CHAPTER 14.

WAC: THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY'S *MEZZATERRA*

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Abstract. *This chapter describes the groundwork laid by WAC pioneer Art Young for the Pearce Center at Clemson University and asks how the Center can maintain its investment in writing and the belief that "everyone can write" in the face of Clemson's research priorities. To persist, a middle ground—a mezzaterra—needed to be found, one that incorporated the values Young modeled: adapting to circumstances, building community both at the university and beyond, and innovating in ways that upset the status quo. These values can be seen in the three initiatives the author describes: Grad WAC Fellows, Service Learning Outreach, and Research Faculty Fellows program.*

To friend and mentor, Art Young

I have often thought of Art Young, a WAC pioneer, as a mentor for the work I've done at Pearce Center for Professional Communication at Clemson University. Art was responsible for establishing the Pearce Center in the 1980s. The groundwork in terms of infrastructure and character laid by Art and his team, including Kathleen Yancey, then Pearce Endowed Chair and Carl Lovitt, then Pearce Center Director, was what I wanted to continue when I was appointed director in 2016. Although Art's numerous accomplishments in building the Center would be hard to catalog in the space of this chapter, they include being given a substantial donation from Mr. and Mrs. Roy Pearce for a professional communication center and the spectacular recognition by *TIME Magazine* in 2001 of Clemson as "Public College of the Year" on the strength of its Communication Across the Curriculum program (Denny, 2000). For me, as a new director, the key strengths that Art modeled might be captured this way: *adapting* to circumstances, *building community* both at the university and beyond, and *innovating* in ways that upset the status quo. It must be noted that we are fortunate, as a Center that continues to be fully supported by foundation and endowment funding, to have the space and latitude to enact these values.

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For Art, writing represented a means to revolutionize student learning. This progressive, activist goal became foundational not only to Clemson's program but also to new WAC programs being established at the time. To achieve this goal, however, WAC leaders had to adapt to the contexts in which they were working. To describe that adaptability, I borrow a term from cultural criticism—*mezzaterra*—which speaks to the value of establishing middle ground. In this chapter, I describe the ways Art Young has contributed to my thinking of writing programs as middle ground, a kind of *mezzaterra* of academic environments, i.e., sites of collective, collaborative activity through writing. Borrowed from Egyptian essayist and novelist, Ahdaf Soueif in *Mezzaterra* (2004), this term provides a structural analogy for an inclusive middle ground that, in WAC programs, comprises not only physical spaces—writing labs and centers—but also psychic space, arenas of imagination for engaging and investing in the power of writing. The term urges us to think outside of dominant vocabularies of the writing field about the sense of space (*terra)* from a wide range of locations, each with its specific perspective about how a cultural hub could be created, an imaginative act of finding and creating middle (*mezza)* ground. WAC programs furnish not only spaces for collaboration but also spaces for difference where competing ideas are expressed, juxtaposed, and combined towards a goal of overcoming possessive territoriality as faculty work together, as writers and teachers, to achieve student learning goals.

To show how Art embraced *mezzaterra* in building the Clemson WAC program, I begin by describing how he created these middle-ground spaces from the time he arrived at Clemson as the Robert Campbell Endowed Chair for Technical Writing, with a joint appointment in the Departments of English (2/3) and Engineering (1/3). I describe three values—adaptability, community building, and innovation—that the Pearce Center, under Art's leadership and continuing to the present, has undertaken towards breaking down disciplinary and programmatic borders. I explain how Art modeled these values in developing the WAC program. Moving to the present, I describe the current research-focused environment at Clemson and its threat to WAC before turning to three programs I've initiated that work against that threat in an effort to cultivate a collective sense of writing and learning goals for students: Grad WAC Fellows to facilitate WAC "through the back door"; expanded client-based Service-Learning programs to extend outreach to the surrounding community; and a Research Faculty Fellows program to find out where and how writing is happening across the university.

ADAPTABILITY

Art learned early on how to adapt to the challenges this position involved. Although recruited by Dixie Goswami, a highly respected writing scholar at

Clemson, neither Engineering nor English knew quite what to do with him. The Department of English, in particular, seemed resistant to his expertise despite his founding position in writing across the curriculum and despite his WAC programming at Michigan Tech, his previous institution, having been declared "an essential pillar" of an MTU education. The department was neither interested in supporting a writing program nor in assigning him courses in literature, saying he was not hired to teach literature, despite his PhD credentials in romantic literature. Thus, even with the encouragement and warm welcome of Goswami and the successes behind him, he had some rough patches in his startup with Clemson, as I learned in a zoom conversation with him (A. Young, personal communication, February 5, 2024).

Although Art's divided disciplinary appointment created challenges, it also produced the conditions that demanded adaptability, community, and innovation, as I'll explain. While, in my experience, English departments have been welcoming spaces on a campus, Art found the opposite situation in the late 1980s when it was a conservative department determined to remain a service department for general education, unwilling to recognize the research on writing and learning that had occurred throughout the 1960s, 1970s and into the 1980s. They seemed to have missed the then-radical conclusions from British and American studies in education that "language is central to learning because through language we 'organize our representation of the world'" (Russell, 2012, p. 19) and that writing had come to stand at the center of both student-centered and active-learning movements. Elaine Maimon summed up with humor the serious intellectual activity that informed the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge: "the teaching of writing is 'scholarly not scullery'" (1980, p. 6, qtd. in Russell, 2012, p. 24).

Two years after his arrival at Clemson, Art seized an opportunity to respond to the conditions he found on campus when he obtained a budget from the Campbell Fund. He immediately printed brochures advertising a writing workshop and distributed them to all university faculty. He arranged to hold the workshop at Kresge Outdoor Lab, near but not on campus, undoubtedly part of the call's success. Sixty signed up for the required two workshops, each lasting a full day, each allowing a rare opportunity for faculty to meet, talk, share notes and ideas about how to help their students better learn the materials of their disciplines. Reflections at the end of each session from the community—engineers, scientists, mathematicians, historians, landscape architects—were positive and the word got around. The provost called: what were these meetings that were generating such buzz? (A. Young, personal communication, February 5, 2024).

At about the same time, Dixie Goswami, in one of the many transformative events affecting "every aspect of my professional life," according to Art, suggested

a project for his technical writing class (Young, 2001, p. 1). His approach exemplified the vision he left for his successors: consider the situation and adapt to its constraints. The project, a user's manual for the Clemson University Forestry and Agriculture Network, revealed to Art and his students that writing projects needed to negotiate competing aims given multiple "clients" interested in the outcome. One party wanted flexibility and accessibility, the other wanted standardization. The project was also a lesson for Art on the need for adaptability, given that "what some perceive as the driest of academic subjects, technical writing—when placed in an authentic context—could be fraught with politics, conflict, and intrigue" (Young, 2001, p. 5).

That need to assess conditions and adapt to multiple demands continues to describe the situation WAC programs face in their commitment to the human investment in writing amidst many universities' ambitions related to gaining or exceeding Research One status, the latter being relevant at Clemson. That WAC today can be considered mainstream given its longevity and persistence attests to its being continually innovative and pioneering, which, as I'll describe shortly, is critical for its survival, a lesson Art quickly learned in his joint assignment.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

The joint assignment that Art Young accepted at Clemson put him squarely on the threshold between the sciences and humanities. Art negotiated separate and competing departmental demands with little to no guidance about what the dual appointment might mean except that he was to continue to build the Effective Technical Communication program established with a substantial gift from a Clemson Engineering alum, Robert Campbell. The dean of engineering, however, had one plan for the funds—funding an engineering laboratory—while the English Department had none, and indeed resisted using funds, thus undermining efforts to establish a writing program (A. Young, personal communication, February 5, 2024). Art's opening gambit at Clemson demonstrates his expertise in creating a middle ground, a *mezzaterra,* as he negotiated the conflicting objectives of the two appointments and created an unexpected community. His early cross-departmental workshops attracted participants from across the university hierarchy from department heads to first-year faculty. From these early workshops, a WAC community emerged, which proved to be vertical as well as horizontal. This idea has been both valuable and indispensable in programmatic developments over the years, as WAC scholars attest. Marty Townsend describes, for example, how the University of Missouri Campus Writing Program achieved its "longevity and vitality … from the 'top down' and 'bottom up' coming together in the middle" approach. "'The faculty wanted this program

to happen'," she explains: "'Equally important, the administration supported the new WAC initiative both fiscally and philosophically without getting in the way of faculty governance. Those two key factors, combined with a dynamic, professional staff, allowed us to create a robust program'" (as cited in Rutz, 2006, p. 45). As WAC practitioners understand, their programs succeed when middle ground includes representatives spanning all levels of departments and the administration.

Middle ground, however, is neither a utopia nor does it achieve consensus; instead, it provides a site of operations working across disciplines with one set of ideas engaging another and thus encouraging new forms of problem solving. Art understood that the new pedagogical movements in writing brought promise for change given that their very structure facilitated interdisciplinary collaboration; he embraced the expansive notion not only that "everyone can write," but also that everyone should participate in the project of writing (Elbow, 2000). From this modest premise, writing programs challenged the status quo. In transcending disciplinary boundaries, writing programs provided space, both physical and psychological, making visible complex problems, challenging academic orthodoxies, and generating fresh theoretical and pedagogical insights. In short, writing programs created conditions in which practitioners became agents of change.

Adaptability has always been central to WAC's identity, emerging not from rigid institutional structures but from the flexible, relational networks that allowed programs to evolve in response to local needs. As David Russell (2006) notes in his introduction to Susan McLeod's and Margot Soven's *Composing a Community: A History of Writing Across the Curriculum*, "WAC has been a training ground for change agents …, relying on a network of personal relationships in a community of practitioners in many disciplines, rather than a formal organization" (p. 4). Demonstrating the intersecting forces of WAC programs, stories like those featured in *Composing a Community* documented the centrality of "a few powerful ideas," "a wide range of possible models," and a "bricolage of theories and methods," eschewing "the usual means of disseminating ideas and practices in academia" (Russell, 2006, p. 5). In fact, WAC formed in opposition to orthodoxy, becoming more about community and less about academy, knitted together through personal connections, and perpetuated in narratives from individuals dedicated to "the network of personal relationships that formed WAC" (Russell, 2006, p. 7).

INNOVATION

Finding middle ground, as mundane as it might sound, is actually revolutionary. By 2000, Art Young's Communication Across the Curriculum program had serious data for bragging rights. He was able to inform Clemson's president that

nearly half of all faculty (400 out of 900 faculty) had come to a writing workshop (A. Young, personal communication, February 5, 2024). But I believe Art would also be among the first to say that writing is so much more than head counts and numbers, even more than words on a page or images on a screen. Writing refers to a larger sphere than ink on the page; it is the very medium through which thought, relationship, and change takes form. Writing, in this sense, not only manifests thought but also defines the transitory relations between people, which Matthew Luskey and Daniel L. Emery (2016) examine in their study of liminality, the threshold condition between established structures, where boundaries blur and new meanings emerge. Transitional spaces, they write, are often marked by various absences: lack of commonalities in vocabulary, dissimilar contexts, differing conceptual and disciplinary knowledge (p. 102). These discontinuities might be seen as possibilities for connection and alignment, allowing, in this case, disciplinary faculty and writing consultants to engage in "fruitful struggle to articulate student-facing writing abilities aligned with disciplinary and epistemological values" (Luskey & Emery, 2016, p. 105). Liminality, then, names a productive in-between state, a moment of ambiguity that precedes new insights, with the promise of unsettling entrenched attitudes and eroding barriers to communication.

Art tapped into this condition of language, its ability to transcend disciplinary borders, in the novel program Poetry Across the Curriculum (PAC), which took poetry to classes of student engineers, scientists, and social scientists. He describes the subversive quality of writing across the curriculum in a poetry experiment designed not only to counteract "education as usual," but also to allow teachers to "shut off the automatic pilot" of student response with "writing tasks that are unpredictable." He characterized this teaching as "not writing *across* the curriculum nor writing *in* the discipline but writing *against* the curriculum" (Young, 2003, p. 473). In poetry, he found paths across the disciplinary barriers erected by the curricula itself.

In that project, Art likely experienced, as many WAC consultants do, a healthy dose of what McLeod (1995) has called "*foreigner* status," a sense of "'not being part of the local departmental power structure'" that permits consultants who "'have no stake in disciplinary arguments … [to] ask questions no one else can ask'" (p. 111). For Art, it meant operating at odds from two departments and disciplines. He became a double émigré, given his use of writing to challenge disciplinary understandings, and his use of literature and literary forms that were contrary to the understanding of some writing experts. Poetry across the curriculum provided a *mezzaterra* for meeting between the two broad disciplinary cultures. It also enacted a kind of social equality, avoiding stereotypes, such as, engineers can't write or technical writing is not creative, while providing an alternative means to meaningful engagement with course content that

involved "tasks that keep writers off balance" (Young, 2003, p. 475).

Writing-across-the-curriculum programs exemplify adaptability because they treat writing as comparative and connective practice, an ensemble of concepts and strategies that enable knowledge to move across contexts, a point Kathleen Yancey et al., (2018) draw upon for conceptualizing transfer. In "Writing Across College: Key Terms and Multiple Contexts as Factors Promoting Students' Transfer of Writing Knowledge and Practice," the authors propose eight key terms, several of which rely on structures of rhetoric, including, for example, rhetorical situation, purpose, audience, genre. When students engage with writing concepts through reflection and integrate them into individualized theories of writing, they gain the conceptual tools to adapt their rhetorical choices and transport writing knowledge from one disciplinary context to another. Another key term, discourse community, includes language itself. It reminds us that transfer depends not only on rhetorical organizational, but also on language, the very material of communication that enables transdisciplinary application. As a brief example, let me digress to describe an impromptu assignment I gave a group of my Graduate WAC Fellows. After showing a short video interview with the mayor of Asheville, NC, I asked the graduate TAs to prepare an assignment for their students that responded to the devastation of Hurricane Helene for neighborhoods just to our north. Their assignment asked students to develop some small part of a solution that drew on their disciplinary expertise and addressed the mayor's needs. The TAs were creative in assignments ranging from designing non-power-dependent communication systems, to designing chemical generating systems, and to developing landscape materials that could sheath wires without stringing or burying them. The projects varied as widely as the diversity of fields represented in the graduate class. Connections between projects became apparent when I asked them to list keywords from each assignment on the board. Not that the keywords were the same, but, rather, the keywords immediately demonstrated that these projects could be in conversation, and indeed all were necessary, to solve the problem that the hurricane presented.

Language, words, writing, all the elements of communication, as WAC directors know, are the very material of the middle ground, the *mezzaterra*. Writing programs facilitate connections between disparate research areas and offer a means of discovering surprising communities, which, in turn, may disrupt the usual lines of disciplinary responses.

MOVING TO THE PRESENT

Since my initial appointment as Pearce Center director in 2016, a role that allows me to continue to work between literature and the writing communities of my

department and college, I have honed the idea of the WAC program at Clemson as the university's *mezzaterra*. Let me explain: Clemson's recent ambitions like many other universities to exceed their designation as a Carnegie R1 university and to strive for membership in the Association of American Universities' cohort of "leading research universities" raises questions about how teaching will be valued going forward. If teaching is critical to the WAC mission, as Art noted in our conversation, then what would result, he asked, if faculty no longer "think of themselves as teachers first." More specifically, how will foundational tenets of WAC, i.e., James Britton's and Janet Emig's argument that language is central to learning, survive when universities emphasize the activities and outcomes of research and not the writing processes central to both. Michael Pemberton (2012) reminds us that WAC programs are built on a social-constructionist paradigm, which "argues, in part, for the distribution of writing expertise *within* and among disciplines, locating the sites of textual authority in many diverse fields and interpretive communities" (p. 369). In noting sites located "*among*" disciplines, Pemberton points, I think, to the idea of *mezzaterra*; that is the collective activity that creates a middle ground, creating, as I said in my opening, physical and psychic spaces for working through difference, spaces where competing ideas are expressed and negotiated and different areas of expertise are recognized, valued, and connected.

Over the years of his career, Art saw WAC as a revolutionary possibility: Writing programs can create not only a culture of writing on university campuses, but also the intersectionality of a middle ground for conversation around ideas, philosophies, and designs for learning, a mezzaterra. In the following section, I describe three initiatives I developed to sustain the program that Art built and that model the values he demonstrated: adaptability, community building, and innovation.

ADAPTABILITY: GRAD WAC FELLOWS

The Pearce Center started the Graduate WAC Fellowship Program as a way of stealthily reviving WAC programming, which had experienced a significant dip, through other than a faculty workshop model, which faculty, as I'd heard, had grown tired of. The director of the Writing Center and I collaborated to establish a two-semester fellowship seminar for graduate students, meeting once a week as a one-credit course. The seminar originally progressed from theory to practice, but most recently it advances from WAC to writing in disciplines (WID), with theory and practice intertwined in both sections. The fellowship is limited to 12 TAs in each section. Most participants come from engineering, science, and social science, chosen each semester from a competitive applicant

pool. Many apply after hearing about it through word-of-mouth; lately, as word of the success of the program spreads, more have applied upon recommendation from their advisors. Grad WAC fellows may start either in the fall or spring since we offer sections each semester. Doctoral fellowship recipients are most often between their second and fourth year of their program. One of the most important criteria for selection is a teaching assignment. Although a few fellows also serve as research assistants or lab mentors in their departments, the Grad WAC Fellows program centers on pedagogy and classroom practice. This focus attracts many international applicants who seek to improve their teaching and, indirectly, their own writing skills by teaching others. Even though Grad WAC fellows improve their own writing as they learn to integrate it into their teaching, the program's primary goal is to expand the culture of writing on campus and help more students use writing as a learning tool.

Our initiative identifies a particular need on our STEM-oriented campus for graduate teaching assistants in science and engineering departments, who are expected to teach often in the first year of their assistantships. In situations when the TAs are still familiarizing themselves with the curriculum, the Grad WAC fellowship focuses on helping TAs figure out ways to assign writing and assess those assignments when they are inexperienced college teachers charged with what may be unfamiliar genres of disciplinary writing. The challenge is often greater for international TAs, who are not only new to Clemson but also to American students and classroom conventions.

The Grad WAC Fellows niche recognizes graduate TAs as occupying an epitome of in-between positions, i.e., working between the professoriate and the student body, they are preparing to negotiate the middle position of *mezzaterra*. Such positioning makes them perfect ambassadors for WAC programming on campus. Their medial situation is, again, especially clear for international TAs (ITAs) who are not only negotiating subject matter between experts and novices but also translating across linguistic sites. Language gaps—between disciplinary jargon and colloquialisms, and between the native languages TAs and professors speak and English that most of the students speak—define the territory international students navigate daily. Like Tamara Mae Roose et al. (2024), I have found that WAC second-language ITAs, necessarily fluent in translation practices, become excellent models for liminal work, both between professors and students and between disciplines (Bushnell, 2020).

In that respect, the Grad WAC Fellows initiative provides both theoretical and practical instruction. The program calls attention to the capacity of words to affect readers, to the rhetorical situation that makes clear how those effects reach readers, to the connections between brain and page through the pen that not only records thought but generates it. The program is arranged in workshop style,

conveying writing strategies that can be tried out in class, such as the three-minute jot or the exactly-25-word summary (Bean & Melzer, 2021). Everything we do in class may be refashioned by the fellows for use in their own classrooms. We also introduce conference abstracts, rubric design, and assignment design (small groups prepare a writing lesson appropriate for their students and present it to their peers), among other assignments. The result is that fellows leave our course with a sense of writing as process, strategies for informal writing, awareness of how to address multiple audiences, and a clear idea of the connection between writing and thinking. The most remarkable outcome is often confidence—fellows help their own students (as well as themselves) learn to trust writing as a mode of learning.

Over the last eight years of its existence, we have reported the success of the program through Pearce Center annual reports and conducted assessments through ever evolving end-of-semester surveys. In annual reports, we spotlight the experiences of one or two grad WAC fellows which also serves to promote the visibility of the program. Assessments have, in the last two years, moved from inconsistent student evaluations to the university's standardized course-evaluation system, which focuses more on individual instructors than on the program as a whole. Over this same period, we have supplemented those data with our own annual surveys of the graduate WAC fellows to capture program-specific outcomes. We review these surveys alongside course-evaluation data to identify recurring patterns—such as shifts in fellows' confidence with disciplinary writing or increases in students' reported ability to write within their majors. A final reflective narrative, in particular, has been central to our assessment as it allows us to code responses for themes such as adaptability, rhetorical awareness, and transfer of writing knowledge, which then informs program revisions and future training sessions.

From the most recent fellows survey (AY 2024–2025), one fellow wrote what is a common sentiment, that she has changed her attitudes about her own writing and her approach to teaching: "This semester as a Grad WAC Fellow has been a transformative experience, both personally and professionally. One of my biggest takeaways is the importance of adaptability in teaching and mentoring writing across diverse disciplines. It was memorable to witness students develop confidence in their writing, especially when breaking down complex scientific ideas into accessible language." Another fellow makes a similar observation: "As a Grad WAC Fellow this semester, I was able to see writing as an adaptable, student-centered process. Even in technical subjects, I discovered how to help students think critically about their audience and purpose. One of the highlights was helping a STEM student simplify their writing without sacrificing intricacy." Finally, one fellow articulated a sense of the ways writing had begun not only

to infiltrate her research practice, but also to transform the laboratory space itself as a site of writing practice:

> This class has taught me patience within the writing process. Though some of the skills being taught in this course [are] things I've previously learned or knew intuitively, taking the time to handwrite things out helped me learn so much about what was actually frustrating me. … this course has taught me skills that I could bring back to our lab students as they navigate this new academic space and journey into their graduate programs …. I enjoyed being able to learn more about the writing process and implementing that work in my own writing subconsciously has felt rewarding!

In aggregate, triangulating these assessment data—course evaluations, survey responses, and reflective narratives—allows us to track program effectiveness over time and adjust mentoring practices, workshop design, and curricular integration accordingly. By so doing, assessment becomes not an endpoint but an adaptive practice, evidence of WAC's ongoing capacity to learn from its own learning.

BUILDING COMMUNITY: SERVICE-LEARNING FACULTY FELLOWS

Pearce Center's newest initiative, the Service-Learning Faculty Fellowship, was started by the Assistant Director of the Pearce Center, Ashley Fisk, while I served as Interim Director of the newly created Interdisciplinary Studies department. Ashley designed this initiative to support faculty willing to embark on a unit designed to be part of an existing course that involves working with a real-world client, for example, the local African Art Museum or the campus Sustainability Commission. Courses across the campus implemented service-learning projects, which not only facilitated undergraduate student connections with the world of work but also emphasized the human dimensions of disciplinary practice—how professional decisions, designs, and research affect people and communities. A case in point is provided by David Williams, a faculty service-learning fellow from the Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design program. He focused a service-learning unit on representations of the Holocaust in old and new media. Students in his first-year composition classes worked with a non-profit client with an educational mission focused on helping teachers and students develop rigorous historical knowledge and critical thinking about the Holocaust. Williams' goal for students was learning composition skills and gaining professional experience while practicing humanitarianism. Each class researched, wrote, and

produced a 20-minute podcast on Holocaust history, one examining Jewish life before the Holocaust, the other exploring its aftermath. Together, the two projects were intended to broaden understanding of this global event by extending Holocaust studies beyond the war years. Both the questions Williams posed to students and the required reflections on the process, Williams found, led them to think differently about a large and difficult subject. Unexpectedly, the question/reflection process also created space for a deeply personal connection, as he learned when one of his students revealed that her grandfather had survived Auschwitz despite being subjected to medical experimentation at the camp (D. Williams, personal communication, May 12, 2024). For Williams, the process of listening, narrating, and reflecting, as part of the service-learning experience, were the means of creating the community and acknowledging the humanity of the writing process, treating writing not as a technical skill but as a human practice grounded in empathy and relationship.

INNOVATION: PEARCE RESEARCH FACULTY FELLOWS

During the post-Young years, 2009–2011, the Pearce Center was briefly dormant. WAC programming restarted in 2012 with undergraduate student internships and client-based projects conducted in collaboration with interested English Department faculty. These developments raised a need for both rebuilding and thinking anew about Pearce Center's mission. To that end, one big challenge consisted of identifying faculty members across the campus who were already involved in writing-oriented projects. In 2021, supported by Pearce Center endowment funds, we launched a Pearce Research Faculty Fellows program. While undergraduate internships and graduate student fellowships continued, we explored what we believed was a subterranean current of respect and understanding of the value of writing based on Art's earlier work and continuing recognition for Clemson by *U.S. News & World Report* as a top university for "Writing in the Disciplines" (Newall, 2011). This recognition led to an idea: rather than positioning the faculty fellows as a force for disseminating research about writing, the program could be a magnetic force, attracting faculty interested in teaching writing through diverse modes and models.

Research Faculty Fellows combines two undertakings: faculty learning communities (FLCs) and individual projects. The FLCs require an application in which faculty propose a project that they will design in the first semester and implement in their course(s) during the second semester. The group also meets once a month to discuss a series of readings around a topic, ranging from transfer of writing knowledge and skills to strategies for meaningful reading, web optimization, and team writing. Our meetings are punctuated by mini lectures

from a guest speaker whose work we are reading. For example, in the first year of the initiative, Kathleen Yancey spoke on transfer, Joanna Wolfe on team writing, and Chris Anson on discourse communities. These were three of seven guest speakers that year, all hosted via Zoom in the midst of the pandemic. As the faculty explored WAC concepts and how writing works in the disciplines, I gained insight from interested faculty about where writing was occurring and what kinds of writing instruction and interventions were already being done. I subsequently conducted informal interviews with five of the inaugural faculty fellows in December 2022, six months after the end of the first-year program, to learn what WAC pedagogies and practices remained useful to their programs.

Among other insights related to the above, I learned from the interviews that, with Pearce Center backing, faculty were interested in starting graduate courses in science writing, in augmenting undergraduate education with authentic projects, and in making intercollegial and international connections based on writing pedagogy projects. So, for example, Professor Karen High launched two new graduate writing and communication courses for the Department of Engineering and Science Education; Professor Shanna Hirsch in Education developed the "ECHO Telementoring Model®," to reach over 200 special education teachers across disciplines, and Professor Carl Blue presented his Technical Writing in Graphic Studies (TWIGS) tool, which started a new collaboration with British Anglo-Ruskin University, hosts of the Cambridge Innovation Center.

Given the two variations of the Faculty Fellows program that I've described—Research Faculty Fellows and Service-Learning Faculty Fellows—our future plans are to run the two faculty programs in parallel, concluding each with interlocking assessments. Relying on exit surveys, we plan to continue to not only measure the success of these programs by their tangible project outcomes, but also to use these assessments to generate new models of WAC programming and opportunities for collaboration.

Overall, my conversation with Art Young raised questions for me about how the Pearce Center can contribute to Clemson's strategic plan, Clemson Elevate. Clemson has ambitious goals for "doubling research expenditures by 2035," for providing "the #1 student experience in the nation," and for transforming lives by emphasizing just how "service builds community" (Clemson Elevate, 2025). These goals, while highlighting research, depend on human interactions and successful collaborations. The structural metaphor of the *mezzaterra* has helped me think through the ways that WAC programming, as Art has advocated, can remain critical amidst the university's increasingly research-oriented ambitions.

Mezzaterra offers a metaphor for a medial territory which WAC programming often occupies. The term describes: 1) a meeting place for different ideas across the cultural landscape of the university, 2) a central exchange for ideas,

theories and practices, and 3) a space that comes into being through the creative efforts of its participants. These kinds of middle ground describe WAC programs as I envision them, with the three initiatives I've described—Graduate WAC Fellows, Service-Learning Faculty Fellows, Research Faculty Fellows—acting as hubs for knowledge collection about writing and student writers, as contact zones for knowledge production about writing in the disciplines, and as crossroads for knowledge dissemination about the teaching of writing across the curriculum. Following Art Young's model, the Pearce Center is ready to be part of the university's goals to transform lives through community and service. By adapting to the evolving conditions of our ambitious research university, we position Pearce Center not just as a middle ground, but a generative, dynamic *mezzaterra,* a vital engine of innovation, learning, and institutional change.

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