

CHAPTER 2.

**BOUNDARY-CROSSING DURING
CHALLENGING POLITICAL
TIMES: AN EXHORTATION
AND HEURISTIC FOR WAC
AS SITE OF DEEP CHANGE**

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***Abstract.** This chapter examines WAC programs within shifting U.S. educational policy regimes, from the equity regime of the mid-twentieth century to the current accountability regime and a potential post-accountability era. The authors argue that WAC programs, with their focus on disciplinary expertise and collaborative change, are uniquely positioned to foster deep, meaningful change within and beyond institutions. They propose a five-part heuristic for WAC leaders to enact change: recognizing systems as changeable, framing problems as scholarly opportunities, leveraging disciplinary expertise, connecting across silos, and centering equity and access. Examples of successful WAC initiatives are discussed.*

Since their inception, writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs have felt the competing pressures of institutional, societal, and disciplinary needs. Narratives from WAC scholars across time illustrate how these initiatives have been

implicated in various literacy crises: At one institution, the Board of Trustees mandated a writing test to “ensure no degrees [were] awarded to students who lacked minimal basic writing skills” (Holder & McLeod, 2006, p. 69). Another university approved a plan that “[gave] each department responsibility for teaching and certifying the reading, writing, and oral communication skills of its students” (Russell, 1991, p. 283), spreading responsibility for evaluating student writing skills among all faculty and all disciplines. In another case, an untenured WPA was called to the dean’s office, where she was asked what she would do about the problem of student writing identified in the explosive *Newsweek* piece, “Why Johnny Can’t Write” (Maimon, 2006).

These internal and external demands persist across time and location, and WAC programs have continued to develop in a shifting educational landscape in response to frustration over student writing ability, a desire to meet accreditation expectations, and calls for improved support for struggling students. While the local needs vary, they reflect broader conversations about the “crisis” in higher education: students are “academically adrift,” one story goes; another story suggests that students are being “brainwashed” by radical leftists; yet another suggests we “return to the basics” that students should have acquired before they even entered college.

Despite these consistent narratives, the context for facing challenges in higher education has changed. Policy regimes, a concept introduced to our field from political science by writing scholar Tyler Branson, provides a useful lens for understanding why, despite local challenges, WAC programs generally flourished over the last 50 years, and why higher education now finds itself at a new crisis point where previous approaches are no longer sufficient. In this chapter, we describe how WAC efforts were initially bolstered by what Branson (2022) has called the “equity regime,” before being challenged by the rise of an “accountability regime” beginning in the 1980s. Over the past few years, equity and access in school settings have come under attack at the state level. Since the Trump administration took office, those efforts have expanded, with direct attacks on individual institutions and the elimination of funding to schools and grant projects. These legislative efforts suggest that the accountability regime may be rapidly transforming into a new and darker regime. This hostile climate increasingly demands that we enact our values and expertise in both internal- and external-facing work that extends beyond WAC programs and even beyond single institutions. The work of teaching students to write, analyze, and think critically has only become more necessary as our contemporary policy regime has begun to shift in distinctly antidemocratic directions. By contextualizing WAC within these policy regimes, we identify five strategies that may be beneficial to WAC

leaders, ultimately arguing that higher education could benefit from WAC leaders and scholars who can apply the field's *ethos* and changemaking strategies beyond WAC programs.

WAC'S HISTORICAL PLACE WITHIN U.S. EDUCATION POLICY REGIMES

Policy regimes help us understand the “governing arrangements of a given policy problem” (Branson, 2022, p. 19), and access to research-based writing education is an institutional policy problem that cannot be removed from its broader context. A policy regime includes interest groups with power; underlying values that limit “ways of seeing, talking, and defining problems, which in turn shape policy solutions”; the ways policies are implemented and by whom; and the policies themselves (Branson, 2022, pp. 14–15). Policy regimes, then, are part and parcel of institutional cultures that can both afford and constrain change by presenting one course of action as commonsense, simply because it fits the goals, rules, and routines of the current policy regime. Policy regimes are not unchangeable but may feel “impenetrable” given their hegemony (Branson, 2022, p. 24). From the early days of WAC to the present, educational policy regimes have gone in and out of favor, and these policy regimes have variously constrained and afforded the goals of WAC.

THE EQUITY REGIME: SUPPORTING ACCESS, IF NOT INCLUSION

The 1940s–1970s were a period of deep transition for American higher education and its students, largely due to landmark federal legislation that provided increased financial access to higher education and legally ended segregation. The GI Bill, the Civil Rights Act, and the Higher Education Act, all expanded access to higher education while positioning “the [federal] government’s role in education as providing equal opportunities to students in poverty” (Branson, 2022, p. 163; citing McGuinn, 2006). That is, the federal government continued to play a “hands-off” role in education, according to Patrick J. McGuinn (2006), under the assumptions “that most schools were doing fine” and “that problems were isolated in schools located in poor areas” (qtd. in Branson, 2022, p. 18). As a result of these assumptions, “there were few mandates for what states were to do with the money they received” (Branson, 2022, p. 18). Termed the “equity regime” by Branson (2022) and McGuinn (2006), these decades saw the federal government take an interest in providing equitable access to higher education primarily through economic means.

The economic focus of the equity regime meant that changes throughout this period increased access to education without creating truly inclusive educational systems. This is perhaps best illustrated by the literacy crises of the 1970s that prompted WAC work as we know it today. More veterans, working class and working poor, women, and students of color entered higher education institutions, bringing with them languages, literacies, and ways of being deemed unacceptable for the academy. Concerns about student writing ability from within and beyond the academy reflected a deficit view of marginalized students, emphasizing their need to achieve writing and literacy standards that centered white, middle-class norms (Weschler & Diner, 2022). By today's standards, the equity regime hardly led to the creation of inclusive and equitable systems, but it was an important step.

The equity regime also made it possible for WAC programs to flourish across the country. For example, Elaine Maimon's (2006) faculty program at Beaver College (now Arcadia University) in 1977 was subsidized by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, itself made possible by the equity regime a decade earlier. Though the relationship between the U.S. education policy regime and the rise of WAC programs was not always this direct, WAC programs were able to grow because higher education broadly emphasized the idea of access and directed funding to those efforts. The result was a "quiet and local flowering," as institutions across the country responded to the literacy crisis in radically different ways as they "faced hard questions about the meaning of education, equality, literacy, democracy, diversity, knowledge, power, and liberation" (Walvoord, 1996, p. 61). WAC programs developed through the 1980s, often funded by grants (Thaiss & Porter, 2010), leading to over 1100 programs across the country in 1987 (McLeod & Shirley, 2000). The equity regime provided a fertile environment for the success of WAC efforts to support struggling students with their writing and learning. Ultimately, that environment did not last.

FROM EQUITY TO ACCOUNTABILITY: SHIFTING EDUCATIONAL POLICY REGIMES

The persistence of widespread, deficit views of (marginalized) students alongside increased federal funding for education ultimately gave rise to an educational policy regime focused on economic accountability instead of equitable access beginning in the 1980s. Bureaucrats like Terrell H. Bell, Secretary of Education under Ronald Reagan, helped usher in this new policy regime. *A Nation at Risk* served a pivotal role in this transformation, framing public education as responsible for and failing to foster the economic growth of the

country while calling for “strengthened curriculum” and “standards” in public education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In subsequent years, both Democratic and Republican administrations continued to enact this economically driven model of public education, spawning bills like No Child Left Behind under the Bush Administration (McGuinn, 2006) and the College Scorecard under the Obama Administration (Welch & Scott, 2016). Together, these policies created a regime of assessment and accountability that resulted in ever-worsening austerity conditions for public education and for mass literacy movements.

Whereas the equity regime’s policy focus had been redistributing resources to support “disadvantaged” students, the accountability regime enacted a belief that federal education mandates “had become too prescriptive or intrusive” while also being “ineffective in improving school quality or student performance” (McGuinn, 2006, p. 39). The emphasis on low student performance framed education as in crisis; policies and funding requirements subsequently moved away from equity and toward accountability with a variety of metrics taken from Taylorism and the business and agricultural sectors (Davidson, 2017; Newfield, 2018). Funding for public education became increasingly performance-based (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001)—and those performance measurements largely became proxy metrics (O’Neil, 2016) that are wholly unrelated to learning or equitable achievement, such as salary after graduation or number of graduates in STEM fields. Institutions unable to perform well on these metrics were subjected to various austerity and accountability protocols (Branson, 2022; McGuinn, 2006) and measures such as budget cuts, layoffs, failure to backfill vacated positions, and lack of cost-of-living adjustments. As the accountability regime gained dominance, education saw the continued rollback of efforts to expand educational opportunities made during the equity regime.

During this period, funding opportunities shifted away from equity and learning and toward efficiency and profit. Programs like WAC, which do not typically produce any revenue but rather enhance existing learning environments, were impacted. Between 1987 and 1995, 32 universities ended their WAC programs, and over half of those cited budgetary reasons such as the end of grant funding that was not replaced by local funds (Thaiss & Porter, 2010). By 2010, most WAC programs were funded internally rather than by grant funding (Thaiss & Porter, 2010). When institutional budgets are squeezed and metrics for success include profitability, WAC programs are vulnerable. The policy movement from equity to accountability impacted not only WAC, but the entire field of rhetoric, composition, and writing studies, the broader humanities, and higher education as a whole.

BEYOND ACCOUNTABILITY: CHALLENGES FOR WAC AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

As we revise this chapter for publication in Fall 2025, the current state of higher education is one in which its capacity for access, equity, and inclusion is diminished and its democratic mission for public good is under threat. The consequences for WAC and other writing-related educational efforts are potentially dire, given the role WAC has long played in inviting students into the work of the university and helping faculty members make their learning environments more inclusive.

Today, the accountability regime is giving way to an even more challenging regime for those who are concerned with issues of equity and federal support for education. While accountability requires often-problematic testing and consequences for failing to meet certain standards, current efforts seem intent on eliminating federal support of education altogether, with states dominating and micromanaging education through an ideological approach that seeks to eliminate the teaching of content deemed too progressive or “woke.” The accountability regime arose as states made an effort to wrest back control over education from the federal government (McGuinn, 2006); today, state governments are using their power to shape higher education in ways that are even more antithetical to the longstanding efforts of WAC scholars to support access, equity, and inclusion. Following the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision that considering race in higher education admissions was a violation of the Equal Protections Law in 2023, states across the country began introducing legislation aimed at limiting or outright banning diversity, equity, and inclusion offices on college campuses (Lu, 2023). Higher education institutions are increasingly emphasizing career preparation and eliminating programs that consulting agencies identify as “unprofitable.” In our shifting policy regime, criticism has shifted from labeling DEI efforts as “unprofitable” toward labeling them as illegal, un-American, or discriminatory. In early 2025, Trump signed an executive order eliminating “illegal and immoral discrimination programs, going by the name ‘diversity, equity, and inclusion’ (DEI)” (The White House, 2025). These efforts extended to the Department of Education, which published a form on its website encouraging American citizens to report activities at schools that could be considered “DEI,” saying:

The U.S. Department of Education is committed to ensuring all students have access to meaningful learning free of divisive ideologies and indoctrination. This submission form is an outlet for students, parents, teachers, and the broader community to report illegal discriminatory practices at institutions of learning. The Department of Education will utilize community submissions to identify potential areas for investigation. (U.S. Department of Education, 2025)

This effort to eliminate DEI programs and content is inevitably affecting pedagogical content in Humanities fields broadly, and particularly in places like English departments. In September of 2025, Professor Melissa McCoul was fired from Texas A&M for teaching about the differences between gender and sex in a children's literature class. Her firing was precipitated by a student who had recorded a tense exchange between herself and McCoul and who argued in the video that McCoul's teaching went against Trump's executive order that outlawed discussions of gender (Priest et al., 2025).

Florida is another illustrative example of the direction national policy may take under the second Trump administration. Governor Ron DeSantis used his authority there to reconstitute the New College Board of Trustees within a matter of weeks. The new board entirely remade the curriculum and eliminated programs and offices related to equity (Holloway, 2023; McMenamin, 2023; Moody, 2023). Those responsible for the takeover at New College plainly stated it was a test case for doing the same thing across the country (Contreras, 2023). The American Association of University Professors (2023) released a grim report about this takeover; in their press release, they noted that the "ideologically driven assault" on higher education is "unparalleled in U.S. history" (p. 1). In the report itself, one faculty member called the situation an "intellectual reign of terror" (AAUP, 2023, p. 1).

In 2025, the federal government has followed suit: the Trump administration has dramatically cut federal grant funding and is attacking universities who do not conform to its mandates to roll back practices meant to support marginalized students. The administration's lawsuits against even powerful private universities like Harvard University, Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Brown University have precipitated concessions from these universities that limit their academic freedom and the free speech of students on their campuses, laying out what promises to be an anti-democratic roadmap for the future of higher education (The Associated Press, 2025). Strides made during the equity regime are swiftly being undone at both the state and federal levels under the guise of "restor[ing] fairness, merit, and safety in higher education" (White House, 2025). In some states, curricular authority, once the purview of the faculty, has now been expressly granted to boards of trustees through state legislation like that passed in Ohio in 2025. The federal government has also attacked accreditation bodies, largely because of their enforcement of equity-related policies, and several states have banded together to form a new accreditation agency (Governor Ron DeSantis Announces, 2025). These efforts illustrate what a post-accountability regime may soon look like, one where politicians have complete control over educational efforts and where higher education (and other institutions vital to democracy) are hollowed out (see Stanley

Crouch's 2004 and 2020 work on post-democracy and the role of institutions such as public education for maintaining democracy).

Though writing is often positioned as an important professional skill, WAC and other writing programs are not inherently "safe" in the unfolding new policy regime, especially when a local WAC program aspires to antiracist work in one of the 30 states that have introduced, approved, or enacted anti-DEI legislation (Chronicle Staff, 2025).

AN EXHORTATION AND HEURISTIC FOR WAC AS DEEP CHANGE SITE

What is the role of WAC programs, not only in the continued policies of the accountability regime but also in the unfolding efforts of states to tightly control educational content? We argue that WAC programs are uniquely positioned to help faculty leverage their expertise to make deep change in, across, and beyond curriculum, programs, and even institutions. This is because WAC programs are one of the few remaining sites of scholarly work that include faculty from across all disciplines making grassroots change on college campuses. Here, we argue that WAC is a uniquely situated site of changemaking and provide a heuristic for what WAC change efforts look like in today's unfolding post-accountability policy regime.

WAC programs are rooted in disciplinary and research-based best practices that help participants shift their ideas about teaching writing. While WAC program participants change their teaching practices, they also often come to change their *ideas* about writing, teaching, and learning over time and through ongoing interactions (Adler-Kassner, 2019; Anson & Flash, 2021; Glotfelter, et al., 2022; Walvoord et al., 1997). In this way, WAC programs offer participants *sensemaking opportunities* in which "individuals attach new meaning to familiar concepts and ideas" (Kezar, 2018, p. 87) or "develop new language and new concepts to discuss a changed institution" (Martin, 2023, p. 17). The result of participating in sensemaking efforts is not simply a changed practice, but also changed values and beliefs (Kezar, 2018). When groups of people engage in collective sensemaking, deep change occurs, prompting a fundamental transformation in their behaviors and practices and in their underlying value systems of individuals and their wider programmatic and institutional contexts (Kezar, 2018). This recursive learning process cannot be mandated and has been demonstrated to be incredibly challenging and rare in higher education (Kezar, 2018). But WAC has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to help groups and institutions engage in successful deep change efforts as they reframe writing, teaching, and learning.

Our examination of WAC practices across time has led us to believe that WAC's ability to help groups both large and small engage in the necessary sense-making efforts to engage in deep change depends on five related principles. These five principles can serve as a heuristic for WAC leaders when they seek to strategically support groups of faculty in deep change efforts:

1. Seeing systems and their parts as changeable;
2. Recognizing problems as scholarly opportunities;
3. Leveraging disciplinary expertise for problem-solving around teaching and learning;
4. Connecting people and resources across silos;
5. Viewing equity and access as central to change (and key to decision-making about what changes to make).

Here we describe each of the elements of this heuristic for WAC as a change agent, illustrated through historical and current examples, including change efforts that we have designed and enacted.

ELEMENT 1: SEE SYSTEMS AND THEIR PARTS AS CHANGEABLE

From its inception, WAC has recognized that just because we inherit a system does not mean we must continue to accept or enact it. Early WAC programs began by changing or creating institutional structures that supported writing, often by offering “supplementary teacher figures who had special expertise” such as “writing center tutors, writing teachers in ‘linked’ or team-taught courses, or student ‘fellows’ attached to courses in the disciplines” (Walvoord, 1996, p. 62). These new structures were the result of seeing the institution as changeable. As WAC continued to help faculty integrate writing into their teaching, programs focused less on changing institution-wide structures and more on changing small parts of them, such as the curriculum and pedagogical strategies within individual classrooms (Anson, 2006). As a field, WAC has recently taken a renewed interest in understanding how individual programs are situated in their local institutions and what areas of that institution may need to be changed for WAC to flourish (Cox et al., 2018).

When WAC leaders see the institution as changeable, they encourage others to ask what if? For instance, a large part of our own work in WAC has been enabling others to locate levers for change in the wider university system. In the 2020–2021 academic year, Miami University's WAC program offered a faculty learning community dedicated to graduate writing support that enabled participants to “take ownership of their disciplinary writing” while also focusing on the systems of graduate education (Olejnik, 2023, p. 162). Representatives of

Miami's graduate school also participated in the community, which enabled faculty participants to better understand the university's overarching policies and how they could innovate within those policies. As facilitator of the program, Olejnik created the conditions for participants to see the institutional system as something they could change. Many aspects of graduate school were designed to serve as gatekeeping mechanisms, but sensemaking around writing, teaching, and learning and about how the institution itself works led to powerful changes that better support student learning (Olejnik, 2023).

Recognizing that the systems we work within are changeable can also enable WAC leaders to use their expertise to enact change beyond WAC and writing. Though not all WAC leaders may aspire to higher administrative roles, the leadership capacities they develop help advance their careers such that “people who care about writing and have the ability to influence the curriculum” (Malenczyk, 2012, p. 104) are actually in positions to do so. Maimon's tenure as president of Governors State University provides a strong example of this. If she had not seen the university system as changeable, GSU may have ceased to exist: It was one of only a few upper-division universities nationwide when she joined in 2007. During her presidency, GSU transitioned from offering only 300- and 400-level and graduate courses to a four-year, comprehensive university through the worst budget crisis Illinois had ever endured (Maimon, 2018). This transition created new opportunities for GSU to fulfill its mission of supporting the diverse learners in the Chicagoland area, while also enabling the university to remain financially solvent. As president, she used many of the same strategies she employed as a WAC leader and WPA (Martin, 2021), illustrating what can happen when a WAC leader takes the values and practices of our field to the highest levels of academic administration.

ELEMENT 2: RECOGNIZE PROBLEMS AS SCHOLARLY OPPORTUNITIES

WAC programs have also been successful because they position writing (and teaching and learning) in scholarly ways—a stark contrast to the bureaucratic and managerial focus of the accountability regime and to the anti-intellectualism of a brewing post-democracy regime. When charged with “solving” the “problem” of student writing, Maimon invited faculty to participate in a “scholarly exchange” through a series of workshops, only some of which involved compensation from the NEH grant (Palmquist et al., 2020, p. 8). As she puts it, faculty in her initial workshop “who had previously thought that a writing workshop would be about commas and semicolons, or, at best, about gerunds and gerundives, found out that writing was an ancient art, a challenging craft, and, in many ways, thinking made visible” (Maimon, 2006, p. 25). That is, rather than treating “writing” as a

skill that could be improved by learning about parts of speech, this foundational WAC work positioned writing as a scholarly activity and as “a complex process that is integrally involved with the subject matter which is written about” (Maimon, 1980, p. 11).

Many WAC programs today take a scholarly approach to faculty development and other aspects of their work, including Miami’s Howe Faculty Writing Fellows Program. The initial design of the Fellows program in 2017 drew on this principle by integrating the threshold concepts framework with writing theory and pedagogy, encouraging faculty to work in disciplinary teams to solve the problems that brought them to the program. The framework, which we explain in detail elsewhere (Glotfelter et al., 2022; Glotfelter et al., 2018), engages faculty teams in sensemaking by offering them scholarship on writing, teaching, and learning before offering them strategies or practices they might try. This scholarly approach extends into all of the WAC programming in the Howe Center for Writing Excellence, including the faculty learning community to support graduate-level writing (Olejnik, 2023), a leadership and change institute to empower faculty as change agents, and new programs for Fellows to continue engaging in long-term sensemaking and change.

Approaching problems as scholarly opportunities is a choice that can inform decision-making at all levels, but problems in higher education are often framed as simple managerial tasks requiring “common sense” decisions based on efficiency and economic savings. These value systems do not see problems as scholarly opportunities because to do so requires a different philosophy regarding leadership and change—and, subsequently, more time, support, structure, and engagement across stakeholder groups than hierarchical managerial decision-making. Though not all changes in higher education will require such a deep change process (Kezar, 2018), failing to engage in sensemaking when it is needed will derail even the best change plans.

ELEMENT 3: LEVERAGE DISCIPLINARY EXPERTISE

When we treat problems as scholarly opportunities, we also make it possible to leverage disciplinary expertise beyond our own. When faculty teams decide to participate in Fellows, for example, they usually want to solve problems related to incorporating writing in their courses or meeting university requirements. As they engage in sensemaking about writing, teaching, and learning, they are also asked to identify the threshold ideas of their fields—their core ways of thinking and practicing, of approaching and solving problems. Once they begin to articulate these learning thresholds, they begin to integrate new ideas from writing theory and learning theory with their disciplinary values and practices. In doing

so, they're able to identify and solve their problems from their expertise, which includes reframed ideas of writing, teaching, and learning. The types of problems they solve vary widely, because the challenges in their programs also vary widely. Some of their projects have taken on problems such as:

- Introductory courses that unintentionally serve as a gatekeeping function because they have not changed in decades;
- Expectations and conventions in a discipline that exclude students of color and minoritized faculty;
- New general education requirements that require new approaches;
- Low enrollment in a major and the need for a coherent curricular approach; and
- Traditional assignments and genres that are not helping students learn threshold concepts that are transferable to other contexts.

The Writing-Enriched Curriculum (WEC) model at University of Minnesota (Flash, 2021), the Campus Writing and Speaking Program at North Carolina State University (Anson & Dannels, 2009), and the “Expeditions in Learning” seminar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Hughes & Miller, 2018) are additional examples that aim to encourage faculty to innovate how they teach writing from a disciplinary perspective.

Teaching writing is not the only place where disciplinary expertise can be a meaningful lever for change. The Opening New Doors for Accelerating Success (ONDAS) Seminar led by Linda Adler-Kassner at University of California, Santa Barbara, illustrates what can happen when WAC leaders are positioned to help faculty innovate beyond a single classroom. This program similarly offers participants a theoretical framework that encourages them to link teaching strategies to disciplinary content knowledge, ideas about communicating knowledge, and ideas about who students are as learners to achieve the ultimate goal: more inclusive teaching that is situated within specific fields' disciplinary epistemologies (Adler-Kassner, 2019; Martin, 2021). Through this seminar, faculty members have made program-wide changes that not only support learners in their efforts to join the disciplines but also question or change the structures of those disciplines at the institution (Adler-Kassner, 2019; Martin, 2021). Some of their efforts focus on writing, but not all of them, as the *ONDAS* seminar is more than a WAC program. By leveraging disciplinary expertise, this program empowers faculty to foster equity, access, and opportunity while also showing the power of moving WAC strategies to new contexts and sites, something we see as crucial for navigating the accountability regime and what follows it.

While leveraging faculty expertise might seem like common sense to WAC leaders, it is not typical of how higher education approaches problems. Instead

of calling on the expertise of faculty, universities more often hire expensive outside consulting firms, a choice that supports the neoliberal, austerity logics of the accountability regime (Mazzucato & Collington, 2023). WAC leaders, in particular, can encourage bringing faculty expertise into larger university conversations because the field has developed strategies and tactics from its decades of experience helping faculty reimagine programs and courses. In this way, WAC leaders can play a crucial role as boundary-brokers across disparate sites of the institution.

ELEMENT 4: CONNECT PEOPLE AND RESOURCES ACROSS SILOS

WAC has long been one of the few sites on campus that regularly engages people from across disciplinary silos in meaningful work together. At the institutional level, WAC programs expose participants to different disciplinary perspectives, and faculty participants often report the value of these mixed settings, giving participants opportunities to connect in ways typically constrained by their day-to-day work. One Fellows participant, for example, commented on how he had no understanding of the work of another department housed in the same building on campus. In a recent cohort, faculty teams from accountancy and sociology identified many shared values and commitments that they previously did not have the opportunity to consider, such as the need to understand cultural factors impacting strikes, prompted by external events during the seminar but afforded by the program's emphasis on collective sensemaking. WAC leaders are well-positioned to help others make connections across disciplinary silos, and the strategies they employ in faculty development can be part of those larger conversations.

The power of collaborating with institutional partners is also well-documented in WAC scholarship. William Condon and Carol Rutz (2012) suggest that a well-integrated WAC program can lead to alliances that benefit multiple institutional programs by increasing visibility, broadening the pool of potential participants, and connecting writing to other initiatives. Centers for teaching and learning are frequent, but not the only sites of collaboration for a WAC program. North Carolina State University's Campus Writing and Speaking Program found success by collaborating not only with disciplinary departments, but also with the Council for Undergraduate Education and the Committee on Undergraduate Program Review (Anson et al., 2003). Collaborations with institutional partners have led some in WAC to be concerned that programs could be subsumed or die out (McLeod, 2008; Walvoord, 1996). Instead, we see these partnerships helping WAC itself change—a theme of the 2023 special issue of *The WAC Journal* edited by Cristyn Elder. We believe WAC can and will change, indeed *must* change, lest

“we risk not allowing it to shape the academy in important ways, ways its pioneers might not have envisioned” (Malenczyk, 2012, p. 104).

ELEMENT 5: VIEW EQUITY AND ACCESS AS CENTRAL TO CHANGE

The challenges presented by the accountability regime (and whatever policy regime is now unfolding) encourage WAC leaders to return to the founding ethic of the modern discipline: It is our responsibility to invite people into writing and literacy, rather than exclude them. We noted earlier that WAC’s founding was in response to efforts to diversify higher education. Through “a quietly subversive movement,” WAC leaders acted as change agents engaging in institutional critique in non-combative ways (McLeod & Maimon, 2000, p. 578). This work drew on and developed research about writing processes grounded in the desire to understand diverse student experiences (see Perl, 1979, 2014; Rose, 1980). Though early discourse in WAC sometimes used deficit-based language to discuss students (Martin, 2021) and programs were sometimes part of “remediation” (Palmquist et al., 2020, p. 5) and gatekeeping efforts, early efforts at inclusion that fall short of today’s standards were important first steps in the field’s ongoing efforts toward access, equity, and inclusion.

The ONDAS Seminar at UCSB is one example of programming that explicitly engages faculty participants in thinking about access, equity, and inclusion, in part because it was funded through a 2015 Department of Education Title V Hispanic-Serving Institution Grant. Emily Bouza (2023) calls for WAC to guide linguistic justice by teaching about language fluidity. Her discussion of the power of linguistic justice for both accessing and changing linguistic norms of various communities echoes how Adler-Kassner (2019) defines access and opportunity (Martin, 2021) and Donna LeCourt’s (1996) now-decades-old call for WAC as a critical pedagogy.

We have also found that simply providing faculty participants with theoretical frames for thinking about the relationship between disciplinary knowledge and writing theories can lead them to critically examine the conventions of their fields and disciplines. Through the Fellows Program at Miami, for example, faculty teams from economics and philosophy have sought to invite students into the work of their fields by grappling with how to teach discourse conventions explicitly (Fennen et al., 2022; Kinghorn & Shao, 2022). On the other hand, a psychologist and woman of color used Fellows to reflect on the various ways that the conventions and discourse expectations of psychology transmit “a message of noninclusion” to “both female faculty and female faculty of color within the discipline, as well as female graduate students of color who have previously been reported feeling like ‘uninvited guests’ in psychology classrooms” (Kalia, 2022, p. 222).

Just as early WAC programs drew on emerging research in their work, current WAC leaders can incorporate our discipline's scholarship to better enact our goals related to equity and access (see Adler-Kassner and Wardle's [2022] description of goals for both access and opportunity). Our field's history of trying, imperfectly, to invite new groups of people into literacy and education reminds us of the need and ability to work now to forefront the values of equity and access in large-scale decision making. Choices have consequences, and we can work with faculty to enact policies and practices where the public good, not profit, is the primary motive. In many places, access and inclusion efforts are under direct attack. We must not only push back against such inequitable shifts when they come but also ensure that we are not "complying in advance," as many universities have done, and abandoning our efforts ahead of any pushback.

WAC AS A SITE FOR CHANGE MOVING FORWARD

The principles outlined above have allowed WAC programs to enact positive changes in higher education across many decades, despite shifting policy regimes and uncertain funding models. While the current moment is challenging for American higher education, we believe that WAC programs (and their leaders) inhabit a particular vantage point from which to intervene. WAC has thrived as *grassroots efforts* toward sensemaking and change within institutions and their programs. At this moment, we might seek to expand those sensemaking efforts and leverage our position as boundary brokers. We can identify openings for connections across silos that support meaningful change, connecting stakeholders with varied interests and experiences who bring various kinds of expertise to bear on the problems we all face. WAC leaders might also seek to make connections across institutions, drawing inspiration from the informal networks built by early WAC leaders to support their work. For example, ongoing collaborations between Miami University and Mesa Community College (see Arreguin & Wilson, this collection) have led leaders of both programs to innovate their work. This collaboration has extended beyond Miami and Mesa through the Sensemaking for Student Success Project, a Lumina Foundation-funded program that supported eight teams from seven Ohio institutions as they aim to respond to pressing institutional challenges that go far beyond the usual scope of WAC (see Sensemaking for Student Success, n.d., and Perez, 2024, for more on this method).

WAC's *ethos* of boundary-crossing collaboration is critical for meeting the challenges higher education faces under the accountability and post-accountability policy regimes. Collaboration with others, rather than competition with them, is paramount to forwarding equity across higher education institutions.

Collaboration provides opportunities to change how groups and individuals interact, whether they are stakeholders from departments housed in the same building that rarely interact or from different institutions across states and countries. In doing so, they build more capacity for deep change by working across once-isolated silos. Given the current political climate, the need for such collaborative work has never been more urgent.

As we face today's changing sociopolitical context, we may feel overwhelmed by the sheer number and force of arguments that seek to demonize and destroy higher education. However, WAC programs have the tools and history to collaborate with faculty across disciplines to push back against the forces changing higher education in ways that undermine its equity imperative.

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