. Students read all the contributions that have been made to the discussion and respond as motivated. Sometimes the conversations concern designated topics. As part of the computer literacy course in George Mason's Plan for Alternative General Education (PAGE) program, students receive access to BITNET and are assigned to read BITNET newsgroups. Each student chooses a newsgroup of interest to summarize and comment on to fellow students. This assignment promotes communication within special-interest groups and challenges students to describe their interests to those who know little or nothing about them.

3. Especially in Universities, Class Size Tends to Be Larger, Maybe Much, Much Larger Than in Major Courses. Although the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has recommended 15 as the ideal size for the required composition class, and most schools keep this number below 25, few subject areas agree that general education can flourish only in small classes. While few try to defend the large lecture class as a forum for learning, large classes, of 50, 100, or several hundred, always look great on the balance sheet and many students abet this strategy by being satisfied just to find an open space. Full-time faculty go along because large classes for general education pay for small classes in the subjects they want to teach to majors and graduate students.

WAC program planners have found large classes to be stumbling blocks for their efforts in two ways. First, the teacher who tolerates the large lecture class as a suitable forum for learning has probably not thought deeply enough about his or her objectives for student learning in order to see the connection between writing and knowing that is so vital for understanding of writing across the curriculum. The mind-set that presents the highest hurdle for WAC planners is the same mind-set that governs the large lecture: "it is my job to present the material and it is their job to learn it," with *learn* an unconsidered term. Because this lack of thought

about learning is so widespread among college faculty, it is indispensable that a WAC workshop for faculty focus early, through discussion and writing, on what we mean by *learning* and how our teaching can help bring it about.

The second stumbling block large classes present is the assumption by faculty that "my class is too large for me to assign writing." This assumption derives from the mistaken notion that *writing* can only mean conventional themes and term papers, meticulously scrutinized, marked up, and graded by the teacher. Knowing that this process is time-consuming and fraught with worry for the teacher who must agonize between granting a B– or a C+, faculty rightly fear the prospect of enduring this for 50 students, not to mention 200.

On the other hand, this fear, because it is so definite and strong, provides a great opportunity for the WAC workshop leader to present a fuller, liberating definition of *writing* and many refreshing alternatives to the conventional term paper torture. If the workshop leads the participants to make connections between writing and learning (as outlined by Britton; Martin et al.; Emig; and many others), then faculty will be open to such key ideas as writing not graded by the teacher, writing used for impromptu problem solving during classes, and writing shared by peers in small groups. Let teachers know that simply sharing with students a systematic way of taking notes and listening to lectures (e.g., Thaiss, *Write*, 58-60) can be a vital contribution to the WAC program.

If the workshop has also focused on writing as process (I recommend that leaders conduct some workshop exercises as processes of drafting, feedback, and revision so that participants get a feel for this; see Magnotto and Stout, this volume), then faculty will be open to seeing how they can ease their grading anxiety by making useful suggestions to early drafts rather than by devoting fruitless worried hours to marking and grading final drafts that the students have no chance to revise. If discussion of such techniques fails to ease faculty fears of the paper load, suggest such techniques as the "microtheme" developed at Montana State (Bean et al.), whereby students write brief essays, on note cards, in response to carefully limited questions.

In addition, emphasize writing that helps the teacher break down his or her own feelings of alienation in the impersonal lecture hall. In the alternative general education (PAGE) program

at George Mason, we have had students write summaries and reviews of lectures in classes of more than 150, and keep these writings in portfolios that we regularly read through. These help us get to know the students, tune us in to what we need to clarify, and help us plan revisions of the course. As a variation, teachers can ask students to write questions about a lecture and use the student questions as the format for a subsequent class. Such exercises bridge the gap between teacher and students often imposed by the numbers and the lecture hall architecture.

While writing to learn can go on in important ways in the large class, no teacher in a large lecture can give to individuals the sustained attention to writing that real improvement either in style or in handling of ideas demands. So although the WAC planner for general education should never give in to the simple equation "large class = no writing," she needs to look for ways around or through the institutional structure to get students that attention. As a rule of thumb, always look for ways to break up large groups. If your institution varies the large lecture with discussion sections led by teaching assistants (TAs), consider putting strong emphasis on the training of TAs in WAC practices. Such institutions as UCLA have become models of this WAC emphasis (Strenski). In addition to seminars and workshops for TAs in WAC practice, UCLA's writing program publishes the *TA at UCLA Newsletter*, with articles written by TAs about such issues as assignment design and evaluation of papers.

Similarly, use the traditional structure of science lecture/laboratory courses to suggest to faculty the different types of writing and writing process appropriate to both venues. Focus on techniques like those described above, for example, microthemes, for the lecture; work with course planners and lab assistants to bring process theory into the writing of lab reports and the keeping of lab notebooks, as have faculty at such schools as Northern Iowa (Jensen) and Michigan Tech (Meese).

If a lecture course has no discussion sections, but has graders to assist the professor, suggest that these persons be trained in WAC theory and that their time be used to respond to the writing of subgroups of the students, with students given the opportunity to confer with the assistant and revise the work. If your institution supports no subdivision of the labor of the large class, do not stop pushing for it. Be inventive; adapt, for example, the writing fellows

model developed at Brown (as described in Haring-Smith, this volume), whereby selected undergraduates are entrusted with responding to the drafts of students in classes across the disciplines. Or work with the writing center at your institution to have specially funded tutorial time allocated to specific large courses, as described in Harris (this volume). (Indeed, the writing center must be an integral part of any WAC program. At some schools, such as SUNY Albany, the WAC enterprise is directed through the center.)

General education planners should also explore the possibility of *linked* courses, one of which gives to writing as process the attention that the other, a large section, cannot give (see Graham, this volume). At Washington State, for example, large sections of world civilization are linked to small sections of composition, with students addressing in their journals and papers issues introduced in world civilization lectures and readings.

Finally, do not lose sight of the context of large and small classes within the general education frame. If the large class is more the exception than the rule in your general education setup, there may be no need to make the large class writing intensive (providing individual attention to drafts and requiring substantial numbers of pages), as long as other courses are providing this support for students. Focus the large class on the writing-to-learn techniques most doable and appropriate.

4. Courses Are Introductory or, in Some Programs, Interdisciplinary, so Students Lack Knowledge of Discourse and Methods in the Subject Area of the Course. The exciting convergence of literary theory, reading theory, and composing theory around the issue of discourse communities has key implications for how teachers view writing in the general education context. WAC planners need to take seriously the reading theorists' (e.g., Estes and Vaughan) exploration of "prior knowledge," the literary theorists' (e.g., Fish) assertion of specialized discourse, and the composing theorists' (e.g., Bartholomae) emphasis on students' slow learning of so-called academic discourse, because most faculty outside of composition classes have understandably given little thought to the often very esoteric nature of the good writing they'd like to expect from students: writing that shows an easy

familiarity with the technical language and major issues of the discipline, a familiarity that can only be achieved over years of reading, writing, and conversation in the field. In WAC workshops with general education faculty, I stress this developmental process, lest faculty who are willing to assign writing in their classes drop out in frustration over the students' awkward prose and apparently sloppy use of key words. Although no writer can sidestep this movement through error to grace, teachers can apply process theory and use some writing-to-learn techniques that can further student development and ease their own frustration.

First, in their evaluation of student writings, faculty can learn to see the positive value in the student's attempts to use the language of the discipline and to achieve a professional tone. Faculty can learn to see through what might look like pompous or merely awkward writing to see the student's working with concepts and struggling to navigate unfamiliar terrain. Within the writing process, response to the student can focus on this intellectual effort rather than on clumsy style, which will improve with practice.

Second, workshop leaders should emphasize Emig's advice to writers to use their own language—language with which they are comfortable, rather than the technical prose of texts—to write about ideas they are trying to understand. In promoting the use of such writing-to-learn techniques as the learning log or brief, end-of-class summaries, teachers can use student samples that demonstrate the difference between thoughtful writing that uses words students know and writing that primarily tries to emulate the style of the textbook or the lecturer. It is vital for unsure students to know that they are allowed to use the familiar. For example, historian Betty Heycke of California State University-Chico assigns the following essay about late nineteenth-century American politics, this assignment designed to help students apply their reading without using textbook style.

> Write your brother about your daily life, your achievements, and your problems in America. You have, by the way, a pretty good idea of who is responsible for your financial problems and what should be done; and you have some strong opinions about the '96 Presidential election and the Populist Party. You think your brother needs to understand a little about American politics and economics to make his decision.

> . . . Be specific. Use material from texts and lectures, *but do not quote the texts directly*. This must be in your own words (*Literacy and Learning* 3).

Indeed, one of the goals for general education in writing should be to develop students' ability to write for different discourse communities. One benefit of writing across the general education curriculum is to give students a taste of the conventional terms and formats of diverse fields. If writing occurs primarily in major courses, students often will not learn how to vary styles and assumptions as they vary their readers. One advantage of the LAN described earlier is that it brings into conversation students with varied interests and different levels of knowledge in a given subject. To contribute to the conversation, writers need to adjust style.

Sometimes this focus on diversifying discourse can be formalized in general education curriculum. At George Mason, an expressed purpose of the required junior-senior writing course is to give students practice in addressing specialized and nonspecialized readers. Students write research reports for readers (often the teachers of major courses) in their fields, then reuse the research data to write a different document for a different purpose to a nonspecialist. The heterogeneous (by majors) enrollment in a given section of the writing course allows for peer-response groups to be formed that give each writer practice in addressing lay readers.

Third, because students can only become familiar with diverse academic discourses through ongoing conversation with those "inside" the discourse, writers need feedback from teachers on drafts and some opportunities to revise. I suggest later that general education curricula should be set up to ensure that multidraft writing occurs in at least one course per semester.

Fourth, part of becoming familiar with academic discourse communities is to realize that there are many such communities and many modes of writing that we can call academic. A good question to ask in a faculty workshop is "What do professionals in your field write?" A useful second question is "Do students in our general education courses get some exposure to these types of writing and some practice doing them?" Invite faculty to bring to the workshop samples of typical documents and have them brainstorm ways to give general education students some practice in doing what professionals do. A WAC program that includes col-

lecting and analyzing data in a science lab, composing program notes for a musical performance, keeping a field log in sociology, and comparing first-person accounts of an historical event in a history class more practically teaches writers versatility than do the artificial exercises in modes of discourse that still characterize many composition classes. These "professional practice" assignments need not be elaborate to be significant; for example, sociologist Keith Crew of Northern Iowa sees the essay exams he gives his introductory students (he formerly gave multiple-choice tests) as vital training in the "sociological imagination" (3).

5. In Four-Year Colleges and Universities, Faculty Who Teach General Education Tend to Have Less Experience, Less Job Security, and Less Chance to Communicate With Other Faculty Than Those Who Teach Major Courses. Addressing WAC in general education forces many institutions to address their inequities in hiring and compensation. The four-year college or university that gives stipends or release time for WAC participation only to regular faculty systematically ignores WAC in general education, if that school uses adjuncts or TAs as the main teaching cadres at the freshman-sophomore level. I've heard it argued that giving workshop stipends to nonregular faculty is not cost effective, because these faculty are not likely to stay at the institution. But is it more cost-effective, in terms of the needs of general education, to give extra money to a full-timer who neither teaches general education courses nor is likely to have much contact with those who do?

If a school wants to upgrade WAC in its general education courses, WAC planners need to look closely at present and future staffing. Despite the strong wishes of department chairs, is it likely that those 25 part-time FTE will be turned into 25 tenure-track slots? Or is it more likely that those 15 adjuncts who have been with the school for the past eight years will be there for the next eight, despite the low prestige, including low pay? Is it equally likely that the full-time equivalent (FTE) for TAs, which grew to 15 in 1985 and 20 in 1988, might become 25 by 1993? If your institutional trend has been that fewer and fewer regular faculty are teaching general education, and if your administration has expressed some commitment to WAC in general education, push your funders to get stipends and other compensation for the

people who'll be doing the teaching and for those regular faculty who have already demonstrated commitment to freshmen and sophomores. Particularly in schools that stress full-timers' research and their directing of graduate students, it is cost-effective to put WAC dollars for general education into workshops for adjuncts and TAs. Such money is necessary compensation for adjuncts who otherwise have no contractual obligation to do more than teach their classes, and it can inspire commitment to the institution, despite the poor conditions under which adjuncts normally work.

As for TAs, WAC money can be used for release time for leaders of training programs, as it is at Harvard, Cornell (Bogel and Gottschalk), UCLA, Syracuse, Ohio State, and a number of other research universities. As long as a significant number of introductory classes, discussion sections, labs, and other occasions for writing in general education are handled by TAs, faculty development money must be spent there, even though the TAs will be taking their skills elsewhere in one or two years. Such spending not only benefits the undergraduate program but makes the graduate program more attractive to students looking to enhance their teaching credentials.

6. The Goals of General Education Courses Tend to Be Broad and Idealistic—e.g., "Cultural Literacy," "The Ability to Write in College," "Appreciation of Scientific Method"—Whereas the Goals of Major Courses Tend to Be Narrow and Preprofessional. The breadth of general education goals at most campuses reflects the uncertainty of faculties about just what our students need to know and do as educated citizens. Campus debates, such as those surrounding the Stanford core, feature urgent complaints about the students' ignorance of history, global interrelations, scientific method, math at all levels, ethics and morals, the arts, cultural diversity, and much else. These debates often lead to new courses, with most faculty attention paid to which authors will be required reading and which topics will show up on sample syllabi.

But because such curricula emerge out of debate of widely differing positions, and because the courses, whatever their shape on paper, will be taught by diverse people with diverse agendas, every general education program has lots of room for experimentation. This makes general education fun for the WAC planner, and indicates a workshop design that promotes imaginative think-

ing and a multitude of individual plans. In a general education WAC workshop, one should give participants plenty of time to invent assignments and to discuss them. Faculty can work both individually and in small groups to brainstorm exciting options.

As facilitator, your primary job is to record and display what the participants create. Because you have done the thinking about writing process that most of them have not, your equally important task is to push them to consider the process implications of their ideas. For example, let's say that participants teaching a course on Western intellectual history since the Renaissance show enthusiasm for a project that asks students to role-play a Marxist critic and a Freudian critic giving reviews of Dickens's *Hard Times*. Use that enthusiasm to start a discussion of their expectations of the students: How will they handle students' intimidation by the task? How will they respond to drafts? How can they involve the students themselves in the creation of criteria and in responding to their peers? Is it necessary for this project to be a multidraft paper, or could the role-play work as a series of log entries? This workshop design lets the participants generate the content and takes advantage of the creative, experimental nature of general education. It also lets the workshop leader avoid playing the expert from on high who is telling them the assignments, criteria, and processes to build into the courses. This design takes full advantage, nevertheless, of the leader's expertise in WAC theory and practice.

If one of the goals of general education at your school is "competence in reading and writing," or something of that nature, the vagueness again allows freedom, although I hasten to add that the presence of such a goal, albeit vague, at most schools shows college teachers' recognition of the importance of literacy. Indeed, almost all interest in WAC is occasioned by this concern. Nevertheless, the vagueness of the goal means that there will be on any campus much uncertainty about the details of competence and how it might be measured. An important job for any WAC planner is to address this unformed, though often intense, concern through information and through careful discussion of the issues underlying the growth and assessment of competence (see Greenberg et al. for a range of ideas on writing assessment by institutions).

If faculty at your school have shown concern about competence, use this concern as the nexus for your workshops. In a recent

workshop for core curriculum faculty at George Mason, teachers representing several departments engaged in reading of sample student papers to determine and prioritize their criteria for competence. This exercise led to discussion of the larger issue of course objectives and how writing can help students meet those objectives. Following the "primary traits" workshop and several days of course-team meetings, faculty produced not only refined sets of course objectives but also inventive ideas for writing assignments clearly linked to the objectives.

In all WAC workshops, I continue to find it useful to show how the British research of the sixties and seventies (e.g., Britton; Martin et al.) that grew into the WAC movement originated in national concern about literacy. Discussion of this research both assures the participants that many professionals have shared their concerns and introduces such key WAC concepts as *writing process* and *writing to learn* as well as opening up connections between writing and the other language modes. Keep in mind that it is possible to begin a WAC workshop at any stage of the writing process, as long as that stage addresses a concern of the participants. If a faculty group is deeply concerned about evaluation of writing, you can begin with an evaluation of sample papers and let the diversity of responses and criteria that emerge lead the group to investigate how one builds assignments, teaches criteria, helps students give feedback to one another, writes comments on drafts, and so on. The workshop leader acts mainly as a resource, suggesting techniques from the literature in response to questions.

7. Most General Education Requirements Come in Three- or Six-Hour Chunks; There Is Neither Continuity From One Chunk to Another nor Any Explicit Connection Between Them. Not only do students enter general education courses without intrinsic motivation (Tendency 1) and with little or no savvy about the discourse of the subject area (Tendency 4) but the courses students take for general education credit usually appear to students to be so many unrelated fragments. This fragmentation doesn't usually trouble students, because they're used to it from high school, where they were also expected to complete courses that other people had chosen for them and that were rarely presented as if they had anything to do with one another. But this state does trouble faculty who have a vision of a coherent general education,

one that students can integrate into their lives during and beyond school. These teachers know that we can't be motivated to learn without a sense of how new information fits with what we already care about. New information that we can't fit into a context we either won't perceive at all or we'll forget as soon as the immediate context, the course, is over. As general education students, we get to be pretty good at keeping alive the names, dates, symbols, and formulas just long enough to pass the final.

One reason WAC has become popular at campuses is that faculty recognize that writing is too useful to be thought of as a fragment. They affirm that written words are the glue that can hold the fragments together. Most faculty readily buy the argument that students will not learn to write well if they write only in the required composition course(s). They also readily agree that if the students do not learn to write well, our verbal-dependent civilization will crumble.

What the WAC workshop can do is help faculty see how writing can help bring about that ideal of the coherent general education. In the PAGE program at George Mason, years of experience have taught us that merely making interdisciplinary courses does not mean students will perceive the interconnectedness of their courses. If one assumes that general education courses are fragments, then it is just as easy to see as unrelated fragments two seminars called Technology in Society and Environmental Problems as it is Biology 101 and Sociology 101. If we want to substitute the paradigm of connectedness for the paradigm of fragmentation, we have to explicitly stress connecting in how we teach. How can writing help?

Informally, in a learning log or in-class exercise, I can ask students to speculate possible connections between ideas in my course and ideas in one or more other courses they are taking. I like to be honest with the class about why I'm asking this: Making these connections will help them see all the courses as more meaningful and give more purpose to our collective enterprise. They do not want to waste their time or their money, and thinking connectedly will ensure that that doesn't happen. *Connections* writing can be a standard part of a course log or an occasional assignment. Some students will catch on more quickly than others, so it is useful to share with a class one or two particularly fine examples from students or devote a bit of class time to small- or large-group discussion of ideas students have come up with.

Such informal "writing to connect" can lead to more formal projects. Let's say that a student in my section of the American literature survey has noted that the readings on slavery in his American history course influenced his reading of *Huckleberry Finn*. Either the history professor or I can suggest a fuller exploration of this connection in a multidraft paper. Through such assignments, not only do we make writing cross-curricular but literature, history, and the other subjects students choose to connect become cross-curricular, too.

THINKING PROGRAMMATICALLY

A WAC workshop devoted to general education can be as course centered or as program centered as participants wish. Faculty will always be interested in the methods they use in their own classes, so a large part of any workshop will focus on writing in that context. But we can't really deal with WAC in general education unless we have participants spend some time seeing their own classes in the context of all the requirements. As I suggested above in my discussion of class size, programmatic thinking can save us the anxiety of trying to turn the large lecture into a writing-intensive course, because a look at the entire distribution of courses will show us where that structure is more appropriate. Similarly, programmatic thinking will help any faculty workshop group achieve a balanced, varied writing experience for students. For example, because journals and logs have proven fairly easy to implement in many contexts (see Fulwiler), WAC programs can unwittingly inflict "journal overkill" on students, with students keeping three or more logs in a semester. We encountered this problem at George Mason not long after the establishment of PAGE in 1982. Consequently, it became a recurring theme of our annual faculty workshops to plan a diverse, complementary writing program across the curriculum. In one semester, for example, students would keep a journal in one course, would do a multistage library/interview research paper in another, would prepare collaborative fieldwork projects in a third, and in a fourth would keep a log that asked them to integrate ideas from the other courses. Programmatic thinking might also coax participants to consider, for example, a combined journal for two or more courses,

or a portfolio of occasional ungraded writings instead of the more conventional log.

The size of your general education program and the number of faculty involved in teaching it, plus the amount of administrative release the program allows, will determine how tightly planned and supervised the writing experiences can be. George Mason's PAGE program (see Appendix to this chapter), with several hundred students and faculty teams of six or eight per each of 12 courses, specifies writing assignments for each section of every course. By contrast, the core curriculum at Brooklyn College (see Appendix to this chapter), which serves thousands of students per year, relies on each faculty member to determine the "nature of the assignments" and specifies only that some assignments in each course be short and that students receive feedback to help them improve their abilities "to think clearly and write well." The Brooklyn core also provides some continuity between freshman English and the other core courses by faculty agreement to use the same set of correction and improvement symbols (*Introduction* 7).

As a WAC planner, you can monitor the diversity of writing in your general education program and work with your faculty individually and in workshops to achieve balance. In workshops, record and display the ideas for implementing WAC that the participants create. Suggest that the group examine the list for balance and diversity:

Do students have regular opportunities in most general education courses to do ungraded writing-to-learn exercises of some kind?

Are writing-to-learn assignments varied between regular log keeping outside of class (in one or two courses a semester) and primarily in-class assignments in other courses?

Do students take at the very least one course per semester in which they write one or more multidraft papers that receive response in process from the teacher or peers?

Are assignments varied to give students practice with some of the diverse types of writing that professionals do in the fields that students encounter in general education, for example, archival research in history, collection and analysis of data in labs, fieldwork log keeping in the social sciences?

Do students get opportunities to write for audiences besides the teacher—peers, professionals, the public?

If variety is lacking, ask the faculty to brainstorm for some alternatives.

When you work with faculty individually, try to balance your sense of the students' needs for a varied writing experience and your sense of the writing appropriate to the given course. If I'm encountering the third person in a row who has the students keep a learning log, I like to listen to how the person describes the log and the rationale for it before I suggest an alternative. If the requirement sounds interesting and well thought out, I'll happily applaud it and feel lucky for the students who have this teacher. If the requirement sounds merely conventional, I'll not hesitate to suggest alternatives that seem to me better suited to the course. This goes for other requirements besides journals, too, especially research papers and essay exams, which faculty often require out of a general sense of obligation to support writing, rather than out of imaginative thinking about students' needs either in writing experience or in learning of the course subject.

Maybe the greatest benefit of programmatic thinking about writing in general education is that you can help faculty design a program of writing for all students that doesn't overburden either student or faculty, that gives the students a well-conceived general education in writing, and that enables faculty to feel that they are contributing to students' overall growth without feeling the anxiety of "not doing enough." The teacher who sees that others are attending to close editing of students' prose will not feel constrained to do the same, and thus will spend more time happily writing comments that nurture the seeds of original thinking. If the thoughtful use of writing in our introductory courses can help our students think critically and creatively, make connections among their seemingly disparate courses, and feel connected to the school, then all our general education planning will have been worth the effort.

APPENDIX

The following are core course requirements in the Plan for Alternative General Education (PAGE) at George Mason University and in the core curriculum at Brooklyn College.

George Mason University PAGE Curriculum

Semester 1
- Computers in Contemporary Society (4 credits)
- Reading the Arts (3 credits)
- Conceptions of the Self (3 credits)
- Symbols, Codes, and Information I (1 credit)
- Values, Themes, and Cultural Problems I (1 credit)

Semester 2
- Analysis and Solution of Quantitative Problems I (3 credits)
- Reading Cultural Signs (3 credits)
- Contemporary Society in Multiple Perspectives (3 credits)
- Symbols, Codes, and Information II (1 credit)
- Values, Themes, and Cultural Problems II (1 credit)

Semester 3
- Analysis and Solution of Quantitative Problems II (3 credits)
- Scientific Thought and Processes I (4 credits)
- Cross-Cultural Perspectives (3 credits)
- Symbols, Codes, and Information III (1 credit)
- Values, Themes, and Cultural Problems III (1 credit)

Semester 4
- Scientific Thought and Processes II (4 credits)
- The Decision-Making Process and the Choice of Technologies (3 credits)
- The Contemporary United States (3 credits)

Brooklyn College Core Curriculum (from *Introduction*)

First Tier
- Core Studies 1: Classical Origins of Western Culture
- Core Studies 2: Introduction to Art
- Core Studies 2: Introduction to Music
- Core Studies 3: People, Power, and Politics
- Core Studies 4: The Shaping of the Modern World
- Core Studies 5: Introduction to Mathematical Reasoning and Computer Programming

Second Tier

Core Studies 6: Landmarks of Literature

Core Studies 7: Science in Modern Life I (Chemistry, Physics)

Core Studies 8: Science in Modern Life II (Biology, Geology)

Core Studies 9: Studies in African, Asian, and Latin American Cultures

Core Studies 10: Knowledge, Existence, and Values

Foreign Language Study through Level 3 or equivalent proficiency.

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