4 What Did Faculty Expect from WAC?

I have this compulsion to keep trying to make my teaching better.
—Art History, Whitworth

You don't have to be a convert.
—Architecture, UC

In our final round of 1993–1995 interviews on all three campuses, we asked faculty to recall why they had come to the WAC events they had attended four, ten, sometimes fifteen years earlier. What did they want and expect from WAC? Our end-of-workshop faculty responses throughout the years and McMahon's interviews for the booklet at Towson likewise address that issue.

Faculty members' image of themselves as self-directed managers of their own continual change and growth underlies everything else in this book.

Faculty reported that they did not come to WAC in a vacuum. Rather, they came with already formed goals and problems which they were working on or because they appreciated the need for periodic reflection and renewal.

Further, they saw the workshop as part of an ongoing pattern of change in their teaching—change which they themselves controlled and directed. They assumed the right to adopt or adapt whatever in WAC was useful to them and to abandon or ignore whatever was not. They assumed that they would continue to change and grow after WAC, just as they had been changing prior to WAC. They did not see themselves as passive recipients of WAC, nor as static or sinning or sick before WAC. To them, WAC was a resource, not a religion. Its purpose was to help them with their own journey.

Faculty Came to WAC for Help with Already Formed Problems and Goals

A UC geographer stopped the interviewer early in the session to say, "You need to understand why I went to the workshop in the first place." He then described the problems he had been wrestling with five years earlier, when he had attended his first WAC workshop. Joan McMahon, in 1988, was so struck by the problem orientation in the eighteen TSU faculty she interviewed that she organized her book (McMahon 1991) around it: in that book, each faculty member describes a teaching problem and the way he or she tried to address it. That problem orientation was strong, as well, in our data at all three institutions.

What types of goals and problems did faculty report? The best answer is *a very wide variety.* But common themes appeared, such as the following:

■ enhancing students' higher-order thinking or habits of mind;

■ making students more active learners;

■ evaluating student work more effectively.

Faculty interviews were often marked by goals that formed a kind of touchstone for each faculty member's thinking and teaching. "I wanted my students to link their lives to the content" was the theme that appeared again and again when we interviewed a UC sociologist. A Whitworth musician told us, "What I've always tried to do at Whitworth is teach openness." A mathematician, just before he came to the WAC workshop at UC, had been assigned to teach a math course for nonmajors, and he came with general goals for that course already worked out:

> Independent of any knowledge about WAC, I wanted the course to have an, I don't know what to call it exactly, an expository feel to it—here are the ideas, here's why we care about the ideas—rather than computations.

Problems which participants mentioned included specific teaching challenges, constraints that were hindering the realization of goals, or a sense that what they were doing wasn't working.

Below is a sample of faculty voices from our 1993–1995 interviews at all three schools.

"I Had Always Used Writing, but I Teach Large Classes"
—Geography, UC

My major problem and the thing that drove me to the workshop is that I teach large classes—180–220 students. In part because I come out of a history tradition and in part because of where I did my doctorate, I have always used writing in my classes regardless of the size. But with 180–220 students, it was not only time-consuming, but I was the laughing stock of my department because I was spending an inordinate amount of time grading. Even if I didn't correct the grammar and spelling and syntax, I felt obligated to do a little rewriting, to tell the students what I felt were the strong points, the weak points. Now people would say, "Sure it's possible with smaller classes, but with classes of 220 you give multiple-choice exams and that's it, who cares, let 'em be." So I really wanted either to find other people who were doing what I was so I wouldn't feel like a fool or to find out some tricks.

"I Was Trying to Get Students Just to Think"
—Criminal Justice, UC

I was sort of doing some of these writing things, but I didn't know there was a whole pedagogy or ideology until I went to the workshop. I was trying to do different things with formal and informal writing, trying to get students just to think about what they were doing, also trying to make sure they were doing the reading, trying to think of ways to improve their writing that would not be terribly time-consuming for me. It was very much by the seat of my pants.

"I Was Already in the Throes of Planning
What to Do with 'Topics in Math'"
—Math, UC

The writing-across-the-curriculum workshop came to my attention just as I was in the midst of planning change. Up until the time I took part in the workshop, I had taught courses aimed at the engineering students and graduate courses—fairly hard-core traditional math courses. In the winter of 1990, I was asked to start planning to take over in the fall of '90 a course called "Topics in Math," which is a course for people who don't want to take math, people in arts and sciences. The book we had selected was very much mathematics as an appreciation subject, rather than as a subject for building technical skills. So I was already in the throes of planning how to teach such a course when I went to the workshop. So WAC, for me, was always thought of in those terms—what am I going to do with it in "Topics in Math."

"Students Were Not Achieving"
—Health Science and Human Resources, TSU

[Before WAC] I had begun to wonder why my students were getting C's. I noticed how hard they worked and how frustrated they appeared with their grades. Gradually, I began to focus on why they weren't achieving. I saw this initially as a learning problem, which eventually led me to the fact that it was a teaching problem. . . . I began to investigate other ways I could learn to improve my students' writing.

"When You Land at Whitworth after a Large University, You Find That Lecture-Oriented Teaching Doesn't Work Here"
—Sociology, Whitworth

I had come back to Whitworth after teaching at a large university where I taught mostly large classes. So I had cultivated a very lecture-oriented teaching style. And when you land at Whitworth, it doesn't take long to figure out that that doesn't work here. To me, it was a faculty development process of learning some new and better ways of teaching.

"Correcting Students' Mistakes Wasn't Getting Me Anywhere"
—History, Whitworth

Before the workshop, I'd always felt strongly about writing and I'd always been a stickler for grammar and punctuation. I could correct mistakes, and I always did, but it didn't get me anywhere. It didn't help the students. And I'd try to figure out how to do that better. The only agenda I had was just to know different ways, more effective ways, to do this. . . . And also maybe different ways to craft assignments, too, because I'm always looking for that.

Faculty Came to WAC for Renewal

A second reason faculty gave for entering WAC was personal renewal or development of their own skills, energy, or commitment. Below is a sample, beginning with a Towson faculty member who entered not a workshop, but a Faculty Writers' Response Group whose purpose was to respond to faculty members' own writings. The final two entries are divergent voices that don't fit either of our two reasons.

"I Joined to Become a Better Writer"
—Speech and Mass Communications, TSU

I joined the Faculty Writers' Response Group primarily to become a better writer. I had embarked on one of the most important writing projects of my life: the first textbook in my field to address in depth the ethical issues involved in managing public relations campaigns. As a man who likes long-distance running and has run a few marathons, I knew the value of discipline and training. I knew that working on a regular basis with the Faculty Writers' Response Group would provide me with an intellectual arena, with supporters along the sidelines to goad me so that I would pace myself appropriately through the process of writing a 475-page book. . . . What I didn't expect from the Faculty Writers' Response Group was learning not only how to become a better writer, but also how to become a better teacher.

"When Whitworth Does Something, You'd Better Get In on It"
—Music, Whitworth

I always take advantage of workshops that Whitworth provides. I'm very, very busy, and chairing the department, and I have a lot of things going on in my profession. But Whitworth can't do a lot, and when it does something, you'd better get in on it. . . . I must show my students that I am availing myself of opportunities as I want them to avail themselves of things we offer.

"When I See Workshops Advertised, I'm One of the First to Sign Up"
—Nursing, TSU

Interviewer: Tell me how you got involved with the writing-across-the-curriculum movement?

Faculty: There were some workshops on campus by Fil Dowling. When I see workshops advertised on campus by another department, if they at all relate to what we're doing, I'm one of the first to sign up, just because I want to know more about whatever the topic is. There were probably six of us in the department who went to that workshop, and as we talked about it, we got excited about it.

"You've Got to Hook Up with Other People"
—Political Science, UC

It's a big struggle to match your teaching strategies to the philosophy you really believe in. That's if you don't get so discouraged that you give up on those philosophies or change them and decide that students aren't learning

or can't. You have to hook up with other people and share their philoso-phies—people who are struggling against the same realities that you are. I think you have to affirm to each other that these things are important. Without that support, you can feel very isolated and discouraged. That was part of my motivation for going to the workshop.

Divergent Voices

"I Was Looking for Anything That Offered Released Time"
—Biology, TSU

I would love to tell you that it was great insight on my part or great recruit-ment by the WAC movement that led me to the workshop, but it wasn't. I was mother to two teenagers, teaching twelve hours, over forty, and thrilled-to-death pregnant. As fall classes started, I was looking for anything that offered released time, and the WAC project promised it.

"Uh, I Don't Remember. Did It Have Any Money Involved?"
—Whitworth

[From an interview five years after the workshop:]

Interviewer: Why did you go to the workshop?
Faculty: Uh, I don't remember. Did it have any money involved? (laughter)

Mixed Reasons—Social, Idealistic, Practical

A variety of other motivations for workshop attendance turned up, and, of course, a single person might have several motives. At UC, one difference between Population A faculty, who were the first on campus to attend the WAC workshops, and Population B, who attended in later years (see Table 2.3), is that Population B, at the beginning of the workshops, more often cited colleague testimonials as a motivation for their own attendance. This same social motivation turned up in one of our TSU interviewees, a physical education faculty member, whose words also show a mixture of social, idealistic, and practical motives. She begins, "My colleague encouraged me to go." Another factor was

her already formed philosophy of teaching: "I believed in required writing assignments." And then there was a very practical reason: the writing-intensive requirement "more or less ensured a full class as a hedge against the vagaries of fluctuating student numbers."

Undoubtedly, then, there were a number of factors that accounted for faculty members' entrance into WAC. But among the most commonly mentioned in our data were faculty members' already formulated goals and problems and their recognition of their need for periodic renewal.

Faculty Expected WAC to Be Part of Their Self-Directed Change and Growth

In faculty members' eyes, the problems and goals that motivated them to come to WAC writing groups or workshops were not static states—nor were they beginning points in the teaching journey. Rather, those problems and goals were part of what faculty saw as a career-long pattern of constant growth and change—a pattern that had begun before WAC and would continue after it. "I learned to be a nurse years and years ago," said a nursing faculty member from TSU, "but I learned to be a teacher along the way, and I think that learning continues. Hardly a semester goes by that I don't learn something new." Problems, setbacks, distractions, stall-outs, and dead ends were seen as temporary limitations to this impetus for change and improvement.

> Interviewer: *"Did you change your teaching because of WAC?"*
>
> Faculty: *"I just kind of change my assignments all the time."*
>
> —History, Raymond Walters College of UC (2-year, open-admissions)

> *"I experiment and change all the time. I'll try anything that works."*
>
> —International Business, TSU

UC's survey of a random sample of faculty—not just those who had attended WAC—showed this sense of constant change to be widespread. Of the 147 UC faculty responses (a 54 percent return), 90 percent reported having, in the past twelve months, "made a change in my undergraduate teaching intended to result in enhanced student learning" (Table 4.1). In an essay on researching classroom change,

Table 4.1. UC faculty's self-reported changes in teaching

Responders	Method	Results
117 UC Population A WAC faculty 6–24 months after WAC workshop. (117 = 89% of the total 1989–1991 Population A attendees who were still on campus in 1991. See p. 36 and Table 2.3 for further details.)	Questionnaire with interview and/or small-group discussion (Appendix C).	99% reported having changed teaching as a result of workshop.
147 UC faculty from random sample. (Random sample was 20% of all faculty. 147 = 54% return. See p. 39 and Table 2.3 for further details.)	Mailed questionnaire (Appendix A).	90% reported having, in the past 12 months, changed their teaching to enhance student learning.

Constable notes that "change does not either happen or not happen. It is rare for nothing to happen" (1994, 5). Given that faculty in our *general* UC sample saw themselves as changing constantly, it is not surprising that *WAC faculty, too,* saw themselves as always changing and that 99 percent of our 117-person UC Population A WAC sample reported having made at least some change in their teaching as a result of the WAC workshop.

Self-reports are questionable evidence when one is trying to measure the amount of change that actually took place. But our point here is different. Our data indicate that faculty outside of WAC as well as in WAC *see themselves* as constantly changing. WAC directors and others who hope to help them change must deal with these self-perceptions.

The literature on faculty vitality we cited in the introduction (page 5, this volume) indicates that change and the seizing of opportunity are part of faculty vitality. Further, if the faculty in WAC workshops fit the characteristics we summarized for "early adopters," then continual change and the willingness to take risks are common traits. We earlier suggested that WAC faculty, on the whole, are both "vital" and "early adopters."

Stimuli to Faculty Change

What stimulated faculty change? Often, faculty reported that changes in their teaching were goal-driven, aimed at specific problems or concerns. But change might also follow a new stimulus—a workshop, hearing a good idea from a colleague, reading something.

Also, sometimes change occurred just because of the constant change process. Faculty felt themselves immersed in an ongoing river of change, moving constantly into new teaching strategies, even leaving behind strategies that had worked well in the past. An art historian at Whitworth mused:

> I did the peer editing, maybe six years ago. I might try that again. [Pause] I haven't thought about that in a long time. I'd sort of forgotten about doing that. Um hm. [Pause] Well, I keep rewriting my syllabus every year and changing assignments. It's not so much that they don't work; it's just that I have this compulsion to keep trying to make them better.

Changes in teaching sometimes also occurred serendipitously. One faculty member we interviewed reported he kept a log from semester to semester, noting things that had worked, things that had not, and things he had changed. He consulted the log whenever he was making up the syllabus for the next semester. But it was rare to find planning so organized. Many faculty reflected a looser, more serendipitous mode, incorporating things they had been newly exposed to or things they were thinking about at the time. Not teaching a course for a long period of time or having many courses to think about simultaneously might cause a more disrupted planning flow. Sometimes teaching strategies would be forgotten or drop away by default. Musing about why he had changed from required draft conferences, which replaced one week's class sessions, to voluntary ones, which did not replace class, a Whitworth political scientist said,

> Well, it probably was a conscious decision to put back the week of missed classes. Or maybe it's just that I didn't think about it when I was redoing the syllabus. I'm not a person who always plans everything down to the last minute.

Some faculty on all three campuses credited the WAC programs with enhancing the pace of change or their willingness to change, as well as with giving them the freedom to direct their own patterns of change. A UC geographer said: "I imagine that, at some point, the changes would have happened anyway; it's just that the workshop has probably accelerated them." An adjunct political scientist teaching

in UC's evening college said: "The workshop made clear that somebody respected my intellect and assumed the best of me." Encouraged by that respect, she reported: "I'm willing to risk more. . . . My classroom has become the never-ending draft."

In sum, faculty took responsibility for managing their own growth and change. They did not see themselves as converts or resisters to WAC but as self-directed seekers. WAC was a resource, not a religion. They felt free to take what they needed, combine it with other things, and make their own unique mix, which itself would continue to change. "You don't have to be a convert," said a UC professor of architecture.

We suggest that WAC programs must not cling to models which subtly assume that the faculty member changes in the WAC workshop and then does not change again, or that the only "acceptable" change is change in the direction of "full implementation" of WAC-defined classroom paradigms (page 6, this volume). Our data suggest that continual change, or at least their own perception of continual change, is a central characteristic of many WAC faculty. WAC programs must deal with faculty members' continual change as a fundamental and desirable characteristic and must grant to faculty the right and the encouragement to direct their own growth and change both inside and outside of WAC.

> *"One impact the workshop had on me was making me feel more secure about trying some of the different creative things or coming up with new things. And also deciding that it was OK if they flopped."*
>
> —Criminal Justice, UC

> *"It varies, whatever I feel like doing. But mainly, since the workshop, I just feel more apt to try something if I think of it. It encourages you to experiment with things."*
>
> —Chemistry, UC

Faculty came into WAC workshops, faculty response groups, and other activities seeking help with their own problems and goals, immersing themselves in a river of change, and actively seeking to manage that change for their own growth as teachers. What those WAC experiences meant to them is the subject of the next chapter.